

Executive Summary
Cache la Poudre River

8.2011

Natural Areas

Management Plan Update





Although many sites retain the marks of human occurrences, the river itself remains wild and full of possibility. -William Wylie

The City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program (NAP) manages 17 natural areas totaling 1,380 acres along 13 miles of the Poudre River through Fort Collins and encompassing more than half of the City's 100-year floodplain. The Cache la Poudre River Natural Areas Management Plan Update identifies significant management opportunities and challenges and details how these community assets will be stewarded in the next 10 years. This plan acknowledges the importance of river flows and hydrology, however specific management of the river channel and in-stream flows is beyond the immediate scope of the plan.

The river corridor provides opportunities for a range of activities including family outings, nature observation, interpretation, reflection, outdoor

recreation, biodiversity protection, and habitat conservation and restoration.

The management plan update is the result of extensive community outreach, field work, and evaluation by staff and guidance from local professionals. The Nature Conservancy's Conservation Action Planning methodology provided a framework for the analysis of conservation and visitor values. The public was invited to share their thoughts through several venues including on-site questionnaires, online comment forms, an open house, and presentations to citizen advisory boards.

Actions outlined in this plan include system-wide strategies, site-specific projects, and identification of critical issues that will require collaborative effort.

Vision for the Poudre River Natural Areas

- Sustainable, resilient, and functioning river ecosystem
- Abundant, high quality, opportunities for outdoor recreation
- Satisfied and well-informed visitors
- Plan implementation through partnerships and collaborations



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Coming Soon to the Natural Areas Along the Poudre River...

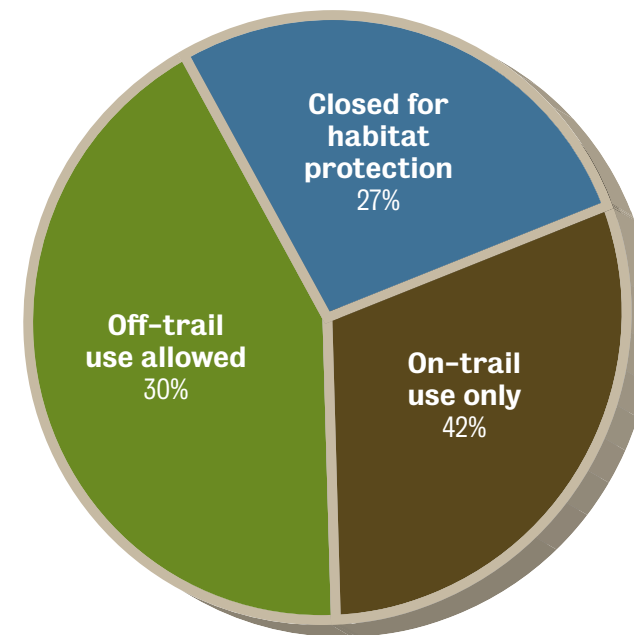
- Improved site information and river corridor wayfinding including kiosks and orientation signage. NAP will work with partners on a navigation information system within and between Poudre River natural areas, parks, and downtown.
- New ecological restoration efforts to expand cottonwood forests, transform remnant gravel ponds into mosaics of vegetated wetlands and open water, and naturalize the Poudre's riverbanks while incorporating recreation features for visitors.
- Improved and new visitor amenities throughout the corridor, including parking areas, picnic shelters, trails, wildlife observation areas, fishing pods, and restrooms.
- New research initiatives to further understand and manage the role of floodplain ponds and wildlife use through the Poudre corridor.
- Area-specific planning and coordination for downtown natural areas (McMurry, Salyer, River's Edge) and parks (Legacy, Lee Martinez, etc.) between multiple City departments to accommodate increasing visitation anticipated with the opening of the new Museum of Discovery, redevelopment of North College, and reconstruction of the Shields Street bridge with associated new trailhead and parking.
- Consolidation and boundary changes of some natural areas. Sterling and Nix natural areas have been incorporated into their respective adjacent natural areas based on geography and management prescription. Other boundary changes have been made to facilitate and streamline site management.

Management Zoning

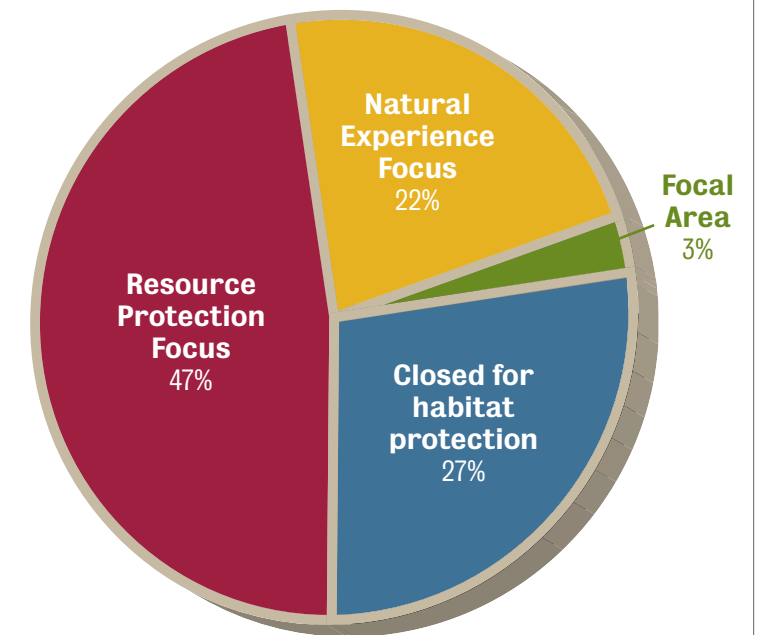
Prior to the Cache la Poudre River Natural Areas Management Plan Update, natural areas were zoned for management in their entirety which did not allow flexibility to zone different areas within a single natural area. The new system consists of five zones (0 to 4) ranging from areas closed to public use (0) to focal areas (4) prescribed for intense public use. A modifier is added to the zoning designation to describe whether on-trail only (A) or off-trail use (B) will be permitted.



Breakdown of **Regulatory Zoning** Across the Whole System



Breakdown of **Management Zoning** Across the Whole System



Overarching Management Concepts

Visitor Experience

Natural areas are places for people to recreate, explore nature, and learn about the river's natural and cultural history. The Natural Areas Program plans to:

- Improve visitors' ability to navigate the Poudre's system of parks and natural areas through trail and signage improvements.
- Ensure that natural areas along the river are inviting, fun places for people to explore and connect with nature. Maintain infrastructure and continue ranger patrols to provide a safe and positive experience.
- Provide a spectrum of nature-based recreation opportunities on land and water while minimizing visitor conflicts and preserving conservation values.
- Increase public awareness and support for natural areas along the river.
- Honor and interpret the iconic significance of the Poudre River to the Fort Collins community.
- Identify, conserve and interpret significant natural and cultural features.



Land and Habitat Conservation

Stewardship of land, water and wildlife habitat is the Natural Areas Program's fundamental mission.

- Participate in City-wide and intergovernmental collaborative efforts to promote ecological viability and sustainability of the river and its ecosystem.
- Leverage NAP land acquisition and restoration funds with grants and other funding sources to conserve additional river properties, improve habitat, and enhance the visitor experience.
- Improve and restore impaired and degraded lands. Protect and maintain high quality large areas already in good ecological condition by proactively addressing minor threats.
- Support ecosystem functions and processes at a local level. Enhance or conserve existing ecological complexity to promote ecological resiliency. Manage for future conditions instead of targeting historic conditions.
- Establish realistic conservation and restoration goals in the urban context. Focus on locations that offer the best opportunity for success.

Conservation Targets

Riparian Cottonwood Forest

A critical habitat for wildlife, the riparian forest provides cover within the regional grassland and urbanized landscape. Primary threats are altered river flows, confinement of the river channel, and non-native trees.



Floodplain Ponds

Thirty-nine ponds within the Poudre River Natural Areas provide important aquatic habitat for birds, fish, wetland plants, and cottonwood trees as well as high recreational value for fishing and boating. Concerns include non-native plants, exotic wildlife, and steep banks.



Floodplain Grasslands

Grassland habitats add to the diversity of plants and wildlife in the corridor, buffer the river habitats, provide views to the river, and enhance the recreational experience. Restoration success is threatened by the persistent encroachment of non-native plants.



Wildlife Corridor and Habitat

Two-hundred and thirty species of birds and 32 species of mammals have been observed along the Poudre, underscoring the high habitat value of the river's natural areas. The corridor and habitat are threatened by fragmentation, urban development pressure, historic land uses, and altered river flows.



Primary Management Goals and Issues by Site



North Shields Ponds and Butterfly Woods
 Conserve and expand cottonwood forests by maintaining ground water levels as well as enhancing the fishing experience at North Shields Ponds.



Magpie Meander, McMurry, Salyer and River's Edge
 Lead and participate in collaborative, interdepartmental and intergovernmental planning and project implementation to accommodate increasing recreation demand while conserving ecological values.

Gustav Swanson and Udall
 Increase opportunities for downtown visitors to enjoy safe and accessible natural areas. Collaboration will help conserve and enhance high quality urban bird habitat and promote wildlife movement along the Poudre River.



Riverbend Ponds and Cattail Chorus
 Provide abundant fishing opportunities at Riverbend Ponds, conserve cottonwood forests, and restore grasslands at Cattail Chorus. Improve visitor access, parking, and directional signage to the Poudre River Trail from the north parking lot at Riverbend Ponds.



Springer, Williams, and Kingfisher Point
 Continue to improve the health of the riparian forest, enhance native grassland restoration, and promote American black currant populations. The rural character of this unit is important as it provides a quiet and more reflective stretch of the river. Develop interpretation of cultural features and pursue additional visitor parking and access to the Poudre River Trail.

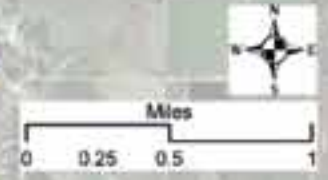


Cottonwood Hollow, Prospect Ponds, and Running Deer
 After farming and gravel mining this area now has some of the most intact habitat within the urban setting of Fort Collins. Continue to maintain the quality wildlife habitat and restore areas covered with non-native vegetation.



Arapaho Bend
 Maintain or improve riparian conditions through restoration, enhance fishing opportunities, and improve public amenities by developing a formal trail system and centralizing parking access.

Cache la Poudre River Natural Areas





The Future

This plan sets the Natural Areas Program on a course to maintain a corridor of healthy river ecosystems, provide a spectrum of recreational opportunities, generate well-informed and satisfied residents, and construct broad collaborations that make it all happen. The management concepts, strategies, and actions in this plan show the way forward for stewardship of the natural areas along the river, an iconic and integral part of Fort Collins.



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Rangers 970-416-2147
Life-threatening emergency 911
For a guided nature walk 970-416-2480

