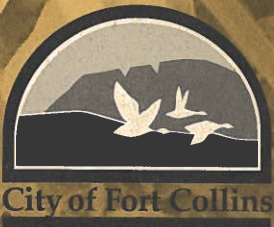


CITY OF FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

NATURAL AREAS

2021



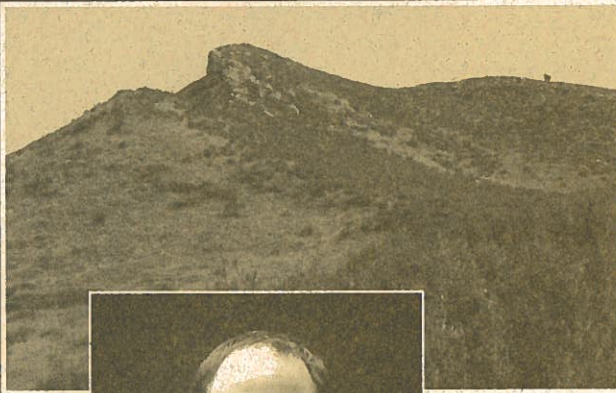
ANNUAL REPORT

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



One year ago, I spent three weeks in Costa Rica studying Spanish, surfing, and getting to know my host family. It was one of the best three weeks of my life, and I was enthralled by my new friends, the stunning tropical beauty, and – of course - the great surf.

Reservoir Ridge Natural Area

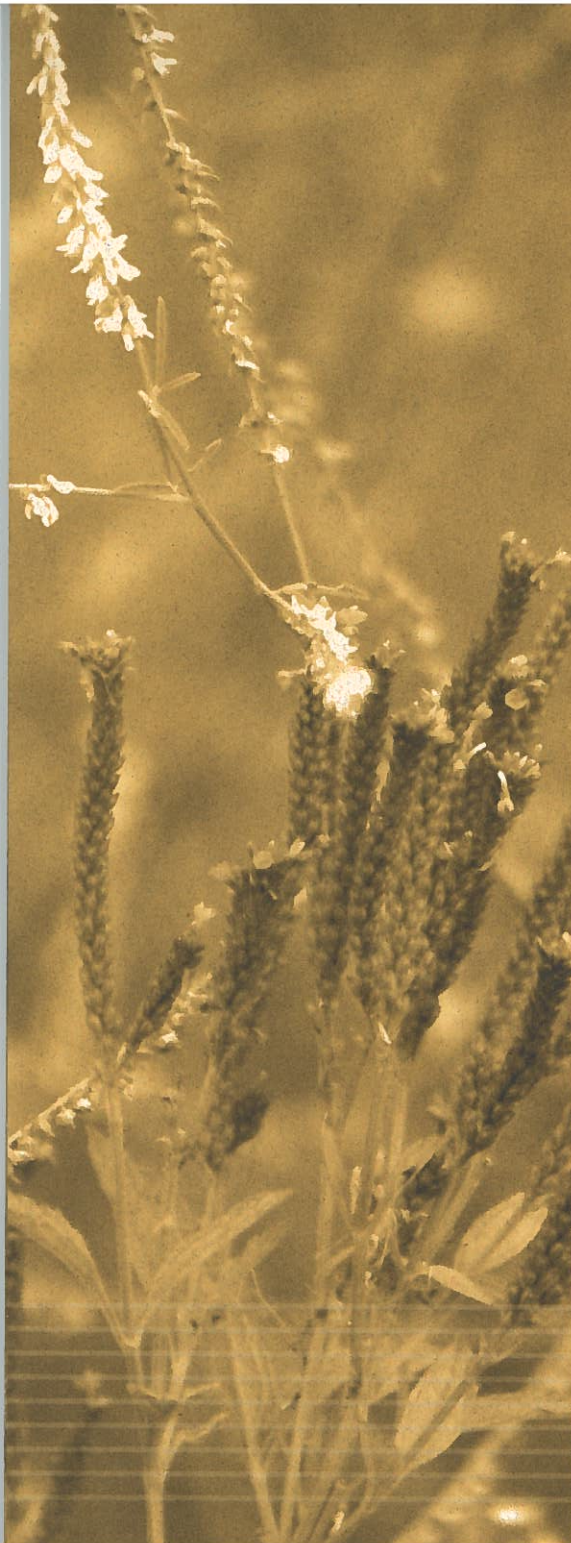


*John Stokes,
Natural Resources Director*

Costa Rica is unique among Latin American countries in that it has no military and has made a conscious decision to conserve as much of its wild resources as possible both for their intrinsic value and their economic value as tourist amenities. Although the country struggles with debt, underemployment, illegal timber harvests, and other issues endemic to the developing world, in many ways it is much cleaner, greener, and better off financially than its neighbors.

Closer to home, Colorado is renowned for its own beauty, a high quality of life, and a rich tradition of conserving natural resources. All of us who work for the Fort Collins Natural Areas Program feel privileged to be a part of that conservation tradition, and we are grateful to the citizens of Fort Collins who have supported and made possible the Natural Areas Program.

Both in Costa Rica and right here in Fort Collins, citizens and voters have decided that robust land conservation programs are integral to maintaining and enhancing quality of life. We often hear of families and businesses that moved to Fort Collins because our community is enriched by a framework of valuable public amenities, including an impressive system of natural areas.



As the new Director of the program, I feel two emotions as I peruse this annual report. I am proud because we have a great staff, a great community that supports our program, and together we are attaining conservation success. On the other hand, I am humbled, because you have entrusted us with the profound responsibility of operating a substantial community effort that is financed with your money.

Fortunately, I am confident that the Natural Areas program is up to the responsibility. In 2003, for example, we allocated \$7.2 million to land conservation and helped conserve approximately 4,700 acres. In addition to the land conservation, there is more good news. Over a three-year period, the program is contributing \$1.5 million to the Parks Department to help construct and reconstruct a variety of trails in and around town. For skaters and bicyclists, this means that a lot of the old bumpy asphalt will be transformed into smooth sailing. In another piece of encouraging news, in late 2004, we anticipate the opening of Fossil Creek Regional Open Space. This joint project with Larimer County promises to be an exciting wildlife observation facility with easy access to Fort Collins residents and families.

There is so much more that I could share with you in this column. But words cannot substitute for the joy of being outside and experiencing the land. Thus, I hope you'll take some time this afternoon or this weekend to enjoy your natural areas. Unlike Costa Rica there won't be any toucans, but there will be an abundance of beautiful prairies, rivers, and foothills to share with your families, friends, and neighbors. I hope that you enjoy your visit, and please let us know how we can better serve you.

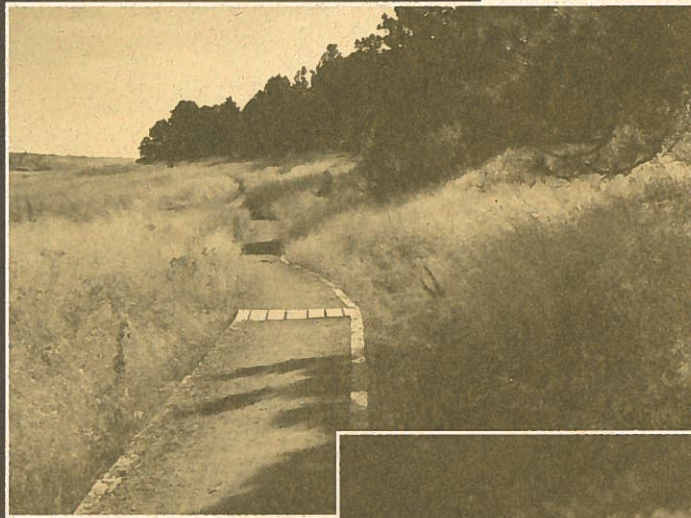
John Stokes

Director of the Natural Resources Department.

221-6600

CITIZENS SAY "YES!"

*Recreational trail at Pineridge
Natural Area*



The City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, in providing this report on the progress of natural areas conservation, acknowledges the vital role citizens play in making conservation possible. The 11,000+ acres of conserved lands, over 23 miles of unpaved recreational trails, habitat available to wildlife, magnificent scenic vistas – all are here because Fort Collins citizens chose to make them possible.

Funding is a key component in conserving natural areas. Voters have said “yes” to several citizen-initiated sales taxes in support of natural areas. In 1992, Fort Collins voters passed the first ¼-cent sales tax dedicated to natural areas. This tax continued for five years. In 1997, as part of “Building Community Choices,” Fort Collins voters extended a major portion of the 1992 ¼-cent City sales tax for natural areas and trails to 2005.

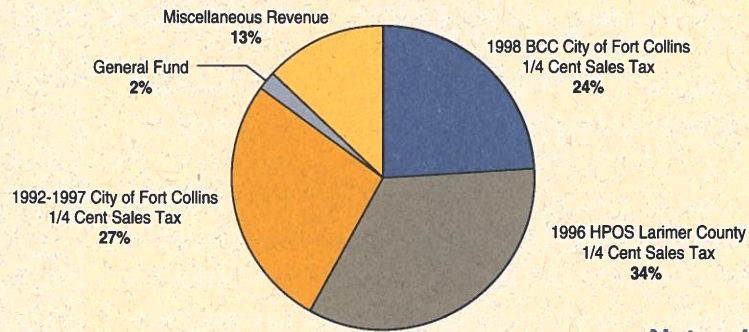
In 2002, Fort Collins voters said “yes” to the citizen-initiated “Open Space Yes” ¼-cent sales tax initiative. “Open Space Yes” takes effect January 2006 and expires December 2030.

*Coyotes roam free in
conserved natural areas*

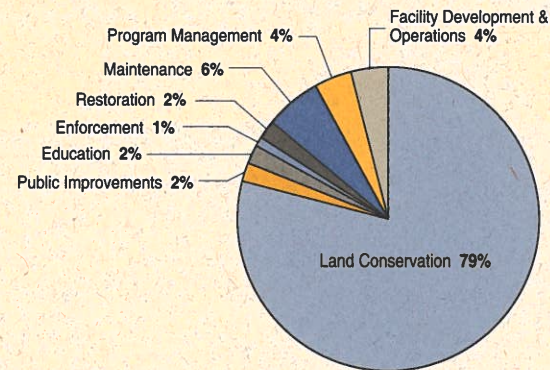


County-wide initiatives also benefit Fort Collins. In 1995, voters of Larimer County passed "Help Preserve Open Space," a county-wide ¼-cent sales tax to fund open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, parks, and trails. A minimum of 55% of this county-wide tax goes to the municipalities within Larimer County. The remainder goes to lands within unincorporated Larimer County and Larimer County's Open Lands Program. This tax took effect in January 1996 and was initially slated to end in 2003. In 1999, voters extended the tax to 2018.

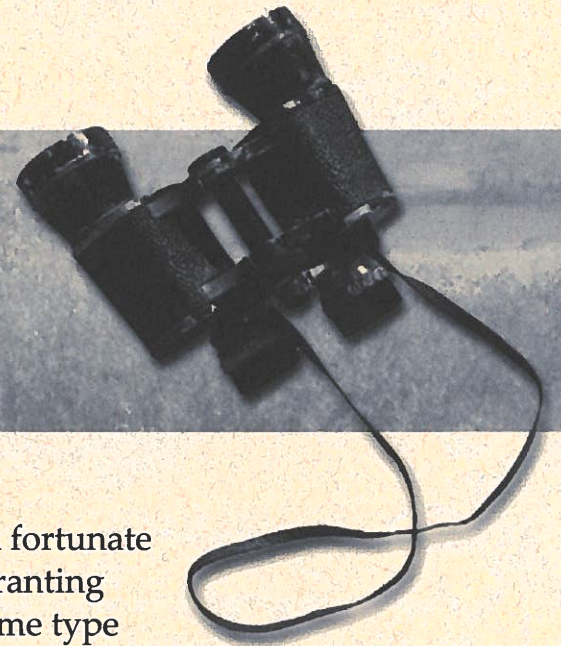
Natural Areas Revenues 1993 - 2003
\$61,769,274



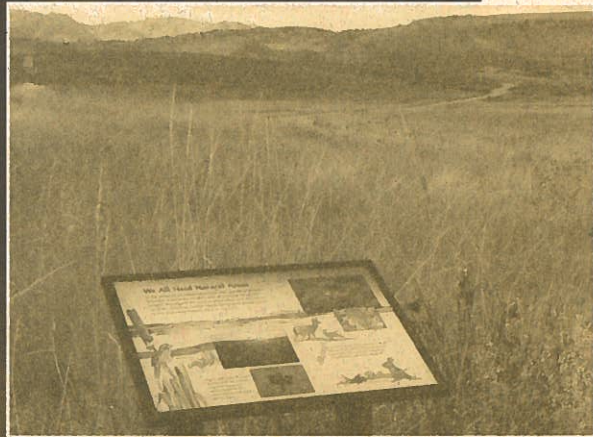
Natural Areas Expenditures - 1993 - 2003
\$55,916,386



GRANTS ARE GREAT



Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area



The Fort Collins Natural Areas Program has been fortunate in receiving grants to extend its buying power. Granting agencies often require applicants to contribute some type of match - either funds or in-kind services. The natural areas and open space taxes have given Fort Collins the needed matching funds to obtain significant grants.

To date, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) has awarded Fort Collins \$50,000 for interpretive features and over \$2 million to help acquire the following sites:

Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area

McMurry Natural Area

Nix Natural Area

Cattail Chorus Natural Area

Running Deer Natural Area

Long View Farm Open Space (jointly owned with Larimer County)

A dryland wheat farm south of Fort Collins (jointly owned with Larimer County and City of Loveland).



*Cattail Chorus
Natural Area*

Over the years, other granting agencies have provided over \$30,000 for fishing piers, plantings, weed control, education projects and equipment, and other activities.

As of the end of 2003, the City of Fort Collins has conserved 11,472 acres of natural areas and open space worth over \$44 million.

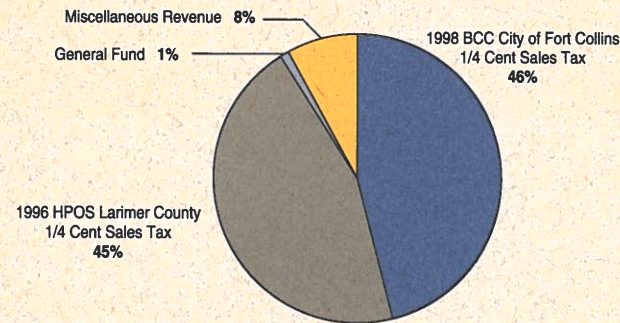
Arapaho Bend Natural Area



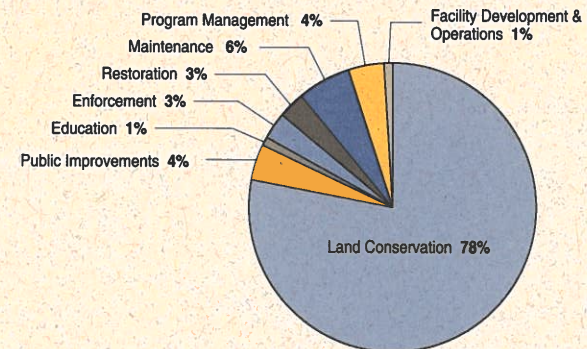
Conservation projects in 2003 included the following:

- Acquisition, jointly with Larimer County, of the final 10-acre parcel of the 460-acre Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space near I-25 and Carpenter Road
- Acquisition of an 82-acre conservation easement on the north side of Fossil Creek Reservoir to provide a habitat protection buffer and protect a bald eagle night roost
- Purchase, from Fort Collins Utilities, of 156 acres of the former Resource Recovery Farm near I-25 and Prospect Road
- Acceptance, from Larimer County, of the original 27 acres of McMurry Natural Area along the Poudre River near Lee Martinez Park
- Acquisition, jointly with Larimer County, of the 1,545-acre Indian Creek parcel of Devil's Backbone Open Space
- An agreement to lease/purchase Bobcat Ridge Natural Area, a 2,470-acre ranch in the foothills southwest of Masonville, over the next four years
- A commitment to partner with Larimer County in acquiring a 209-acre agriculture conservation easement south of Wellington

Natural Areas 2003 Revenue
\$7,567,431



Natural Areas 2003 Expenditures
\$9,603,997



TAXES AT WORK

VERY VALUABLE VOLUNTEERS



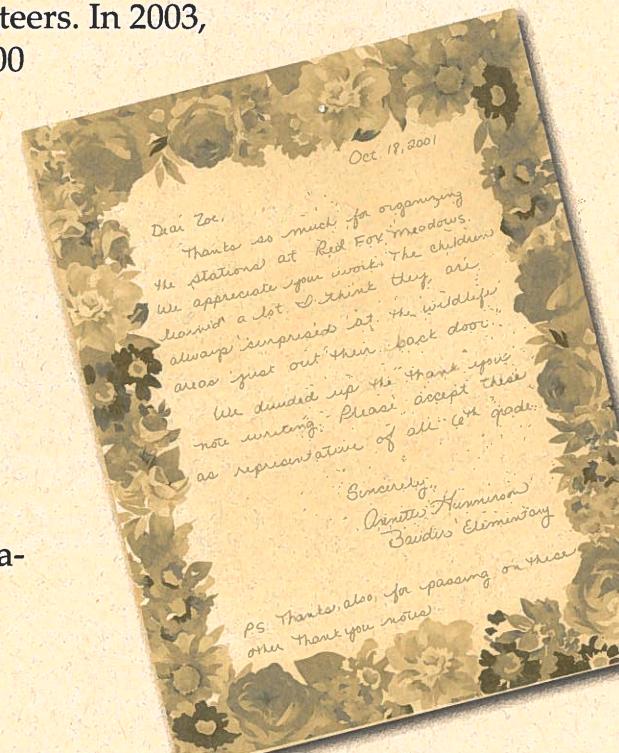
Volunteers do trail work at
Riverbend Ponds Natural Area



Volunteers are key to the success of the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program. They are the backbone of the highly popular Master Naturalist Program; they contribute many hours of service for site management projects; and they serve as dedicated Adopt-a-Natural Area volunteers. In 2003, over 400 individuals contributed more than 3,800 hours of volunteer time to the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program.

The Adopt-a-Natural Area program began in 1993. In adopting a natural area, volunteer organizations and individuals commit to at least a year of periodic site clean-up. In 2003, thirty groups were active Adopt-a-Natural Area volunteers.

Students learn from a
Master Naturalist at
Cathy Fromme Prairie
Natural Area



Oct/18/2001

Dear Ms. Shark,

Thank you very much for your time to take us to Red Fox Meadows and for the cool scavenger Hunt. It was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed looking for different items!

I learned that if you look closely you see more things than you ever expected. Thank you again for your time!

BAUDER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Sincerely,

Tamara Kirchhoff

Volunteer Master Naturalists lead interpretive field trips, give class presentations, and conduct other outreach and education programs. To become Certified Master Naturalists, volunteers are trained by the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program. In 2003, optional Certified Interpretive Guide instruction was added to the training program. There are currently 100 Certified Master Naturalist volunteers. In 2003, these volunteers provided 138 programs totaling over 1,300 volunteer hours. These programs reached more than 4,500 people. Since the program's inception in 1994, Master Naturalists have donated over 7,500 hours of time, reaching over 33,000 people.

Dear Pete, thank you for sharing facts with us. AND WITH THEM I WILL TAKE OVER THE WORLD!!!!!!
Not.... ok, I wont. Thank you for coming in and telling us about mammals!

Sincerely Geoff

Ken + Carl,
Thank you for the wonderful presentation a Cathy Fromme Praine. We, the class, enjoyed getting out + see + learning something about our own Backyard!

Thanks again
Deborah Fran
Leshar Jr. High

thanks

Dear Bill and Pete,

10/21/02

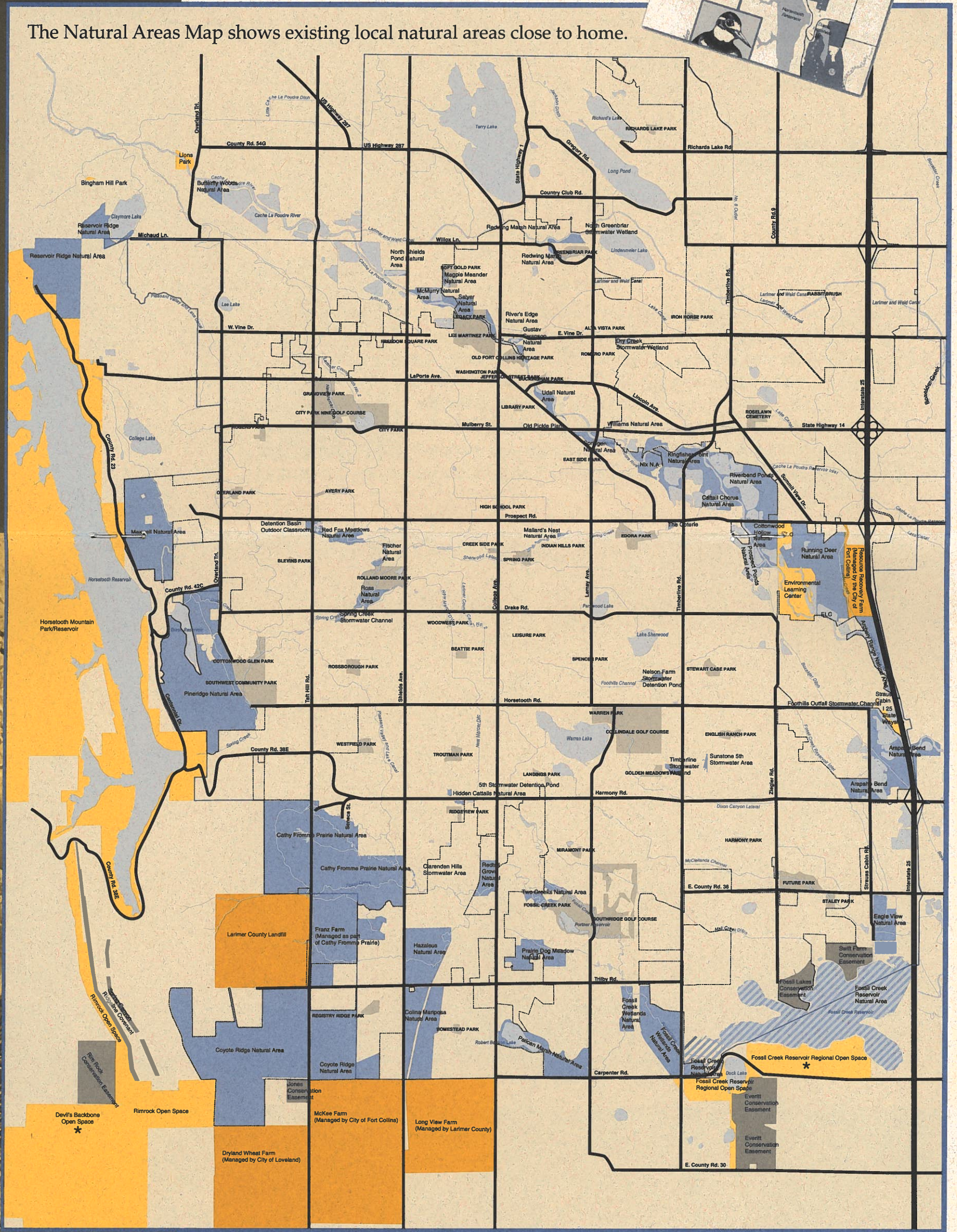
Thank you so much for coming to share your knowledge and enthusiasm about geology. Your presentations were right up the kids' alley! They are excited about our mountains unit - more now than before. I feel so lucky to have found the Master Naturalist program. Every experience has been terrific!

Thank you,
Dee Wanger

LOCAL NATURAL AREAS

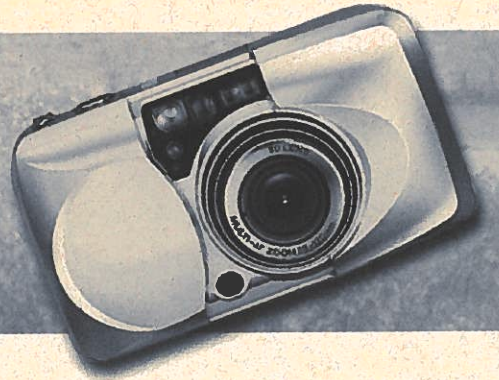


The Natural Areas Map shows existing local natural areas close to home.

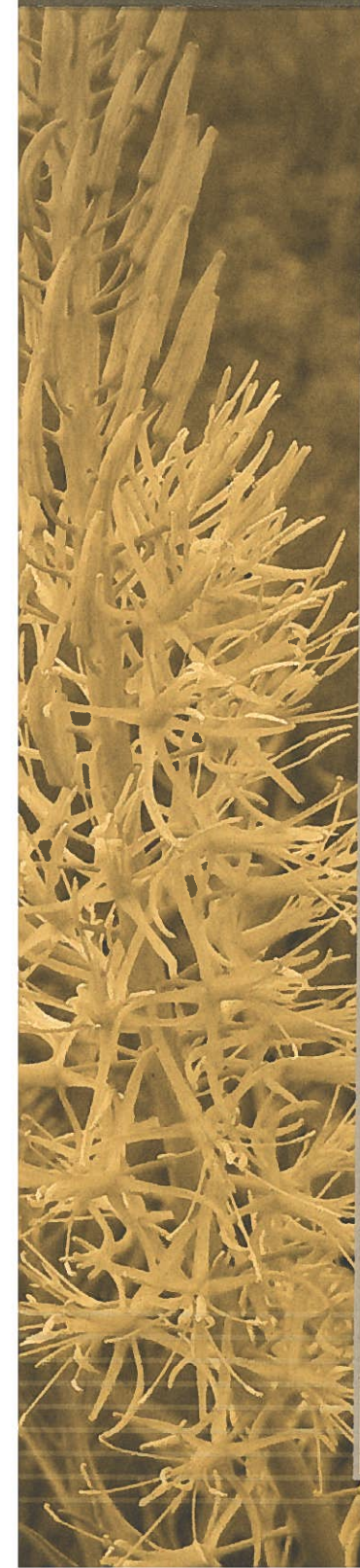
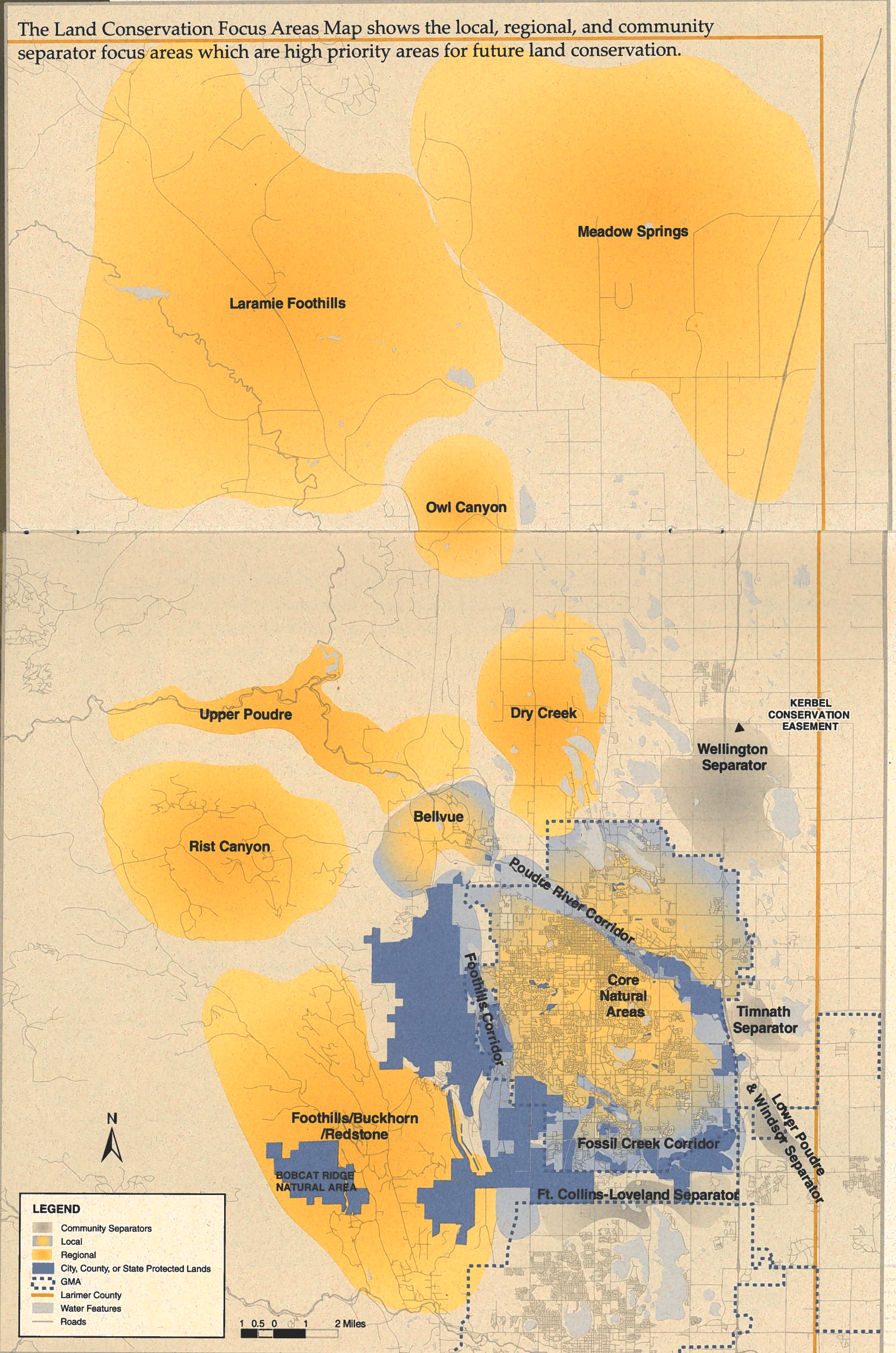


Legend	
	City Limits
	City of Fort Collins Natural Area
	County or City Open Lands
	Larimer County, State, or CSU Natural Area
	Lease
	Significant City Contribution
	GMA
	Streets
	Water Features
	Parks
	Conservation Easement

REGIONAL NATURAL AREAS



The Land Conservation Focus Areas Map shows the local, regional, and community separator focus areas which are high priority areas for future land conservation.



MOVING TOWARD THE PAST



The City is restoring many of the lands acquired in its Natural Areas Program to native ecosystems. This is being done to . . .

- . . . re-establish the land's ability to provide adequate homes and travel routes for wildlife,*
- . . . strengthen the land's natural water cleansing functions,*
- . . . begin the process of healing erosion's scars,*
- . . . offer recreational opportunities that blend well into the land's forms and functions,*
- . . . return to Fort Collins' citizens and visitors the beauty of native wildflower fields.*



Natural areas protect bald eagle roosting sites

This is a complex task. It can't be done by just taking a hands-off approach. Disturbed lands are hospitable to weeds and other opportunistic plants that decrease natural diversity and lessen habitat value. Years of disturbance have resulted in heavy weed infestations on many of the City's natural areas. Removing these invasive plants and reestablishing native ecosystems takes time, especially here in the arid west. Until restoration is well-established, weeds continue to enter the sites. They blow in from other properties, wash in along waterways, and sprout from seeds still in the soil. On properties open to recreation, weed seeds walk in on hikers' shoes, are carried in by horses, and travel on bicycle tires.



Great Blue Heron

Weed control was an intensive activity in 2003. Removal takes many forms: prescribed fire, cover crops, hand-pulling, mechanical measures, and herbicide applications.

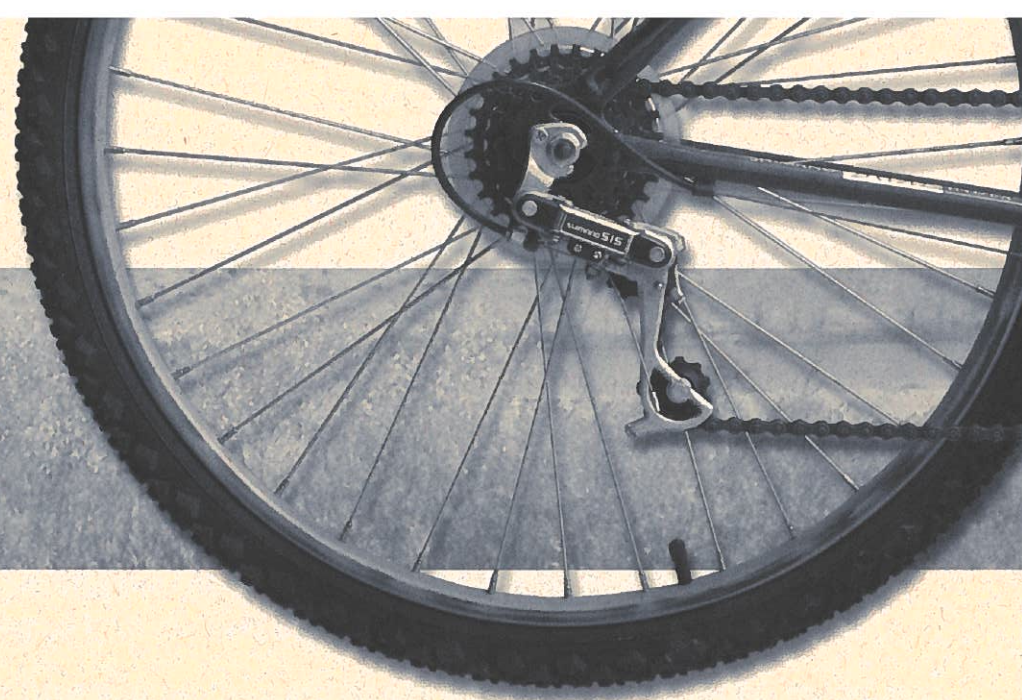
In January and May of 2003, prescribed fire was used in an attempt to reduce weeds on Kingfisher Point Natural Area. These fires prepared more than 35 acres for an initial restorative planting.

Planting of cover crops such as wheat, oats, and barley was used in 2003 to provide a vegetative cover to the soil while offering a growing season in which to conduct an all-out assault on weeds. Cover crops were used at Nix, Kingfisher Point, River's Edge, Prairie Dog Meadow, and Pelican Marsh natural areas.

Herbicide application and mechanical measures of weed control (hand pulling, mowing, plowing/discing) are used in most natural areas. Some weeds are mowed before going to seed, reducing their ability to spread. When appropriate, weeds are pulled by hand, often with the help of volunteers. In other cases, plants are mulched by discing or buried by plowing them under. Together, these tools form the Natural Areas Program's integrated weed management system designed to aggressively tackle the weed problem while minimizing impacts on non-target resources.

Restoration is not limited to City-owned natural areas. The City's Natural Areas Certification Program encourages private landowners and non-City public landowners to protect, restore, and enhance native animal and plant communities. Limited funds are available from the City's Natural Areas Program to assist in enhancing or restoring Certified Natural Areas. Since 1995, over \$118,000 has been awarded for these enhancement and restoration projects. In 2003, \$15,000 was awarded for seven projects.

REACHING TOWARD THE FUTURE



*Coyote Ridge Natural Area,
a site close to home*



Bobcat Ridge Natural Area,

City Council directed expansion of the Land Conservation Plan to include “regional” land conservation, in response to the Open Space Yes! Citizen Initiative passed by voters in 2002 and public input received in 2002 and 2003.

City Council adopted a resolution that:

- Added a “regional” focus to the Natural Areas Policy Plan
- Approved the Land Conservation Focus Areas Map - general guide for future land conservation
- Established the following considerations to be evaluated prior to land acquisition

Willingness of property owner to sell

Recreation opportunities

Ecological value (e.g., wildlife and habitat)

Cost of acquisition

Long-term stewardship costs

Geographic proximity to Fort Collins

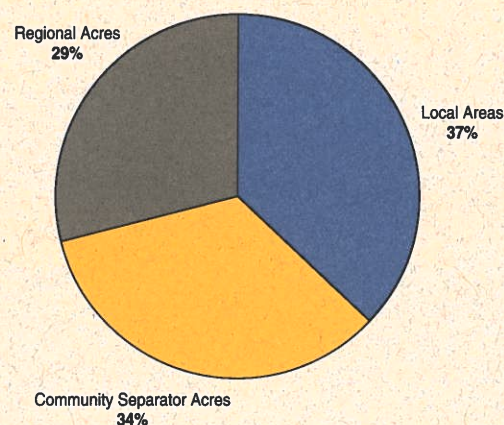
Expected threat to the integrity of the natural resource values of a property

Also in 2003, at City Council's direction staff prepared the Framework for Future Land Conservation. The "Framework" envisions a future where our community identity is protected by open lands between surrounding communities, where local natural areas are numerous and close to home, and where after a short drive to regional natural areas, residents can hike through a red rock canyon, stand in the middle of a prairie and gaze at an uninterrupted view of the mountains, or climb to the top of the foothills to look out over Fort Collins.

Land conservation is accomplished through the purchase of lands, acceptance of donated lands, and purchase or donation of conservation easements. Lands are acquired solely by the Natural Areas Program or in partnership with other City departments, or in partnership with other entities (e.g., Larimer County).

The Fort Collins Natural Areas Program manages most, but not all, of the land it conserves. The program currently manages 10,500 acres. Lands conserved by conservation easements are managed by property owners who continue existing operations (often farming or ranching). For future regional land conservation, the City will acquire and manage lands, will partner with other entities (e.g., Larimer County) to purchase and management lands, and will acquire conservation easements with the land remaining under private management.

Land Conservation Areas
11,472 Acres



CONSERVATION



LANDS LOADED WITH LIFE

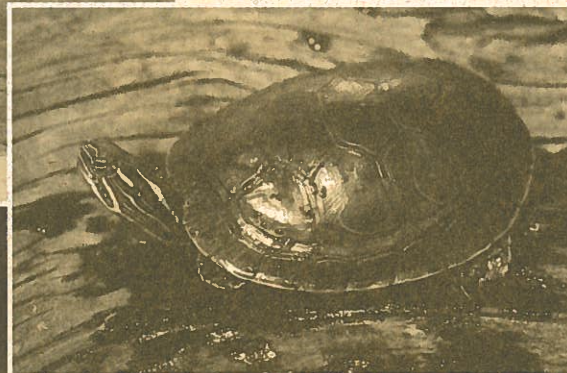
At first glance, some people see undeveloped lands as “underutilized lands that are just sitting there doing nothing.” Look closely! Natural areas are teeming with life. They provide recreation, wildlife homes and travel corridors, native plant habitats, educational and research opportunities, mountain vistas, and more.

Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area



Recreation - There are over 23 miles of natural surface trail. Pineridge alone has over six miles of trails. In addition to natural surface trails, the paved Poudre River, Spring Creek, and Fossil Creek trails go through Cathy Fromme Prairie, Nix, and many other natural areas. Trails are used for hiking, biking, skate boarding, on-leash dog walking, horseback riding, birdwatching, and just escaping the pressures of everyday life.

Enforcement - Natural Areas and Trails Rangers provide assistance to visitors and protect ecological resources. In 2003, rangers developed a comprehensive trail marking system at Pineridge Natural Area. In 2004, rangers will initiate a new volunteer mountain bike patrol and extend the number of locations with updated trail signage including the Foothills Trail.



Western Painted Turtle at Arapaho Bend Natural Area



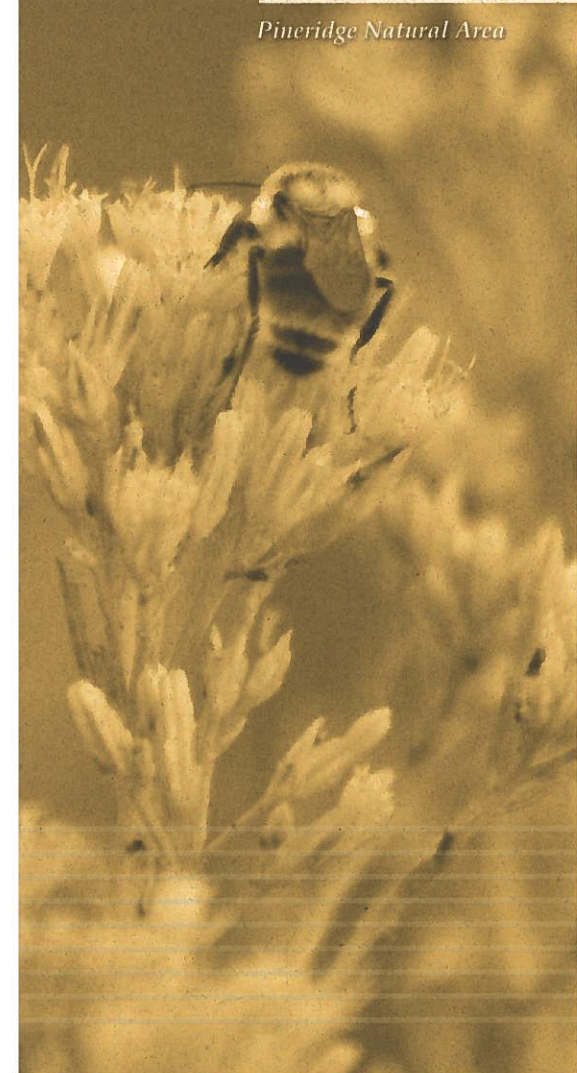
Pineridge Natural Area

Education – Under the leadership of the Natural Areas Program’s education staff, volunteer Master Naturalists provide education and interpretation in natural areas for school classes and other groups who want to learn about nature. On-site interpretive features also provide valuable information in natural areas. Education staff completed the Pineridge interpretive project in 2003, educating visitors about nature and providing a map of the site’s recreational trails.

Research – In 2003, the Natural Areas Program’s maintenance staff conducted a prairie dog research project. The project found that there are 614 acres within Fort Collins’ natural areas (spread among 10 sites) occupied by black-tailed prairie dogs. Density estimates indicate approximately 8,400 prairie dogs living on these sites. We intend to repeat the research in future years to monitor increases or decreases in acreage or density of prairie dogs.

Wildlife - Natural areas not only provide habitat for wildlife within those areas, but also enhance opportunities to see wildlife throughout the Fort Collins area. Checklists indicate more bird species (334) have been seen within the 48,000-acre Fort Collins Growth Management Area than in the 2.2 million-acre Yellowstone National Park (311 species), 193,060-acre Pawnee National Grassland (301 species), or 265,726-acre Rocky Mountain National Park (280 species). Residents often report seeing bald eagles, pelicans, herons, and other exciting wildlife right in the middle of town. Local natural areas make such sightings possible.

Plant Life - An amazing diversity of native plants live in Fort Collins’ natural areas. Foothills sites alone (Coyote Ridge, Pineridge, Maxwell, and Reservoir Ridge) are home to over 30 native tree and shrub species, over 50 native grass and grass-like plant species, and over 170 native wildflower and vine species. Natural areas along waterways and on the prairie are home to native riparian and prairie species.





Community Planning and Environmental Services
Natural Resources Department
Natural Areas Program
P.O. Box 580
Fort Collins, CO 80522

CONTACT US:

Natural Areas Program (970) 221-6600

To schedule a Master Naturalist presentation (970) 416-2480

To become a Master Naturalist (970) 224-6118

Natural Areas and Trails Rangers (970) 416-2147

Adopt-a-Natural Area (970) 416-2133

Certified Natural Areas (970) 221-6310

Web site: www.fcgov.com/naturalareas



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