

Volunteer News



RECORDS ARE BREAKING!

Our community has taken a big punch this year with one of the most destructive wildfires in Colorado's history. But our community has also banded together to help each other by volunteering time to make a difference. As the Natural Areas Department's Volunteer Coordinator, I have the privilege to witness people give their time, donate their skills, and share their experiences.

Helping others is definitely nothing new to the citizens of Fort Collins. Did you know that over 40% of Fort Collins residents volunteer? It's pretty obvious to anyone who works at the Natural Areas Department that volunteering is a priority for you.

This has been a record-breaking year in many ways: record-high temperatures, record-breaking fire season, and record-low precipitation. But there's other records being broken this year.

Master Naturalists and Master Naturalist Assistants are in high demand. By June 30, 2011, 1,495 people had attended public programs; but this year we have already served 2,311 people (see page 3)! Last spring MNs and MNAs taught 1,474 students through school programs; this spring we were able to get 312 more kids outdoors for a total of 1,786!

The Service Learning program has really taken off, also. Last year, 974 people volunteered in one-day projects. This year we've already worked with 807 people and it's only July (see page 4)! VRAs have been busy patrolling natural areas and open spaces, logging 950 patrol hours despite the heavy smoke and closed areas (see page 5). Gardeners are hard at work and feel like they finally have the upper hand on all the weeds, shoots, and suckers that have plagued the Nix garden since it was installed. This current gardening team has worked together on the Nix garden for the last three years and the progress really shows.

Volunteers continue play a pivotal roll in conservation throughout the state and Fort Collins is a stellar example of that. You inspire and amaze us with your dedication, energy and enthusiasm. Thank you.



Natural Areas Department display at a recent event staffed by volunteers.

NATURALIST'S NICHE

Meet the New Classes of 2012!

In the spring of 2012, 20 Master Naturalists and 22 Master Naturalist Assistants got all trained up, joined the ranks, and have been volunteering like crazy! Thank you!

New Master Naturalists are:

Dale Agger
Mary Aldrich
Roger Alexander
David Bayer
Bill Cornell
Mary Joyce Fink
Diane Heck
Ed Heffern
Corynne Hilbert
Kate McSherry
Becky McGenity
Marie Mohn
Wendy Potts
Suzy Riding



New Master Naturalist Assistants are:

Torin Caffery
Norma Carrasco
Jeanette Cooley
Rich Ernst
Joe Fanelli
Marie Flynn
Patrick Flynn
Ann Grant
James Haas
Tara Hancock
Burney Hill
Angela Huxel
Bin Lu
Gene Meier
Kathy Miczulski
Harry Mueller
Betsy Perna
Leanne Trozan
Stacey Waldfoegel

*Welcome and thanks for joining the ranks of
volunteer educators!*

2012: A Stellar Year for Public Programs!

By Deborah Price, Public Programs Educator

This has been a challenging summer with smoke and fire issues, flooding at Bobcat Ridge, and extreme heat. Despite a number of programs being canceled and rescheduled, we have surpassed all previous public program attendance! You were all flexible and accommodated the changes and made it possible to provide the educational opportunities that our visitors were seeking.

In 2011, our total public program attendance was 3,081. This year, we have already reached close to that number! Our increase is due not only to more *Tracks & Trails* pro-



grams offered, but we are also receiving requests for more programs from a variety of groups and organizations. The word is out and people love learning about their natural areas!

Our outdoor “classrooms” continue to provide new opportunities for adults and children. Thanks for your positive attitude, for your excitement, and your energy for sharing the wonders of our natural areas with others!



SERVICE LEARNING

By Cate Dillon, Service Learning Educator

Service Learning Volunteers have had a busy year. They have donated 2,534 hours—nearly surpassing the total amount of hours Service Learning Volunteers donated in 2011! Here's a sampling of what they've been up to:

Eighteen organizations participated in trash pick-ups. The amount of litter along the Poudre River corridor and in the regional natural areas is dramatically reduced. Over 100 community members celebrated National Trails Day and maintained four miles of trail at Bobcat Ridge Natural Area. Employees from Anheuser-Busch donated and planted 126 fruit bearing shrubs at Riverbend Ponds Natural Area for their company-sponsored event: World Environment Day.



With the assistance of Plymouth Congregation, Forest Fire Lookout Association, and community members, the Natural Areas Department is repairing the cab (top) of a historic forest fire lookout. The lookout was originally located on top of West White Pine Mountain in an area that has now been affected by the High Park Fire.



The Adopt-a-Trail program is up and running. Rocky Mountain Flycasters of Trout Unlimited, Otter Box, and Peloton Bike



Shop have all committed to maintain and improve portions of the natural areas trail system. Keep your eyes open for improved trail conditions in Maxwell, Pineridge and Gateway natural areas!



VOLUNTEER RANGER ASSISTANTS

By Rhonda Peckham, Natural Areas and Trails Ranger

In February, 2012, a new class of 22 Volunteer Ranger Assistants joined the ranks. This new class has enthusiastically joined the veterans in patrolling the city and county natural areas and trails.

The city and county have increased the variety and numbers of activities on the natural areas and open lands and Volunteer Ranger Assistants have really stepped up to help provide services. So far in 2012, they have served as monitors for properties which are at capacity, worked as trailhead monitors for prescribed fires, staffed special events to assist with parking and information, staffed gatehouses at Soapstone Prairie and Gateway natural areas, and recently participated (along with many other City volunteers) helping the City of Fort Collins conduct trail intercept surveys and counts as part of the Trails Master Plan process. All of this has been in addition to over 900 hours of patrol time.

Heat, fire, and floods just can't keep a good VRA down!



Thanks for all you do!

WILDLIFE AND WILDFIRES

By Deborah Huth Price

Reprinted with permission from the Loveland Reporter-Herald

Fire burns, people flee, homes and landscapes are lost. Fire can sometimes change our lives dramatically. But what implications do wildfires have on local wildlife?

When fire hits, "wildlife that can run will run, wildlife that can fly will fly, and wildlife that can burrow will burrow," notes Jennifer Churchill, public information officer, Colorado Parks and Wildlife. That means animals like bears, deer, birds, squirrels and other mammals will recover. While certain individuals are lost in a fire, populations survive, some without ever leaving the fire perimeter, she explains.

"Wild animals are very adept at fleeing from danger, and fire is a natural part of their world." Even though the High Park fire was destructive, there are untouched green pockets of land sprinkled across the surface of burned and charred landscape. These pockets will provide refuge for many animals in weeks to come.

Immediately following a fire, new life emerges through the ashes. With the thick forest gone, sun penetrates the soil, allowing nutrient-rich grasses and forbs to regrow, explains Churchill, adding that animals actually find it easier to move around in open areas where thick forests appeared before. Some animals have an immediate benefit from a fire. Local naturalist Dave Leatherman says "Hairy and American three-toed woodpeckers will have all the food they want and an abundance of dead and decaying trees to excavate for homes. Hawks and Olive-sided flycatchers will have lots of perches from which to hunt." Some birds may have to relocate or wander further to find food. "We could expect more hummingbirds at feeders, both in the fire area and lower in elevation," notes Leatherman.

Local resident Andy Goris, who lives just inside the southern edge of the High Park fire zone, noticed his hummingbird feeders sat empty during the evacuation, but the birds have returned and are just as abundant as they were prior to the fire. He has also seen red-tailed hawks, turkey vultures,



house finches, mountain bluebirds and towhees. What probably affected birds the most is that the fire hit during breeding season. "When the fire moved through, the adult bird would have flown away abandoning the nest, which would have burned," says Jeff Connor, natural resource specialist for Rocky Mountain National Park. "Many of these birds are keyed into specific areas so with the area burned they will not re-nest ... this year."

Other wildlife, such as bears, may be temporarily displaced from their habitats and food sources. Following evacuations, stocked kitchens were left behind and power was off, creating lots of odors to attract the noses of bears. Sky Ranch Lutheran Camp, near Pingree Park, came back after evacuations were lifted to find two large bears residing in the camp's kitchen. Churchill alerts local residents to be on the lookout for bears who may be drawn to populated areas, not only as a result of food sources lost to the fire,

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but the added problem of drought and the fact that bears have become aware of food sources in people's homes during evacuations. She suggests removing all bear attractants (including garbage and bird feeders) if bears are noticed nearby, and scaring away bears with noisemakers.

Fish don't fare as well as most other animals.

Slurry used to help quench the fire finds its way into waterways, and weather contributes obstacles. Rains following a fire wash ash and loose soil no longer held in place by trees into streams and rivers. This sediment blocks the gills of fish, explains Churchill.

"We will monitor burned areas and will likely have to restock many of the streams and rivers when conditions allow."

An important thing to remember is that fire is part of the natural world. Churchill wants to assure the public that "wildlife will be OK and that things in the forest will return to normal very quickly."

Death and fire are part of the natural cycle in the world of wildlife. Despite losses and habitat change, most animals are well-equipped for survival and will continue to enjoy the Colorado landscape.

A Grebe Success Story

On Sunday, July 1, 2012, District Wildlife Manager, Nancy Howard was called to out to New Belgium Brewery to rescue a bird. She relates the story:



"This little dude nearly had a tragic day. He had his foot caught in the grate on the loading dock at New Belgium Brewery and was slowly baking to death while waiting to be run over by a semi-truck.

Due to the intrepid grebe wrangling skills of the New Belgium security guard and myself, the bird was de-grated and whisked to a nearby pond (behind Nix) where it happily swam off.

It's probably the feistiest wild animal I've ever dealt with. I feel fortunate to still have two eyeballs!

I have no idea where a baby grebe would come from and end up at New Belgium. It could walk and swim, but not fly yet, and it seemed like it needed water, so off to Nix we went."

We are happy to report that the baby western grebe is still at the pond and doing well. We expect it to be flying soon and joining up with others of its kind.

SEE YOU SOON! *Annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic!*

It's time to celebrate! Let us show our appreciation for all you do for the Natural Areas Department. You and your family are invited to join us for a tasty BBQ, live music, games, hikes, and much more. Bring your favorite dessert and enter it in the Dessert Contest. Fellow volunteers will be the judges. The winner's name will be added to the "Silver Fork" plaque which is proudly displayed in the Nix kitchen.

Schedule:

10:15-11:30	Hikes and games
11:00-12:30	Food served
12:45	Dessert Contest Award
1:00	Wrap up

Respond to the e-vite in your mailbox or RSVP by calling Kristi at 970-416-2815.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

MEET BARB KITTELL

Barb Kittell joined the Natural Areas Department in 2010 as a Master Naturalist Assistant. She quickly became vital to the program, earning the “Rookie of the Year” award. Barb quickly signed on as a Master Naturalist in 2011. Barb says that she was attracted to the Natural Areas Department because she wanted to find a way to combine two of her passions—teaching kids and being outdoors. She has found a home here and we are grateful to have her.

Barb was born in Ohio and went to school in Wyoming. After earning her Ph.D in Molecular Biology from UC San Diego, Barb stayed on as a research associate for four years. By the time her first son was four and her second son was born, Barb and her husband decided to relocate to Fort Collins where she could stay home with her boys and raise them in an environment more compatible with their values. Barb had always been passionate about the outdoors and wanted to share that with her children. The family spent as much time outdoors as possible skiing and camping. Barb’s efforts paid off as both of her boys are now involved in the field of natural resources.

Barb feels strongly that all kids need to experience the outdoors. As Barb says simply, “How can they appreciate nature if they don’t experience it?” Barb has dedicated a tremendous amount of time leading school field trips, public programs, and teaching high school students about the wildlife cameras at Bobcat Ridge. She definitely walks her talk. When asked what keeps her engaged in the program Barb said “Well, I enjoy the continuing education and the other volunteers and staff -- but when a child makes a positive comment to me about being outside, I feel like I had a little influence, at least for today.”

We’re sure your influence is long-lasting and will affect these children well into the future. Thank you, Barb!



Barb helps present a wildlife program at Rigden Farm Assisted Living Center.

From all of us at the Natural Areas Department: Thank you to every volunteer. No matter what your service is, we appreciate it and feel honored that you want to contribute your time, efforts, and talent to the natural areas. You are making a difference every day!

