



2008

NATURAL AREAS PROGRAM

Annual Report

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Reaching Out

The Natural Area Program's education and outreach efforts were greatly increased in 2008. More than 11,000 people participated in over 330 educational programs. Generous volunteers are crucial to this work - in fact, volunteers provided over 6,000 hours of service. Educational offerings included an exciting variety of activities at Bobcat Ridge, packed tours of Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, Poudre River excursions, field trips for school groups and so much more. Volunteer Master Naturalists make it possible to offer so many high quality programs. We love and appreciate our volunteers!

In 2008 the first Fall Program Guide was produced- a comprehensive listing of natural areas educational offerings. The guide was very popular and the spring/summer version will be even more widely distributed in 2009. Check fcgov.com/naturalareas for program announcements.



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Master Naturalist class of 2008

Joining Forces

Last year, the City's Volunteer Trail Hosts and Larimer County's Volunteer Ranger Assistants were similar but separate programs. In 2008, the two programs were merged for efficiency. This means Volunteer Ranger Assistants can now visit both City natural areas and County open spaces helping visitors all the while.

The partnership has been a great success! Over 70 people are part of the joint program and Volunteer Ranger Assistants donated over 1,300 hours in 2008. These volunteers make a real difference- for example; a Volunteer Ranger Assistant on duty at Cathy Fromme Prairie witnessed a rollerblader take a bad fall and used her training to call a ranger and 911. Another Volunteer Ranger Assistant reported a crime in progress to rangers

who, along with police, immediately responded and issued a citation to the perpetrator. At Coyote Ridge, a Volunteer Ranger Assistant spotted a rattlesnake on the trail and stood by to alert visitors coming down the trail. The Natural Areas Program appreciates all the Volunteer Ranger Assistants!

There were even more eyes and ears on the trails thanks to Diamond Peaks Mountain Bike Patrol volunteers who began patrolling city natural area trails. This arrangement took several years of negotiations, but thanks to the commitment of Diamond Peaks' Barb Allan and Fort Collins Natural Areas Ranger Dave Irwin the project is now a reality. In 2008, 45 volunteers were trained to monitor City natural areas and trails.

Diamond Peaks volunteers have been busy- donating almost 100 hours in 2008 including sponsoring "Trail Day" an educational event at Bobcat Ridge for visitors focused on low-impact biking, cooperation among trail users, safety and volunteer participation. Diamond Peaks also worked with SingleTrack Trails and public improvements staff to construct two alternate-route structures on the Bobcat Ridge Ginny Trail this fall. The 26 volunteers spent the day building a ladder bridge and a log ride, using nearby materials. The structures serve dual purposes: protecting the trail when wet, and adding some excitement to the ride. Look for Diamond Peaks volunteers on popular mountain bike routes such as Bobcat Ridge's Ginny Trail and the Foothills Trail year-round. Thank you Diamond Peaks!



(Left) Chinking the historic cabin at Bobcat Ridge (Right) Enjoying the Ginny Trail at Bobcat Ridge

Bobcat Ridge Enhanced

The Pulliam Charitable Trust, the legacy of Ginny and D.R. Pulliam, previous owners of the Bobcat Ridge property, funded restoration of several historic structures as well as some very popular education and outreach activities at Bobcat Ridge. A major achievement was the restoration of a historic log cabin which has been stabilized with a new roof, floor and chinking. Picnic tables, a vault toilet, a working hand water pump and the accessible grade trail to the cabin are also finished. In addition, a new trail was built through the historic corrals past the restored calving shed, hay barn, a restored farm house (now used as the on-site Ranger residence), and to the historic chicken shed and pioneer barn.

Over 1,300 people explored Bobcat Ridge through participatory programs such as Wild and Open Skies, 9 AM With a Naturalist, and Junior Bobcats. Program attendance was up by 251% over 2007. Enthusiastic participants shared comments such as “Thank you all so much! I had a wonderful time. I loved everything- the chores, the Masonville Mercantile, the geology and the hike. It was even more amazing than I thought it would be! PS Bobcat Ridge Rocks” (from Amanda C., a 4th grader).

Without the Pulliam Trust, these historic projects and most of the educational programming would not exist. The Natural Areas Program deeply appreciates the Pulliam Trust’s support.



© Charlie Johnson

Soapstone Prairie Progress Report

Soapstone Prairie Natural Area is a landscape of spectacular beauty with rolling grasslands, brilliant white cliffs, beautiful red-rock canyons and foothills. Abundant wildlife inhabits this extraordinary place and humans have been a part of the Soapstone Prairie landscape for thousands of years, from prehistory to the present.

The June 6, 2009 grand opening of Soapstone Prairie Natural Area is approaching fast. 2008 was busy with preparations such as construction of a nine-mile gravel access road, three road bridges; two parking lots, three picnic shelters, two kiosks, an overlook and an entrance station. The forty miles of trails, interpretive signage and restrooms which will be constructed over the winter of 2008-2009 were generously funded in part by Great Outdoors Colorado/ Colorado Lottery through a \$220,000 grant in partnership with Larimer County.

In 2009 the focus will be on finishing trails, installing interpretive features and signage, restoration and on helping visitors prepare for their experience. Grand opening festivities and a Bio-blitz (a 24 hour all-species count) are planned for June, too. Activity details will be at fcgov.com/naturalareas.

Leap Year Frog Survey

2008 was declared the “Year of the Frog,” (it was a leap year- get it?) but local frogs might tell you, “it’s not easy being green”. Native amphibian (frogs and toads) populations are in decline worldwide. Because of their highly permeable skin, amphibians are particularly vulnerable to changes in their environment. Many scientists consider them an indicator species- a good gauge for the health of an ecosystem. With this in mind, over 80 citizen scientist volunteers helped the Natural Areas Program collect valuable information about frogs through an audio survey. Volunteers visited natural areas to listen for frog calls and reported the species. The results were positive- fewer bullfrogs (an invasive species) than expected and chorus frogs and Woodhouse toads were found at most natural areas surveyed. The survey was a great success- thank you volunteers! To read the entire report, visit fcgov.com/naturalareas/wildlife.php.



© US Fish and Wildlife Service

Woodhouse toad

Click, Click the sound of a photo contest

Enjoying natural areas with a camera is a great way to get outside. This summer, sixty-one people submitted photographs taken on City of Fort Collins natural areas for the contest sponsored by Fine Print Imaging and Fort Collins Natural Areas Program. The three top images were printed in the Coloradoan’s Xplore section and winners received a gallery wrapped 16x 20 canvas print. Everyone who entered won a free 11x 14 print. Many wonderful images were submitted and were donated to the Natural Areas Program’s photo library for our use. Thank you Fine Print Imaging, the Coloradoan and all the photographers!



Renewing the Land

Natural systems function best when they are diverse. For example, a mosaic of many kinds of native plants will support a variety of creatures from insects to mammals. On the other hand, a landscape dominated by one type of plant (a monoculture) is unnatural and may support only a few types of wildlife.

So naturally, the goal of natural areas restoration is to create mosaics of native plants and prevent or treat monocultures of non-natives. Degraded land is returned to a healthier native condition that can provide wildlife habitat for a greater number of species. Although it is a slow process, long-term ecological stewardship is a mission-critical component of the Natural Areas Program.

Projects in 2008 included battling introduced species and

noxious weeds using herbicides, hand-pulling, mowing, competitive seeding, prescribed burns, and a tremendous effort by many volunteers to ensure that quality habitat remains. Crews also planted native seed on 265 acres in 2008 and are continuing to work on restoration projects at Pineridge, Coyote Ridge, Nix, Kingfisher, Pelican Marsh, Two Creeks, and many other natural areas. Progress is tracked through a sophisticated database and pictures of the same locations throughout time. In 2008 there was impressive native blue grama grass (*Bouteloua gracilis*) growth at natural areas such as Kingfisher Point and Mallard’s Nest because of the moisture conditions. Did you notice? It’s fun to keep an eye on a restoration project near you and watch the progress.

from the **Director**

2008 has been a year of momentous change for our country. In this time of upheaval and uncertainty, it is comforting to know that our natural areas are there to enjoy. With millions of visits annually, Fort Collins natural areas are popular places. Natural areas are just the right place to enjoy a “stay-local vacation,” to get fit outside, to take in the view of undeveloped foothills, or to experience nature as a quiet respite from city clatter. Whatever your reason for appreciating natural areas, they are yours to explore, experience and treasure for now and into the future.

The Natural Areas Program was established sixteen years ago when citizens of Fort Collins voted to tax themselves to conserve and manage natural areas. As I wrote in last year’s annual report, over the last few years the Natural Areas Program has placed a strong emphasis on building public improvements and opening natural areas to public use. There was some catching up to do, and we’ve made great strides. There is an ever-increasing emphasis on operations, restoration, maintenance, enforcement and education. By the time 2009

concludes, over 95% of the 32,000 acres of under the management of the Natural Areas Program will be open to the public. I hope you have some time in the coming year to get out and enjoy your beautiful natural areas! Thank yourself for it is your citizen-initiated sales tax dollars that conserve land and fund stewardship and visitor services. Your natural areas are vital in making Fort Collins a great place to live, work and recreate.

John Stokes

Natural Resources Department Director

Land Conservation

Two major land conservation projects were completed within the Laramie Foothills – Mountains to Plains project area (the area surrounding Soapstone Prairie Natural Area). Great Outdoors Colorado granted \$265,000 towards the 1,760-acre Bernard Ranch conservation easement and the City acquired a 1,150-acre conservation easement on the Wire Draw Ranch. Both ranches are just south of Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. They host an incredible diversity of plants and animals and are also rich in human history. These conservation easements protect panoramic views from Soapstone Prairie Natural Area and Red Mountain Open Space and fill in a previously unprotected “donut hole” of land surrounded by conserved areas.

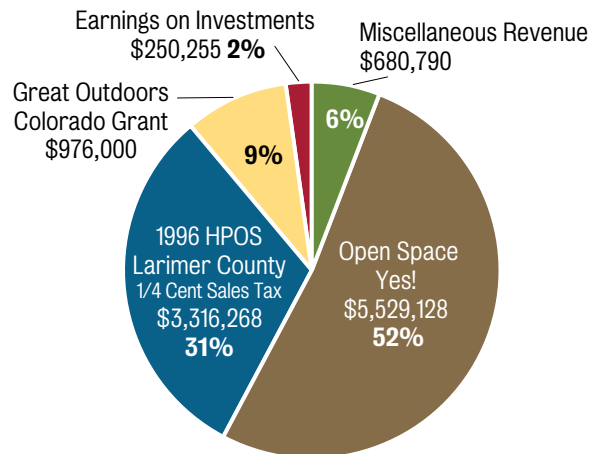
In addition to the lands near Soapstone Prairie, the Natural Areas Program acquired 24 acres from Colorado State University at Reservoir Ridge Natural Area. It also made the first of five closings scheduled for a 523-acre property in the lower Poudre Canyon, adjacent to the wildly popular Picnic Rock recreation site.

At Long Last: Two long term projects near completion

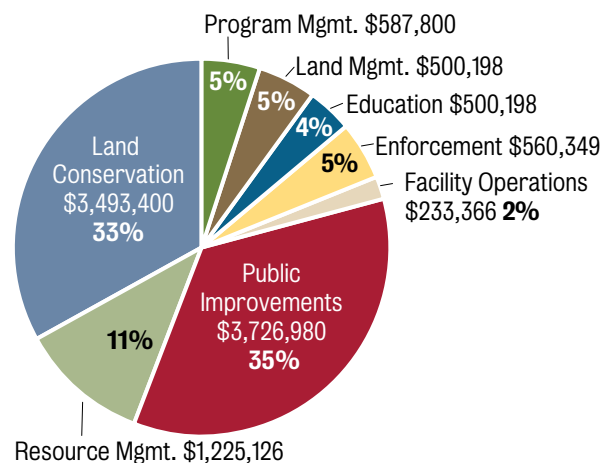
After years of planning and design work, reconstruction of the Benson Reservoir Dam in the Pelican Marsh Natural Area is due to be completed by summer 2009. Once the dam work is completed the site will be restored, trails constructed and the site opened to the public in 2010.

The Resource Recovery Farm gravel mine at Running Deer Natural Area is being restored. Lafarge completed the mining several years ago and is now in the process of completing the finish grading on the site and will seed the site with native grasses in spring 2009. Once the grass has been reestablished and the mining permit closed, trails will be constructed and the site opened to the public.

NAP 2008 Revenues \$10,752,441



NAP 2007 Expenditures \$10,713,029





**Culture, Parks, Recreation
and Environment**

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