

Draft Natural Areas Master Plan 2014

Priorities

Continuing the Natural Areas Success Story

- **Aspire to the vision:** Through the work of the Natural Areas Department, a diverse system of conserved and restored lands connects community members to nature. These conserved lands protect nature and contribute to the health and wellbeing of our community.
- **Stick to the core mission:** To conserve and enhance lands with natural resource, agricultural, and scenic values, while providing meaningful education and recreation opportunities.
- **Continue to conserve high priority lands, wildlife corridors and trail connections.**
- **Continue to restore land.**
- **Continue to provide visitor and recreation services.**
- **Continue to provide education, interpretation, and volunteer opportunities.**
- **Continue to contribute to the character and culture of our City.**

Land Conservation

- **Highest priority-acquiring and conserving local areas, particularly the Poudre River, the Bellvue area, and adjoining foothills.**
- **High priority- conserving agricultural lands and waters between Fort Collins and Wellington.**
- **Regional lands are a lower priority to be conserved as opportunities and funding permit.**





The Cache la Poudre River

- Explore ways to sustain and improve water flows to boost ecological function in the Poudre and other important streams.
- Implement restoration projects that connect the river to its floodplain, create abundant wildlife habitat, improve aesthetics, and provide recreational opportunities.
- Create ponds and wetlands by addressing water administration needs including comprehensive water augmentation and water supply plans.

Education, Outreach, and Volunteer Coordination

- Use diverse and creative strategies to connect people to nature.
- Directly reach 1 in 10 people in Fort Collins each year. Ensure offerings engage and reflect the demographics and diversity of the entire community.
- Meet the community's expectation to give back to the places they love by expanding opportunities for service learning and other volunteer involvement.

Resource Management

- Aspire to create "Wilderness in the City" to exceed traditional expectations for urban natural areas.
- Substantially complete grassland restoration in southwest Fort Collins and foothills natural areas.
- Reintroduce endangered or threatened native wildlife into suitable landscapes including the black-footed ferret and bison to Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.

Local Food & Agriculture

- Conserve working agricultural lands with prime soils and water.
- Balance resource conservation and agricultural activities within conserved working farms and ranches.
- Utilize appropriate agriculture-based management activities such as haying and grazing as a tool to aid in restoration and to help replace lost or impacted ecological processes.

Ranger and Visitor Services

- Maintain high quality customer service, as measured by Citizen Survey reports.
- Collaborate with Social Sustainability Department and Police Services to resolve homeless issues.
- Monitor visitor use and capacity and seek out techniques to resolve multiuse conflicts.

Recreation, Public Improvements, Facilities

- Construct improvements to open the four sites in the natural areas network not yet open to the public.
- Improve access to the Poudre River by completing at least three new parking lots and associated trail connections.
- Use innovative design and management techniques to adapt to changing environmental and recreational conditions.
- Maintain a natural surface trail system that supports a variety of recreational experiences, while minimizing user conflicts and negative impacts on conservation values. Improve trail sustainability and connectivity.
- Seek ways to expand the spectrum of recreational opportunities compatible with the Natural Areas Department mission, such as sport and family-friendly fishing, areas for solitude, off-trail nature exploration, natural play areas for children, and limited hunting opportunities.
- Maintain all facilities to reduce future repair costs. Expand Nix Farm Facility shop, and remodel small Nix Farm historic house. Continue to pursue outside funding to make energy and safety improvements to facilities.

Cultural Resources

- Continue to use primarily non-departmental resources, including grants, to conserve and restore cultural resources.
- Develop policies to guide the Department in funding and managing cultural resources.
- Pursue state or federal historic designation for noteworthy structures, such as the Warren Ranch buildings on Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.



Management Planning and Implementation, Environmental Sustainability

- Prepare or update management plans and agreements for all natural area sites.
- Mineral Development- document mineral ownership and develop a minerals extraction policy. Avoid, minimize, or mitigate negative impacts on natural areas from energy development. Investigate opportunities for mineral purchase or lease arrangements that benefit the Department's conservation mission.
- Utility Easements and Rights-of-Way- continue to influence easement projects on natural areas to minimize impacts and maximize mitigation efforts to achieve department goals. Update agreements and vacate abandoned rights-of way to contemporary standards.
- Continue to support the City's Planning Department to protect natural resources through the development review process and participation in Nature in the City project.
- Establish an enhancement grant program for conservation easement landowners.
- Expand internal Facility Operations Pollution Prevention Team, set targets for ongoing environmental sustainability improvements.

Follow-up from First Open House & Emerging Issues

- Hunting is planned, in particular limited pronghorn hunting at Soapstone Prairie.
- Backcountry camping is not recommended because of the limited number of people it would serve, abundance of other regional opportunities, and the high cost of providing this service.
- The Department does not plan to offer dogs off leash areas since they are not compatible with its conservation mission. A dog off leash area, however, may be compatible with the City's park system. Natural Areas staff will bring this idea forward with the Parks Department.
- Hours at Reservoir Ridge Natural Area have been adjusted. The site is open from 5 a.m to 11 p.m. and the parking lots off Michaud Lane and Overland Trail Road are open to vehicle traffic from dawn to dusk (in winter, 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.)

