

# Foothills Action Plan- October 2019

This document is intended to guide work groups within the Natural Areas Department when creating work plans. Work groups included are Planning and Special Projects, Public Engagement, Land Conservation, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Rangers, Trails and Visitor Amenities, and Resource Management.

## **Goal: Promote Ecological Integrity**

**Conserve, maintain, enhance, and restore native plant and wildlife communities to promote ecological integrity.**

- **Objective: Conserve and improve large connected habitats and wildlife movement corridors.**
  - **Strategy-** Identify potential wildlife corridors and valuable habitat patches.
    - **Tactic-** GIS will use the Ecological Tool to identify valuable habitat patches and wildlife corridors. Valuable habitat patches can include rare species habitat or large unfragmented habitats.
  - **Strategy-** Assess identified valuable habitat patches for restoration needs.
    - **Tactic-** Resource Management will work with GIS to identify valuable habitat patches, surrounding habitat, and wildlife corridors to assess for restoration potential.
- **Objective: Restore native plant communities, wildlife, and ecological processes.**
  - **Strategy -** Continue to manage habitat according to the [Restoration Plan](#). In addition, continue to include plants for endemic pollinators and invertebrates (e.g., Bumble bees, rare butterflies) in seed mixes for restorations.
    - **Tactic-** Resource Management will reference the Restoration Plan (Zone 3) for habitat restoration goals and priorities when creating work plans.
    - **Tactic-** Resource Management will develop restoration seed mixes that support endemic invertebrates/pollinators, giving attention to host plants and preferred pollen and nectar plants for Species of Interest.
  - **Strategy-** Restore a more natural cycle of disturbance in grassland ecosystems using tools such as grazing, prescribed burning, and mowing.

- Tactic- Resource Management will refer to the [Fire Management Plan](#) and Restoration Plan to target areas for managed habitat disturbance.
- Tactic- Resource Management will reference the breeding bird data in the Foothills natural areas to target areas for natural disturbance and identify when management practices have been successful.
- Strategy- Continue to manage wildlife and wildlife habitat according to the Wildlife Conservation Guidelines.
  - Tactic- Resource Management will reference chapters 4 and 5 of the [Wildlife Conservation Guidelines](#) for wildlife and habitat management in the Foothills natural areas.
- Strategy- Continue to manage for native plants by reducing non-native plants using an integrated pest management approach (early detection, proper plant identification, and a combination of mechanical control, prescribed fire, biological control, and herbicides).
  - Tactic- Resource Management will identify areas of non-native annuals (especially cheatgrass) and treat where feasible.
  - Tactic- Resource Management will survey and spot treat near disturbed areas to suppress new introductions of non-native plants.
- Strategy- Implement restoration that considers Species of Interest for the hay fields at Reservoir Ridge Natural Area.
  - Tactic- Resource Management will implement restoration activities (e.g., replace smooth brome with native grassland) and a monitoring plan for the hay fields at Reservoir Ridge Natural Area that consider Species of Interest such as bobolinks, grasshopper sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, arogos skipper, Ottoe's skipper, crossline skipper, bumblebees, and any rare plants.
- Strategy- Continue and complete restoration that considers Species of Interest for the previously farmed strips at Coyote Ridge Natural Area.
  - Tactic- Resource Management will continue to restore the previously farmed strips at Coyote Ridge Natural Area.

- **Objective: Promote the recovery of Species of Interest by understanding species populations, implementing habitat enhancements, conserving land, and minimizing habitat fragmentation.**
  - Strategy- Fill data gaps about plant and wildlife Species of Interest through surveys.
    - Tactic- Resource Management will survey the Foothills natural areas for rare butterfly species to understand species presence.
    - Tactic- Resource Management will survey the Foothills natural areas for small mammals and reptiles to understand species presence and evaluate restoration success.
    - Tactic- Resource Management will continue to survey the Foothills natural areas for new rare plant populations every 3 years.
  - Strategy- Continue to monitor plant communities, wildlife populations, populations of indicator species, and known Species of Interest.
    - Tactic- Resource Management will continue grassland and shrubland breeding bird (indicator species) monitoring on the Foothills natural areas to understand species presence and restoration success.
    - Tactic- Resource Management will continue to annually monitor raptor nests and prairie dog colonies in the Foothills natural areas.
    - Tactic- Resource Management will establish more indicator species monitoring. This will create more metrics for evaluating ecological health and function.
    - Tactic- Resource Management will continue to monitor floristic quality and existing conditions of vegetative communities in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Restoration Plan.
  - Strategy- Comply with the Wildlife Conservation Guidelines for the conservation of wildlife Species of Interest.
    - Tactic- Resource Management will continue to reference and implement the Wildlife Conservation Guidelines (chapters 3 and 4) and the Restoration Plan for the conservation of wildlife Species of Interest.

- Strategy- Comply with the Restoration Plan and its goals for the conservation of plant Species of Interest.
  - Tactic- Resource Management will continue to implement the Restoration Plan for the conservation of rare plants (Chapter 4, Table 1).
  - Tactic- Resource Management will implement restoration priorities (i.e., augmentation, reintroduction, and ex situ conservation) for plant Species of Interest including the following species: *Humulus lupulus* var. *neomexicanus*, *Physaria bellii*, *Spiranthes diluvialis*, *Triodanis leptocarpa*, *Triodanis perfoliata*, *Ceanothus herbaceous*, *Crataegus erythropoda*, *Crataegus succulenta*, *Scrophularia lanceolata*, and *Sherperdia argentea*.

### **Goal: Provide Public Access**

**Provide public access planning, management, facilities, and enforcement that conserves and enhances ecological, social, and cultural resources.**

- **Objective: Provide appropriate visitor use opportunities that examines ecological impacts, cultural resource impacts, social considerations, and administrative considerations.**
  - Strategy- Implement the decisions from the Visitor Use Impact and Decision Framework (IDF) at Maxwell, Pineridge, and Reservoir Ridge natural areas.
    - Tactic- Planning and Public Engagement will deepen the strategic approach to attracting diverse visitors by building a system wide strategy for natural areas to ensure all demographics of our community are connecting to nature in ways they affiliate with.
      - Natural Areas Department subcommittee will co-create Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan with internal staff and the community and follow with implementation actions.
      - Work with an external team representing the demographics of the City of Fort Collins to understand needs. Ensure people from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities, people with low income, and families are represented.
      - Advertise the availability of short loop interpretive trails within the system.

- Tactic- Maxwell Natural Area Potential Trail Additions: Land Conservation and Planning will continue to explore a new trail from Maxwell to Laporte Avenue to provide connectivity to the CSU Foothills Campus.
- Tactic- Trails and Visitor Amenities and Planning will work with an outside professional trail builder to refresh the Maxwell trail system to ensure sustainability while keeping the trail fun and safe for all users. User input will help inform the trail refresh.
  - Education, Planning, and Rangers will enhance education around proper trail etiquette including keeping dogs on-leash, one earbud out, not riding too fast, giving verbal warnings when passing, and general trail courtesy for all users.
- Tactic- Pineridge Natural Area Sledding: Discontinue sledding due to safety issues. Trails and Visitor Amenities will place “no sledding” signs and Rangers will use an educational approach to enforcement before issuing tickets. Planning and Department leaders will advocate for the retention of the sledding hill at the Hughes redevelopment site.
- Strategy- Continue to use the IDF to evaluate future visitor use opportunities when they become feasible. Planning will work with other work groups and organizations to assess feasibility for trail connections. Potential trail connections, pending land availability, and impact analyses, include:
  - Maxwell Natural Area to Laporte Avenue. *In progress- inform the community of progress via the Natural Areas Department website and social media by 2020.*
  - Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area to Coyote Ridge Natural Area. *In progress- inform the community of progress via Natural Areas Department website and social media by 2022.*
  - Reservoir Ridge Natural Area to the Poudre Trail *This is a long-term goal; due to private land the timeline is unknown.*
- Tactic- Planning will form teams to evaluate the feasibility of potential trail connections.
- Tactic- Planning will work with Land Conservation and the Department will partner with other organizations to evaluate the feasibility of trail

connections and acquire land if it becomes available for the potential trail connections.

- **Strategy-** Continue to monitor for and close social trails (i.e., unauthorized trails) to protect habitats from fragmentation.
  - **Tactic-** Rangers will work with Trails and Visitor Amenities to identify and close social trails.
  - **Tactic-** Trails and Visitor Amenities will designate an additional trail through Dixon Woods at Pineridge Natural Area. This trail will be designed with flooding from the reservoir in mind and may include a boardwalk. A bird viewing area adjacent to the trail will be designated.
  - **Tactic-** Rangers will work with Trails and Visitor Amenities to add signage to Pineridge Natural Area (Dixon Woods) as on-trail only. Single-rail fencing may also be needed to discourage off-trail use. The area has not been enforced regularly so Rangers will take a slow approach to enforcement starting with education before issuing tickets.
- **Objective: Monitor visitor use.**
  - **Strategy-** Continue visitor use intercept surveys in order to understand perceived crowding and conflict, visitor demographics, and recreation types.
    - **Tactic-** Trails and Visitor Amenities will work with Colorado State University to continue statistically valid visitor use intercept surveys on at least a 10-year cycle.
  - **Strategy-** Continue to monitor visitor use through strategically placed trail counters.
    - **Tactic-** Trails and Visitor Amenities will continue to monitor visitor use as an ongoing monitoring program.
- **Objective: Provide habitat protection and a safe visitor experience through Natural Areas Ranger visitor contacts, management practices, and education.**
  - **Strategy-** Continue to temporarily close trails during wet and muddy conditions.
    - **Tactic-** Rangers and Trails and Visitor Amenities will follow standard operating procedures to close and re-open trails during wet and muddy

conditions. Public Engagement will continue to promote information sources so public can easily track closures.

- Strategy- Work with the public to encourage responsible use, educate about natural areas, and when necessary, issue warnings and/or citations to those who violate established regulations.
  - Tactic- Utilize Volunteer Ranger Assistants to assist visitors and provide education about natural areas and trail etiquette (e.g., yielding, staying on the trail, leashing dogs, cleaning up pet waste).
  - Tactic- Natural Areas Rangers will assist and educate visitors about responsible use of natural areas and patrol and issue warnings and/or citations to those who violate established regulations.
  - Tactic- Public Engagement and Rangers- Establish BARK Rangers program, Volunteer Ranger Assistants patrolling with their canines.
- Strategy- Continue to follow guidelines established in the Natural Areas and Trails Ranger Manual and work in partnership with Fort Collins Police Services, City of Fort Collins Park Rangers, Larimer Humane Society (for animal control), Larimer County Sheriff's Office, Larimer County Rangers, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife.
  - Tactic- Natural Areas Rangers will continue to follow guidelines established in the Natural Areas and Trails Ranger Manual and maintain partnerships.
- Strategy- Implement management practices to handle increasing visitor use.
  - Tactic- Planning, Trails and Visitor Amenities, and Rangers will consult mapped management plan zoning for the foothills natural areas to more effectively protect natural resources and manage visitor use.
  - Tactic- Rangers will install parking lot cameras where feasible to allow visitors to know when parking lots are full and better plan their trip.
  - Tactic- Trails and Visitor Amenities will provide trail difficulty ratings (i.e., green, blue, and black) to allow visitors to better plan their trip and know what to expect.
  - Tactic- Rangers will work with Larimer County to determine if it is feasible to eliminate parking and enforce a no parking zone just east of

the crosswalk between Pineridge and Maxwell natural areas on County Road 42C. This will allow cyclists room on the shoulder.

- Tactic- Trails and Visitor Amenities will work with Larimer County to determine if it is feasible to install a crosswalk from the Piano Boulders parking area to Duncan's Ridge.
- **Objective: Protect Cultural Resources**
  - Strategy- Protect cultural resources when considering new visitor use opportunities.
    - Tactic- Planning and Trails and Visitor Amenities will avoid impacting known cultural resource sites when implementing new visitor use opportunities.
    - Tactic- Trails and Visitor Amenities and Planning will consider archeological surveys or consult an archeological expert before implementing new visitor use opportunities that have the potential to impact cultural resources.

### **Goal: Connect People to Nature**

**Provide engagement opportunities that inspire stewardship, deepen a connection to nature, and contribute to community wellness.**

- **Objective: Engage the entire community through a variety of creative and inspiring programs, events, activities, and media.**
  - Strategy- Continue to offer education programs about the shortgrass prairie, wildlife, cultural history, and geology.
    - Tactic- Public Engagement will continue to offer school field trips that meet state standards and leverage natural areas as outdoor learning environments.
    - Tactic- Public Engagement will continue to offer a regular calendar of programming provided throughout the year on topics ranging from natural history to cultural history to encouraging outdoor recreation.
    - Tactic- Public Engagement will utilize volunteer educators for programs-by-request, tailored group programs, and regular programming.





- Strategy- Preserve the natural experience, reduce maintenance costs, and adapt to the modern communications environment.
  - Tactic- Public Engagement and Trails and Visitor Amenities will remove interpretive panels as they age and deteriorate, with the exception of certain signs at select destination points that will be maintained. Kiosk panels will be replaced and updated.
  - Tactic- Public Engagement will provide information about natural areas through social media and the Natural Areas Department website.