

Thanks for Volunteering!

Volunteers are an integral part of the Natural Areas Department and serve as ambassadors to all audiences. The department has diverse volunteers who are engaged in an array of meaningful and necessary tasks that deepen their connection and that of the community to the natural world.

The community members of Fort Collins are blessed with a rich natural heritage. The coalescence of prairies, foothills, and riparian ecosystems gives our area an incredible diversity of habitat types and wildlife.

To help preserve this heritage, in November, 1992, interested community members put sales tax initiative on ballot dedicated to the preservation of natural areas. The voters overwhelmingly voted to tax themselves at the rate of 1/4 cent on each dollar spent to acquire and manage land with natural values. In 1993, the Natural Areas Department was created. In 1994, the education component of the was formed in order to promote the values of natural areas to the community members. At that time the Master Naturalist Program was born. The Master Naturalist Program trains and supports volunteers, who then lead a wide variety of outreach activities through-out our community.

The City of Fort Collins is committed to conserving natural areas in a manner that protects their integrity and provides educational, interpretive and recreational opportunities to the community members of Fort Collins.

Education Staff:

Charlotte Norville: Volunteer Training, Onboarding, Development

Diane Wendt: Stewardship Volunteers and Education

Alex McHenry: Interim Educational Support

AJ Chlebnik: Media, Community Programs

Laura Fritz: School Programs, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Tyler Eisenhand: School Programs, Events

CERTIFICATION AS A MASTER NATURALIST

The Master Naturalist training includes instruction in basic ecological principles, the history and location of major natural areas in Fort Collins, knowledge of the resources and the dominant features, and presentation and education techniques.

At the end of the training you should be able to:

- articulate the values and benefits of natural areas to the community.
- understand the management policies pertaining to natural areas.
- apply knowledge of basic ecology to natural areas.
- identify the key components of different habitat types.
- identify common flora and fauna of each habitat type.
- implement education and interpretation techniques.
- provide a welcoming presence
- promote a sense of stewardship to natural areas visitors.

Certification Requirements:

- Be 18 years or older and successfully complete a background check.
- Successfully attend and fully participate in the Master Naturalist Training.
- Present a ten-minute interpretive program to peers.
- Complete a certification field trip.

Master Naturalist Volunteer Commitment:

- Volunteer for at least two years after certification.
- Lead at least two programs each year.
- Donate at least 50 contact hours within two years of training.
- Attend at least two qualified continuing education programs each year.



Certification as a Master Naturalist Assistant

Certification Requirements:

- Be 18 years or older and successfully complete a background check.
- Successfully attend and fully participate in the Master Naturalist Assistant Training Program.

Volunteer Commitment:

- Assist with at least two programs each calendar year.
- Donate at least 25 hours within two years of training.
- Attend at least two qualified continuing education programs.

MASTER NATURALIST AND ASSISTANTS VOLUNTEER SERVICE GUIDELINES

We Give You Clothes!

At the conclusion of the Master Naturalist or Assistant training, you will receive a polo-style shirt, hat, name badge, and jacket. It's important that people know who you are, and that our program is visible to users of the natural areas. Always wear these identifiers when giving presentations for the Natural Areas Department.

Our Programs Are Free

There is never a charge for Master Naturalist presentations. Presentations at facilities where general admission or tuition is normally charged (day care facilities, private schools) are acceptable.

You're Never Alone!

The City has a policy that any City employee or volunteer who works with children or others who may be considered "vulnerable" must agree to a background check. In order to protect everyone, Master Naturalists are never the only adult with a group of children, senior community members, disabled persons, or other persons of vulnerability. There must always be a responsible adult from the group requesting the services of a Master Naturalist present during any Master Naturalist program. If a child needs to use the restroom, please refer him to their teacher or guardian for assistance and permission.

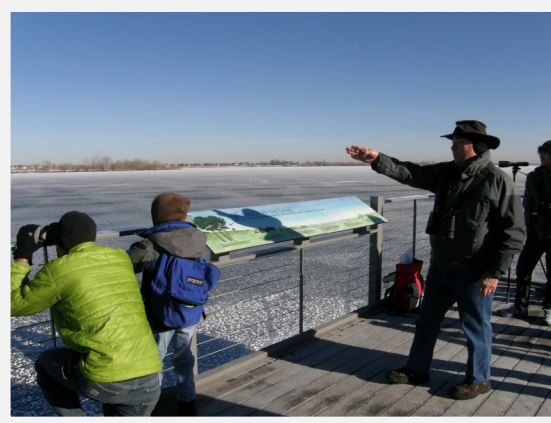
Master Naturalists should not transport people to or from an event. Exceptions would be those occasions when a Master Naturalist is also a volunteer for the organization requesting a presentation.

Outreach Procedures

Requests for presentations **must**

come into the Natural Areas Department. This is important for liability issues, quality control, tracking volunteer hours, evaluating programs, and the substance and focus of presentations. A Master Naturalist can schedule a presentation directly with a group but the volunteer coordinator must be notified as soon as possible so it can be entered into *Engage*. This is also where you sign up to lead a program.

Additionally, if someone other than staff or a Master Naturalist wants to present a program on a natural area,



this requires a permit. Staff will arrange guest scientist speakers for the *Science Behind the Scenery* series, but all other programs are delivered by staff and Master Naturalists only.

Resource Room

The Resource Room is our materials and work room. Work with the education staff to coordinate materials for your program. All supplies are provided. Usually, staff will set out and put back supplies and materials for each program. You pick them up and return them. If you think we need something please let us know and we can evaluate the request to see if it's something we would use repeatedly.

Please sign out/in the materials on the check-out sheets.

Reimbursements

We prefer not to reimburse volunteers for supplies (too much paperwork!). The City does not reimburse volunteers for mileage. Mileage used to participate in volunteer activities can be used as an income tax deduction. Consult with an accountant or the IRS for details. Volunteers are responsible for keeping their own mileage records.

Continuing Education

We are very proud of our continuing education programs for Master Naturalists. You will know about these in advance and they may include book studies, documentaries, Project Wild and Wet training, Certified Interpretive Guide, as well as special topics.

Attendance at two qualified continuing education programs per calendar year is required to maintain active status.

See continuing education guidelines.



NATURAL AREAS DEPARTMENT

The mission of the Natural Areas Department is to conserve and enhance lands with natural resource, agricultural, and scenic values, while providing meaningful education and recreation opportunities.

EDUCATION VISION AND GOALS

Mission

The mission of the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Education Program is to inspire stewardship and connection to nature by providing diverse engagement opportunities for our community.

Vision

We are a community where everyone has the opportunity to be connected to the outdoors

Goals

1. The education program seeks to increase support and awareness of natural areas values. These include educational, economic, aesthetic, spiritual, recreational, ecological, scientific, historical and cultural values.
2. The education program provides a

welcoming presence for visitors to natural areas and program participants, instills a sense of stewardship toward natural areas, and provides meaningful experiences while increasing support for the Natural Areas Department.

3. The education program seeks out and welcomes feedback and facilitates civic involvement.

4. Through education and outreach efforts, community members will become aware of the Natural Areas Department's vision and mission, increase their recognition of the Natural Areas Department, and understand the funding and ballot requirements for the program.

5. Media, training, and signage reflect and reinforce our messages of welcome, stewardship, and diverse experiences, while increasing recognition through standard visual components and design, active voice text, and engaging photos.

6. Education and outreach provides diverse programming for diverse audiences reflecting the demographics of Fort Collins and Larimer County.

7. Timely, accurate information, experiential and participatory learning situations, and a thematic approach are part of each program.



WHAT IS A NATURAL AREA?

Natural areas are an anchor to windward. Knowing they are there, we can also know that we are still a rich nation, tending our resources as we should—not a people in despair searching every last nook and cranny of our land for a board of lumber, a barrel of oil, a blade of grass, or a tank of water.

—Clinton P. Anderson



Natural areas differ from parks in use and management. Activities associated with natural areas include photography, wildlife observation, scientific research, interpretation, and reflection, as well as hiking and biking. Many of our natural areas cannot and should not accommodate all of the users that parks accommodate, such as organized sports.

Designation of a natural area does not imply that there is no management. The main management focus of natural areas is protection of the resource. Allowing natural ecological processes to occur over time is key to their existence. Some natural areas have limited trails, on-trail only requirements,

blinds for wildlife observation, and even exclusion during certain critical times of the year. Of course, these types of policies require the public's understanding and cooperation.

Unlike a park setting, natural areas are infrequently mowed or watered, and only native species are planted. While some types of recreation are appropriate in natural areas, many are not. Frisbees throwing, kite flying, ball games, and playgrounds are great in parks, but *not* great in natural areas.

Natural areas are critical to the existence of wild animals and native plants. Some natural areas are home to rare plants. Many natural areas provide essential habitat for wildlife such as ferruginous hawks,

burrowing owls, prairie dogs, and bald eagles. Other wildlife use our natural areas as crucial corridors for migration. Some songbirds and butterflies are seasonal visitors.

Just as there are different types of neighborhoods, there are different types of natural areas with different functions. These include prairies, ponds, riparian areas, forests, and shrublands.

HOW DO WE VALUE NATURAL AREAS?

Educational Value

Natural areas provide outdoor classrooms for study, interpretation, and hands-on learning. These educational opportunities serve to enhance appreciation and understanding of the natural world.

Scientific Value

Natural areas serve as unique and irreplaceable living laboratories for scientific research. Many research possibilities exist including studies on urban wildlife management, stream restoration, fisheries enhancement, animal behavior, water quality, native and non-native vegetation, medicinal investigation, landscape design, rare and endangered species,

areas.

Economic Value

Property next to natural areas tend to have a higher value than property values located at a distance from them. Companies seeking new plant or office locations are increasingly influenced by the presence of open lands and natural areas. Bird watching and nature photography are multi-million dollar industries.

The land itself is valuable. Bequests and donations of properties to City open lands and natural areas can be of significant value.



Natural areas hold soils and recycle nutrients; they provide refuge for sensitive, rare and endangered species, and protect resources for the future.



archaeology, geology, and history.

Recreational Value

School children, youth groups, senior community members, walkers, joggers, bird watchers, naturalists, anglers, photographers, and others all use natural areas. This has far-reaching benefits. People are healthier. Natural areas are places for children to play and interact directly with natural processes. As adults they may work to enhance or preserve natural



Natural areas also provide valuable services to the City. It is less costly to provide open lands than to provide other types of public services such as infrastructure.

Conservation Value

The City of Fort Collins depends on open lands and natural areas for protecting properties from flooding, recharging groundwater supplies from undeveloped uplands, filtration and cleansing of stormwater before it enters natural systems, and even to help treat wastewater.

Historic and Cultural Value

Historic values in natural areas may be cultural as well as natural. Certain geological features and processes are preserved in natural areas. Natural areas may contain souvenirs of our past. These artifacts tell a story about our relationship with nature. In some cases natural objects are an integral part of our culture. Our society's symbols of freedom, beauty, strength, and independence (bald eagle, bighorn sheep ram, bull elk, etc.) stem from the natural world.

HOW DO WE VALUE NATURAL AREAS?

Spiritual Value—Spiritual values of natural areas are the hardest to express or measure, yet often are the most important and strongly felt. Natural areas provide us with scenic views and opportunities for reflection. Peaceful feelings and an increased sense of well-being may arise from those opportunities. In these places we experience a re-connection to the natural world. We appreciate beauty in the natural world in a way we cannot from books or movies. Scenic views, sounds of trickling water, sunlight upon our faces, a hawk soaring, or dew upon a spider's web are things that we treasure. Natural areas are refuges from the pressures of a fast-paced society. They provide relief from machinery, from the confines of steel and concrete, and from crowding by our fellow humans. Natural areas offer havens for personal growth and for contemplating the relationship between humans and the land.

Importance of Natural Areas

Natural areas in Fort Collins are important locally, regionally, statewide, nationally, and internationally. Our natural areas provide important connections to other natural areas as corridors for wildlife movement from adjacent regions and states. Natural areas in Fort Collins provide much needed respite, food, water, and shelter for migrating wildlife during their long journeys, as well as destination points for others. Globally rare plant and animal species are found in our natural areas.

