



2015 | NATURAL AREAS ANNUAL REPORT





Your Natural Legacy

A big reason people love living in northern Colorado is the extensive system of inviting trails and the large network of conserved land. City of Fort Collins’ residents have consistently voted to tax themselves to fund land conservation and stewardship. Thanks to the voters, there are over 40 natural areas and 100 miles of trail with more added every year. We hope you enjoy reading how the Natural Areas Department helped the community conserve and enhance lands with natural resource, agricultural and scenic values while providing meaningful education and appropriate recreation opportunities.

Acres Conserved	Location
7.5	Addition to Redwing Marsh Natural Area
22.8	Four parcels along the Cache la Poudre River corridor
113	Agricultural land in the Fort Collins/Loveland Community Separator
240	Addition to Soapstone Prairie Natural Area’s south boundary
734	Wildlife habitat northwest of Lory State Park
3,873	Non-use mineral rights lease at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area

Flowing Waters

A number of efforts were focused on conserving the Cache la Poudre River in 2015. Fish movement was enhanced through modifications of the Fossil Creek Reservoir Inlet Ditch with North Poudre Irrigation Company. The River Health Assessment Framework was created as the foundation for a State of the River Report. Indicators such as water quality, wildlife, sediment, riverside plants, and hydrology will be given A-F grades

to determine river health. The City also submitted comments on the Northern Integrated Supply Project Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement.



A Homecoming for Bison

Iconic American bison roamed the Great Plains by the millions until overhunting brought the species to near extinction. As part of a nationwide recovery effort, the Natural Areas Department and its partners reintroduced this keystone species to Soapstone Prairie and Red Mountain Open Space, managed by Larimer County. The Bison Welcome Home event celebrated this milestone with honored guests from tribal nations, dignitaries and bison lovers of all ages. The crowd stood mesmerized as the herd sprinted onto the gently rolling plains.



Nurturing the New Locals

Nighttime surveys confirmed that the endangered black-footed ferrets reintroduced last year at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area are doing well. Plague prevention treatments were applied at the prairie dog colonies



that sustain ferrets. The colonies were monitored and additional ferrets were released to supplement the population.

A Wetland for Wildlife grant (\$50,000) from Colorado Parks and Wildlife helped fund restoration at Topminnow Natural Area

so it can serve as a nursery for several native species of fish that are species of conservation concern. The first step was removing non-native fish, then volunteers helped install 10,000 wetland plants.

Renewal Comes Naturally

Enhancing the ecological vitality of the City's natural areas is core to the Natural Areas mission. In 2015, a ten-year outlook for ecological restoration and improvement was prepared with the ambitious goals of initiating all grassland projects by 2019 and all river projects by 2025. In the last three years, restoration efforts along the Poudre River have added 73 new acres into the river's 5-year floodplain. The river work and more than 1,700 acres of on-going grassland restoration between Fort Collins and Loveland are hallmarks of the Department's restoration efforts.



Looking Ahead

Natural areas that are within the city and not in the foothills, Poudre River corridor, or Fossil Creek drainage are called the Core Natural Areas. A management plan for these eight sites was approved this year. Because the sites are small and most have been well established in the City system for a decade or more, major changes to site management were not proposed.

Ranger Field Report

Rangers are a friendly and knowledgeable resource for visitors; in fact, they logged 8,468 positive contacts in 2015. Kudos to Ranger Karl Manderbach for his award from Colorado Field Ornithologists for assisting birdwatchers at Bobcat Ridge Natural Area. Likewise, Gateway Ranger, Karl Sanders, was recognized with a City-wide employee award for customer service. Ranger services were rated good or very good by 83% of 2015 Citizen Survey respondents; one of the top three rated safety services. Finally, more people than ever enjoyed the outdoors; Natural Area parking lots filled to capacity on 60 days this year.



CONNECT & EXPERIENCE

Art in Nature



a whimsical bike rack at Cattail Chorus Natural Area.

The beauty of natural areas was complemented by two Art in Public Places projects installed in 2015. A transformer box at Natural Areas headquarters was painted by Gale Whitman to reflect seasonal changes and James Lynxwiler created

Following Trails

A new trailhead and access to the Poudre River on Shields Street improves parking and safety issues. The Natural Areas Department worked with Larimer County and City of Fort Collins Parks to build a parking lot, trails, underpass, and sandstone stairs leading to the river's edge.

Downstream at Riverbend Ponds Natural Area, a new accessible trail and fishing pier were added and the ¼ mile boardwalk was replaced.

Arapaho Bend Natural Area has two miles of new trail around the newly constructed Rigden Reservoir and is now part of the paved Poudre Trail thanks to a partnership with City of Fort Collins Parks Planning and Development and Utilities. The trail was funded largely by a Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant.

Sustainability and drainage improvement was the focus of trail work at Pineridge, Maxwell, Bobcat Ridge,

McMurry, and Homestead natural areas.

At Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, volunteers helped reroute the Cheyenne Rim trail to provide a great singletrack experience that is more sustainable. Cyclists at Soapstone Prairie enjoyed new trestles which allow bikes to bypass the trail gates.



All this hard work resulted in 87% of trails in good condition and less than 1% of trails in poor condition at the end of the year.

Connecting to Nature

It was a record-breaking year for participation in field trips, events, volunteer projects and educational activities. Staff and volunteers provided 381 activities reaching nearly 18,000 people. The Natural Areas Department joined Facebook and Twitter in with regular posts to more than 1,400 followers. Updated interpretive signs and kiosk panels were installed at Running Deer, Kingfisher Point, Pineridge, McMurry, and North Shields Ponds natural areas.

SHARE



Volunteers Matter

Over 1,800 volunteers generously supported natural areas in 2015. They donated 15,806 hours, the equivalent hours of 7.5 employees and a value of \$364,612.



» Service learning volunteers planted over 12,000 plants and assisted with trail-building, restoration, and litter clean-up.

- » Adopt-a-Trail- Trout Unlimited, OtterCares Foundation, REI, Trailology and Colorado Addicted Trailbuilder's Society worked on trails.
- » Master Naturalists and Assistants led field trips, taught classes, and staffed events for people of all ages, attracting record-breaking attendance.
- » Volunteer Ranger Assistants assisted with serving a dramatic increase in trail users; their contacts increased by 50% to 8,895. Diamond Peaks patrollers recorded a 41% increase in contacts to 1,568.
- » Natural Area Adopters picked up litter monthly to keep natural areas safe and beautiful.
- » Citizen scientists collected dark sky and rare plant data.



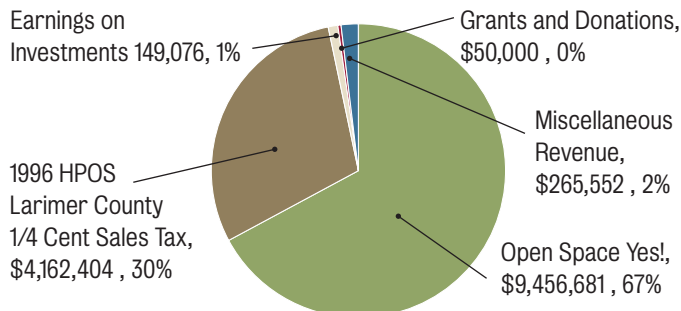


Presence of the Past

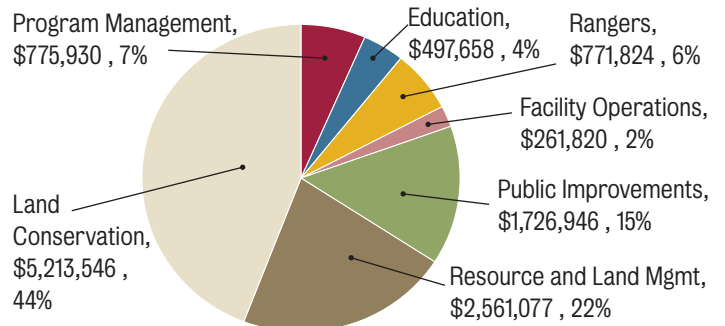
Natural areas are special places where traces of our heritage are conserved. In 2015, Bobcat Ridge Natural Area's historic poultry building and equipment shed were restored with funding from History Colorado and the Pulliam Charitable Trust. The historic cabin came alive with the addition of historic tools and furnishings, giving visitors a glimpse of the past.



2015 Natural Areas Revenues \$14,083,713



2015 Natural Areas Expenditures \$11,808,801



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 with soy-based ink



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