

WINTER 2016-2017

Volunteer News



Annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner!

It's time to celebrate! Let us show our appreciation for all you do for the Natural Areas Department. You and your family are invited to join us for this very special and lively event featuring good food, a cash bar, award presentations, and lots of catching up with friends—many volunteers eagerly look forward to this event each year.

When: Friday, January 20, 2017, 5:30–8:00 p.m.

Where: Lincoln Center, 417 East Magnolia Street, Canyon West

Bring: Your family!

Schedule:

5:30 – Doors open and food served (no one admitted before 5:30!)

7:00–8:00 – Awards presentations and socializing

RSVP required! Sign up on [Engage](#) or email mvattano@fcgov.com
Or call 970-416-2815.

See you there!

There's plenty of time to socialize and meet fellow volunteers.

Food will be served until 7:00.



Education Staff Changes

Emily Olivo, Community Programs Coordinator, and Diane Wendt, Education Specialist, both started their positions in February, 2016. There's been a lot of changes since then! In December, Emily accepted a position with the Utilities Department and Diane stepped in to fill the very large vacancy in Service Learning. In November, we learned that the Service Learning position would be converted from a nine-month seasonal position to a full-time permanent, classified position—welcome news! Diane Wendt will step into this position in January. Community Programs Educator and Education Assistant positions are expected to be filled by mid-February.



A note from Emily:

As I wrap up my season with Natural Areas, I want to thank you all for your support, your passion, and your knowledge that you've shared with me. It has been a privilege to work with such dedicated volunteers. I have learned something from each one of you that I've worked with, and truly appreciate how welcome you made me feel to the Natural Areas team. We had a very successful 2016 of community programs, delivering more than 230 programs to over 5,500 people! Our feedback from the public has been overwhelmingly positive, and that is a credit to what you bring to the table.

I have transitioned to the Utilities Department, continuing in environmental education with a focus on energy conservation. I will miss working with volunteers but look forward to seeing you at collaborative programs and, of course, around town!



By Matt Sampson, Natural Areas Facilities Assistant



The headquarters of the Natural Areas Department at Nix Farm features Colorado native plants in the landscaping. As any homeowner knows, landscaping always requires maintenance. Over the course of the summer of 2016, we were grateful to have as many as eight volunteers at a time helping out. Projects included planting new and diverse species, reapplying mulch, weeding, and pruning. These efforts really began to show through the growing season as a palette of colors and diverse insect and animal life emerged. Visitors to the Nix Farm campus regularly commented that they were inspired by the display and planned on implementing similar practices in their own gardens. In August, we hosted a community program teaching planting techniques, best plant choices, and how to grow native plants. Everyone took home some native seeds.

As fall arrived and the multitude of flowering plants went to seed, we were witness to flocks of lively migrating song birds stopping by for a much appreciated snack. Finally, with cold weather descending upon the garden and the beautiful colors becoming a memory, our garden volunteers worked diligently to put the garden to bed for the winter. Dead plants were cut back, leaves were raked, and seeds were collected to use next year.

Overall the Nix Farm Native Plant garden was a great success, thanks entirely to the efforts of the amazing volunteers that we have the privilege to work with at the Natural Areas Department.



Volunteers who help with surveys and collecting data have become a mainstay in the Natural Areas Department.

BIRDS, BUTTERFLIES, AND BEES!

By Stephanie Kopplin, Natural Areas Environmental Planner



The *Nature in the City Biodiversity Project* is a citizen science program to monitor birds, butterflies, and bees around Fort Collins. With technical guidance from CSU and the Wildlife Conservation Society, City volunteers collect long-term ecological data that supports the [Nature in the City Strategic Plan](#) to maintain “a connected open space network accessible to the entire community that provides a variety of experiences and functional habitat for people, plants, and wildlife.”

The summer of 2016 marked the third year of bird and butterfly monitoring, and first year of bee monitoring by citizen scientists assisting with the *Nature in the City Biodiversity Project*.

For birds and butterflies, volunteers focused on detection of 10 indicator species whose presence or relative abundance helps researchers map high quality habitat and model key wildlife corridors throughout the city. Twenty-seven volunteers conducted 163 bird surveys and 150 butterfly surveys across 52 sampling points, observed 51 different species of birds and 22 different species of butterflies, and logged 1,546 observations total! This incredible wealth of information will help *Nature in the City* identify high priority areas for conservation or habitat restoration in Fort Collins.

For bees, City volunteers monitored native bee activities in three key areas of Fort Collins during peak activity times to get baseline data on pollinator preferences and patterns in the community. Monitoring results are still being compiled and analyzed, but researchers and volunteers alike had a fantastic time learning about the amazing diversity of native bees found in and around the city.

The *Nature in the City Biodiversity Project* will continue in the summer of 2017 – stayed tuned for opportunities to get involved!



Volunteers who help with surveys and collecting data have become a mainstay in the Natural Areas Department.

Natural Areas Volunteers Assist with Frog Call Surveys

By Jenny Roberts, Natural Areas Environmental Planner

Gadwall Pond is located on Kingfisher Point Natural Area and its northern and western edges are scheduled for restoration in 2017. Restorations will include reshaping the pond edges from steep to gentle slopes that allows wetland plantings to take hold. These plants will provide areas for native wildlife to feed and nest.

In order to measure the success of creating wetland wildlife habitat, the Natural Areas Department identified native amphibians as wildlife indicator species. To understand the quality of the existing habitat, a baseline survey was needed. Ten volunteers learned to identify frogs by their calls, counted the number of frogs heard (frog call index) and collected weather and background noise data. Over four weeks, eight surveys were conducted.



Bullfrogs

The native western chorus frog was the most common frog heard, followed by Woodhouse's toad (also native), and then the non-native bullfrog. Woodhouse's toads and chorus frogs were heard every night and bullfrogs were heard three out of eight nights.

The results indicate that the wetlands on the south end of the pond support the two native species of amphibians. The results also reveal that few native amphibians use the northern and western edges of the pond. A goal of the restoration is to have a positive response from the native amphibians in these areas. Additional surveys after the restoration work could reveal additional native frog species or more of the same native species (higher call index).

The frog survey was a success and an important component of our ongoing restoration efforts—thank you everyone who participated!



Western Chorus Frog



Woodhouse's Toad

Special Events

By Diane Wendt, Service Learning and Education Assistant



Special events were a huge hit this 2016 season! Although I seemed to have terrible luck with weather, we reached a lot of community members with events like Poudre River Fest, Nature's Harvest Fest, and Wade the River! This being my first year, it was always thrilling to plan an event without knowing really what to expect in terms of community engagement. One of my highlights and great examples of this was Wade the River. After re-scheduling due to weather, we had a great turnout and it was a beautiful day.

One of my favorite memories was watching Master Naturalist Volunteer John Atkinson. We had a very diverse group and John was so flexible and accommodating, making sure that everyone had an amazing experience!

Thanks to everyone who helped with special events this year!



Service Learning Updates

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By Diane Wendt, Service Learning and Education Assistant

As most of you know, I took on Service Learning this July. I truly enjoyed the opportunity to work with community organizations, volunteers and various groups as they came out to give back to their Natural Areas. Highlights included a trash clean up with the *Coloradoan* newspaper staff and National Public Lands Day, where community members helped get our new natural area, Tanglewood, ready to open. What a special opportunity! I also very much enjoyed Master Naturalists and Volunteer Ranger Assistants coming out to help.

Thank you and I'm looking forward to more opportunities in 2017!



VOLUNTEER RANGER ASSISTANTS

By Rhonda Peckham, Natural Areas and Trails Ranger

The City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department and the Larimer County Natural Resources Department co-manage the Volunteer Ranger Assistant program. Volunteer Rangers Assistants (VRA) greet visitors on the City's natural areas and the County's open space trails, promote outdoor safety, and assist rangers by explaining the reasons for policies and regulations. These one-on-one contacts are invaluable to our visitors and to our departments.

Volunteer Ranger Assistants had another record-breaking year—they made over 13,000 visitor contacts and contributed 4,196 hours of service in 2016!

While patrolling, these intrepid volunteers make one-on-one contacts with hikers, bikers, equestrians, joggers, and dog walkers. They provide education on a plethora of topics and promote visitor safety on our natural areas and open spaces.

The most contacts (more than 7,000) were made in four sites. In order are: Devil's Backbone, Horsetooth Mountain, Bobcat Ridge, and Coyote Ridge. This is an indication of increasing use on foothills properties for both the City and County.

Noteworthy items from the past year include scores of welfare assistance and minor medical services, reports that resulted in a recovered stolen vehicle, and large transient camps.

Maintenance items included broken fences, trail problems, graffiti and facility damage, as well as requests for more efficient signage. Our VRAs soldier on with a smile.

Thank you from a very grateful staff!



From all of us at the Natural Areas Department: Thank you to every volunteer. No matter what your service is, we appreciate it and feel honored that you want to contribute your time, efforts, and talent to the natural areas. You make a difference every day!