



# Volunteer News



## Looking Back and Looking Ahead

By Susan Schafer, Education and Volunteer Coordinator

The past year has been an incredible year with record-breaking program participation and volunteer hours donated—in spite of the heat and fires of this summer. Everyone at the Natural Areas Department would like to extend our most sincere gratitude for all your help. I hope you will join us on January 25<sup>th</sup> for the annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner (see page 7) so we can shower you with thanks.

Looking ahead to 2013, we have a few unexpected twists coming our way, so here is a heads-up. I am going to have another baby and will be gone April–June. I realize that the timing is not great given that our volunteer projects really gear up in spring and summer but, hey, what can you do? We will continue most of the volunteer projects as usual, but we will put our school field trips on hold and be back to a normal schedule in the fall.

Also this spring, we will introduce you to a new software system for signing up for volunteer opportunities. We are excited to move to a more powerful, user-friendly, and efficient way to include all our volunteers in one database. You will be getting plenty of information and training when the time arrives.



Mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*) seed head, Soapstone Prairie. Photo by Kristi Schwickerath

I think we will have another incredibly busy year in 2013 and I'm looking forward to all the changes and improvements, and especially, the rewards of working with you. Enjoy reading the latest edition of *Volunteer News*, full of the many activities you accomplish for us.

Once again, thanks for all you do to make Fort Collins and the Natural Areas Department such special places!

## NATURALIST'S NICHE

*Sue Kenney, Education and Outreach Coordinator*

Hello MNs and MNAs,

We had a super year with the 20<sup>th</sup> Master Naturalist training this spring and another successful MNA training, also. If you know of anyone who would be a good MN or MNA candidate please let them know about the 2013 training. Applications will be accepted from January 4 to March 15 on our website: [www.fcgov.com/naturalareas](http://www.fcgov.com/naturalareas).

I'll be gone in January and February. Deborah Price will be coordinating all the scheduled and requested programming during that time. I'm sorry that I'll miss seeing all of you at the Volunteer Appreciation Dinner – it's one of my favorite events! But I look forward to seeing you later in the spring and summer.

*A few memorable moments from 2012:*





## SERVICE LEARNING

*By Cate Dillon, Service Learning Educator*

Service Learning Volunteers had a fantastic year! In 2012, 1,200 volunteers donated over 4,000 hours to help maintain and restore natural areas.

I would like to extend a huge THANK YOU to everyone who volunteered! Your actions have made a real difference in the Fort Collins community and the health of our City's natural areas.

Volunteers maintained trails, picked up trash, restored historic structures, planted shrubs, hand-pulled non-native weeds, modified wildlife fences, and protected native cottonwoods along the Poudre River. Volunteers participated in special events such as National Trails Day, National Public Lands Day, Make a Difference Day, and CSUnity.

Over 40 businesses, schools, clubs and organizations volunteered to accomplish valuable project work. Give you self a huge pat on the back! And join us again next year.



*CSU students cleaned up Colina Mariposa Natural Area.*



*Otter Cares weeded McMurry Natural Area.*



*Volunteers after cleanup at Strauss Cabin homestead, built in 1860.*

## VOLUNTEER RANGER ASSISTANTS : BEATIN' FEET IN THE HEAT!

*By Rhonda Peckham, Natural Areas and Trails Ranger*

Unbelievably, the year is drawing to a close and it is time to take a moment and reflect on the priceless service that the Volunteer Ranger Assistants have once again provided to our community. There are currently 100 VRAs who have been able to make over a thousand public contacts this year, when heat, flames, smoke and closures to properties for weeks on end became commonplace obstacles. Their efforts to stay involved with educational programs, special events, and special assignments reflected flexibility and an inherent curiosity to try new things.

From parking cars to manning trailheads, from giving directions to providing first-aid, VRAs show the program's coordinators through their eyes a view of Larimer County Open Space and the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas lands. Their patrol logs (once again representing over 2,000 hours of service) relay information, often with humor and insight, about the values that our citizen and visitors have. Although it is often easy to focus on the small percentage of contacts which are related to compliance issues, the big picture painted by the VRAs is one in which visitors are respectful, grateful, and interested in the natural lands we manage.

### NEW VRA GUIDEBOOK

Several VRAs came together to construct new mini flip-style guidebooks—a handy reference while on patrol. The new guidebooks contain information on procedures for medical situations, search and rescue, bad weather, and contacting full-time staff. There is also a recreational activity guide for Larimer County and City of Fort Collins properties. The mini-guides needed to be laminated, cut to size, hole-punched, and equipped with binder rings. These will be useful for current and future VRAs.

The VRAs also took advantage of the gathering and had a holiday cookie exchange. Thanks for all the goodies and your hard work!



*Ernie Pope and Meg Parmer work together on the new VRA guidebooks.*



*Volunteers are hard at work on the new guidebooks—and they enjoyed yummy holiday cookies, too.*



*Barry Steen and Charlie Sturgill use their engineering skills to construct the guidebooks.*

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

## Rare Plant Survey

In 2012, Crystal Strouse, Natural Areas Department botanist and the intrepid Rare Plant Surveyers took on the wetlands. Volunteers donated 402 hours toward this effort on twelve natural areas. Crystal says, "I have the greatest respect for these volunteers. They deal with heat, wind, mosquitos, rattlesnakes, deep mud, steep hikes, walking for hours, and trying to identify microscopic details of plants. They do all this without a paycheck. The best part for me is that I get to work with these amazing individuals and we all get to discover the natural areas together."

Some highlights of their work include:

Tufted loosestrife (*Lysimachia thyrsoiflora*), were found at McMurry Natural Area.

Slenderleaf false foxglove (*Agalinis tenuifolia*) and slender flatsedge (*Cyperus bipartitus*) were found at Sterling.

Smallflower halfchaff (*Lipocarpa micrantha*), Flodman's thistle (*Cirsium flodmanii*), Two-headed starwort (*Callitriche heterophylla*), and Narrowleaf four'o clock (*Mirabilis linearis*) were found at Bobcat Ridge.

Bearded flatsedge (*Cyperus squarrosus*) was documented at McMurry, Sterling and Bobcat Ridge natural areas. Most occurrences of this plant were from the 1880s. It's the first time it was documented in the natural areas.

Great Plains flatsedge (*Cyperus lupulinus*) was found at Bobcat Ridge. This plant has not been documented in Larimer County since 1946. It's the first time it was documented in the natural areas.

Southern marsh yellowcress (*Rorippa teres*) was found for the first time at Fossil Creek Reservoir.



Slender false foxglove (*Agalinis tenuifolia*). Photo by Crystal Strouse.

Flower of an hour (*Hibiscus trionum*) was found at Fossil Creek Reservoir. This plant is on the Colorado Noxious Weed List. Our collection is the second time this plant has been documented in Larimer County and the first time documented in the natural areas.

Flodman's thistle (*Cirsium flodmanii*) and narrowleaf four'o clock (*Mirabilis linearis*) was found on Reservoir Ridge and narrowleaf four'o clock (*Mirabilis linearis*) was found on Running Deer.

## Thank you Rare Plant Surveyers!



Volunteers Dot Tomlinson, Judy Putnam, Pam Craig, and Helen Boggs survey the wetland at Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area. Photo by Crystal Strouse.

## 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 special event.

Friday, January 25, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Club Tico, 1599 City Park Avenue. This is in City Park by the swimming pool.

### Schedule:

5:45—Food served

6:30—Slide show, guest speakers, awards presentation

7:00—Dessert and fellowship

Watch your email for an invitation after the holidays.



*Ranger Rhonda Peckham honors VRAs at the 2011 Volunteer Appreciation Dinner.*



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



*Natural Areas Department education staff has a good time at the Volunteer Appreciation Dinner in 2012.*

SEE YOU SOON!



## Celebrate 20 Years of Natural Areas!

By Zoe Whyman, Community Relations Manager

It has been two decades since the first citizen-initiated sales tax to fund natural areas was passed. Citizens have voted to approve four ballot measures since then! Natural Areas are currently funded by a county and a city sales tax, each a ¼ cent on the dollar. The city sales tax is in effect until 2030 and the county sales tax until 2018.

Before 1992, the City had conserved some natural areas such as Pineridge and Reservoir Ridge, encompassing 1,190 acres. After 1992, land conservation really took off. Fort Collins has conserved 41,665 acres to date!

Everyone is invited to celebrate with us in 2013. We hope you will enjoy these special events and free activities:

- Watch the inspiring video, *Celebrating Your Natural Areas* (at [www.fcgov.com/naturalareas](http://www.fcgov.com/naturalareas)).
- Complete *Your Passport to Natural Areas*, a checklist of natural areas to visit, activities and volunteer opportunities. Win a prize by completing your passport and be entered into a drawing for a backpack full of outdoor supplies. The passport will be available in January.
- Contribute to the multi-media *Natural Areas Journal* by submitting a photo, written story or video ([www.fcgov.com/naturalareas](http://www.fcgov.com/naturalareas)).
- Get decked out in all your outdoor gear (hiking, biking, horseback riding, fishing, etc.) and join the Natural Areas Department in the St. Patrick's Day parade in March. Details will be announced in February.
- In mid-April look for a special edition of *Tracks & Trails*, your program guide to events and activities in the natural areas.

The accomplishments of the last twenty years could not have been possible without the incredible volunteer support of the community. Thank you so very much for your important role in making twenty years of natural areas possible!

And then we'll all be looking forward to the next twenty years!



Riverbend Ponds Natural Area.  
Photo by Chris Metz.



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 make a difference every day!



## Best Wishes to Kimberly and Dolores!

We say goodbye to Kimberly Tamkun, Education Assistant, and Dolores Daniels, School Programs Assistant. Kimberly is continuing her jobs at the new Fort Collins Museum of Discovery and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Black-Footed Ferret Recovery Program. Dolores is retiring and moving on to other new and exciting projects. We will miss them both!

Dolores started with us as a Master Naturalist in 2005 and volunteered like crazy! We hired her in 2009 to help write curriculum and lesson plans and she became a valuable member of the education team. Dolores co-wrote most of the lesson plans, organized all the school kits, kept them clean and maintained, organized the library, mentored Master Naturalists and Master Naturalist Assistants, stepped in and taught many stations on school field trips, greeted every bus and got everyone organized, schlepped countless supplies to and from field trips, showed up with much-appreciated drinks and treats—and did all this with unfailing energy and enthusiasm! We wish her well in her new endeavors and hope she has a real retirement — but we expect her to be just as busy as ever!



Kimberly brought her unique personality, generous nature, and enthusiasm along when she joined the ranks of Master Naturalists in the infamous



class of 2007. In 2009, we received a grant from the USFWS for prairie education and we knew immediately that Kimberly was the only option! She jumped right in with new lesson plans and materials, classroom presentations with a live ferret, special events, and dozens of engaging field trips. When the grant funding for her position ended we just couldn't let her go. We scooped her up to create imaginative displays (she does have an art degree



after all!), assist with events, and be our expert on the black-footed ferrets on display in the Natural Areas Visitor Center of the recently opened Fort Collins Museum of Discovery.

While Kimberly is leaving the Natural Areas Department, we'll still see her in other roles with these other agencies—it certainly is our loss and their gain. Best of luck to Kimberly!



*Dolores and Kimberly busy at work through the years.*