



# 2016 | NATURAL AREAS ANNUAL REPORT



City of  
**Fort Collins**  
Natural  
Areas

*naturally yours*

## From the Director

Each year the City's Natural Areas Department provides this summary of its core programs and accomplishments. However, the annual report doesn't fully represent the true essence and substance of the community's treasured natural areas system. That can only be truly experienced at one of the 41 natural

areas open to the public. Alternatively, come join us at a public event or volunteer with us. We would love to meet you. Wherever you land in a natural area, it is likely to be somewhere that you can find beauty, peace, and a much needed respite from the daily routine.

– John Stokes

## Wildlife Thrives

A new fish passage on the Fossil Creek Reservoir Inlet diversion structure makes the Cache la Poudre River more fish-friendly. Plus, fish habitat and angling access were enhanced at North Shields Ponds.

The Laramie Foothills Bison Conservation Herd at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area and Red Mountain Open Space celebrated its first anniversary and an additional brucellosis-free Yellowstone bull joined the herd briefly to diversify the genetics. Visitors to Soapstone Prairie enjoyed a new roadside pull-off and bison interpretive signs.

To support the endangered black-footed ferrets that were reintroduced to Soapstone Prairie Natural Area two years ago, sylvatic plague, a flea-borne disease that wipes out prairie dog colonies, was controlled on prairie dog colonies (ferrets' main food source). Nineteen ferrets were released to supplement the population and natural breeding was confirmed when five wild-born kits were seen. Natural areas that were used for commercial



agriculture are being restored to native grassland and encouragingly, are supporting bird species that are of "special concern" as shown by the bi-annual Foothills Breeding Bird Survey. Prairie dogs were relocated from a private land development site to Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area - by the Prairie Dog Coalition, a non-profit wildlife group.

To manage the pronghorn herd and provide a recreational opportunity, five hunters participated in the inaugural limited pronghorn hunt at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.

## Plants for the Future

Some non-native crack willows were removed along the Poudre River to allow the native cottonwood forest to expand. Herbicide application by helicopter was an element of a strategy to reduce non-native cheatgrass on over 1,000 acres in the foothills.



### TO RESTORE NATURAL AREAS

**200+**  
**ACRES**

were planted with native  
**GRASSES & WILDFLOWERS**

**13,000+**  
**INDIVIDUAL**

**WETLAND PLANTS**  
were planted



## Planning Ahead

Several planning efforts made major headway in 2016:

The Natural Areas' Ten-Year Restoration Plan update set forth priorities for ecological restoration.

An update of the 2007 Wildlife Conservation Guidelines was initiated including stakeholder meetings, an open house, and meetings with the Land Conservation and Stewardship Advisory Board.



Planning and permitting got underway for a major restoration project at Kingfisher Point Natural Area with construction expected in 2017.

An update to the Fossil Creek Natural Areas Management Plan was initiated, which covers twelve natural areas.

The Bobcat Ridge Management Plan update was nearly completed. It will include ambitious conservation goals, and address high visitor use, new trail construction, and elk management.



## Caring for Trails & Visitor Amenities

Trail stewardship includes assessment, snow removal, mowing along edges, fixing problem areas, and adding handicap access features. A new watercraft slide and steps were added at Pineridge Natural Area to improve boater access.

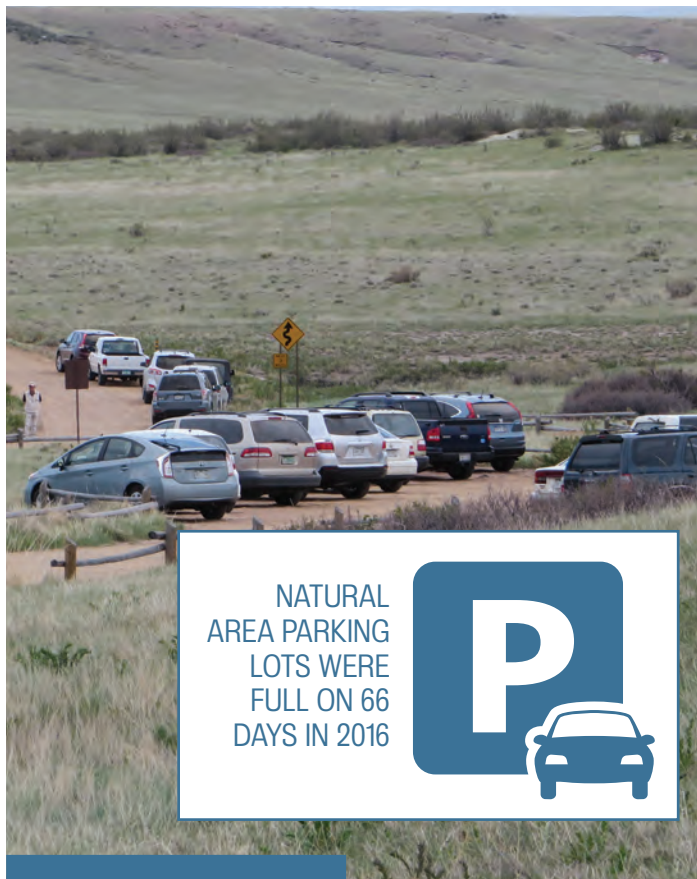


Crews were busy with regular maintenance such as fencing repair and restroom cleaning, as well as camp clean-ups and addressing vandalism.

New interpretive signs at Arapaho Bend Natural Area were installed to highlight the site's history. Elders from the Northern Arapaho Tribe performed a ceremony to honor the Council Tree site.

The historic cabin at Bobcat Ridge Natural Area was protected from the weather with windows and a door. Additions at Bobcat Ridge's other historic structures included two new interpretive signs, identification tags for historic furnishings, and improvements to visitor access. Thanks to funding from the Pulliam Charitable Trust, the trail from the picnic shelter to the cabin was refurbished.





## Cheers to Volunteers

Natural Areas sends a heartfelt thank you to the 1,800 volunteers who gave their time and talents in 2016! Volunteers donated an astounding 15,886 hours, more than the time of seven full time employees! There were 57 one-day volunteer service projects involving 1,198 people including trail projects, gardening, litter

clean-ups, and restoration. Ninety-two Volunteer Ranger Assistants did a phenomenal amount of outreach on visitor safety and awareness by providing 3,613 hours of patrol and making 11,179 visitor contacts, 20% more than in 2015. Overland Mountain Bike Club patrollers provided 166 service hours and made more than 900 visitor contacts.

Colorado State University's award, Exceptional Achievement in Service-Learning: Community Partner recognized Natural Areas Department's Volunteer Coordinators —congratulations!



## Outdoor Inspiration

To inspire the community's connection to nature, staff and volunteers provided 370 educational activities for 15,884 people. Waitlists became common for popular programs. NoCoTrailReport.org was introduced to give an interactive map of regional trail closures.

Great Outdoors Colorado provided a planning grant to connect the neighborhood around the Fort Collins Boys & Girls Club to nature. The Plug in to Nature In Northwest Fort Collins grant sponsored an extensive community engagement process and Youth Advisory Council. The planning process will develop recommendations for place-based improvements, outdoor programs, and natural resource career pathways for youth.





## NATURE IN THE CITY

The purpose of the Council-adopted Nature in the City program is to support and enhance a connected open space network for people and wildlife as Fort Collins reaches build-out in the next 20 – 30 years. The program focuses on partnerships, policy development, and capital projects to achieve its objectives. In 2016, Nature in the City was housed within the Natural Areas Department and began implementing its strategic plan.

Concepts related to easy access to nature, high-quality natural spaces, and land stewardship were advanced in various City plans such as the Water Efficiency Plan, Downtown Plan, and Road to

2020 Climate Action Plan. An outreach campaign generated 53 proposals from residents to support connections to nature and wildlife habitat, some of which will be funded in 2017. Thirty citizen science volunteers completed over 300 bird and butterfly surveys to help focus land acquisition and habitat improvement efforts.

Five pilot projects included a pollinator garden at McGraw Elementary and at a stormwater detention site, a Living Wall at a new downtown City Utilities building, tree planting in the Greenbriar neighborhood, and collaborations on planning portions of the new Twin Silos Community Park.

## Serve & Protect

Rangers safeguard visitors and natural areas in many ways including reporting trail closures on social media, updating NoCoTrailReport.org, and answering inquiries. Rangers made 7,399 positive contacts and wrote 700 tickets and warnings this year. Work continued with Fort Collins Police Services to address camping issues in natural areas and Rangers participated in a citywide task force to develop strategies for homelessness. Rangers regularly provided public safety and security by assisting with wildland fires and medical situations.



## Sustainability

The Natural Areas Department achieved its goal for no annual increase in electrical power for the headquarters campus; in fact there was a 25% decrease due to additional solar panels. Seventeen re-used metal barrels from New Belgium Brewery were repurposed as trash and recycling receptacles.



Older pet waste bag dispensers were diverted from the landfill by donating them to managers of certified natural areas.

## Enhancement Fund

To encourage stewardship of natural places, the Natural Areas Enhancement Fund supports community proposals to enhance or restore private or public natural areas. Removing invasive plants, installing native plants, and enhancing aquatic habitat were supported by \$15,000 in grant funds.



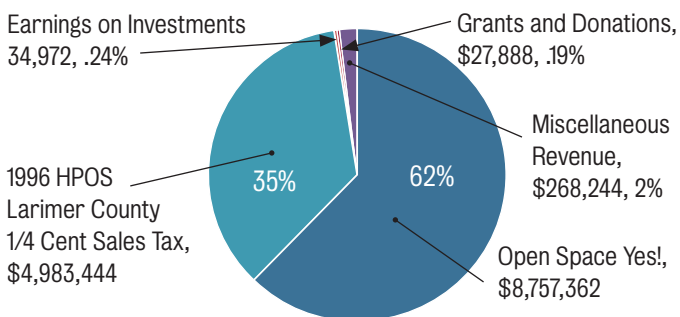
## A Growing Network of Lands

Tanglewood Natural Area, a ten-acre site along Spring Creek, was added and opened to the public. Topminnow Natural Area was expanded to the south by six acres and Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area grew by 20 acres. Goose Hollow Natural Area, a five-acre site in northeast Fort Collins was added through a partnership with Fort Collins Housing Authority and Neighbor to Neighbor.

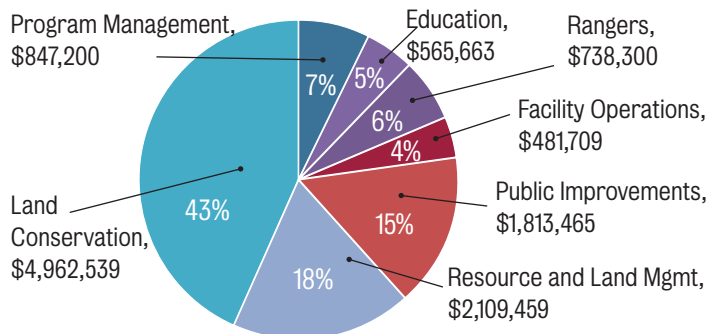
Flores del Sol Natural Area, 152 acres of irrigated farm land adjacent to the Colorado Front Range Trail corridor, was added to enlarge the Fort Collins/ Loveland Community Separator. In addition, a 95-acre tree farm was added to the Wellington Community Separator through a conservation easement. West of Lory State Park, 170 acres of prime foothills wildlife habitat was conserved by two conservation easements.



### 2016 Natural Areas Revenues \$14,071,911



### 2016 Natural Areas Expenditures \$11,518,335



## CITY COUNCIL/CITY MANAGER

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 Gino Campana, District 3  
 Kristin Stephens, District 4  
 Ross Cunniff, District 5  
 Gerry Horak, Mayor Pro Tem, District 6

Darin Atteberry, City Manager

## Community Services

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