

City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department

Resource Management 2015

Restoration of Grasslands

It was an awesome year for grassland restoration on the natural areas! In 2015, staff planted 194 acres of native seed bringing the area of actively managed restoration from 1,539 acres in 2014 to 1,733 acres in 2015! In some Natural Areas, smooth brome, a non-native pasture grass was returned to native grasses and wildflowers. This conversion from a monoculture to native prairie plants with diversity in species and structure will afford improved habitat for a variety of prairie wildlife. At Topminnow Natural Area, upland areas were graded and planted with native grasses in preparation to become home to all kinds of living creatures.



In other areas, efforts were made to diversify native grass with wildflower and shrub seed. An additional 76 acres were prepared for restoration by planting a cover crop as a measure to prevent soil erosion through the winter. Seeding for the year totaled 270 acres!



**Total Acres Under Active Restoration:
1,733 acres!**

Current Condition of Restoration	# of Acres	% of Total Acreage
> 75% native plants	659 acres	38%
25%-75% native plants	849 acres	49%
> 25% native, weedy plants dominant	225 acres	13%

Wetland Mats Installed at North Shields Ponds

Canada geese are an ongoing challenge when it comes to wetland restoration as they can decimate tender wetland shoots soon after planting. At North Shields Ponds Natural Area, resource management crews installed fifty wetland mats that measure 30 square feet each. These mats take root faster than wetland plugs and will be more difficult for geese to pluck from the ground. The mats were installed during the late summer with the anticipation that they will naturally spread into un-vegetated areas over the next several years.



The Restoration Plan Provides Valuable Findings



The Resource Management team initiated an update of the 2004 Comprehensive Restoration Plan in 2015. This update added key findings to the restoration goals for the next 10 years including a “Species of Interest” list that will inform and guide future restoration objectives. Focused “designer” restoration goals will draw upon species’ life history and habitat needs, biotic and abiotic processes, climate change, and other factors that are intended to improve restoration outcomes. The plan features a restoration priority and a 10-year a budget.

Volunteers Help Steward!

Volunteers made big contributions to restoration in 2015. This included planting 12,229 shrubs, bare root willows, wetland plants and wildflower plugs at Top Minnow, Springer, McMurry and North Shields Ponds Natural Areas. Restoration Corps volunteers contributed 315 hours to 23 projects in 2015.



Poudre River Breeding Bird Survey

The fourth year of breeding bird surveys on the Poudre river properties was completed and provided interesting observations. During high spring flows, a restored floodplain forest at McMurry Natural Area hosted several bird species that are more common to the forests of the eastern United States and the boreal forests of Canada. These migrating birds were found utilizing a patch of flooded forest to forage for invertebrates on debris piles that had accumulated at the base of trees and shrubs. Reconnecting the Poudre river to its floodplain at McMurry helped to make this scenario possible. Waterfowl and wading birds also seemed to take advantage of the slower moving water in the floodplain and forests, especially wood ducks. These observations help highlight the importance of floodplain connectivity for wildlife.



Poudre River Restoration

Resource Management crews continued to care for the 1,000s of native plants associated with the river restoration projects at McMurry and North Shields Ponds Natural Areas. Watering will continue at North Shields Ponds for one more year, but this was likely the last year that McMurry plantings will need follow-up care and supplemental watering!

Natural Areas Crews Assist with Bobcat Wildfire and Implement Burns

On the afternoon of August 13th, 2015, regional crews and Natural Areas Rangers responded to a wildfire at Bobcat Ridge Natural Area. The following day, Resource Management crews and Rangers arrived to assist with suppression and mop-up. The fire was contained at 7 acres and did not escape the original control lines. Natural Areas fire crews also completed 8 agricultural burns (including 2 ditch burns) for a total of 37.5 acres in 2015. Burn objectives included; stressing western wheat monocultures to allow for more forbs in an area, reducing competition in a wetland where Utes-ladies'-tresses orchid was documented, and increasing plant and wildlife diversity in grassland ecosystems.



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