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# 2011 | NATURAL AREAS ANNUAL REPORT



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*naturally yours*



## Their Hearts Are In Nature

Fort Collins citizens love their natural areas; in fact nearly 1,400 people demonstrated their love by volunteering in 2011. Involvement ranged from one day projects to year-round participation. It is a privilege for the Natural Areas Program to work with extraordinary people who generously share their time and talents- thank you! You are part of the Natural Areas Program's success.



## Year-round Dedication

Some inspiring and special volunteers engaged in longer term volunteer opportunities.

- **Adopt-A-Trail** groups Trout Unlimited, and Overland Bike Club did fabulous on-going maintenance work on the trails at Gateway Natural Area and the Foothills Trail.
- **Master Naturalists** and **Master Naturalist Assistants** shared their knowledge and enthusiasm for natural areas by providing 238 classes, field trips, events, and activities for nearly 11,000 people.
- **Northern Colorado Astronomical Society** led monthly stargazing for the public at natural areas.
- **Volunteer Ranger Assistants** and **Diamond Peaks Mountain Bike Patrol** were a welcoming face for visitors on the trail. They conducted 1,135 patrols and made 1,166 friendly contacts.
- **Adopt-a-Natural Area** volunteers visited a natural area once a month to remove litter which makes natural areas better for people and wildlife.
- **Citizen Science** volunteers helped monitor revegetated areas by locating and photographing 129 survey points. Volunteers also monitored birds and bullfrog egg masses.



## New Focus on Service Learning

Because the community's interest in volunteering has outpaced the available opportunities for several years, the Natural Areas Program focused on providing more one day service learning projects. These combine volunteer service with education and reflection. It was a great success! Forty-four projects accomplished everything from planting native trees and shrubs to litter clean-up, to trail maintenance, and other important stewardship initiatives. Nine hundred and forty seven people donated 2,549 hours, an estimated value of \$55,000!







## Amenities for Visitors

This year, a playground was created where a crumbling building foundation once stood. The Gateway Natural Playground features natural and recycled materials and provides opportunity for imaginative free play in the outdoors at Gateway Natural Area.

At Pineridge Natural Area, staff and Larimer County Youth Corps fixed an eroded and braided trail by installing an elevated rock causeway and widening the trail tread. The cracked and bumpy asphalt trail at Gustav Swanson Natural Area was replaced with a concrete trail and a new vault toilet was installed.

Fishing line recycling receptacles were installed at seven natural areas. Fishing line is dangerous to birds and other wildlife that can die from entanglement with it. The deposited fishing line is collected by Trout Unlimited volunteers and recycled into benches and fish habitat structures.

An extensive flood control and habitat improvement project at Red Fox Meadows Natural Area was completed in 2011. There is now an outdoor classroom boardwalk, new access points, parking, a vault toilet, and a trailhead kiosk. You might also notice more native plants and better wildlife habitat.

## Survey Says...

The City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program asks for feedback from visitors and residents every five years through a survey. Results from 2011 show that natural areas are popular and well-liked. The survey found that 80% of respondents had visited a natural area in the past year. Ninety percent said the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program is doing a good job, very good job or excellent job.



## Caring for Nature

Stewardship of the Poudre River corridor was a high priority for the Natural Areas Program in 2011. The update to the Cache La Poudre River Natural Areas Management Plan was completed. It outlines a conservation and recreation vision for 17 natural areas totaling 1,380 acres along a 13-mile stretch of riverfront. The planning group was selected as one of the City's "World Class Work Teams"—congratulations to all!

At McMurry Natural Area, four acres of cottonwood forest were restored—the area's single most important ecological feature (other than the river itself). The project also added three acres of wetlands and removed steep shorelines in order to provide critical habitat for aquatic insects, fish, amphibians, and birds.



## Rare Plant Finds

Natural Area volunteers and staff showed that there is still much to learn about natural areas through their successful search for undiscovered populations of rare plants. In 2011, they carefully combed wetlands and identified 12 new rare plants. Natural Areas are home to a total of 31 rare plants.



© Crystal Strouse

## Focus on Running Deer Natural Area

The historic White Pine Fire Lookout cab (or top) was moved to Running Deer Natural Area. Stabilizing the structure, interpretation and public access will come in 2012.

The fire tower cab will give a great view of Running Deer's award-winning reclamation project. The Colorado Division of Mining Reclamation and Safety and the Colorado Stone, Sand and Gravel Association awarded Lafarge West, Inc., and the City of Fort Collins the Jack Starner Reclamation Award this year.

Clean-up is underway! About 78 tons of concrete and trash and 260 dump truck loads of mulch from invasive trees and logs were removed from Cottonwood Hollow and Running Deer in 2011.



## Multi-Purpose Land Use Team

Fort Collins Natural Areas, Utilities and Parks began looking for partnership opportunities to acquire lands within the City's growth management area that could serve multiple purposes, such as trail and wildlife corridors, drainage ways, water quality, and flood control.



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## Policies Updated & Created

The Utility Easement Policy, Americans with Disabilities Act Policies and the Land Conservation Policies and Procedures were updated and the Agricultural Use Policy and the Encroachment Policy were created to adaptively manage natural areas and open lands.



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## Bobcat Ridge Historical Grant

The State Historical Fund (a program of History Colorado) awarded the Natural Areas Program \$93,392 to restore the historic log chicken house and pioneer barn at Bobcat Ridge Natural Area.



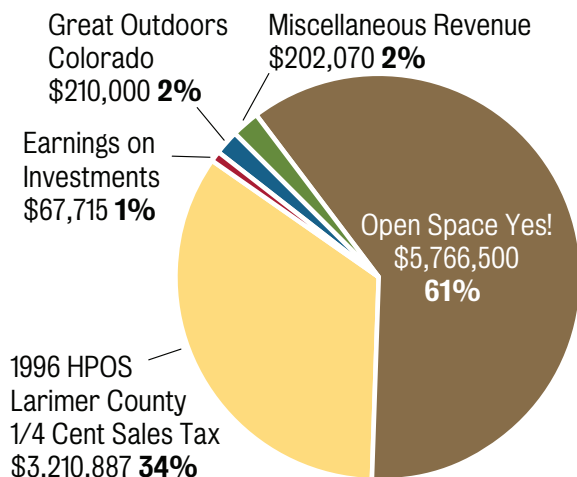
# Naturally Yours

It was a year of important accomplishments for the Natural Areas Program. We focused on maintaining and improving the natural area sites and services that Fort Collins residents value so much. Natural areas are important for many reasons; they serve as a peaceful sanctuary from urban life, a place to recreate and exercise, a home for native plants and animals and a place for scientists and students alike to learn about the natural world.

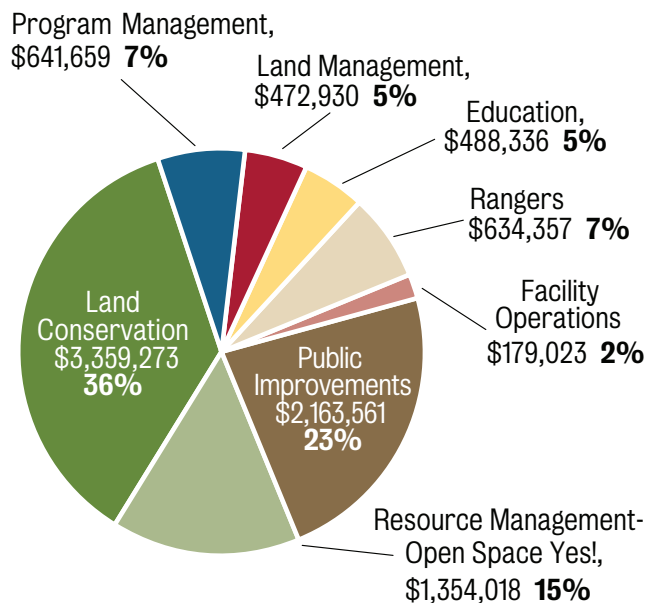
You are the owners and stewards of these wonderful natural areas and it is you that make them so special. Larimer County and Fort Collins voters have consistently supported citizen-initiated sales tax ballot measures which make it possible for everyone to explore and help conserve natural areas.

*Thank you!*

**Natural Areas Program  
2011 Revenues \$9,457,172**



**Natural Areas Program  
2011 Expenditures \$9,293,157**



2011 expenditures included funds carried over from prior year's revenues.

## Land Conservation

**Strauss Cabin** – This historic structure and the surrounding land was transferred from Larimer County to the City in order to facilitate public access and historical interpretation. It will be incorporated into Arapaho Bend Natural Area.

**Foothills Views Protected** – The Natural Areas Program acquired a 100 acre conservation easement ensuring a perpetual scenic view of the foothills from North Overland Trail Road and Reservoir Ridge Natural Area.

**Soapstone Prairie Additions** – Two properties within the boundaries of Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, totaling 280 acres, were acquired.

**Wellington Community Separator** – Conservation easements totaling 343 acres were acquired to conserve a buffer between Wellington and Fort Collins and to conserve prime irrigated farm land. The easements were funded in part by a Federal Farmland Protection Grant administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.



## Natural Heroes

Natural Area and Trail Rangers are on the front line of customer service seven days a week. In 2011, Rangers made 12,000 friendly contacts with visitors and responded to more than 700 inquiries on the ranger hotline (970-416-2147). In addition to daily patrol activities, the rangers provided medical assistance to visitors and worked with more than 100 natural area neighbors on clarifying property boundaries.



## CITY COUNCIL / CITY MANAGER

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