



Cache la Poudre River 2023 Zone Update



December 2023

Poudre River

2023 Zone Update

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Acronyms:

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
CFS	Cubic Feet per Second
CPW	Colorado Parks & Wildlife
CSU	Colorado State University
ELC	Environmental Learning Center
FC Moves	Fort Collins Moves (City Department)
FCNAD	Fort Collins Natural Areas Department
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
IDF	Impact and Decision Framework
PFA	Poudre Fire Authority
RHAF	River Health Assessment Framework
USFS	US Forest Service

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A Message from the Director

Running right through the heart of Fort Collins, the Poudre River is cherished by the community. For thousands of years to the present time, people in what we now call Northern Colorado relied on the Cache la Poudre River (Poudre River or the river) for drinking water and agriculture, as well as a place to gather, take refuge, and find renewal. For the past three decades, the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department (FCNAD or the department) has connected the community to the river, serving as steward of nearly 60% of the river's urban floodplain. I am proud to present this holistic update to guide management of natural areas along the Poudre River.

The community co-created this plan with FCNAD to support a healthy and resilient Poudre River for future generations. They expressed a desire for additional conservation and recreation efforts. They spoke of the need for a functioning river ecosystem with reliable flows that can sustain native plant communities and abundant wildlife. In addition, they described a need for enhanced infrastructure, while managing disallowed activities, supporting safety, and easing tensions between different uses.

Thanks to the support of voters, the community, and City leaders, FCNAD has a unique opportunity to proactively manage the natural areas in the Poudre Zone. This plan outlines how that will be done through prioritizing enhanced natural resource values, equitable access, and appropriate infrastructure. The actions recommended in this plan build on FCNAD's many partnerships to ensure the resiliency of the Poudre River in the face of future challenges such as climate change and higher demand for water, while remaining a key feature of the Fort Collins community that can be enjoyed by all.

The vision laid out in this plan invites our community to come together like never before to support and connect to the Poudre River. I encourage our whole community to partner with the Natural Areas to work toward the outcomes in this plan to foster an inclusive and resilient Poudre River Zone.



Katie Donahue, Natural Areas Director

December 12, 2023

Date

Executive Summary

The Cache la Poudre River Zone Update will guide the responsible stewardship of the beautiful and diverse natural areas along the Poudre River. Building on ten years of community feedback, staff expertise, and partner input, the Zone Update identifies implementation priorities, grounded in FCNAD's four goals:



Conserve and protect lands and water



Protect and improve ecosystem health and resilience



Provide meaningful education and appropriate recreation opportunities



Responsibly steward the community's resources

This Zone Update is part of an adaptive planning method which allows for modifications based on community feedback and changing landscape needs, while remaining true to the department goals, mission, and ballot language.

Highlights from the Zone Update include expanding monitoring of different wildlife and plant communities, developing key partnerships to keep more water in the river and increase safety for visitors, and engaging diverse audiences to understand how to make natural areas more accessible so that persons of all identities can fully participate in natural areas and create a resilient Poudre River Zone.



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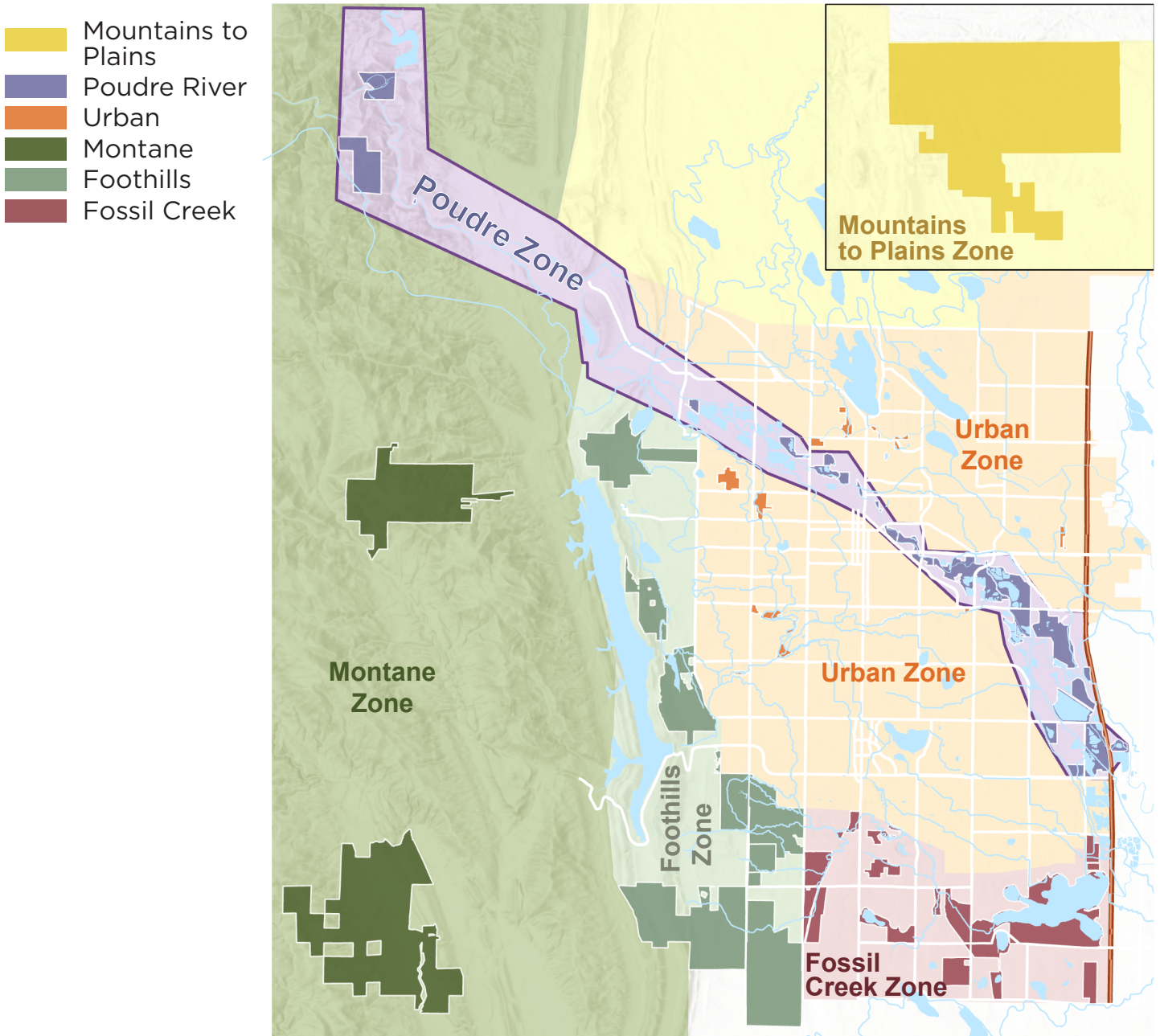
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Conservation and Stewardship Planning Zones

Conservation and Stewardship Planning (CSP) divides the region into six management zones that all natural areas fall within. Zones are roughly defined based on ecosystem type, geographic area, or a unique feature - like the Poudre River (see Map).

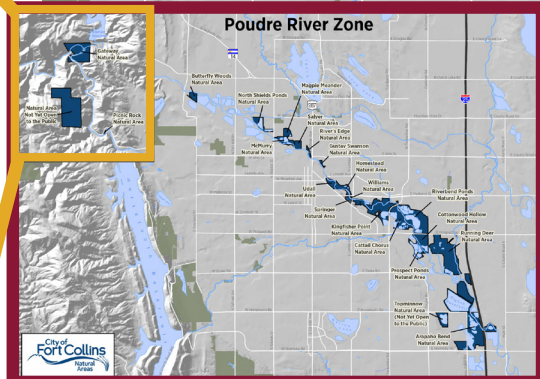
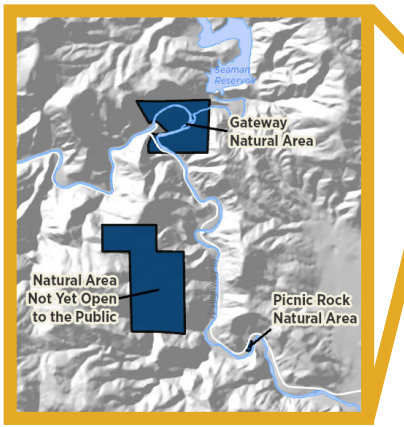
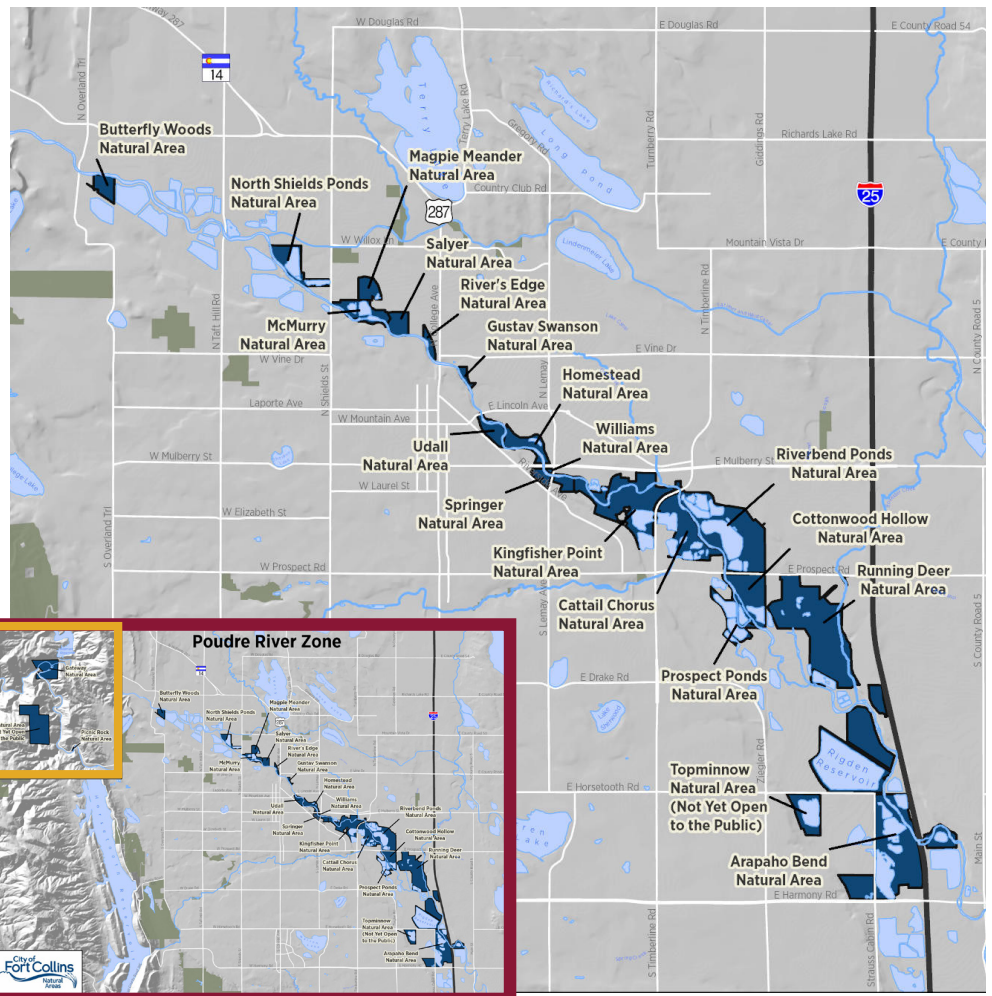
Each zone is periodically evaluated in-depth and management updates are made. These Zone Updates work to ensure alignment between FCNAD management actions and Natural Areas ballot language, community priorities, and FCNAD's mission.



Poudre River Zone Overview

The Poudre River is a connector. It is a corridor that links the mountains to the plains, from its headwater in Rocky Mountain National Park to the confluence with the South Platte River near Greeley. This pathway allows wildlife, plants, water, and materials to travel between ecosystems. It has also been an important location for humans to connect and gather resources for at least 12,000 years. This area is the original homelands of the Hinono'eiteen (Arapaho), Tsétséhéstàhesè (Cheyenne), Nùmùntàx (Comanche), Kiowa (Caiugu), Čariks i Čariks (Pawnee), Sosonih (Shoshone), Oc'eti S'akowin (Sioux) and Núuchiu (Ute) Peoples and an important site of trade, gathering, and healing for numerous Native Nations. Today, the Poudre River draws thousands of people to its banks to connect with friends and family, while immersing themselves in the sights, sounds, and experiences of the river.

The Poudre River Zone (the Zone) follows the iconic Cache la Poudre River from Gateway Natural Area in the scenic Poudre Canyon, downstream through the heart of Fort Collins, and makes its way through Arapaho Bend Natural Area, adjacent to Interstate 25. The Zone contains 21 natural area sites comprising 2,282 acres of land that help provide clean water, habitat for plants and animals, and protect the community from floods. This ownership structure and the importance of the river leads to a diverse group of stakeholders, priorities, and interests in the Zone.



Community Engagement

What people said they appreciate about Poudre River natural areas:

1. Conserved land
2. Trail system
3. Beauty and wildlife viewing

Key Feedback Themes for the Poudre River:

- Balancing conservation and recreation
- Enhancing infrastructure
- Managing unwanted activities
- Maintaining safety
- Easing tensions between user types
- Maintaining river flows



Data in this report reflects broad outreach efforts from spring and summer of 2022, and 2023. Feedback forms were available in English and Spanish.

Common Themes:

A healthy natural system: Roughly 80% of Fort Collins' biodiversity occurs along the river. Natural Areas will continue to protect sensitive species and the range of biodiversity along the river through restoration and targeting the removal of invasive species.

Amount of water in the river: Demands for water from the Poudre River have resulted in reduced in-stream flows. Reduced flows impact river functions, recreation, water quality, and native species. Natural Areas will continue to work with regional water providers and partners to increase water in the river where possible.

Illegal camping: Community feedback identified issues related to illegal camping on natural areas as a concern. Natural areas is part of the broad effort alongside other City departments and partner organizations to address long-term solutions to support people experiencing homelessness. Natural Areas will continue to protect conserved areas through education, connection to services, cleanups, and enforcement efforts.

Dogs off leash: Dogs can disrupt natural ecosystems and leave waste in sensitive areas when allowed off leash, causing problems for native ecosystems. Natural Areas rangers will continue to educate community members and enforce leash rules by ticketing violators to protect the ecosystem.

Trash: Wind, littering, and increased public use lead to concerns about trash along the Poudre River. Natural Areas will continue to address trash by coordinating with other City partners on trash can design, location, and pick-up schedule.

About the Feedback:

Input was collected in English and Spanish through web-based and paper forms, online and at events, March 2022 - June 2023. Outreach included:

- Irish Elementary Day of the Child
- Kestrel Fields Drop-In
- Poudre River Drop-In
- Soapstone Prairie Drop-In
- Consultant-led Accessibility Assessment at Soapstone Prairie and Poudre River
- Natural Areas E-news
- Land Conservation and Stewardship Board
- Social Media
- Trailhead Signs
- Mailing to Neighbors
- Volunteer Coffee Talk
- Presentations to Poudre School District Teachers and a PSD English Language Learners Group
- Native American and Indigenous Community Meeting
- Summer Bike to Work Day, 2023



Feedback Demographics:

The demographics of the 432 feedback form respondents were generally older, wealthier, and more educated than the general population. Of the respondents who provided information on their race, 87.5% were white, while only 5% were Hispanic/Latinx, 4% were two or more races, and other demographics combined were less than 4%. Around 17% of respondents did not provide information on their race or ethnicity. While this feedback doesn't accurately represent the community, Natural Areas strives to conduct inclusive public engagement that reflects the diverse demographics of the community and is always evolving its processes to meet this goal.

In addition to the feedback form, community input is expressed through many other methods, all of which are valued by the Natural Areas Department. Feedback on natural areas management can be provided anytime at fcgov.com/naturalareas/feedback.



"I enjoy birding on the Poudre trail. It's nice that along the length of the trail there are many different ecological niches/habitats that allow for a diversity of species to be observed."

-Community member

*"Que son una fuente de tranquilidad y relajacion"
"They are a source of tranquility and relaxation"*

-Community member

Poudre River Zone Priorities

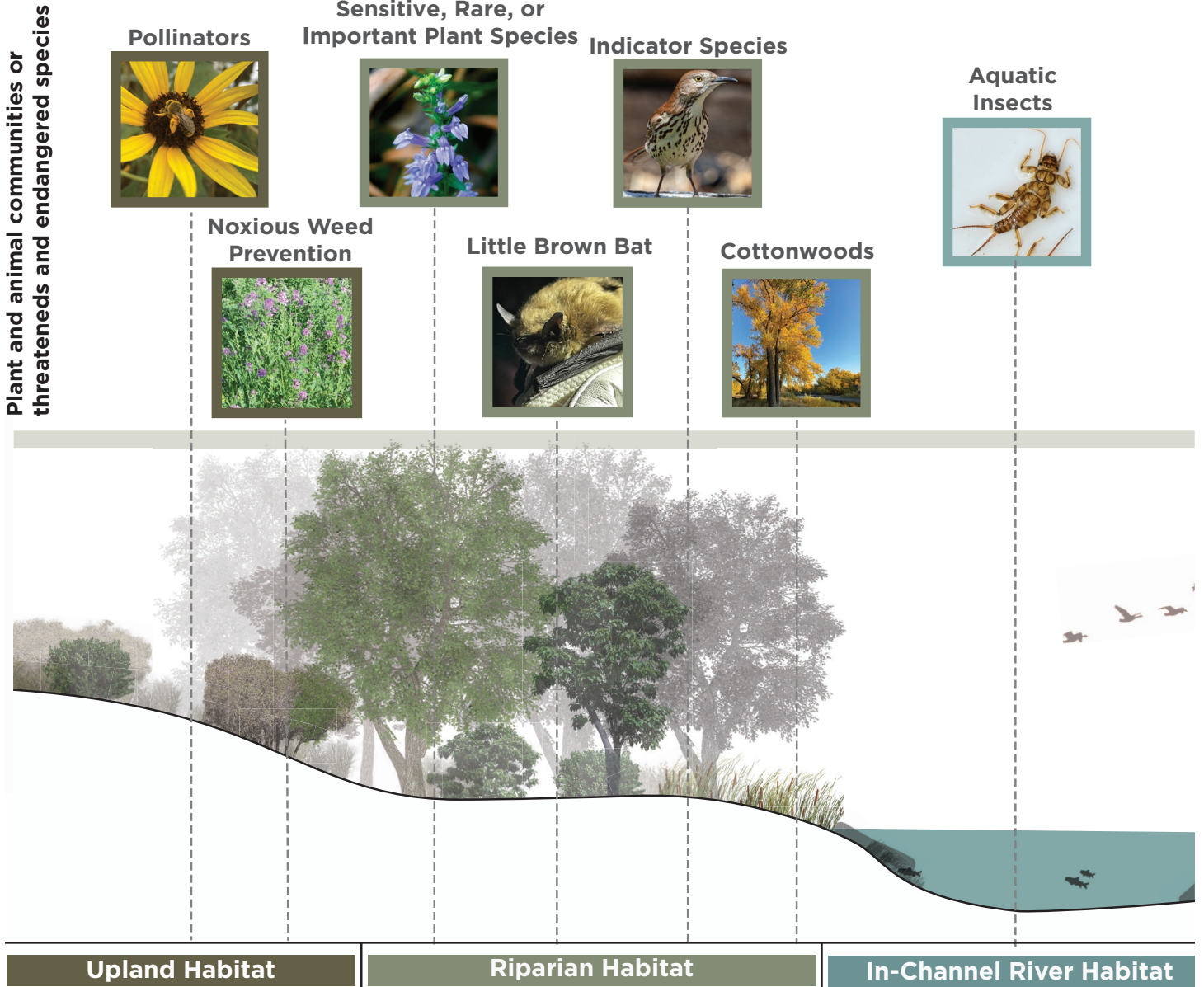


The Poudre River Zone is characterized by both high visitor use and high ecological value. Natural areas in the Zone have the highest recorded visitor use¹ of all FCNAD natural areas. In addition, the Zone is of great ecological importance in Colorado's arid climate. Riparian habitats (the area along the river edge and banks) in Colorado support 80% of all wildlife yet make up only 2-4% of the land. In alignment with the Natural Areas mission, ballot language, city-wide strategic efforts, and community feedback, this plan establishes both Conservation Priorities and People Priorities for the Zone.

The following priorities will guide the work of the Natural Areas Department's management efforts over the next decade. The tactics outlined later in this Zone Update were specifically developed around the Conservation and People Priorities established in this plan.

¹ Poudre visitation report is posted at fcgov.com/naturalareas/plans-policies

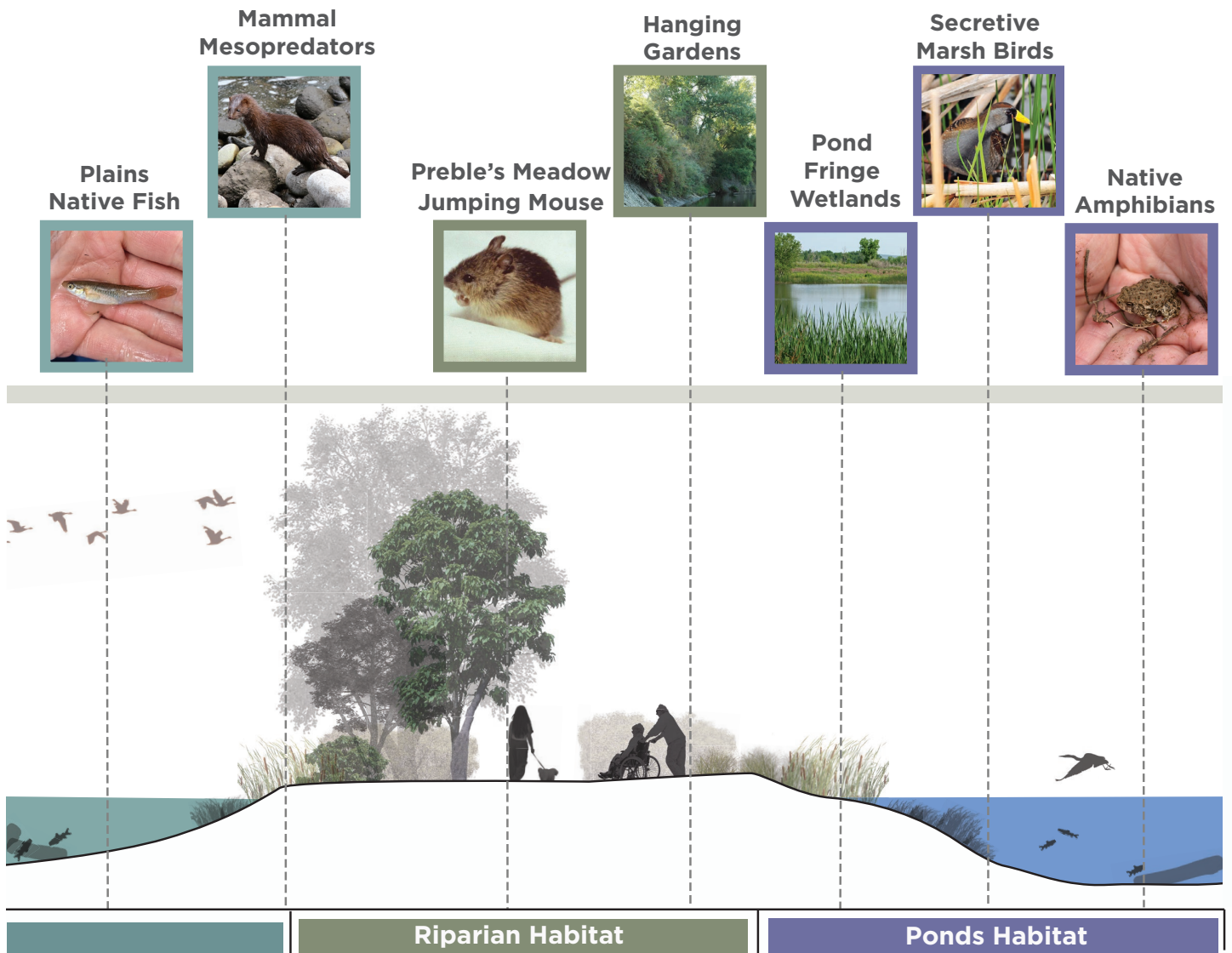
Conservation Priorities



In-Channel River Ecological Processes

- **Functional flows:** High springtime flows scour fine sediment, rejuvenate the riverbed, and sustain wetlands while base flows maintain essential aquatic habitat throughout the rest of the year.
- **Sediment balance:** Fine sediment, gravel, and larger cobble rock naturally move through the system. Balancing the amount of sediment that comes into a stretch of the river with the amount that leaves is critical for river health.
- **Confluence(s) with Poudre tributaries:** Confluences with Spring Creek, Boxelder Creek, and numerous other urban tributaries connect flows, plants seeds, and extends habitat for fish.
- **Coarse & fine-scale river habitat:** Both large and small-scale habitat features provide essential fish habitat pockets for reproduction, feeding, and escape from predators.
- **Water quality:** Having the right levels of oxygen, nutrients, and turbidity and appropriate temperatures is essential for sustaining the river's food web.

Conservation priorities focus on ecological processes, plant or animal communities, and species that require protection, monitoring, and maintenance to sustain a functioning, healthy, and resilient river ecosystem.



Riparian Ecological Processes

- **Connected river and riparian habitat:** Connected floodplains and uplands along the Poudre River provide larger habitat patches for wildlife, corridors for migration, and critical pathways for floodwaters to move safely through the city.
- **Riparian flooding:** Wetlands, willows, and cottonwoods rely on intermittent springtime flooding to thrive and keep non-native upland plants from taking over.
- **Vegetative structural diversity:** Riverside vegetation supports the most wildlife species when it offers a mosaic of habitats and diversity of heights and shapes of native trees, shrubs, and wetland plants.

Ponds Ecological Processes

- **Oxbow analogs, overflow channels, backwater habitats:** The Poudre River used to constantly create new side channels and flow paths. Restoration efforts can mimic these habitat features to recreate a braided system.
- **Native fish refugia:** The river system naturally forms seasonal ponds that disconnect and reconnect to the river. These habitats enable native fish to escape from predatory trout. Restoration efforts can reproduce these habitats.

People Priorities

People priorities focus on creating equitable and safe natural areas, enhancing the visitor use experience, and ensuring resource protection. Addressing these areas allows all community members to participate in natural areas and be part of protecting conservation values.



Equitable and Safe:

- Welcoming for all
- Native American and Indigenous culture and history, past and present
- Community members and visitors with disabilities
- Families or large groups
- People experiencing homelessness
- Parking lot safety

Visitor Use Experience:

- Access points
- Adjacent management agencies
- Fishing experience
- Watercraft recreation experience and safety
- Wayfinding

Resource Protection:

- Address visitor use trends
- Concentrated use and access



Flows in the Poudre River

Flows are critical

Water from the Poudre River makes it possible for nearly half a million people to live in northern Colorado. Fish, wildlife, and ecosystems that live along the river rely on flows to survive and thrive.



Flows are low in fall, winter, and spring

Low flows are a result of the natural hydrologic cycle of the Poudre River coupled with the 24 diversion structures that remove water from the channel year round.¹ Snowmelt from high elevations in the upper watershed provide most of the flows in the river, creating high flows in May through August. The rest of the year, flows

¹ Simpson, Mark. 2014. Poudre River Water Commissioner Presentation: Water in the Poudre: Where does it come from, who has the rights to use it, and who's watching?

are naturally low. The diversions on the river lower the peak flows in the summer and at times can remove all water from the river in the fall, winter, and spring. This results in dry-up points along the Poudre River with no flowing surface water.

Flow projects address dry-ups

Since the 1980s, the City of Fort Collins has invested in instream water rights and efforts to address low flows. For example, starting in 2021, City Council identified enhancing instream flows as a citywide priority, asserting that our community values protecting instream flows. To meet this need, the City and its partners are investing in projects to enhance instream flows - see map on page 12.

Future of Poudre flows

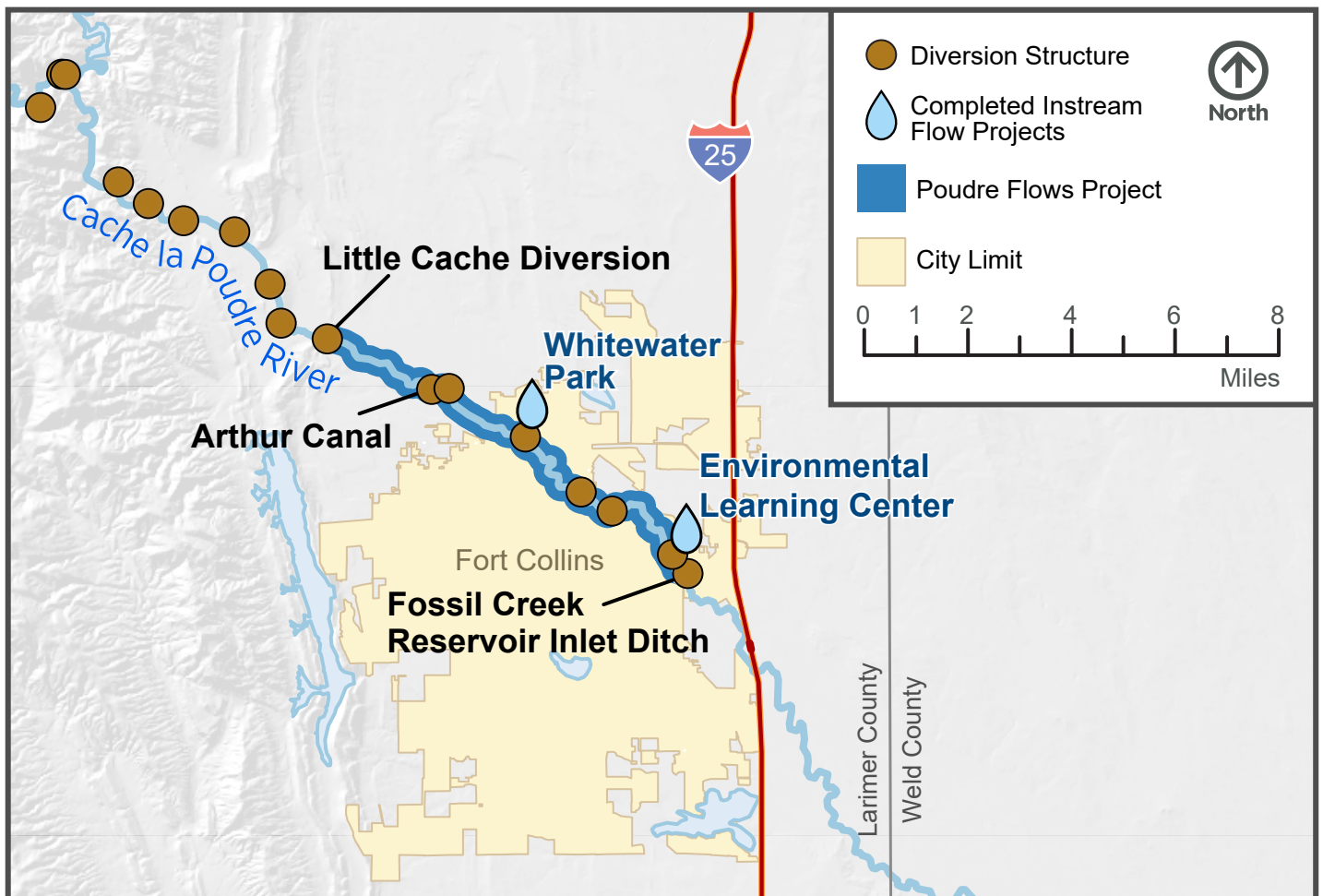
Over the past two centuries, human use has caused dramatic changes to the amount and quality of river flows, the physical form of its channels and floodplains, and the diversity of ecosystems, fish, plants, and wildlife. Our human footprint, coupled with the impacts of climate change, place additional pressure on the river ecosystem and the natural processes that sustain it. In the coming decades, it is anticipated that river flows and the ecosystem services they provide will continue to be affected by warming temperatures, natural disasters, infrastructure outages, increasing water demand by growing population, and large water development projects^{2,3,4}. The City and its partners will continue to collaborate and invest on projects that protect and enhance instream river flows.

² Colorado Climate Plan: State Level Policies and Strategies to Mitigate and Adapt. 2015

³ Colorado Climate Plan: State Level Policies and Strategies to Mitigate and Adapt. 2015

⁴ Colorado Water Plan, Colorado Water Conservation Board 2023

City of Fort Collins Instream Flow Projects



The Poudre River has many diversions that reduce flows for fish, wildlife, and recreation. The City invests in instream flow projects to protect the health of the Poudre River. The map above shows completed projects ongoing projects that aim to keep more water in the river.

Completed and Ongoing Projects:

- **Poudre Flows Plan** - An ongoing partnership with regional water providers to protect and enhance instream flows.
- **Poudre River Whitewater Park** - Completed in 2019, keeps up to 30 cfs in the river.
- **Environmental Learning Center Flow Restoration Project** - Completed in 2023, keeps up to 30 cfs in the river.
- **River Health Assessment Framework** - An ongoing collaborative effort to monitor and report on the health of the Poudre River.

Equity and Access

A broad and diverse sector of the Fort Collins community cares about and spends time along the Poudre River. These visitors have different ways of enjoying or experiencing the river. FCNAD is committed to honoring these differences and providing a variety of visitor use experiences to ensure equitable access to nature that meet the needs and preferences of community members. Commitment to equitable access means that FCNAD will use its resources to ensure that the most marginalized in the community are able to access nature. FCNAD aims for all visitors to feel welcome and safe on natural areas.

To work towards these aims, Natural Areas will continue to:

- Partner with other departments and agencies to address complex safety and social issues.
- Focus outreach opportunities to better understand the use and needs of children, community members with disabilities, and Native American and Indigenous peoples in the zone.
- Replace old signs with new ones providing messaging in English and Spanish.

These actions and more add up to more accessible and enjoyable natural areas for all members of the community.

"It would be great if there were more choices- different ways to get close to the water in a wheelchair."

- Community member



Natural Area Goals and Tactics

Four primary goals fulfill the intent of the current ballot language and make progress toward the FCNAD mission. The Poudre Zone Update outlines how FCNAD will work to achieve these goals.

<p>Goal 1</p> 	<p>CONSERVE & PROTECT LANDS & WATER</p> 	<p>Goal 2</p> 	<p>PROTECT & IMPROVE ECOSYSTEM HEALTH & RESILIENCE</p> 
<p>Goal 3</p> 	<p>PROVIDE MEANINGFUL EDUCATION & APPROPRIATE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES</p> 	<p>Goal 4</p> 	<p>RESPONSIBLY STEWARD THE COMMUNITY'S RESOURCES</p> 

Goal

1

CONSERVE & PROTECT LANDS & WATER



Riparian areas make up some of the most critical habitat for conservation across Colorado. These areas are incredibly biodiverse in Colorado’s dry ecosystems. At the same time, there is very high demand for water for human consumptive uses as well as recreational experiences. These factors make conserving and protecting land and water in the Poudre River Zone a continued goal of FCNAD to ensure local river ecosystems can provide services for both habitat and human needs.

Strategies: FCNAD will continue to identify and protect lands through fee title purchase or conservation easements across the Poudre River Zone that reflect City strategic priorities. FCNAD will partner with other land managers or regulatory entities in coming years to influence ecosystem health and trail connections on properties not owned by FCNAD. FCNAD will continuously seek opportunities to protect water resources in the Poudre River Zone and its tributaries to keep more water in the river to strive for a functioning river ecosystem.

Tactics:

Update land conservation priorities for the Poudre River Zone and foster relationships accordingly.

In coordination with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), explore opportunities for streamlined management of Picnic Rock and North Picnic Rock.

Work with regional partners to explore feasibility of improving riparian health between Butterfly Woods and North Shields Ponds natural areas.

Identify opportunities to connect northeast Fort Collins to the Poudre River corridor through acquisition and trail easements.

Identify opportunities to connect Poudre River and Foothills natural areas through acquisition and trail easements.

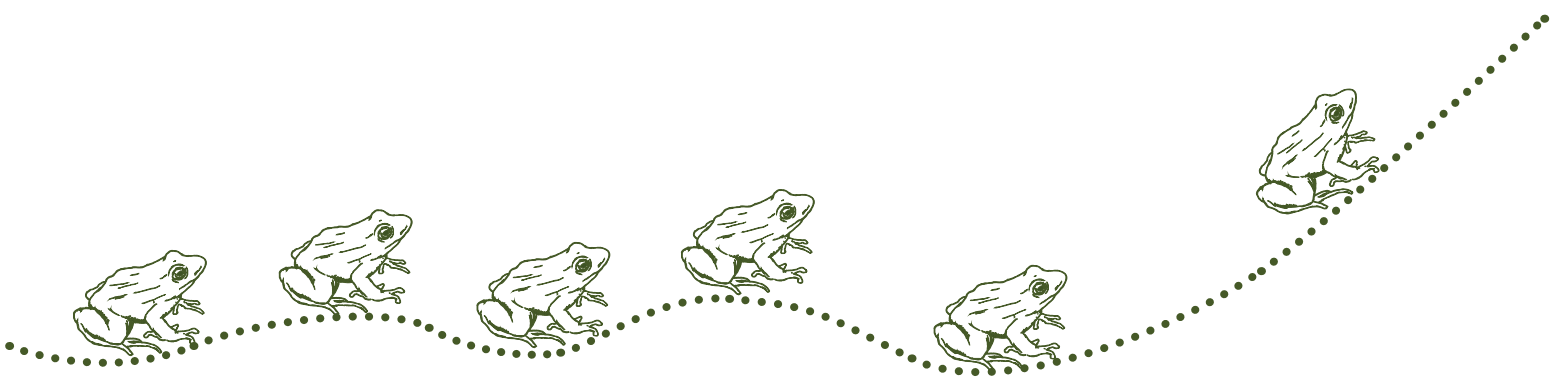
Coordinate with internal partners to support conservation and access priorities between the CSU Environmental Learning Center (ELC) and Rigden Reservoir.

Support Parks Department to complete Poudre Trail connections in the Zone.

Secure instream flows for the Poudre River through the ELC project and the Poudre Flows Plan by working with regional partners.

Explore opportunities to secure short-term agricultural water leases utilizing Agricultural Water Protection Act allowances.


Represent Natural Areas and citywide river health priorities in regional efforts related to mitigation planning and implementation of major water development projects.



Goal

2

PROTECT & IMPROVE ECOSYSTEM HEALTH



Much of the river and adjacent lands were highly modified and degraded through the 1900s. These alterations have negatively impacted the ecological health and resilience of the system. Restoration efforts such as reconnecting the river to its floodplain and securing in-stream flows, allow natural ecological process to occur. These processes support the establishment of native plant communities and wildlife populations and help protect the community from large flood events by giving floodwaters areas to flow into without impacting the community's infrastructure.

Strategy: FCNAD will promote more resilient and self-sustaining land and water resources in the face of climate change and population growth by focusing on maintaining or improving ecological functions and processes, such as riparian flooding and functional river flows, when possible.

Tactics:

Provide leadership and support for the management of the Poudre River's diverse resources and functions towards a sustainable river ecosystem (City Plan Principle ENV 7).

Engage in regional collaborative river health initiatives that have a direct link to FCNAD river health goals.

Continue to work with City of Fort Collins' Utilities to implement large and small wood installations in the river and evolve design standards.

Collaborate with City of Fort Collins' Utilities Stream Rehabilitation Program on restoration opportunities on natural areas.

Work to establish closer relationships with regional partners for management issues at Gateway Natural Area.

Pursue a restoration project at Arapaho Bend Natural Area.

Work with CPW to monitor and maintain habitat for Plains Topminnow at the Environmental Learning Center.

Participate in cross-departmental planning efforts that support ecological functions, recreation, and community safety needs upstream of College Avenue bridge.

Support implementation of a cross-department project upstream of College Avenue bridge.

Determine primary ecological management objectives for the east pond at North Shields Pond Natural Area and take necessary management actions.

Use existing research to develop conceptual models of food webs for Tier 1 and Tier 2 State Wildlife Action Plan fish species for management decisions.

Develop strategic tactics that will prioritize FCNAD pond management efforts including fisheries, water quality, restoration, and recreation.

Continue to use grazing as a management tool to improve soil health and vegetation along the river corridor, outside of the riparian zone.

Expand management actions for proactive blue-green algae management and public safety.

Create tree replacement schedule for the park trees at Gateway Natural Area and implement.

Strategy: FCNAD will continue to strategically monitor and learn about select indicators of ecosystem health (e.g., amphibians, geomorphic conditions, wetlands) to contribute to and use the best available data, knowledge, and practices to guide ecological management. This work is possible through partnerships across City departments, other agencies, and conservation organizations.

Tactics:

Map the location and extent of American currant populations and cross-reference with the tree canopy.

Collaborate with City of Fort Collins' Utilities to understand aquatic insect populations along the river and how FCNAD management can influence them.

Work with City of Fort Collins' Utilities to establish permanent transects to measure changing geomorphic conditions.

In collaboration with the City Forestry department, inventory large tree species along the river.

Conduct a baseline study to document focal mesopredator species populations and movement along the Poudre River; prioritize ongoing monitoring, if appropriate.

Further define FCNAD conservation priorities for amphibians; formalize a rotational schedule for amphibian surveys along the river to support those priorities.

Research and document the ecological difference between narrowleaf and broadleaf cattails; identify management implications.

Map delineated wetlands on natural areas in the Poudre River Zone.

Conduct breeding bird monitoring on a two-years-on, two-years-off schedule in the Poudre Zone.

Explore opportunities to extend existing bird monitoring along the river to include secretive marsh birds.

Review eBird data to identify possible secretive marsh bird populations.

Continue to work with regional partners to preserve and understand the maternity bat roost at Gateway Natural Area.

Survey for northern leopard frogs along Poudre River tributaries.

Determine and document feasibility of northern leopard frog re-introduction.

Identify ponds suitable for native fish habitat.

Use isolated ponds for native endemic fish refugia, where appropriate.

Collaborate with Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed, City of Fort Collins' Utilities, and regional partners to update the River Health Assessment Framework (RHAF) and secure funding for implementation.

Interpret data from the updated RHAF to share results with the community and continue to inform FCNAD's approach to adaptive management.

Adapt the RHAF to assess health of Poudre River tributaries.

Assess water quality data to identify opportunities where vegetation projects on natural areas can support water quality improvements.

Create fish database with mapping dashboard for the Poudre River and its tributaries.



Goal

3

PROVIDE MEANINGFUL EDUCATION & APPROPRIATE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES



People have been going to the river for thousands of years to feel connected and find respite. Education and stewardship opportunities are as important as ever, as people look for ways to learn more about this cherished ecosystem and enjoy the many types of experiences offered in the Poudre River Zone. Natural Areas will continue to ensure all visitors feel welcome through meaningful engagement and can find ways to safely and appropriately recreate.

Strategy: Safety for visitors in the Poudre River Zone is of utmost importance. FCNAD will continue working with key partners including Larimer County, City of Fort Collins Parks Department and Police Services, Poudre Fire Authority (PFA), and Homeward Alliance to improve safety for all visitors to natural areas. In addition, amenities on natural areas will be monitored and maintained for safety.

Tactics:

Manage the beet flume on Kingfisher Point Natural Area for safety including reinforcing the safety closure.

Engage with City of Fort Collins Art in Public Places to prioritize a project for the blank bridge buttresses at McMurry Natural Area.

Monitor the bridge at Riverbend Ponds Natural Area that crosses Trout Pond for safety and determine best management actions.

Continue to participate on cross-City teams that coordinate on homelessness issues and implement identified actions.

Explore alternatives to pond hockey on natural areas through coordination across Community Services departments to offer outdoor skating options.

Partner with and support Police Services with their Flock Safety pilot program to install hi-tech cameras in parking lots to prevent or mitigate illegal use of the site and break-ins to vehicles.

Investigate options for distributing personal floatation devices to improve safety for recreators.

Work with PFA to inventory, maintain, improve or add to existing signage about safety before dams on natural areas to encourage water recreators to portage around them.

Work with Parks to add 'no jumping' and 'no fishing' signs to the Salyer bridge and assist with enforcement.

Continue collaborations with Highwater Safety Group and implement best practices. Encourage more frequent meetings in the spring/summer.

Continue to evaluate and monitor for the removal of river hazards and strainers between North Shields Pond Natural Area and the Whitewater Park.

Evaluate best location for an additional cubic feet per second (CFS) measuring tool; as new locations are identified, partner with Poudre Heritage Alliance on implementation.

Continue discussions with City of Fort Collins Emergency Services and Poudre Fire Authority to identify roles and responsibilities around river safety communication.

Refresh the "Play it Safe" campaign.

Continue existing communications and explore opportunities for expanded river safety communications.

Continue trailhead tabling based on feedback and evaluation of efforts.

In coordination with Larimer County, monitor effectiveness of Volunteer Ranger Program paddlecraft efforts, continue if effective.

Repaint the bridge at Gustav Swanson Natural Area.

Continue to explore partnerships to increase boater and recreation safety by improving diversion structures.

Strategy: The Natural Areas Department is committed to increasing equitable access so that persons of all identities can fully participate in natural areas recreation and educational opportunities. FCNAD is dedicated to listening to all community members, and as part of that effort, continued outreach is needed to better understand how natural areas can serve the whole community. Focused outreach opportunities with the Native American and Indigenous community, community members with disabilities, anglers, children, and people experiencing homelessness will be organized to work towards listening to voices from all backgrounds and to hear their needs along the Poudre River Zone.

Tactics:

Continue engagement with the Native American and Indigenous community to incorporate Traditional Knowledges and adaptive management priorities for natural areas. Provide co-creating engagement opportunities such as

programming and interpretive signage content for Tribes with historical ties to these lands as well as the local Native American community.

Explore communications that feature Native American place names, in partnership with tribal partners.

Participate and contribute to formal nation-to-nation Tribal Consultation efforts lead by the Equity Office.

Support and participate in local urban Native American and Indigenous community-driven conversations including with the Native Nations Community Advisory Panel.

Continue to educate the community about diverse topics including the value of the Zone for flood mitigation, river processes, native fish, and historic agricultural and industrial use; amplify the stories of historically marginalized communities.

All new interpretive signs, and brochures, will be bilingual in **Spanish and English** and have welcoming language as they age out and are replaced.

Continue building a relationship with the angling community and look for opportunities to make fishing more accessible on natural areas.

Continue to engage people experiencing homelessness as a Natural Areas visitors and outreach audience.

Consider increasing allowable group size at Gateway Natural Area.

Explore options for the reservation system at Gateway Natural Area to allow large groups to reserve shelters.

Explore ADA and wheelchair-friendly access at Gateway to allow more access to the river.

Explore locations for an ADA accessible water play feature along the river.

Explore trail amenities in the Zone for sight impaired users such as adding a low visibility ropes feature.

In partnership with CPW, update bathroom facilities at Picnic Rock, including gender neutral signage.

Continue administering the free library pass system for use at Gateway Natural Area. Explore other ways to reduce financial barriers to access.

Run a facilitated feedback session with kids to help continue to evolve amenities throughout the Zone.

Strategy: FCNAD will strategically monitor, plan, and implement visitor use amenities and recreation opportunities to protect ecological resources, while adapting to visitor use trends and the needs of the community. Increased visitation to the natural areas along the river has created a need to assess how people are accessing the properties and where there may be resource degradation from increased use. In particular, the need for new concentrated amenities will be explored at the natural areas close to downtown, as well as Gateway, Riverbend Ponds, and Arapaho Bend natural areas to ensure equitable access and discourage impacts to resources.

Tactics:

Complete an audit of how peer communities manage people and natural resources along urban rivers; identify best practices to adopt.

Reassess site zoning at Arapaho Bend Natural Area to align with other management zones and regional scale planning.

Consider changing the zoning at Riverbend Ponds Natural Area along the river to concentrate use.

In collaboration with Park Planning and Development, explore opportunities to extend the Poudre River Trail on the north side of the river at the Whitewater Park.

Develop an amenities plan for Salyer, River's Edge, and McMurry natural areas in conjunction with other downtown projects.

Develop a replacement plan for improved trashcans along the river that are wildlife proof, ADA friendly, and safe for staff to empty.

Monitor trashcan utilization and explore options for strategically scheduling maintenance.

Add more recycling cans in key areas along the river.

Work with Fort Collins Moves (FC Moves) and bike advocacy groups to add a solar bike pump at Shields Street River Access.

Collaborate with FC Moves or other partners to install bike racks at parking lots and trailheads along the Poudre River.

Identify areas that could provide enhanced mountain bike trail features.

Explore extending the crusher fine trail at Homestead Natural Area to create a connection to the paved trail system and provide increased access for anglers.

Add a vault toilet at North Shields Pond Natural Area parking lot.

Continue to expand labeling of bridges from current road names to include natural areas and parks.

Explore obtaining a trailhead easement for the Harmony Park & Ride parking lot for access to Arapaho Bend Natural Area.

Consider improved access between the Harmony Transportation Center parking lot and Beaver Pond at Arapaho Bend Natural Area.

Conduct an Impact and Decision Framework (IDF) assessment to identify parking infrastructure updates and address visitor use trends at Arapaho Bend Natural Area.

Conduct an IDF assessment to identify parking infrastructure updates and address visitor use trends at Kingfisher Point Natural Area.

Redevelop parking options for Riverbend Ponds Natural Area to increase capacity.

Explore adding a pedestrian bridge across the river next to the beet flume and adding a parking lot and trailhead on the north side of Kingfisher Point Natural Area.

Maintain rules about no dogs or biking at Running Deer and Cottonwood Hollow natural areas.

Build a fence on the north side of the Poudre Trail on Arapaho Bend Natural Area east of I-25 to align with management zones.

Implement a trail improvement project to address muddy trail conditions at Riverbend Ponds Natural Area.

Identify areas with larger, already impacted shorelines for creating purposeful gathering spaces and river access.

Assess opportunities for additional boat ramp access along the river in response to visitor use trends.

Identify social trails that are priorities for closure and restoration.

Assess opportunities for enhancing outdoor learning spaces along the river and integrate into future visitor amenities prioritization.

Identify appropriate areas that may support larger gatherings on natural areas and determine the level of service needed to support those spaces.

Explore adding amenities at the south parking lot at Prospect Ponds Natural Area.

Explore the creation of an aquatic trail at Arapaho Bend Natural Area in conjunction with the river restoration project.

Conduct a feasibility study on developing a Poudre River Paddling Trail.

Complete wayfinding sign inventory in the Zone and install consistent wayfinding in key locations.

Implement 2022 Gateway Landscape Plan including signage, safety, amenity, and habitat improvements.

Evaluate impacts of updates to Gateway Natural Area and explore the feasibility of implementing additional tactics to address visitor use pressures.

Explore interagency partnerships for regional trail connections at Gateway Natural Area.

Complete audit and documentation of visitor use amenities for the Poudre River Zone natural areas.

Explore adding benches or shade structures along expanded portions of the Poudre River Trail.



Goal

4

RESPONSIBLY STEWARD THE COMMUNITY'S RESOURCES



As a highly visible and well-loved feature of the Fort Collins community, it is a goal of FCNAD to responsibly steward the Poudre River. This responsibility includes ensuring staff has the resources, training, and procedures in place needed to promote high quality habitat for plants and wildlife and accessible recreation opportunities for the community.

Strategy: Empower and invest in FCNAD staff by creating a workplace with a culture of innovation and mutual respect that responsibly manages assets in accordance with FCNAD and City strategies. In the Poudre River Zone, additional staff capacity to assist in creating a safe experience for visitors and resources may be needed, along with streamlining of processes to make experiencing natural areas simpler. Moving forward, the Conservation and Stewardship Planning process will be used to regularly review tactics in the Poudre River Zone and ensure they are aligned with the mission of FCNAD and the community's values.

Tactics:

Complete a comprehensive site plan for Arapaho Bend Natural Area that documents existing ecological, cultural, and social considerations and guides implementation of related tactics.

Explore adding seasonal non-commissioned Rangers to help patrol the river.

Explore options for cell signal extension technology at Gateway Natural Area.

Explore feasibility of administratively combining adjacent natural areas in the Zone.

Integrate Gateway Natural Area into FCNAD's overall event space management approach.

Seek out and apply for grants that support department and zone priorities. Model and support DEI focused professional development.

Poudre River

Visit <https://www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/poudre-river-zone> to learn more about the Poudre River zone and to find opportunities for providing feedback.

Thank you to the voters and taxpayers of the City of Fort Collins and Larimer County for supporting community-initiated sales taxes that ensures open lands in the Poudre River zone are preserved for generations to come.

Related plans, policies, and reports

[Cache la Poudre River Natural Areas Management Plan Update, 2011](#)

[Gateway History](#)

[Gateway Natural Areas Management Plan](#)

[Poudre Flows Plan 2020](#)

[Poudre River Downtown Master Plan, 2014](#)

[Poudre River Riparian Corridor Bird Monitoring, Final Report 2019](#)

[Restoration Plan, 2016](#)

[River Health Assessment Framework, 2015](#)

[Wildlife Conservation Guidelines](#)



