

# Volunteer News



*See you next year!*

*By Susan Schafer, Education and Volunteer Coordinator*

It seems like just yesterday I was writing to tell you about my new baby, Emerson, and now she's 8 months old! The sun is setting on another fabulous year for the Natural Areas Department. We were proud to celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with you and despite the challenges of snowstorms, rain, floods, and decreased staffing, you continued your work and made a huge impact on our community. Thank you! In fact, we hope to see many of you and your families at our Volunteer Appreciation Dinner in January. This is also our awards presentation so you don't want to miss it! See page 6 for all the details.

As we say farewell to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, we look ahead to several exciting changes in 2014. One of the most exciting is the new office building here at Nix Farm. We outgrew our cozy little farmhouse many years ago and have finally broken ground on a new facility that is specifically designed around the needs of volunteers! The new building will have a volunteer workroom, additional library and resource space, a training room, patio and native plant garden. It's scheduled to open in the spring (depending on weather). Watch out for construction equipment when visiting Nix in the coming months.

Next year marks the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Smithsonian Institute's archaeological dig at the Lindenmeier site at Soapstone Prairie — of course we plan to celebrate this in true Natural Areas style! In April, look for a special training for Master Naturalists and Museum education volunteers. We'll kick off a season of special activities on May 17-18 at Soapstone Prairie, special family programming through the spring and summer, and a professional symposium in the fall. Watch for all the details in your email boxes.

In the spring, we are going to pilot some school field trips in partnership with the Gardens on Spring Creek and will offer several first grade classes the opportunity to participate in a combined field trip. NAD Master Naturalists will deliver our lessons "Gifts from Plants" and "Hitchhiking with a Green Thumb." The Gardens volunteers and staff will do one lesson on edible plants and one on sensory discovery. We'll let you know about these opportunities.

As you can see there is a lot to be excited about next year! Take a look at the following pages for a look back at 2013. We look forward to another fun year in 2014 with all of you!

## Community Programs Survive the Flood!

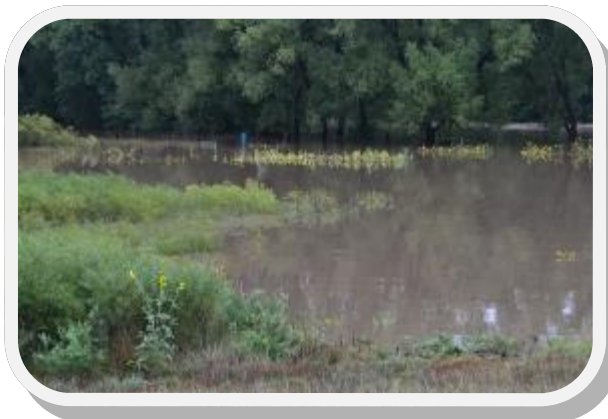
By Deborah Price, Community Programs Educator

To say the flooding created obstacles and problems for community programs would be an understatement. Over half of our scheduled programs were canceled in September and several in October. Even after the water subsided, Bobcat Ridge became an important evacuation route for those stranded in the mountains. Despite all this, you persevered, not only with great flexibility, but with a smile! We were lucky—there are so many people who have lost homes or suffered serious loss. All we had to worry about as an education staff was how to juggle programs—thanks for hanging in there with us!

Despite the setbacks, we had another successful year. From January through the end of October 2013, we served 3,541 people through community programs and programs by request, averaging out to 23.77 people per program.

Highlights include:

- ◆ Record numbers attended *Nature Nuggets* for preschoolers.
- ◆ Excellent response from many of you who took up the challenge to lead our night walks this year—people just love to go on these walks.
- ◆ A stellar year for the Bobcat Ridge camera project: amazing photos and great dedication from all of you. The *Wild by Wild* exhibit was held at the museum for the first time and has received great feedback from visitors.
- ◆ Wonderful ideas from many of you about programs you created on your own and led. These were very well received and allowed you to share your knowledge in a special way.
- ◆ Our first year doing



*Nix Farm acquired a couple of new lakes during the flood!*

some collaborative programming with the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery. These programs went well and we hope to add more next year.

Here are just a few responses received through feedback forms from program participants:

“We’re visiting the area for two weeks and this was the highlight of our visit. Way to go, Fort Collins, for protecting these special areas for future generations. The leaders of our program were great as were the other volunteers. They were professional and dedicated. We had a fantastic time!”

“Thank you for great programming and well-trained, passionate volunteers.”

“I am so disappointed I didn’t discover these programs sooner. Will definitely be back to this natural area and to these programs again next summer.”

“I love having this option as an addition to the homeschooling I do. The naturalists know so very much more than I do and it is not just book knowledge. Makes it very interesting.”

“I am most impressed that the funding comes from the public. I feel privileged to now live here.”

All I can say is, “Wind, rain, hail, or sleet—our volunteers always manage to stay on their feet!” Thanks for a great year. I’ll be off duty until February 15, but will be eager to see you again. Watch for email from me in mid-February and be thinking about new ideas for 2014.

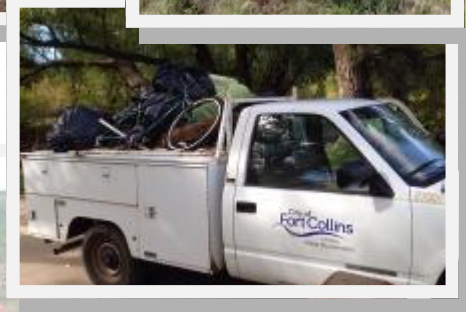
Happy winter holidays!

## SERVICE LEARNING

By Cate Dillon, Service Learning Educator

- ◆ Service Learning Volunteer Hours: 3,334
- ◆ Volunteers: 1,061
- ◆ Children volunteers: 271
- ◆ Flood clean-up volunteers: 84
- ◆ Make a Difference Day volunteers: 37
- ◆ Adopt-a-Trail groups: 4
- ◆ National Trails Day Volunteers: 91
- ◆ Bags of trash: 320
- ◆ Willows staked along the Poudre River: 250
- ◆ Fruit bearing shrubs planted: 230
- ◆ Cottonwood saplings transplanted: 90
- ◆ Miles of trail maintained: 15
- ◆ Cattle gates installed in Bobcat Ridge barn: 10
- ◆ Trail reroutes: 2
- ◆ Service Learning Educator: 1

The numbers say it all. . . . . A HUGE thank you goes out to all of the community members who volunteered their time and energy to make our natural areas clean, safe and enjoyable for all of Fort Collins. We could not do it without you! Volunteers endured blistering sun, torrential downpours, 50 mph winds, snow, mud, blisters, sunburns, and few perfect Colorado days as well. This year, my family was able to volunteer and I can tell you that seeing my 3-year-old plant his first tree meant a lot. A special thank you goes to all of you who nudge your family and friends to get out and volunteer too. Together, we make Fort Collins great!



*"Never underestimate the power of a small group of people to change the world. In fact, it is the only way it ever has."* —Margaret Mead.



## VOLUNTEER RANGER ASSISTANTS

### TAKING NOTICE

*By Rhonda Peckham, Natural Areas and Trails Ranger*

As the year closes quickly, the Volunteer Ranger Assistant program continues to provide tangible benefits to the Natural Areas Department and the citizens of Fort Collins and Larimer County by providing personal contacts to our visitors that is so important.

Working independently and diligently, giving large portions of their time, Volunteer Ranger Assistants, simply put, notice things. While it is sometimes difficult to define the actual position description for this special brand of volunteer because of its scope, the individuals in this program have given over 1,100 hours of service in 2013 by making themselves available as a source of education and assistance to all sorts of visitors.

VRAs responded to requests for assistance, not just with patrol and trailhead control efforts, but with for night-sky and conservation easement monitoring, education program and special event logistical support, and trail counts for the biking and pedestrian community.

In the words of the VRAs:

“It was a great day to be at Coyote Ridge. Despite the cool temps and the wind, the sky was really clear, making the views amazing! I hiked to the top of the ridge and back and passed about a dozen people either hiking or jogging. Contact with trail users was cordial and brief since most of them seemed very engrossed in their workouts.”

“Talked with two new bike users about the trails: where they could go, loop trails, trail conditions, and the best way to approach a horse.”

“Treated abrasion on wrist”

“7/3/2013 9:30:00 A.M. VRA Running Deer

PELICAN POND HAIKU

One literate pelican  
finally realizes.  
It's for him.  
— E. Lyons



*Photo courtesy of Norm Keally.*

**Happy Winter Solstice and Happy Trails to the Volunteer Ranger Assistants!**

## Why We Teach

By Jessica Miller, Education Assistant

It's just past 9:00 a.m. on a chilly morning. The sun is peeking through the clouds and the golden leaves rustle in a quiet breeze. A group of people gathers in the parking lot, all of them wearing green jackets with a white logo over layers of sweaters, extra jackets, gloves, and hats. They greet each other with smiles and hugs and begin chatting about the day's upcoming events. Plans are settled on; materials are sorted out; and final preparation are made.

A vivid yellow school bus appears around the bend, with steamed up windows masking a boisterous group of bundled students, eager to get going on unknown explorations. They spill out onto the pavement with loud calls and laughter, excitement pouring out the door with them. It takes time to get them sorted and counted and focused on instructions, but eventually it's done. Then, they're almost bursting with impatience.

The conversation among the kids is what might be expected, what food is packed for lunch, the video game they played last night, comparisons of shoes, all very focused on themselves and the technology of daily life. Little attention is given to the surroundings, after all, it's just nature, and there are more important things.

But slowly, an amazing thing begins to happen. Eyes lift from the ground. The constant hum of electricity fades from ears. Backpacks that were too



heavy to carry become unnoticeable. Interest grows from mild inquisitiveness to intense discovery and enthusiasm. Conversation becomes exclamations of "No way!" and "That's *so* cool!" followed by mass pushing to get closer to see it all.

An oblivious little beetle, wandering in the middle of the trail, is suddenly mobbed by students, who form a ring around it to poke and prod and eventually to try and stomp. One small hand bravely darts out from the ring and cups protectively over the beetle. "Don't hurt it!" she cries. "It lives here, too!" The raised foot comes down elsewhere, and miraculously all stomping desires are squashed. Around the next corner, a clump of bushes sprouts a pair of tall ears, flicked in the direction of the noise. Quiet falls over the group and there is silence for the first time that day. All eyes are on the deer—thoughts of food, tired feet, playgrounds, and bathrooms are forgotten. "This is the best day EVER!" comes out of more than one mouth.



Eventually, the vivid yellow bus looms again and there's reluctance to board it. "I wish we could stay here forever." "Can we come back tomorrow?" But the bus door beckons and a chorus of thank you's rings out. One girl wiggles her way out of the crowd and runs to me for a hug. She gives a promise that makes my heart sing: "I'm not going to wait until I'm grown up to start saving the planet. I can do it right now. And I will."

I hope they all will. But first they must learn. And that is why we gather on all manner of mornings. That is why we lead. That is why we share, and laugh, and explore. That is why we teach.



## Annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner!

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 this very special event. The popular pasta bar will be back and a cash bar will also be available.

**Mark the date:** Friday, January 24, 5:30-8:00 p.m. at the Lincoln Center, 417 East Magnolia Street, Canyon West Room

**Schedule:**

5:30—Food served

6:30—Awards Presentations

7:00—Dessert and fellowship

RSVP required. Watch your email for an invitation after the holidays.



*Volunteers enjoy the festivities at the Annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner in January, 2012.*



*Education staff at Volunteer Appreciation Picnic in August, 2012.*

**SEE YOU SOON!**



## Your Natural Areas: After 20 Years, What's Next?

By Zoe Whyman, Community Relations Manager

Natural areas are part of what makes Fort Collins such a special place to live. There are 39 natural areas to experience with over 100 miles of trails to explore. The City's Natural Areas Department is wrapping up its year of celebration of the 20th anniversary since the first citizen-initiated sales tax was passed. These taxes fund all components of the Natural Areas Department. You, the citizens of Fort Collins and Larimer County, have voted to support natural areas sales tax ballot measures four more times since 1992. Thank you. voters and thank you. everyone that participated in the many celebratory activities.

What does the future hold? There will be lots of opportunities to care for the conserved land and for outdoor experiences. The Natural Areas Department's rehabilitation and restoration efforts help natural areas become more biologically diverse and sustainable. The ultimate goal is for natural areas to have at least 70% native vegetation. While many sites meet or exceed this standard, there are numerous former farmland or industrial areas that are undergoing transformation more slowly.

In addition to their biological richness, natural areas are great places to play and learn. We hope to continue to provide fun and meaningful educational activities, events, and hands-on volunteer projects for thousands of people a year. With over 100 miles of trails and facilities such as restrooms, fences, and kiosks, there is much to and maintain.

Fortunately, the community has strongly supported natural areas with a City dedicated sales tax that expires in 2030. In addition, City of Fort Collins Natural Areas receives a portion of Larimer County's open space sales tax. The County's sales tax expires in 2018 unless renewed by the voters. The potential expiration of the County tax represents a significant challenge to the Natural Areas Department since we rely on it for a majority of our operating expenses.

In the next few years the community will be discussing these opportunities and challenges and deciding the way forward. The Natural Areas Department will be updating the *Natural Areas Master Plan* which sets the direction for your natural areas for the next ten years. We very much hope that you will share your thoughts with us at [fcgov.com/naturalareas](http://fcgov.com/naturalareas) and watch for the public open house on Jan. 30.

In the next 20 years the community will make some crucial choices about our natural areas and their future.

*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*



## THE RESULTS ARE IN!

By Sue Kenney, Education and Outreach Coordinator

In 2013, two new outreach projects were launched in honor of the 20th anniversary: *Passport to the Natural Areas* and *Junior Naturalists*.

*Passport to the Natural Areas* was a self-guided tour of the natural areas. Participants were challenged to visit 20 or more natural areas, visit natural areas at least 20 times, help with a volunteer projects, and tell us about their experiences. Completed passports were entered into a drawing.

The lucky winner was Owen, pictured at right. He and his family are enjoying a backpack stuffed full of outdoor equipment and fun family games.

Several enthusiastic youngsters earned their *Junior Naturalists* certificates and pins by attending programs, volunteering, and writing about something they learned. They were so proud!

We hope to continue these outreach projects, plus implement more ideas in the coming years.

Thanks to all of you who assisted!



Ranger Karl Manderbach poses with several new Junior Naturalists.