



Volunteer News



Wow, what a year!

By Susan Schafer, Volunteer Coordinator

Anyone else feel like they've just finished a marathon? I've been with the Natural Areas Program for four years and it seems like the volunteer program gets bigger and busier every year. I am always amazed by the energy and enthusiasm that permeates our town.

One big success was the launch of the new Service Learning program. Service Learning is a strategy that integrates meaningful volunteer service with education and reflection which enriches the learning experience, teaches civic responsibility, and strengthens our community. Over the years we've noticed a growing eagerness in our community to support the natural areas through short term service. We met this desire with high quality volunteer experiences. In February, Cate Dillon joined our team and hit the ground running, working to coordinate the needs of the program with the demands of the public. We couldn't have asked for a more successful year. What an impact this makes on natural areas and all the people who love them! See page 4 for Cate's summary of her year.

Master Naturalists and Assistants were also hard at work educating the public. Naturalists taught in all kinds of weather, from rain to snow. Your flexibility and creativity were evident in the way you brought outdoor lessons indoors on very short notice. More than 3,000 people attended a wide range of public programs and more than 3,500 school children attended programs just for them! See pages 2-3 for more about these programs.

VRAs and Naturalists worked together on many special events such as Wade the River, the Carp Derby, and the Northern Colorado Birding Fair, as well as large public programs. Almost 4,000 people attended special events this year. See page 5 for more on VRA activities.

Overall, you donated more than 10,000 hours so far in 2011 (if haven't reported your hours please send them in) and we served about 11,500 people in our community. Volunteers continue to be a beacon of hope in this sometimes crazy world. You inspire everyone around you. Thank you for all your hard work!

Did You Know?

The Natural Areas Program will become the *Natural Areas Department* starting January 1, 2012. This is due to some reorganization in the City of Fort Collins government. This doesn't really impact you except to practice calling us by a different name!

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NATURALIST'S NICHE

Master Naturalists and MN Assistants are all over the Natural Areas Program's education efforts. We categorize them into four general types of programs:

1. School Programs: headed up by Susan Schafer, Dolores Daniels, and Kimberly Tamkun;
2. Public Programs: led by Deborah Price and Sue Kenney;
3. Events: coordinated by everyone;
4. Service Learning: directed by Cate Dillon;
5. Media and Communications (includes geocache projects): led by Zoe Whyman

WHAT A YEAR FOR SCHOOL PROGRAMS!

By Dolores Daniels, School Programs Assistant

Together we shared the natural areas, tickled the imaginations, and touched the hearts of more than 3,500 school children—an incredible accomplishment! And made possible only by the dedication and commitment of Master Naturalists and Master Naturalist Assistants. It is my privilege to work with all of you. We make a great team and we have a whole lot of fun doing it.

Two new additions to our repertoire this year were the 1st grade pre-trip package and the 5th grade Eco-week hike. Both were well received and will be expanded to other grades and new programs next year.

Thank you to all who came to the MN debrief session and those who shared their thoughts in the online survey. We have read and recorded all your ideas and have already started to think about ways to implement them.

So have a cozy winter, but think spring field trip season and mark your 2012 calendars to save us some dates in April and May.

Happy Trails! I'll see you in 2012.



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NATURAL PUBLIC PROGRAMS!

By Deborah Price, Public Programs Educator

In 2011, we found new ways to promote all things **NATURAL** with the public programs. Here are a few reflections from this past year:

Night time rocks! Our evening programs were greatly expanded this year, and many of you stepped up to the plate to help with these very popular programs. Look for more next year!

Attitude! You have taken on all types of situations with a positive attitude. We had groups that got lost on the way to Soapstone Prairie, or that rescheduled, or even, that didn't show up, but you went with the flow and jumped into the next opportunity.

Teamwork! I love working with all of you. We've shared creative ideas, worked on programs together, and presented close to 150 public programs for more than 3,000 people.

Uncharted Seas! We tried out new things: we took some groups to Gateway Natural Area this year where the shelters worked great for lunch and groups loved the site; we expanded children and family programs to include Fossil Creek Reservoir; and we added night programs to the offerings at Coyote Ridge.

Rain! Nothing stops us in our tracks. We did programs in the barn at Bobcat Ridge, under shelters at Soapstone Prairie, and inside buildings instead of on trails—and people loved it!

All Ages! From preschoolers to seniors, we've touched the lives of many with information about our natural areas—these visitors included local residents, and people from around our state, our country, and even other countries.

Lots of wildlife photos! The camera checkers have continued to keep our wildlife camera project going at Bobcat Ridge, and we even got to put our animal celebrities on display at the first *Wild Shots Exhibit* event which was a great success.

Thanks to all of you for the love, effort and hours of work you put into your programs. This helps make all of our programs so enjoyable, beneficial, and important to the people we serve. I'm looking forward to an even better year in 2012!

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SERVICE LEARNING

By Cate Dillon, Service Learning Educator

Service Learning Volunteers sign up for short term projects—usually lasting one day. Projects included building and fixing trails, planting trees, trash pick up, uniform recycling, fence removal and modification, weeding, and mulching. In just six months almost 1,000 people volunteered 2,500 hours of their time! This more than doubled the amount of volunteer opportunities offered to Fort Collins and surrounding communities.

Restoration of McMurry Natural Area was a major focus. Volunteers raked up debris and collected rocks that inhibited planting. They collected roughly 20 tons of cobbles, worth about \$50 a ton saving the Natural Areas Program about \$1,000. The cobble is used in landscaping at Nix and other building projects. This was a valuable way for community members to contribute to the restoration of a local natural area. As one volunteer stated at the end of a long afternoon of piling up river rock, “I’m tired, my head doesn’t hurt, and I accomplished something for the Natural Areas Program!”

Trail work was another significant Service Learning activity. On National trails Day, nearly 100 people filled in eroded sections of the Valley Loop Trail at Bobcat Ridge Natural Area. Club members from local organizations such as Overland Mountain Bike Club, Babes on Bikes, and Team Peloton

greatly improved the conditions of the Foothills Trail System. Members of Rocky Mountain Flycasters and Trout Unlimited adopted Gateway Natural Area trails and the overgrown trail were cleared.

Numerous community members donated their time to cleaning up the natural areas. In May, 100 volunteers collected a full 3-yard dumpster of trash and 150 gallons of glass and aluminum (sent to recycling) from the Poudre River corridor. In conjunction with the Northern Colorado Birding Fair, volunteers collected fishing line and trash from Riverbend Ponds Natural Area. Members of Poudre Paddlers took volunteers out in boats to clean up the shoreline. One volunteer actually got into a canoe for the first time!

Service Learning projects take a break November through February. Please join us in 2012 for more projects that make a huge difference.



Cate Dillon does the happy tree dance.

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VOLUNTEER RANGER ASSISTANTS

By Rhonda Peckham, Natural Areas and Trails Ranger

Now in its fourth year as a cooperative project with Larimer County, the Volunteer Ranger Assistant program continues to amaze us with the dedication and service provided by volunteers. With 146 volunteers on the roster, the intrepid VRAs have covered a lot of country while logging 1,103 patrols and 2,842 hours of service!



Besides the regular patrols, VRAs increased their participation in special events this year including assistance to education and restoration efforts. Events included two prescribed burns, seven astronomy programs, a carp fishing derby, a memorial equestrian ride at Soapstone Prairie, a night wildlife spotting program, a *Poop De-Do* happening, the annual Northern Colorado Birding Fair, and a natural playground grand opening at Gateway Natural Area.



We achieved our objective of providing four continuing education classes to VRAs by the combined agencies. We offered CPR/First Aid in the spring and fall, a Search and Rescue first-on-the-scene training, and classes in map and compass, and wilderness survival techniques.

VRAs provide a large variety of services—these examples are taken directly from patrol logs:

- shared granola bars and water with the hungry and thirsty,
- provided directions to the lost,
- returned binkies to a grateful family,
- assisted stranded cyclists,
- babysat rattlesnakes,
- prevented regulation violations with gentle reminders and a uniformed presence,
- relayed suspicious activity to rangers,
- noted hazards,
- and found lots of humor in human behavior.

As 2012 approaches, we will begin enrollment for the new VRA class. Online applications will be accepted through January. The training is February 21, 23 and 25. As always, personal referrals from active VRAs are appreciated and expedite the recruitment process—**tell your friends!**



Thanks for all you do!

ADOPTERS LEAVE THEIR MARK!

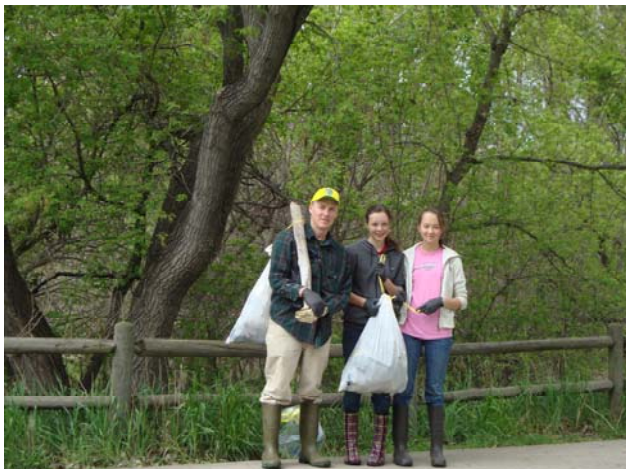
By Susan Schafer, Volunteer Coordinator

“When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”— Aldo Leopold, Sand County Almanac

Volunteers who adopt natural areas embody this quote by actively treating the land with love and respect! About 70 Adopt-a-Natural Area volunteers donated over 500 hours in 2011. They work behind the scenes doing crucial stewardship.

Several Adopters stood out this year as “super stars.”

In April, a CSU student, Chris Verdone, came to me with a concern about the trash problem in Springer and Williams natural areas. Chris is an avid angler and has spent a great deal of time on the Poudre River. Rather than simply complaining about the litter problem, Chris decided to get involved. In addition to becoming a monthly Adopter, Chris mobilized 40 other CSU students to participate in a trash clean-up on April 10. On a cold, windy Saturday these students removed 47 bags of trash from Springer and Williams. What an impact!



For more than 12 years Charles Ralph has been a shining star in the stewardship of Riverbend Ponds, Running Deer, and Cottonwood Hollow natural areas.

Charles is a retired CSU biology professor and wanted to spend his free time doing something interesting in the field. His knowledge and experience gave him the tools to be a driving force behind the removal of tamarisk, an invasive noxious weed.



The impact he has made is best highlighted by Matt Parker, Resource Management Crew Chief:

“Through his generosity, dedication, and persistence, Charles Ralph has ensured that the natural areas will not need to spend significant resources fighting tamarisk in the future. Solely through his work, the Natural Areas Program and the City of Fort Collins can stand as a leader in the battle against this highly invasive and very costly noxious weed.”

Every Adopter makes a huge impact on the site that they care for and on the community around them. They model good environmental ethics to their friends, families, and children.

We thank all 70 Adopters for their quiet, noble work making natural areas cleaner, safer, and healthier for all.

“There are some who can live without wild things and some who cannot.” —Aldo Leopold.

SAVE THE DATE! Annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Friday, February 17, 5:30-8:00 p.m. at the Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Drive.

Meet old and new friends, enjoy a Mexican food buffet, cash bar, prizes, volunteer awards, and more.

Volunteer Uniforms

There's a deadline looming! On **January 1, 2012**, we are no longer allowed to wear clothing with the old City logo (the one with flying geese). In order to be fiscally and environmentally responsible, we aren't destroy the uniforms—we're providing iron-on patches to cover the old logo on the front left side of your uniforms. The Natural Areas Program grass logo on the back of your uniforms is still current and okay to use. Patches and instructions are available to pick up Monday-Friday, 8-5 at Nix. Please iron them onto the polo shirts and windbreakers.

Of course, if your uniform is no longer useable (torn, dirty, or faded) bring it in and we'll supply you with a new one. And we still have some lightweight polyester shirts for sale (\$10.35)—these are great in the summer.

Please remember: to volunteer for us as an MN, MNA, or VRA you **MUST** wear the uniform.

Thanks for your help!

Rare Plants Live Here!

By Crystal Strouse, Natural Areas Botanist

Now in its third year, the 2011 rare plant survey focused on aquatic and wetland areas throughout the natural areas system. In the past, we've searched for specific plants but in 2011 we simply wanted a list of species that occurred in target aquatic and wetland areas.



Here's What We Found:

In 2011, we surveyed 15 natural areas, collected more than 150 plants, and added 12 new rare plants!

Overall, we now have 31 rare plant species in the natural areas. Two are federally threatened; one is globally imperiled and are endemic to only two Colorado counties; two are state records (they occur nowhere else in the state except Fort Collins natural areas); twelve are Larimer County records (they occur only in Fort Collins natural areas and nowhere else in the county).

Everyone gets excited about the large regional natural areas, but don't overlook our local ones! We are finding many significant treasures in small urban natural areas such as McMurry, Magpie Meander, Riverbend Ponds, and Ross. They're pretty exciting, too!

Thank you to all the surveyors who worked so hard!



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

MEET CHARLIE STURGILL

“The natural areas are there for people to use and forget about the hustle and bustle of everyday life.”— Charlie Sturgill

Master Naturalist and Volunteer Ranger Assistant Charlie Sturgill can often be seen walking the trails at Running Deer Natural Area, staffing booths, helping out as a fire steward, and leading many educational programs for students of all ages. Charlie has a deep love of the outdoors and he dispenses his knowledge and insight in an unmistakable Kentucky drawl.



Since 2000, Charlie has volunteered at the State Welcome Center on East Prospect. He often walked on the nearby natural area and picked up trash and cleaned up trails. He thought it was CSU’s Environmental Learning Center. Soon, he learned that he was actually doing work on a Fort Collins natural area! Running Deer is adjacent to the Welcome Center and has recently re-opened to the public. Charlie contacted the Natural Areas Program and several staff met him onsite so he could show them what he had been doing. Staff was thrilled and Charlie became an official Trail Host Volunteer (now called Volunteer Ranger Assistant). In 2011, Charlie increased his commitment by becoming a Master Naturalist.

Charlie says, “My wife and I always enjoyed the outdoors—we both loved to fish and I used to hunt. I always took my granddaughter to walk on what we thought was the ELC... There is much for a small child to see and it is fairly safe.”

When asked about his favorite part of volunteering he said, “As a VRA, I enjoy talking to the people I meet on the trails. As a Master Naturalist, I like letting people know what is in the natural areas and how to respect them. I have found that when younger people are informed about the areas, they will grow to up to respect everything about them.”



Candid Cameras

Citizen scientists have been out hunting on the natural areas—for weeds that is. Every year, Natural Areas Program staff takes photos of restoration projects to document the progress over time. In 2011, volunteers started clicking away. After a brief training, the photo-monitoring volunteers located and documented 129 data points, saving a tremendous amount of staff time and effort. Thanks everyone!