



2017 | NATURAL AREAS ANNUAL REPORT



City of
Fort Collins
Natural
Areas

naturally yours



Conservation in Action

Twelve acquisitions conserved 1,165 acres ranging from a 1-acre donation from Neighbor to Neighbor to a 415-acre conservation easement in the foothills. About 2,500 acres adjacent to Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, Devil's Backbone Open Space, and Coyote Ridge Natural Area were protected through a partnership between Natural Areas, Larimer County and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO). A big thank you to GOCO, which contributed nearly \$5 million to the effort. The City's contributed portion of the Horsetooth Foothills Conservation Project protected 1,082 acres adjacent to Coyote Ridge Natural Area.



Ranger Program Anniversary

Natural Areas Rangers are everyday heroes that safeguard visitors and natural areas. The first Ranger was hired 20 years ago. Since that beginning, their jobs have changed as the community has grown and the issues they encounter have become more challenging. In addition to working with people, Rangers get some strange animal assignments. Rangers were instrumental in the rescue of a stray llama that wandered Bobcat Ridge Natural Area for nearly six months before she was captured and adopted by a llama rescue group. Rangers also helped gather over 50 domestic rats, abandoned at Riverbend Ponds and North Shields Ponds natural areas. Please add your voice to the chorus of appreciation next time you see a ranger.



7,369 positive visitor contacts



356 summonses and civil citations



251 warnings



123 parking citations



SHAPING THE FUTURE

With public participation, three important plans were updated in 2017; the Fossil Creek Natural Areas Management Plan, the Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Management Plan, and the Wildlife Conservation Guidelines.



Bison and Black-footed Ferret Report

The Laramie Foothills Bison Conservation Herd is growing and their pasture is expanding. Eleven bison calves were born in 2017, growing the herd to 36 members. On three work days, 114 volunteers removed seven miles of fence to allow the herd to roam on 2,700 acres.

Nighttime spotlight surveys confirmed that the black-footed ferrets at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area and Meadow Springs Ranch are successfully breeding in the wild. Fourteen additional black-footed ferrets were released in 2017, bringing the total released to 95.



Connecting You to Natural Areas

- You can now visit Goose Hollow Natural Area which was opened after trail and other site improvements were installed.
- The Colorado Front Range Trail, on the west side of Flores del Sol Natural Area now links Fort Collins to Loveland. The Long View Trail, a second link from Fort Collins to Loveland along Shields Street began construction.
- A new artful bridge railing was constructed at McMurtry Natural Area in partnership with Art in Public Places and artist Mario Miguel Echevarria.
- The parking lot at Coyote Ridge Natural Area was expanded by 23 parking spaces and two handicap accessible spaces while horse trailer parking was reduced to two spaces.
- A handicap-accessible concrete trail was added at Riverbend Ponds Natural Area that connects the Cherly Street parking lot to a boardwalk and a fishing pad at Big Pond.

Historic Preservation Award

The Landmark Preservation Commission honored the Natural Areas Department with a 2017 Friend of Preservation Award for Outstanding Interpretation and Documentation of the Great Western Sugar Company flume and bridge. In addition, the flume and bridge were featured in a video by City of Fort Collins Historic Preservation Department and in a PBS Colorado History episode.

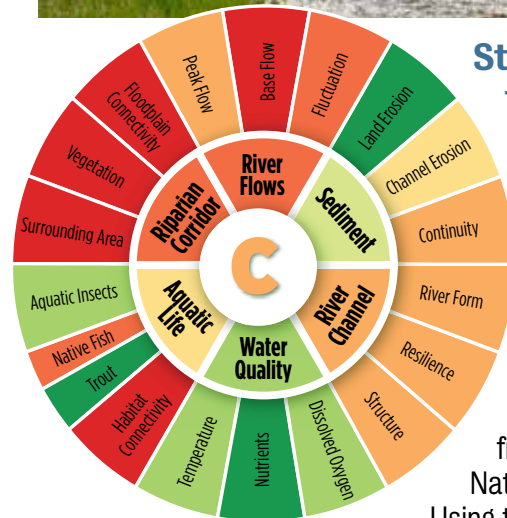


Restoring Natural Areas

Can you imagine 2,500 football fields all lined up? That is about how much active restoration was underway in 2017. An acre is approximately the size of a football field and ecological restoration efforts touched 2,498 acres in 2017. Highlights include:

- Steep riverbanks at Udall Natural Area were contoured to allow natural flooding to return. Non-native plants were replaced with 20 large cottonwood trees, over 600 shrubs, and native grasses.
- A record was broken for reducing herbicide use while weed control treated 2,120 acres, the greatest annual acreage to date.

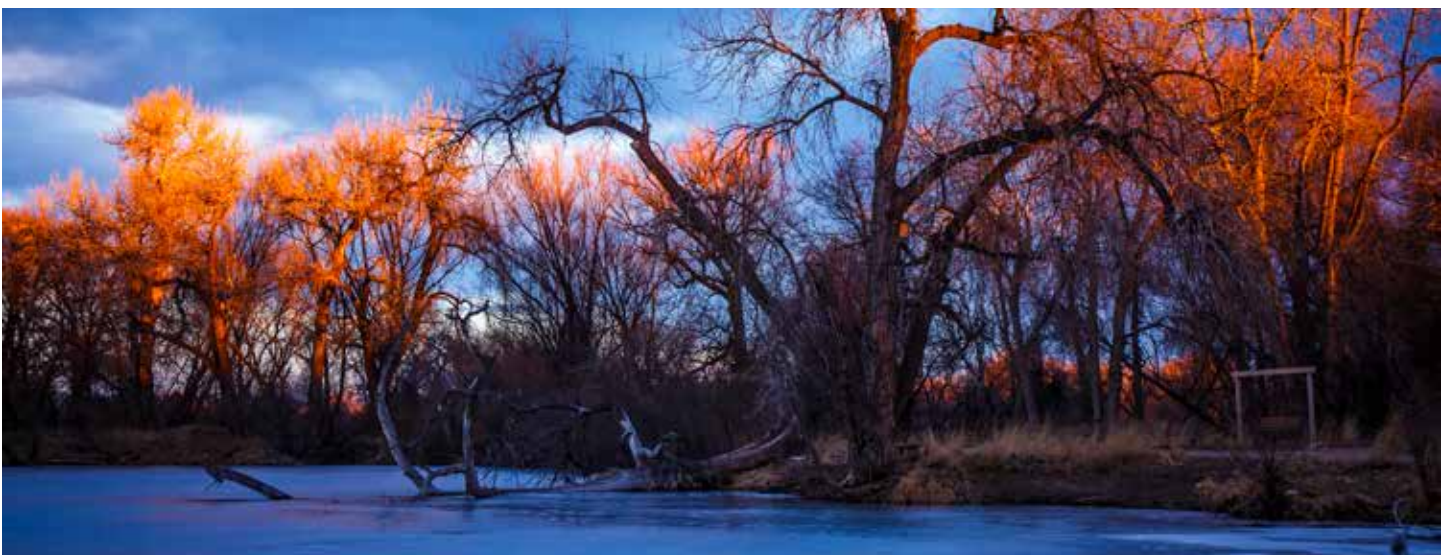
Plants and animals benefit from stewardship and monitoring efforts. For example, did you know that 44 rare plant species are found within natural areas? This year, resource management data collection via smart phone and iPads increased accuracy and efficiency. Ecological monitoring discovered bats using the habitat at Gateway, Reservoir Ridge, and Bobcat Ridge natural areas. In 47% of natural areas, restoration is complete (has achieved 75% or more native plant composition).



State of the River Report

A new river health assessment and report card studied the Cache la Poudre River from Gateway Natural Area to I-25.

Using the report, the community and City of Fort Collins can comprehensively track trends and benchmark progress towards the vision of sustaining a healthy and resilient Poudre. The 24-mile stretch of river received an overall C grade. This means that while there are numerous stressors that impair its health, the Poudre continues to support basic elements of a functioning ecosystem. Some elements of the river are in good shape while others show poor ecological condition. These lower functioning areas will be the priority for future restoration and collaboration initiatives.





Discovering & Giving Back

Community members love getting outside and learning at the same time. There were 346 educational activities that reached 12,329 people in 2017. One thousand eight hundred generous volunteers shared their talents and donated 15,793 hours— a value of \$391,000 and more than the time of eight employees. There were 59 one-day volunteer stewardship projects involving 1,245 people. Over 5,000 native plants were installed and 300 bags of trash were collected.

WELL LOVED

The 12 most popular parking lots filled to capacity on 126 days.

A new web camera at Bobcat Ridge shows real-time parking availability

One hundred and thirty-two Volunteer Ranger Assistants supported visitor safety and awareness by providing 2,239 hours of patrol and making 4,136 visitor contacts. Overland Mountain Bike Club provided 68 patrols and talked with 450 people. Way to go, volunteers. Thank you!



Natural Areas Headquarters

The center of operations for the Natural Areas Department is Nix Farm Natural Areas Campus. A new campus master plan was created to facilitate operations into the next 30 years. In 2018 the equipment yard and maintenance shop will be remodeled and expanded; a 5,000 square feet vehicle storage building will be added; solar panels will be installed to provide net positive energy to the new building and additions, and a temporary office building will be added.



NATURAL AREAS CONFERENCE



This annual national event highlighted the outstanding restoration and stewardship work happening in Fort Collins. John Stokes, Natural Areas Director, was the plenary speaker and staff shared their talents as symposia presenters, speakers, and field trip leaders.



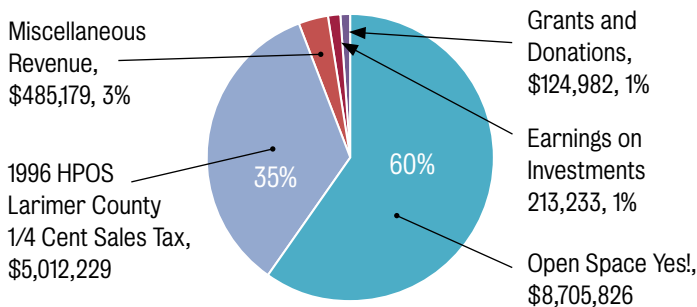
Nature in the City

Thanks to funding from Nature in the City, eight community projects increased access to nature and enhanced natural spaces for both people and wildlife.

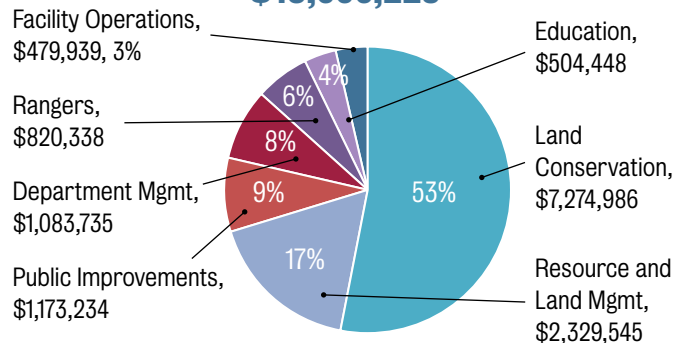
Pollinator gardens and/or outdoor classrooms were installed to encourage outdoor experiential learning at

Bacon, Bennet, and Coyote Ridge elementary schools, and Front Range Community College. A new trail and pollinator/community garden was added at The Genesis Project. A new perimeter garden at the Murphy Center offers guests snackable treats while providing pollinator habitat. To increase connectivity between natural spaces and to support wildlife, the Skyview neighborhood removed 15 invasive Russian olive trees and planted over 400 native plants. Volunteers planted 31 shade trees in the Spring Park neighborhood.

2017 Natural Areas Revenues \$14,071,911



2017 Natural Areas Expenditures \$13,666,225



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