2023

Visitors to the Urban Zone Natural Areas

CITY OF FORT COLLINS NATURAL AREAS DEPARTMENT PLANNING AND SPECIAL PROJECTS TEAM

Executive Summary

To manage the network of City of Fort Collins Natural Areas, eastern Larimer County is divided into six management zones based on geography. The Urban Zone is composed of ten natural areas distributed throughout Fort Collins. While many are located along the Spring Creek trail (e.g., Fischer, Ross, Mallard's Nest, Tanglewood, The Coterie) others are located elsewhere (e.g., Puente Verde, Goose Hollow, Redwing Marsh, Kestrel Fields, Red Fox Meadows). These sites serve multiple purposes including habitat preservation, stormwater protection, automobilefree commuting, and recreation.

In 2022 and 2023 City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department staff collected information from Urban Zone visitors to better manage natural areas by assessing visitor characteristics including group size and composition, evaluation of facilities and accessibility, primary activities and motivations, and demographics. A total of 213 responses were collected via quick response (QR) codes distributed on signage throughout Urban Zone natural areas.

Demographics

- Nearly 20% more females (57%) than males (38%) responded.
- More than half (54%) of respondents were aged twenty-six to forty-five. Participant ages ranged from fourteen to eighty-three years old, with the average age being forty-one years old.
- Ninety-two percent of respondents identified as non-Hispanic and ninety-five percent as white.
- Over eighty (81%) percent had attained a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Annual household incomes were distributed widely with over half (56%) of participants earning less than \$100,000 per year.

Visitation

• Visitation to the Urban Zone was highest in the spring (47%) and during weekdays (64%) with over a third (35%) of respondents visiting over fifty times in a year.

Group Characteristics

- Fifty-nine percent of participants visited alone.
- Groups typically contained two adults (79%), with at least one child present thirty-three percent of the time.

Facility and Experience Ratings

- The most used facilities were trails and informational kiosks. Eighty-seven percent of respondents rated trails as "good" to "excellent", and kiosks seventy-five percent "good" to "excellent."
- Over three-quarters of respondents (77%) rated their overall experience as "good" to "excellent."

Reasons for Visiting

- Nearly half of respondents reported dog walking (49%) as their primary activity, followed by hiking (27%), and wildlife viewing (11%).
- The top three motivations for visiting an Urban Zone natural area instead of other areas were "its close to home" (42%) "to be in nature" (25%) and "to get exercise" (12%).
- Ninety-three percent of respondents felt that access to the Urban Zone was either "somewhat easy" (13%) or "very easy" (80%).
- No respondents reported access as being "very difficult."

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Methodology

In March of 2022, Natural Areas staff installed twenty-four 6"x9" signs throughout Urban Zone natural areas, inviting visitors to participate in a survey via a quick response (QR) code. The signs were installed at major entrances to the natural areas and remained in place for twelve months. A total of 213 responses were collected through ESRI's Survey 123 platform and analyzed through IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. (SPSS). Open-ended responses were thematically coded and analyzed through Dedoose.

Most responses originated from Red Fox Meadows (45%), followed by Redwing Marsh (13%), and The Coterie (10%).

Natural Area	
Red Fox Meadows	45%
Redwing Marsh	13%
Coterie	10%
Tanglewood	9%
Mallard's Nest	8%
Ross	7%
Fischer	3%
Goose Hollow	3%
Puente Verde	3%

Table 1. Responses by natural area

Results

Table 2. Demographics

Gender			
Female	57%		
Male	38%		
Trans-Male	1%		
Gender nonconforming	2%		
Prefer to self-identify	1%		
Age	Age		
< 20	3%		
21 to 25	14%		
26 to 35	28%		
36 to 45	26%		
46 to 55	9%		
56 to 65	10%		
Over 65	10%		
Age Range	14 to 83		
Mean Age	41		

Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	4%
Non-Hispanic/Latinx	92%
Prefer to self-identify	5%
Race	
Asian	2%
Black	1%
White	95%
Two or more races	3%
Education	
Some high school or less	1%
GED or high school grad	11%
Associate degree	8%
Bachelor's degree	38%
Master's/PhD	43%
Income	
<24,999	11%
25 to 34,999	4%
35 to 49,999	13%
50 to 74,999	18%
75 to 99,999	11%
100 to 149,999	24%
150 to 199,999	13%
\$200,000+	8%

Visitation Characteristics

Table 3. Responses by visit characteristic

Season of visit	
Winter	6%
Spring	47%
Summer	27%
Fall	20%
Day of visit	
Weekday	64%
Weekend	36%

Number of visits	
First time visiting	7%
1 to 2 visits	11%
3 to 5 visits	
6 to 10 visits	14%
11 to 20 visits	9%
21 to 50 visits	17%
Over 50 visits	35%

Nearly half of respondents reported dog walking (49%) as their primary activity, followed by hiking (27%), and wildlife viewing (11%).

Table 4. Primary Activity

Primary Activity	
Dog Walking	49%
Hiking	27%
Wildlife Viewing	11%
Other	6%
Photography/Art	2%
Mountain Biking	2%
Trail Running	1%
Family Gathering	1%
Fishing	1%

Group Characteristics

Fifty-nine percent of participants visited alone. Those who traveled in groups typically had two adults (79%). At least one child was present in thirty-three percent of groups.

Table 5. Group Characteristics

Are you visiting alone or with a group?	
Alone	59%
Group	41%
Adults in group	
1	17%
2	79%
3	4%
Children in group	
0	68%
1	15%
2	15%
3 or more	3%

Facility and Experience Ratings

Unlike other natural areas studied using similar questions, Urban Zone natural areas offer visitors fewer facilities. Not surprisingly, most respondents indicated that they did not use the limited facilities present. However, trails rated (87%) well above the standard of satisfaction (the literature suggests \leq 80%), while all other infrastructure rated below this standard. Further, overall quality of experience rated slightly below the standard for satisfaction (75%). This rating stands somewhat in contrast to open ended responses that assert relative "ease of access", "well-maintained" infrastructure, and "love and appreciation" for Urban natural areas.

Restrooms	
Very Poor	14%
Poor	5%
Average	46%
Good	18%
Excellent	18%
Parking Areas	
Very Poor	6%
Poor	6%
Average	14%
Good	39%
Excellent	37%
Picnic Areas	
Very Poor	16%
Poor	11%
Average	21%
Good	32%
Excellent	21%
Trash and Recycling Cans	
Very Poor	4%
Poor	3%
Average	20%
Good	32%
Excellent	43%
Informational Kiosks	
Very Poor	1%
Poor	2%
Average	21%
Good	39%
Excellent	36%

Table 6. Facility Ratings

Trails	
Poor	2%
Average	11%
Good	33%
Excellent	54%

Open ended responses to facility ratings include appreciation for trails (n = 21) and wellmaintained infrastructure (n = 17), more generally. Few responses suggested the need for more trail maintenance (n = 7), more trashcans (n = 4) and a "bridge over the inner canal" for better trail connectivity.



Figure 1. Word cloud representing open-ended responses for facility ratings. Larger words were mentioned more often than smaller words.

Table 7. Overall Experience

Overall Experience	
Very poor	0%
Poor	6%
Average	16%
Good	40%
Excellent	37%

Over three-quarters of respondents (77%) rated their overall experience as "good" to "excellent." Open-ended responses related to overall quality of experience were overwhelmingly positive and most often included comments about "nature" and "wildlife" (n = 41). One respondent

commented, "I love to hear the birds and frogs. It is a quiet place to walk close to my home. I love that this is a natural area in town."

"Love and appreciation" (n = 20) "Beauty" (n = 13), and "ease of access" (n = 13) were the next most often reported comments.

Less positive comments were related to the need for maintenance and infrastructure improvements (n = 10). For example, one comment stated, "The beautiful trees need some trimming, trashcan needed, fences are a little run down."

Managing user conflict (n = 8) was cited to improve overall quality and included off-leash dogs, dog and horse excrement, people experiencing homelessness, and e-bikes and bikes moving too fast.



Figure 2. Word cloud representing open-ended responses for overall experience rating. Larger words were mentioned more often than smaller words.

Accessibility

Ninety-three percent of visitors to all Urban Zone natural areas reported access as being "somewhat" to "very easy." However, in an evaluation of individual Urban zone natural areas, fifty percent of Goose Hollow visitors rated access to the natural area as "somewhat difficult".

Table 8. Accessibility

Accessibility	
Very Difficult	0%
Somewhat Difficult	4%
Neither Easy or Difficult	3%
Somewhat Easy	13%
Very Easy	80%

Table 9. Accessibility by Location

Accessibility by Location					
	Very Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Neither Easy or Difficult	Somewhat Easy	Very Easy
The Coterie			5%	5%	90%
Fischer				33%	67%
Goose Hollow		50%	17%		33%
Mallard's Nest		6%		19%	75%
Puente Verde		20%	20%		60%
Red Fox Meadows				13%	87%
Redwing Marsh	4%	4%	4%	15%	74%
Ross				14%	86%
Tanglewood		11%	11%	6%	72%

Respondents most often indicated that "nothing" (n = 38) needed to be done to improve access to the Urban Zone. However, some specific comments related to improving accessibility through "crosswalks" (RWM, RFM), a "legit left turn lane" (RFM), and improved wayfinding signage (GHN, RWM, TNA) to surrounding crossroads and neighborhoods.



Figure 3. Word cloud representing open-ended responses for ways to improve access. Larger words were mentioned more often than smaller words.

Motivations for visiting

The top three motivations for visiting an Urban Zone natural area instead of other areas were "its close to home" (42%) "to be in nature" (25%) and "to get exercise" (12%).

Table 10.	Top	motivation	for visiting
	100	mouration	ion violung

Top motivations for visiting	
It's close to home.	42%
To be in nature.	25%
To get exercise.	12%
It's less crowded than other natural areas.	6%
For relaxation.	4%
To spend time with friends or family.	4%
To feel better spiritually.	2%
Other	2%
I feel safe here.	1%
To learn about nature.	1%
To escape from everyday responsibilities or pressure.	1%

Table 11. Motivations by natural area

Motivations by natural area											
	It's close to home.	To get exercise.	l feel safe here.	To learn about nature.	To be in nature.	For relaxation.	To escape from everyday responsibilities or	To feel better spiritually.	It's less crowded than other natural areas.	To spend time with friends or family.	Other
The Coterie	41%	21%		3%	15%				3%	8%	10%
Fischer	45%	18%			27%	9%					
Goose Hollow	50%				42%	8%					
Mallard's Nest	47%	10%			17%	3%				20%	3%
Puente Verde	50%	10%			20%	20%					
Red Fox Meadows	41%	10%	1%	1%	31%	4%	1%	2%	6%	3%	1%
Redwing Marsh	40%	17%	2%		19%	4%		6%	10%		2%
Ross	41%	19%			30%	11%					
Tanglewood	44%	8%		3%	17%		3%	6%	14%	3%	3%

Additional Comments

The opportunity to respond to an "Additional Comments" box garnered thirty-eight responses. Twenty-four of these responses expressed gratitude for natural areas. One respondent stated, "Very grateful to have discovered these natural areas. I really appreciate how the city even makes use of the smallest spaces to create little oases." Another declared "Thank you for putting so many resources toward natural areas right in the city." Other comment themes were fewer and ranged from comments about off-leash dogs, improving access (MLN, RFM), and the need for continued maintenance.



Figure 4. Word cloud representing additional comments. Larger words were mentioned more often than smaller words.

Conclusion

To manage the network of City of Fort Collins Natural Areas, eastern Larimer County is divided into six management zones based on geography. The Urban Zone is composed of ten natural areas distributed throughout Fort Collins. While many are located along the Spring Creek trail (e.g., Fischer, Ross, Mallard's Nest, Tanglewood, The Coterie) others are located elsewhere (e.g., Puente Verde, Goose Hollow, Redwing Marsh, Kestrel Fields, Red Fox Meadows). These sites serve multiple purposes including habitat preservation, stormwater protection, automobilefree commuting, and recreation.

Using onsite QR codes, a total of 213 responses were collected from the Urban Zone over a period of twelve months. Most responses originated from Red Fox Meadows and primarily occurred in the spring of 2022 on weekends.

Respondents primarily identified as female. They were on average in their early forties, white and non-Hispanic, and traveling alone. Group size typically included two adults with children being present over thirty percent of the time. More than half of visitors indicated visiting more than twenty times in a year. Visitors were primarily engaged in dog walking and rated most facilities slightly below the standard of satisfaction (≤ 80%). However, open-ended responses related to facilities indicate a latent acceptance and satisfaction with facilities provided. Access to Urban Zone natural areas was rated as "somewhat" to "very easy". Top motivations for visiting included "its close to home" "to be in nature" and "to get exercise".

Feelings of appreciation, love and gratitude for natural areas were abundantly expressed in all open-ended response options. Participants also cited "nature" and "wildlife" frequently as contributing to the overall quality of their experience. One respondent commented, "I love to hear the birds and frogs. It is a quiet place to walk close to my home. I love that this is a natural area in town."

Opportunities for improvement lie within Red Fox Meadows where respondents have expressed a desire for a better turn lane and a bridge over a ditch. There also seems to be some confusion regarding the management boundaries of Redwing Marsh, with ditch company, HOA, and City of Fort Collins Utilities properties often considered part of the natural area. One comment expressed a desire for Goose Hollow's trail system to completely circumnavigate the pond. Respondents at Ross expressed dissatisfaction with the ditch company's maintenance practices and its effect on the area's trails.

While the sampling procedure selected for this data collection effort does not include randomization, the ability of respondents to participate privately may have alleviated social desirability bias. Social desirability bias occurs when a participant responds to a survey item in the way that they anticipate the surveyor wants them to answer. Further, the tendency to satisfice, or thoughtlessly select responses on one side of a response scale, is not apparent in the data. While this data set cannot be considered entirely representative of all visitors to the Urban Zone it represents a single data point for decision making and benchmarking. Natural Areas values and considers input that is expressed in many other forms, in addition to the feedback form

Survey Instrument



This survey will help City of Fort Collins Natural Areas staff better understand visitors' views and improve service delivery. Your participation is completely voluntary, and your answers will remain anonymous. Thank you for your help- your input is greatly appreciated!

TODAY'S VISIT

1.	Which natural area are you visiting toda	ay?		
	Coterie	Kestrel Fields	Red Fox Meadows	□ Tanglewood
	Fisher	Mallards Nest	Red Wing Marsh	
	Goose Hollow	Puente Verde	Ross	

 About how many visits have you made to this natural area in the past 12 months? (If this is your first visit or you come here less than once per year, write 0)

3. What was your primary activity TODAY during your visit? (Check only one)

Hiking	Family gathering	Wildlife Viewing
Biking	Picnicking	Dog walking
Trail running	Photography/Art	Fishing

4. WHO were you travelling with today?

(Check one and write in the number of people in your group, if more than just you today.)
____Just me! ____Group (____# adults, ____# children)

5. Please rate the quality of each of the facilities that you used today by circling the appropriate number for each facility.

	Did Not Use	Very Poor				Very Good
			Poor	Average	Good	
Restrooms	0	1	2	3	4	5
Parking Areas	0	1	2	3	4	5
Picnic Areas	0	1	2	3	4	5
Trash Receptacles	0	1	2	3	4	5
Kiosk Materials & Signs	0	1	2	3	4	5
Trails	0	1	2	3	4	5

Please explain why you rated the facilities this way:

5. How would you rate the overall quality of this natural area? (Circle one number)

Poor			Neutral		Excellent
1		2	3	4	5
Ple	ase explain why yo	ou rated it this way:			
6.	How easy, if at a	all, do you feel it is to access	s this natural area?	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult
7.	, ,		to make accessing natural areas		,

8.	Please check the two main reasons you chose to visit THIS natural area instead of others.						
	It's close to home.	To be in nature.		It's less crowded than other natural areas.			
	To get exercise.	For relaxation.		To develop my skills and abilities.			
	I feel safe here.	To escape from everyday resp	onsibilities or	To spend time with friends or family.			
п	To learn about nature.	pressure.		Other			
_							
9.	is these a particular City of Fer	rt Collins Natural Areas site that y	eu cheasa ta na li	annan - Grit 7			
э.	No	t Collins Natural Areas site that y	ou choase to <u>no k</u>	ongervisitr			
	If yes, why do you a	woid this property?					
Please tell	us about yourself (All respons	es will be kept confidential).					
	Which best describes your ger						
	Female	Transgender Female		ender non-conforming			
_							
L	Male	Transgender Male	ш н —	refer to self- identify			
11.	What is your age? (Yea	rs)					
	What is your ethnicity?						
п	Hispanic/Latinx	Non-Hispanic/Latinx	п	Prefer to self-identify			
-	The participation of the second						
12	Million in concernance?						
	What is your race? American Indian/Alaska Nativ	e 🛛 Asian	Black/Africa	n American			
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island	der 🗆 White	Two or more	e races			
14.	What is your highest level of c	ompleted education?					
	Some High School or less	Graduated	from High School,	/GED			
	Associate degree	Bachelor's	iegree	□ Master's/Ph.D.			
	What is your annual househol						
L	Less than \$24,999	□ \$50,000 to \$74,999		□ \$150,000 to \$199,999			
	\$25,000 to \$34,999	□ \$75,000 to \$99,999		\$200,000 or more			
	\$35,000 to \$49,999	□ \$100,000 to \$149,9	99				
16.	What is your Zip Code for you	PRIMARY residence?					
17.	If you live in Larimer County, I	now long have you lived here?	(Years)				
<u>co</u>	MMENTS						