

# Visitors to Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area

CITY OF FORT COLLINS NATURAL AREAS

## Executive Summary

Natural Areas staff administered visitor exit interviews ( $n = 190$ ) at Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area during 2021 and 2022. Interviews were conducted on both weekdays and weekends in four shifts (i.e., 8 am to 9:30 am, 10:15 am to 11:45 am, 12:30pm to 2 pm, and 2:45 pm to 4:15 pm). Shift times and days were selected using a stratified random sampling procedure.

The purpose of this effort was to gain a better understanding of visitors to Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area. This report is intended to (a) provide a baseline of visitor information at Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area and (b) to aid Natural Areas staff in making informed management decisions.

Given the population of Fort Collins, the sample size, and random selection procedures this data has a 95% confidence interval  $\pm 7\%$ . Data is represented in terms of frequencies of responses and represents the average visitor.

### Demographics (Table 2)

- Over 60% of respondents lived within Larimer County.
- Slightly more respondents were female (52%) than male (47%).
- The average respondent was 56 years old, non-Hispanic (89%), and White (92%).
- Over 75% of respondents possessed a bachelor's degree or higher
- Slightly more than half the respondents reported annual household incomes under \$100,000.

### Visitation Characteristics (Table 3)

- Respondents reported visiting Fossil Creek Reservoir an average of twenty-nine times per year.
- The top primary activities reported were hiking (51%) and wildlife viewing (32%) followed by trail running (10%)

### Group Characteristics (Table 5)

- Most respondents visited alone (49%) or with one other individual (31%).
- Children were reported present in 13% of groups.

### Motivations for Visiting (Table 6)

- The top two motivations for visiting Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area included "to be in nature" (24%) and because "its close to home" (23%).

### Visitor Satisfaction (Tables 7 & 8)

- Facility ratings at Fossil Creek Reservoir were high, with between 87% and 98% of respondents rating them either "good" or "very good".
- Ninety-nine percent of respondents rated their overall experience as either "good" or "very good."

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## Introduction

Public land managers are often tasked with providing high quality recreational experiences for visitors. However, it can be difficult to accurately understand the quality of a visitor’s experience without a thorough evaluation. Self-report surveys provide an easy, expedient way to gather large amounts of information for visitor studies. When grounded in theory and paired with a stratified random sampling process, self-report surveys can yield valid, representative, and generalizable data for decision makers.

The objectives of this study were to gather data on:

1. Demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity)
2. Trip characteristics (e.g., group size, primary activity)
3. Motivations for visiting
4. Visitor satisfaction

This report is intended to (a) provide a baseline of visitor information at Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area and (b) to aid Natural Areas staff in making informed management decisions.

## Methods

### Data Collection

Natural Areas staff conducted visitor exit interviews ( $n = 190$ ) at Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area during 2021 and 2022.

Development of the survey instrument was guided by theoretical concepts (e.g., cognitive theory, goal interference) and seeks to build off previous research related to indicators and standards for quality visitor experiences (Vaske, 2019).

A stratified random sampling procedure was used to ensure representativeness and generalizability to the community of Larimer County, Colorado. Survey days and times were selected using a random number generator (stattrek.com). Interviews were conducted on both weekdays and weekends in four shifts (i.e., 8 am to 9:30 am, 10:15 am to 11:45 am, 12:30pm to 2 pm, and 2:45 pm to 4:15 pm). Table 1 summarizes this data collection effort.

**Table 1. Visitor survey data collection effort at Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area**

Year	
2021	19%
2022	81%
Season	
Winter	15%
Spring	20%
Summer	28%
Fall	37%
Day of Week	
Weekday	45%

Weekend	55%
Shift	
8:00 - 9:30	18%
10:15 - 11:45	32%
12:30 - 2:00	33%
2:45 - 4:15	17%

Over 60% of respondents lived within Larimer County. Slightly more respondents were female (52%) than male (47%). The average respondent was 56 years old, non-Hispanic (89%), and White (92%). Over 75% of respondents possessed a bachelor’s degree or higher, and more than half reported annual household incomes under \$100,000.

**Table 2. Demographic profile of visitors to Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area**

Do you live in Larimer County?	Percentage of responses
Yes	62.6%
No	37.4%
Gender	
Female	52.4%
Male	46.5%
Gender non-conforming	1.1%
Age	
<20	2.1%
21 to 25	3.2%
26 to 35	9.5%
36 to 45	15.3%
46 to 55	14.8%
56 to 65	21.7%
Over 65	33.3%
Mean age	56
Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	6.0%
Non-Hispanic/Latinx	89.2%
Prefer to self-identify	4.2%
Race	
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1%
Asian	2.7%
Black	.5%
White	92.3%
Two or more races	3.3%
Highest Level of Education	
Some high school or less	.5%
GED or high school grad	11.2%
Associate degree	12.3%

Highest Level of Education	Percentage of responses
Bachelor's degree	33.7%
Masters/PhD	41.7%
Household Income	
Less than \$24,999	5.6%
\$25,000 – \$34,999	5%
\$35,000 – \$49,999	8.1%
\$50,000 – \$74,999	19.9%
\$75,000 – \$99,999	12.4%
\$100,000 – \$149,999	28.6%
\$150,000 – \$199,999	11.2%
\$200,000+	9.3%
Years of Residency	
One year or less	12.9%
2 to 3	7.6%
4 to 5	5.3%
6 to 10	10.6%
11 to 20	32.6%
21 to 30	10.6%
More than 30 years	20.5%

Respondents reported visiting Fossil Creek reservoir an average of twenty-nine times per year.

**Table 3. Visitation Patterns to Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area**

Visits	Percentage of responses
First time visiting	19.3%
1 to 2 visits	23.3%
3 to 5 visits	12.5%
6 to 10 visits	9.7%
11 to 20 visits	12.5%
21 to 50 visits	10.2%
Over 50 visits	12.5%
Mean visits	29

The top primary activities reported were hiking (51%) and wildlife viewing (32%) followed by trail running (10%).

**Table 4. Primary Activities Reported at Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area**

Primary Activity	Percentage of responses
Hiking	51.2%
Trail Running	10%
Family Gathering	2.4%

Primary Activity	Percentage of responses
Picnicking	1.8%
Photography/Art	2.4%
Wildlife Viewing	31.8%
Dog walking	.6%

Most respondents visited alone (49%) or with one other individual (31%) and children were reported in 13% of groups.

**Table 5. Group Characteristics at Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area**

Number of people in group	Percentage of responses
1	48.9%
2	31.4%
3	8%
4 to 5	11.2%
6 or more	.5%
Mean	1.9
Range	1 to 10
Number of adults in group	Percentage of responses
1	51.9%
2	36.9%
3	4.3%
4 to 5	6.4%
6 or more	.5%
Mean	1.7
Range	1 to 10
Number of children in group	Percentage of responses
0	86.6%
1	9.6%
2	2.7%
3 or more	1.1%
Mean	0.2
Range	0 to 3

The top two motivations for visiting Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area included “to be in nature” (24%) and because “it’s close to home” (23%).

**Table 6. Two Primary Motivations for Visiting Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area**

Motivations	Percentage of responses
It's close to home.	22.6%
To get exercise.	16.5%
I feel safe here.	1.2%

Motivations	Percentage of responses
To learn about nature.	2.4%
To be in nature.	24.2%
For relaxation.	5.8%
To escape from everyday responsibilities or pressure.	3.7%
To feel better spiritually.	1.8%
It's less crowded than other natural areas.	10.1%
To develop my skills and abilities.	1.2%
To spend time with friends or family.	4.6%
Other.	5.8%

Facility ratings at Fossil Creek Reservoir were high, with between 87% and 98% of respondents rating them either “good” or “very good”. While ninety-nine percent of respondents rated their overall experience as either “good” or “very good.”

**Table 7. Facility Type and Overall Experience Ratings**

Facility Type	Rating of “good” or “very good”
Restrooms	98%
Parking areas	98%
Picnic areas	95%
Trash receptacles	90%
Kiosk information	87%
Trails	96%
Overall Quality of Experience	Rating
Average	1%
Good	22%
Excellent	77%

## Conclusion

To better understand visitors at Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area, staff conducted on-site, visitor exit interviews ( $n = 190$ ) during 2021 and 2022. The purpose of this effort was to (a) provide a baseline of visitor information at Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area and (b) to aid in decision making. A stratified random sampling procedure was used to select shift times and days. Unfortunately, despite a year’s worth of collection, the effort yielded a sample size ( $n = 190$ ) too small to be considered statistically significant. However, the data collected does provide an understanding of the average visitor to Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area.

Over 60% of respondents lived within Larimer County, and slightly more respondents identified as female (52%). The average respondent was 56 years old, non-Hispanic (89%), and White (92%). Over 75% of respondents possessed a bachelor’s degree or higher, and more than half reported annual household incomes under \$100,000. Respondents reported visiting Fossil Creek Reservoir an average of twenty-nine times per year and were primarily engaged in either hiking (51%), wildlife viewing (32%), or trail running (10%). Most respondents visited alone (49%) or with one other individual (31%), and



children were reported in 13% of groups. The top two motivations for visiting Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area were reported as “to be in nature” (24%) and because “it’s close to home” (23%). The average respondent rated facilities at Fossil Creek Reservoir between 87% and 98% as either “good” or “very good”, and ninety-nine percent of respondents rated their overall experience as either “good” or “very good”.

Some notable differences emerged from this data set compared to visitor data collected throughout other City of Fort Collins Natural Areas. First, a third of visitors are not residents of Larimer County. This provides potential for future analysis should the need arise. Secondly, visitors are somewhat older and skew more female than visitors to other areas (e.g., Maxwell). There also seems to be more diversity in annual household income levels compared to other management zones (e.g., Foothills; Mountain to Plains). Additionally, more children (13%) are present in groups at Fossil Creek Reservoir than compared to other areas (e.g., Foothills), but less than in others (e.g., Gateway). While not surprising, reports of wildlife viewing (32%) as a primary activity were higher than in most zones, but equal to responses at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. Finally, in terms of visitor satisfaction, Fossil Creek Reservoir has some of the highest ratings reported across the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas landscape.

## Appendix A- Verbatim responses

### Reasons for facility ratings

Adult has difficulty walking. Need more benches to rest.  
all in fine shape  
always clean, easy access  
always lovely & well maintained  
Always pleasant  
Beautiful area!  
Beautiful day. Great location, clean  
Beautiful, well-maintained trails.  
because I like to come here  
Cause I'm honest.  
clean  
clean & kept up  
clean, easy access, smooth walking areas & clear picnic tables  
Clean, nice  
cleanliness, beauty  
Cleanliness; natural beauty  
Close location. Gravel trail.  
Close to home and beautiful scenery.  
Close to home, gravel trail, great bathrooms.  
concrete overgrown  
Did not use.  
easy to park. Clear, informative signs. Easy to walk on trails - good accessibility  
Either didn't use or good.  
Enjoyed the trail/facilities  
Everything in great condition.  
everything is clean + great. The picnic area can be covered in birds' nests/bees.  
Everything is good. No complaints.  
everything is very clean, and trails were great. Bird watching areas are great.  
everything terrific  
everything was clean, trash was empty  
Everything was great  
everything was very good`  
Excellent  
Excellently maintained!  
found nothing wrong  
good overall can use new or more info kiosks  
great location & concept of protecting wetlands  
Great place for a morning walk  
great place to hike & visit

Great place. No bikes and no dogs!  
Great trails!  
high quality and clean  
I like it here - walking is great  
I like lots of information!  
I love coming here and birdwatching.  
I really enjoy how tranquil and well-kept the area is.  
I walk every day and enjoy the trail/facilities very much  
impressed, first time  
It is my sanctuary. It is a blessed place.  
It's always clean and peaceful  
It's good.  
It's lovely & both wild and attentive to natural needs  
it's very clean & enjoyable. The trails are maintained well  
It's well maintained  
Just went on a short walk with a 1.5 yr old  
Lots of mud, wasp nests on inside of wildlife viewing blinds (shelters). Needs good cleaning. Restrooms should have auto sensors - Toilets not flushed and not 100% sanitary - carpenter road trail had prairie dog mounds in the middle = hazard  
Love Fort Collins  
Love that its quieter than most. Like to birdwatch. Would like to be closer to water.  
love this area  
love to come here for the well-done open spaces  
Love visiting here! Wonderful mountain/grassland views  
Lovely spot  
might be good to have some trash receptacles near picnic areas  
Mostly great, but not perfect  
need a trail sign out by the observation lookout on the loop  
Need higher benches w/ back for handicapped access  
Need some clean up on trails of overgrowth  
needs map posted by dock  
Nice facilities, trails had some vegetation overgrowth  
nice natural area  
Nice paved & gravel trails which are easy to follow & provide multiple views of reservoir & grassland  
Nice place in general; looks natural.  
One of my favorite birding locals  
one of my favorite outdoor places  
option of paved/groomed trails and a restroom  
Overall experience is very good, but on other visits the trash has been full.  
overall, very good  
Overall, very nice.  
positive experience

Restroom nice to have but some areas are stinky  
Restrooms are always clean, parking is available; trails could extend further  
Restrooms are clean  
Restrooms clean but without paper towel. Parking good, trails groomed  
Safe place to come  
signs could be more detailed. Need a trail closer to the lake.  
Signs have faded and need replacement. Maybe an additional trash receptacle.  
signs were very informational and pretty at the same time! Things looked maintained here.  
The bird ID sign was very helpful!  
The facilities are great  
The trail + facilities are great  
There's a bit of a blind spot coming into the parking - would be nervous about pedestrians  
They are just so!  
They are very good, clean, well paved.  
Trails and parking lot are maintained. Very little litter. I usually only come here for birdwatching.  
Trails are a bit overgrown  
Trails are good, but traces of dogs and bicycles  
Trails nicely maintained through all years  
Typical Condition  
Very beautiful, but tons of flying bugs.  
very clean  
very clean, well kept  
very good compared to other parts; very accessible  
very nice  
Very well kept up. Pleasant people use the park.  
very well maintained & in great condition  
Very well maintained. Loved the viewing area with blinds benches to sit on while using binoculars and the descriptions/illustrations of local birds - fantastic!  
Very well-maintained and planned.  
well maintained area all around!  
Well maintained, clean  
What we used was good.  
Would be nice to have signs to show wildlife, wish the picnic table were closer. Parents can't walk.

### **Reasons for overall experience rating**

Ability to get close in  
all good  
Almost perfect, except that I saw in the past the wildflowers were ploughed.  
Always a pleasure to visit  
always clean & well taken care of  
Always clean and something "new" to see

always pleasant  
Awesome!  
bathroom needed cleaning  
beautiful  
Beautiful spot - didn't see eagles today but have other times  
beautiful views  
Beautiful views  
beautiful, natural, and well-preserved space  
beautiful!  
beautifully kept, quiet, and opportunity to view wildlife  
birds  
cared for  
Clean and with animals in mind  
Clean, low traffic.  
clean, not very busy, plenty to see  
clean; quiet  
clean/not crowded  
Could have more extended trails  
despite trails & restroom development, it seems very natural.  
Easy access and great trails  
Easy on my legs to walk. Scenic. Maintained.  
Easy, clean.  
Everything is great. The swallows make a big mess during the season, but it is what it is.  
Excellent prairie habitat  
Except for the algae bloom? Very soothing, scenic, tranquil  
favorite place.  
good overall  
good place to view birds  
Good trails and well maintained.  
good walkways  
great area  
great area. No dogs. No bicycles  
Great habitats.  
great open area, maintained well.  
Great place to bird watch, close to home, great views  
Great place to go for lunch walks  
great place to walk during my lunch break  
Great quiet place to walk and see birds.  
great wildlife viewing, easy trails  
I am always impressed by the cleanliness of this area  
I enjoy this area  
I love how its kept close to natural

I rated it excellent due to clean walks, beautiful views, respectable people  
I would recommend this trail to others.  
It is my sanctuary. It is a blessed place.  
It's drop dead gorgeous  
it's nice!  
It's a nice place to relax.  
it's beautiful  
Less crowded, quiet.  
less traveled, lots of open space  
Long way to picnic tables, very hot in summer with sunny trails  
Lots and lots of different birds.  
lots of animals  
Love it here  
Love the birds & grassland & water. Nature thrives - glad dogs are not allowed.  
Love this place.  
Lovely spot  
Low usage, usually clean  
Magnificent  
Many beautiful spots in CO  
mileage signage perhaps  
More trails.  
Native plants.  
Natural areas, native plants.  
No bikes or dogs.  
no bikes, no dogs. Nice area  
NO DOGS!  
Northern hide overgrown. No longer able to see the lake or birds  
not crowded & nice walking trails & views  
not too busy, very user-friendly, meets many needs  
Openness, Cleanliness, natural Beauty, serenity.  
Peaceful  
Peaceful and clean  
Pretty good birding, easy parking  
Pretty good, sometimes smelly.  
Quality habitat balanced with recreation.  
Quiet and uplifting.  
Quiet place to spend lunch break  
quiet, clean, peaceful, trails well kept  
Quiet, good views  
Quiet, lots of solitude, lots of waterfowl on reservoir.  
Quiet, love the water, views, and sounds of birds  
Quiet, no dogs, lots of birds, easy trails.

Relaxing and away from the crowds.  
relaxing, nice views  
same  
same as #4  
see other comment  
see previous  
Short trails. Longer trails would be nice.  
Smell?  
so beautiful  
The area is always quiet + peaceful  
The variety of landscapes paired with ample space to roam.  
This natural area is a great quiet place between Loveland + Ft Collins  
This trail is great  
Trails are maintained.  
trails are well maintained & easy to walk  
Trails have some overgrowth of plants  
Trails overgrown  
Trails were too far from the water  
Variety of wildlife sometimes active, sometimes quiet  
vast, truly natural areas  
very accessible  
Very accessible, good birding  
very beautiful & clean  
Very few people.  
very nice - need to come back in the spring!  
very nice place to visit. Imagine would be even better if water levels were higher  
very nicely maintained  
very peaceful  
Very Pretty  
Viewing blinds for birding.  
water treatment plant smell.  
We like this area because it is not over traveled.  
we love the mountain views!  
Well maintained  
well maintained & peaceful area

#### **Additional comments**

Add additional signage (e.g., scat, literati app), plant more natives, grateful no bikes or dogs.  
add birding to list  
appreciate upkeep- terrific!  
beautiful

Beautiful nature reserve

Glad that dogs aren't allowed.

Have just moved here recently, like what we've seen so far in our explorations

I miss the board that named the mountains that used to be along the trail

I see several times in the past year wildflowers were ploughed away, not sure why. But I enjoyed them. Hope this won't happen again.

I'm glad it is being watched via TV. My son's car broken into last year! The no dogs is great.

Lived in the area from 2006-2016 and had never been here

Looks like a great place to see migrating ducks & other waterfowl. Sorry the water levels are so low now.

Love Fossil Creek!

Love Natural Areas.

love out in nature

main entrance not easy to see

Many dogs are present, people fish here, people dump animals here.

Overall enjoyable, easy to access. Today the air smelled like a raw sewer. Beautiful views and wildlife.

such a nice day, always well-maintained easy access - nice to have a paved area for wheelchairs and elderly to use

Thank you!

Thanks for maintaining very inviting natural areas.

Thanks for your work preserving this beautiful spot!

This is convenient to get to, and open to easy walking`

We could use some volunteer time cleaning out invasive thistle, wasp nests and cobwebs in blinds and restroom roof

We enjoy a picni without having to drive too far from our home

We utilize service dog. Thank you for reposting "service dogs allowed" signs. Reduces confrontations.

Would like to be closer to water to the east



## Appendix B – Survey Instrument



This survey will help **City of Fort Collins Natural Areas** staff better understand visitors' views and improve service delivery. Your participation is completely voluntary, and your answers will remain anonymous. **Thank you for your help- your input is greatly appreciated!**

### TODAY'S VISIT

- About how many visits have you made to this natural area in the past 12 months?  
(If this is your first visit or you come here less than once per year, write 0) \_\_\_\_\_
- What was your primary activity **TODAY** during your visit? (Check only one)
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Hiking	<input type="checkbox"/> Family gathering	<input type="checkbox"/> Wildlife viewing
<input type="checkbox"/> Mountain biking	<input type="checkbox"/> Horseback riding	<input type="checkbox"/> Photography/Art
<input type="checkbox"/> Trail running	<input type="checkbox"/> Picnicking	
- WHO** were you travelling with today?  
(Check one and write in the number of people in your group, if more than just you today.)  
 Just me!       Group (\_\_\_\_# adults, \_\_\_\_# children)
- Please rate the quality of each of the facilities that you used today by circling the appropriate number for each facility.

	Did Not Use	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very Good
Restrooms	0	1	2	3	4	5
Parking Areas	0	1	2	3	4	5
Picnic Areas	0	1	2	3	4	5
Trash Receptacles	0	1	2	3	4	5
Kiosk Materials & Signs	0	1	2	3	4	5
Trails	0	1	2	3	4	5

Please explain why you rated the facilities this way: \_\_\_\_\_

- How would you rate the overall quality of this natural area? (Circle one number)

Poor	Neutral	Excellent
1	2	3
4	5	5

Please explain why you rated it this way: \_\_\_\_\_

- Please check the two main reasons you choose to visit **THIS** natural area instead of other places?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> It's close to home.	<input type="checkbox"/> To be in nature.	<input type="checkbox"/> It's less crowded than other natural areas.
<input type="checkbox"/> To get exercise.	<input type="checkbox"/> For relaxation.	<input type="checkbox"/> To develop my skills and abilities.
<input type="checkbox"/> I feel safe here.	<input type="checkbox"/> To escape from everyday responsibilities or pressure.	<input type="checkbox"/> To spend time with friends or family.
<input type="checkbox"/> To learn about nature.	<input type="checkbox"/> To feel better spiritually.	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

- Is there a particular City of Fort Collins Natural Areas site that you choose to **no longer** visit?

\_\_\_ No  
\_\_\_ Yes    If yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, why do you avoid this property? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Please tell us about yourself (All responses will be kept confidential).**

- Which best describes your gender?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Transgender Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Gender non-conforming
<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Transgender Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer to self- identify _____
- What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ (Years)
- What is your ethnicity?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latinx	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-Hispanic/Latinx	<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer to self-identify _____
--	--	--
- What is your race?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> American Indian/Alaska Native	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American
<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/> White	<input type="checkbox"/> Two or more races
- What is your highest level of completed education?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Some High School or less	<input type="checkbox"/> Graduated from High School/GED	
<input type="checkbox"/> Associate degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Master's/Ph.D.
- What is your annual household income?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$24,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 to \$74,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150,000 to \$199,999
<input type="checkbox"/> \$25,000 to \$34,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75,000 to \$99,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$200,000 or more
<input type="checkbox"/> \$35,000 to \$49,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 to \$149,999	

14. What is your Zip Code for your PRIMARY residence? \_\_\_\_\_

If you live in Larimer County, how long have you lived here? \_\_\_\_\_ (*Years*)

**COMMENTS**