



Natural Areas Special Use Policy

City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department

Purpose

The purpose of the Special Use Permit Policy (SUP) is to describe the policies and procedures of the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department (department) with respect to requests for special use activities that occur within publicly city-owned Natural Areas (NA) managed by the department. The SUP describes the most common categories of Special Use Permits issued by the Natural Areas Department and provides specific information for each of those categories.

The (NAD) may at its sole discretion elect to deny or revoke any special use permit for failure to comply with the permit conditions or policies as outlined herein. A special use permit is a revocable license. The issuance of a permit does not grant any interest in property.

Chapter 23 (Public Property), Article IX (Natural Areas), section 23-194 of Fort Collins City Municipal Code (the "Code") authorizes the Natural Areas Director to administer a permit system for uses or activities that are otherwise prohibited under Article IX.

The intent of this policy revision is to update, clarify, and streamline the Special Use Permit (SUP) process. The goal is a transparent process as well as a reasonable time period to provide thoughtful review of each application.

Staff review of an application is made to ensure the safety of visitors, prevent visitor conflicts, and to ensure protection of wildlife, wildlife habitat, and rare species. Another purpose of these policies is to require groups or individuals who collect research data to share both data and reports as a condition of approval. Excluded from this policy is any permit request that has a commercial component. Those requests fall under the department's Commercial Use Permit Policy.

Description of Special User Permits

Special Use Permit applications are generally requested to allow access to closed sections of a natural area, or to permit group activities greater than 15 individuals. Other common permit requests pertain to ecological research, educational programs or field trips, or to recreational or other activities that are otherwise generally prohibited in the Code.

Special Use Permits are reviewed by Natural Areas Department staff and take up to fifteen (15) business days to review.

Special Use Permits are classified into three categories: 1) Research; 2) Educational; and, 3) Recreational. These three categories as well as the general terms and conditions are described below.

1. Research

Research permits are required for those seeking to perform ecological, wildlife, or related research within a natural area. These permits are typically issued for a lengthy period to perform research and collect data. They do not include instructional activities such as on-site classes, research training or demonstrations of research. Unlike all other Special Use Permit applications, Research Permits are accepted year-round but only reviewed and approved twice a year (February and September). Staff will review the request to ensure they meet several standards while notifying applicants of approval or denial within fifteen (15) business days.

Incomplete applications may not be accepted or significantly delay the review process. The Natural Areas website (<https://www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/permits.php>) details the process and other requirements of the permit process.

Permit will be evaluated based on the project's scientific merits including the specific research question, proposed methodology and analysis, and commitment to provide the department a final report via digital copy. Final reports shall include results or research findings in an abstract or executive summary format within six months of the ending date of the permit.

2. Education

Requests for K-12 field trips and similar activities may be requested on a year-round basis. Any component of an educational request that includes a fee for service must apply under the Commercial Use Permit system. The Department will review requests to ensure there are no conflicting uses or events for the days and locations requested. The review period is 15 business days.

3. Recreation

Recreation permit requests will be reviewed for compatibility with resource protection needs and the potential for interference with general visitor use and or wildlife disturbance. Any component of a recreational request that includes a fee for participation is required to apply under the department's Commercial Use Permit system. The review period is 15 business days.

Tips for Applying

The following permit application tips will be listed on the website and provided to applicants as needed:

- Applications must be complete. Permits can be denied if required information is missing.
- Documents should include a research summary, specific research area, nature of the education or recreation activity, and dates and times of activity, timeframe when data or analysis/conclusions would be available to the Department (for research permits). Maps indicating access points, vehicles, and persons included in the permit are critical supporting documentation.
- Applicants must describe how the activity will not cause negative resource or wildlife impacts or interfere with Natural Area visitor use. If there are anticipated impacts, they must be described, and justification provided.