

2007

NATURAL AREAS PROGRAM

Annual Report



naturally yours

The Natural Areas Program: **Naturally Yours**

Thank you Fort Collins and Larimer County voters! Your citizen-initiated sales tax dollars conserve land and fund stewardship and visitor services.

Your City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program was hard at work in 2007. Trails were constructed, Primrose Studio was opened, land was conserved and restored, and many of you – working as volunteers, were involved in a variety of ways. We hope you enjoy reading about the accomplishments of 2007.

The Fort Collins Natural Areas Program was established in 1992 when citizens voted to tax themselves to preserve natural lands. Because of continued citizen support, over 36,000 acres have been conserved locally and regionally. Dedicated staff care for

these lands and provide outstanding recreation opportunities and interpretive programs.

Natural areas are yours to explore and treasure. They are places to hike, fish, ride your bike, walk your dog, ride your horse, watch birds, learn something new, experience history, create art and get away from the urban environment.

The mission of the Natural Areas Program is to conserve and enhance lands with existing or potential natural area values, lands that serve as community separators, agricultural lands, and lands with scenic values. Conservation of natural habitats and features is the first priority, while providing for education and recreation for the Fort Collins community.



Bobcat Ridge Natural Area

Trails and Tales at **Bobcat Ridge Natural Area**

Bobcat Ridge Natural Area, just west of Masonville, offers exceptional hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, and more. In 2007, several new trails opened. The Ginny Trail is 5.4 miles long and goes through traverses open, steep and rocky terrain to Mahoney Park, a beautiful meadow with interesting rock formations and great views. The D.R. Trail is 3.3 miles and climbs through ponderosa pines to Mahoney Park. Both trails were constructed using state-of-the-art techniques to make them more sustainable and user-friendly. The Ginny Trail is open to mountain bikes and has been hailed by the cycling community as one of the best, and most challenging, trails, in northern Colorado. The trails are named after Ginny and D.R. Pulliam, previous owners of the Bobcat Ridge

property whose charitable trust helped fund trail construction. All the trails that were planned for Bobcat Ridge Natural Area are now open.

The D.R. and Virginia D. Pulliam Charitable Trust has made a tremendous difference at Bobcat in making recreation and education opportunities available to the public. The Natural Areas Program is very thankful to the Trust for its generous support. In 2007, a grant of \$166,700 funded trail construction, a season of exciting education opportunities, the partial restoration of historic structures, and the creation of a detailed historical record. Over 40 educational programs were offered covering a wide range of topics including star-gazing, bird watching, geology and history of the area. Some very special

young people became Junior Bobcats by participating in activities and pledging to be environmental stewards.

Also thanks to the Pulliam Trust, the history of Bobcat Ridge is now documented. *Pieces of the Past: The Story of Bobcat Ridge* was created through extensive research and interviews by a professional historian. Learn more about the history of Bobcat Ridge by participating in educational programs in 2008.

Bobcat Ridge Natural Area is open from dawn to dusk. Visitors are reminded to leave their dogs at home as this is one of the few natural areas where dogs are not permitted. Equestrians: horse trailer parking is limited to 8 spaces, so if the parking lot is full, please come back another time.



A Soapstone Prairie Tour

Soapstone Prairie Update

The management planning process for Soapstone Prairie continued in 2007 and things are on track for a 2009 opening. With input from citizens, the technical advisory group, staff, and citizen advisory boards, a final management plan was adopted in September. In late 2007 road construction started. Guided tours of Soapstone Prairie continued to be popular, with over 500 participants in 2007. Tours will again be offered May-October 2008, as weather and construction activity permit. To register for a free guided tour, call 970-416-2815 or email gkidawski@fcgov.com.



Reservoir Ridge Natural Area Expanded

An exciting land exchange happened in 2007 between the Colorado State University Research Foundation and the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program. The Natural Areas Program obtained 267 acres at the northern end of CSU's Foothills Campus, which expands Reservoir Ridge Natural Area to 748 acres. CSU obtained a 143-acre parcel at the southwest corner of Prospect Road and I-25. The university will use the land to build a clean energy research park. The project promotes local clean energy economic goals while conserving additional land. "This is a terrific project by Fort Collins and CSU to achieve multiple objectives that benefit the environment and the economy," said John Stokes, Natural Resources Department Director.



Primrose Studio Opens

In 2001, the late Rob and Dorothy Udall, advocates for conservation and social work, donated Primrose Studio and surrounding land to the Natural Areas Program. The land and studio are now part of Reservoir Ridge Natural Area. It was the Udalls' wish that the land be conserved and that the studio be available for groups to use. That wish came true in November 2007 with the opening of Primrose Studio.

The studio's unique design is inspired by the spectacular setting and Dorothy Udall's art, some of which is displayed at Primrose Studio. Artist Barb McKee, of Surface Strategies, Inc. painted images of native grasses from Dorothy's compositions on the face of several doors and cabinets as part of the City's Art in Public Places program.

Primrose Studio is available for rent by the public for gatherings. For reservation and rate information call 970-416-2815 or email gkidawski@fcgov.com.

Thank You **Volunteers!**

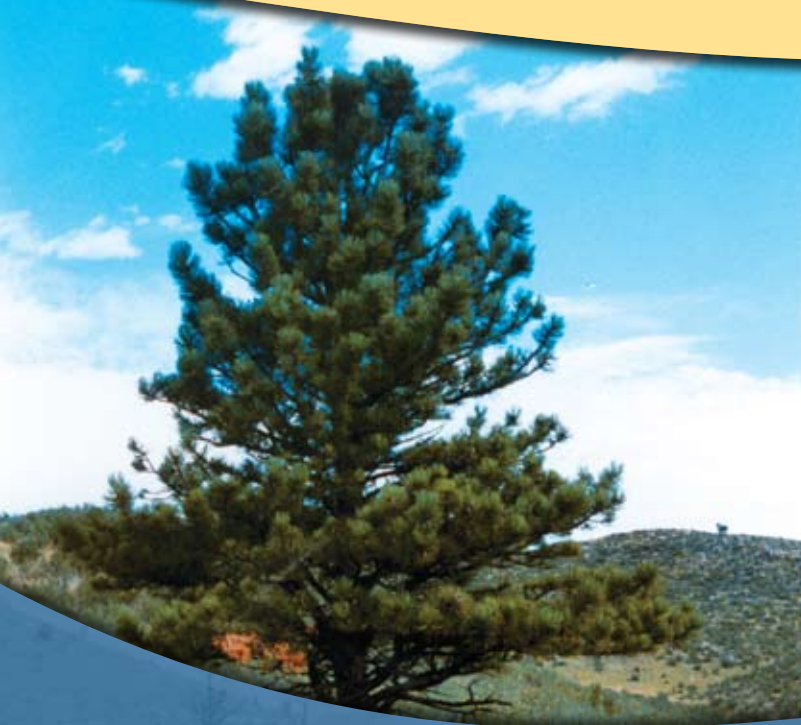
In 2007 over 4,000 hours were donated to the Natural Areas Program. Volunteer activities included 65 Master Naturalists providing 219 educational programs serving 9,481 people. This is a 62% increase over 2006 participant numbers! Trail Hosts donated almost 600 hours greeting and assisting visitors and monitoring trails. Volunteers kept natural areas free of litter by adopting 21 sites. Other volunteers hand-pulled invasive weeds at Soapstone Prairie and Bobcat Ridge natural areas, built bat and flicker houses to be distributed to the public, maintained the native plant garden at Nix Natural Area, packaged wildflower seeds, conducted bird surveys and more. A sincere thank you to our wonderful volunteers for their stewardship and involvement! To volunteer, contact Susan Schafer, 970-416-2480, sschafer@fcgov.com.



Fishing at Gateway

Wildlife Stewardship

Natural areas provide habitat and travel corridors for a rich diversity of wildlife. In 2007, after extensive public outreach, the Natural Areas Program adopted the *Wildlife Management Guidelines*. The guidelines provide a framework for promoting and enhancing ecological health and sustainability. They encourage consistent management between natural areas and give guidance on managing human-wildlife conflicts. The management of prairie dogs and their habitat, wildlife recovery issues, and the control of invasive species are also included. The guidelines were developed with citizens, citizen advisory boards, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, and City Council. You can view the *Wildlife Management Guidelines* at www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/plans-policies.php



Going Native

A mission-critical component of the Natural Areas Program is rehabilitating and restoring degraded land so that it more closely approximates native ecosystems. This work provides habitat, conserves corridors for wildlife and stabilizes and enriches land biologically. Restoration is especially important as habitat fragmentation and climate change threaten biological diversity and ecological resilience. Controlling non-native plants is an important element of restoration and allows native grasses, wildflowers, shrubs and trees to thrive. In 2007, the Natural Areas Program treated 4,338 acres of weeds with herbicide, mowed 840 acres, and prescriptively burned an additional 30 acres. Weeds were hand-pulled by volunteers and staff at 16 natural areas and invasive trees such as salt cedar, Russian olive, Siberian elm, crack willow and white poplar were removed from another 13 natural areas.

Another important aspect of restoration is promoting native plants through conservation projects and monitoring. 2007 was the third year of the “beaver tree” project. Volunteers and staff paint the base of native cottonwoods with a sand/paint mixture that beavers will not gnaw through. Beavers eat non-native willows instead. This project has helped conserve 75% of the native cottonwoods along the Poudre River while also helping to control non-native vegetation. In other plant news- rare natives such as Bell’s twinpod, Ute ladies’-tresses, American currant and others were documented at ten natural areas.

naturally yours

from the Director

Thank you for taking a moment to read this annual report and thank you for your continued support of the Natural Areas Program.

Over the last two years, the Natural Areas Program has developed a strong emphasis on visitor enjoyment, capital improvements and land restoration. In 2007 we added new parking lots, trails, and yes, new bathrooms. In addition to these recreation oriented improvements, there have been

substantial efforts to rehabilitate and restore habitat. The Natural Areas Program is not only conserving land through acquisition, but it is undertaking a long-term program to improve land health. The City of Fort Collins is a strong leader in habitat rehabilitation and restoration.

We also are a leader in the way natural areas are integrated and threaded throughout our local and regional community. This integration contributes to a healthy environment while also providing ready

access to nature for our citizens.

Time in the outdoors has been shown by researchers to contribute to our overall well being and happiness. The Natural Areas Program distinguishes Fort Collins as a great place to live and helps create a happier and healthier community overall.

From the Natural Areas Program, we wish you a happy, healthy and prosperous 2008.

John Stokes,
Natural Resources Department Director

Land Conservation

In 2007, the Natural Areas Program conserved 1,361 acres at a cost of \$5,690,541. Much of this success was achieved in partnership with other organizations. The Natural Areas Program partnered with CSU to trade land that expanded Reservoir Ridge Natural Area (see story inside). The Natural Areas Program also partnered with Larimer County Open Lands on Hermit Park and the Gallegos Ranch. Hermit Park, a gorgeous 1,362 acre property near Estes Park, benefited from a \$90,000 contribution, and the Gallegos Ranch – a 1,480-acre property between Soapstone Prairie Natural Area and Red Mountain Open Space, was the beneficiary of a \$970,000 donation. The Gallegos Ranch funds were provided by Great Outdoors Colorado thru the City. Hermit Park Open Space will offer spectacular hiking, camping and mountain biking trails when it opens in 2008. The Gallegos Ranch was a critical private inholding and will provide trail connections, a parking area, and other amenities.

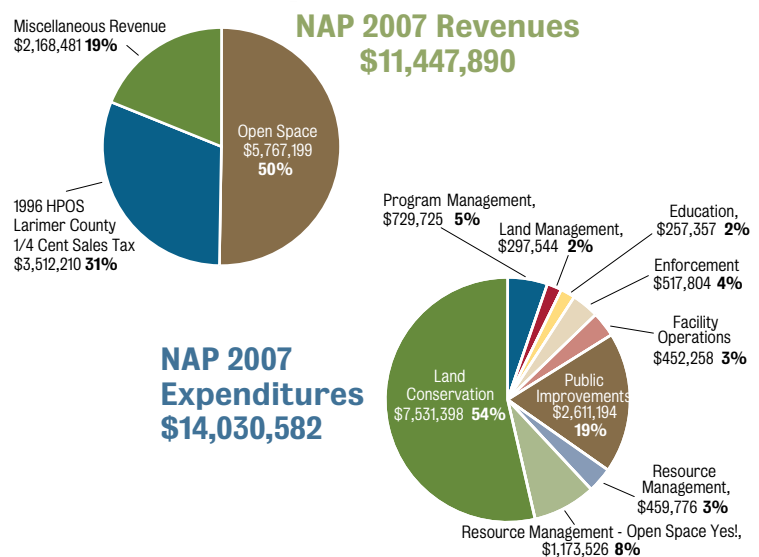
In 2007, the Natural Areas Program partnered with Poudre School District to lease Sterling Natural Area for \$1 a year. Sterling Natural Area is a 44-acre site, west of North Shields Pond Natural Area along the Poudre River.

In other land conservation news, Coyote Ridge Natural Area was expanded by 75 acres with the purchase of the land directly south of the parking lot and trail. The existing house, fence and horse infrastructure ultimately will be removed and the site will be completely restored to native vegetation.

Also in 2007 the Natural Areas Program made its final payment on Bobcat Ridge Natural Area, acquiring the final 386 acres.

The Program also made the second payment out of seven towards the acquisition of the 1,760-acre Bernard Ranch. The conservation of this ranch will provide a buffer on County Road 15, the main entrance to Soapstone Prairie.

By partnering with other organizations and through careful stewardship of its financial resources and conserved land, the Natural Areas Program continues to thrive. Thank you Fort Collins and Larimer County voters. Your citizen-initiated sales tax dollars conserve land and funds restoration and visitor services.



Revenues & Expenditures

Frequently Asked Questions

How can expenditures exceed revenues?

Natural Area's sales tax revenues are designated funds; therefore, if funds are not spent in a given year they must be carried over to the next year.

Why was so much spent on Public Improvements?

Major efforts are underway to have Soapstone Prairie Natural Area ready to open for recreation use in 2009, public improvements include over 30 miles of hiking/biking/equestrian trails, picnic shelters, vault toilets, two parking lots, and the access road. Also an additional 11 miles of trails were added to Bobcat Ridge.

It seems like there is less money being spent on Land Conservation?

As the Natural Areas Program acquires more land, there is an increased need for funding of operations, maintenance, public improvements, vegetation restoration, enforcement and education. The Natural Areas Program now manages over 32,000 acres of land on over 40 sites.



**Culture, Parks, Recreation
and Environment**

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