



## Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Wildlife Camera Project

### Background

CSU undergraduate Honors students Bonnie Greenwood and Tory Wilson worked with the Rocky Mountain Cat Conservancy to set up eight cameras at Bobcat Ridge Natural Area in June 2009. Four cameras were on-trail and four off-trail. One of the focuses of their project was to see how the presence of humans affected wildlife behavior. What the photos showed is that wildlife generally like using human-made trails, but usually when humans are not present. There were instances of wildlife on trails moments after and before humans were photographed. In general, the presence of humans does affect their behavior, and wildlife tend to avoid people as much as possible.

### Continuation of Project

After Bonnie and Tory finished their project in August 2009, the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department decided to keep the cameras in place and continue monitoring wildlife photos. Cameras are checked twice a month by volunteers and students, which involves retrieving photos, checking or changing batteries, resetting cameras as needed, and looking for other signs of wildlife. Volunteers who monitor the project include volunteers with the Natural Areas Department and students from Rocky Mountain High School. The high school students check cameras on their own time and use the photos in their classroom to learn about different wildlife species and to explore the scientific method.

The cameras are owned by the Rocky Mountain Cat Conservancy. This non-profit organization takes care of maintaining the cameras and overseeing data collection for a database. Some of the cameras are in the original locations while others have been moved to new locations.

Selected photos are posted each month on the natural areas web page at <http://www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/wildlife-camera.php>. The Natural Areas Department has learned much about the wildlife at Bobcat Ridge through this project, including the diversity of wildlife that live there, including black bears, coyotes, red fox, bobcats, mountain lions, bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer, striped skunks, western spotted skunks, Abert's squirrels, raccoons, cottontail rabbits, wild turkeys, and raptors. Several of these were species that had not been seen on the property before (western spotted skunks, bighorn sheep, Abert's squirrels). Collared elk and collared and ear-tagged mountain lions have been captured in the photos, originating from Estes Park (elk) and Wyoming and Boulder (mountain lions).

### Expansion of the Project

In 2012, the Natural Areas Department partnered with Colorado State University and the Poudre School District to begin a similar project at Pineridge Natural Area. CSU graduate students, under Dr. Kevin Crooks of the Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Biology Department, worked with sixth graders in Brooks Ramsey's science classes at Boltz Middle School to set up six cameras at Pineridge, which were monitored several times during the school year. The Boltz students used the photos to learn how to design data graphs and learn about wildlife species. CSU students are using the data for research projects. The Pineridge camera project will continue in the 2013-14 school year.

### Future

Each year that data is collected adds another important year of photos to the overall database. The Natural Areas Department is working with the Rocky Mountain Cat Conservancy and students from CSU to input this data into a manageable database. In the next year or so, we hope to have this in a format that can be utilized by educational organizations and individuals in the community who wish to do wildlife research queries and data compilation.

*For more information about the project, please contact Deborah Price, Community Programs Educator, at 970-217-3075 or [dprice@fcgov.com](mailto:dprice@fcgov.com).*