2018
Open Lands & Trails
Annual Report

East Big Thompson River at Boise Bend Natural Area
Loveland Open Lands & Trails

OUR MISSION

The mission of the City of Loveland Open Lands & Trails Division is to identify, preserve, protect and enhance open space, natural areas, trails and other significant lands. This is accomplished through cooperation with and respect for private and public landowners, surrounding municipalities and counties, natural resource agencies and other organizations with similar interests.

GET OUTDOORS WITH US

Loveland’s Open Lands & Trails Division devoted much of 2018 to building on recent years’ efforts to conserve and plan open lands, engage local citizens and improve natural areas for the benefit of wildlife and visitors. We built more than six miles of new trails and other amenities, opened three new sites (109 acres) for outdoor recreation and alternative transportation and connected new neighborhoods and communities to these open spaces. Programming for all ages and a variety of interests enticed residents to the outdoors for learning, exploration, recreation and stewardship.

We invite you to visit your local natural areas to discover something new, attend a program, volunteer for a project and enjoy the great outdoors!

OPEN LANDS & TRAILS TEAM

- Elizabeth Kayl, Parks and Recreation Director
- Marilyn Hilgenberg, Open Lands & Trails Manager
- Brian Hayes, Open Lands Coordinator
- Debbie Eley, Open Lands Specialist
- Jonathan Huey, Open Lands & Trails Crew Supervisor
- Michele Van Hare, Environmental Education Coordinator
- Bree Knouse, Open Lands & Trails Maintenance Worker
- Thomas Shields, Open Lands & Trails Maintenance Worker
- Bryan Harding, Parks & Recreation Planning Manager
- Jeanie Vetter, Parks & Recreation Planner
Open Lands & Natural Areas (8,250 acres)

Big Thompson River Corridor (770 acres)
- Morey Wildlife Reserve*
- Wild Natural Area
- Ward Trust Natural Area
- Oxbow Natural Area*
- Medina’s Crossing Natural Area
- Namaqua Natural Area*
- Cottonwood Run Natural Area*
- River’s Edge Natural Area*
- Centennial Natural Area
- Kings Crossing Natural Area*
- Old St. Louis Natural Area*
- Boise Bend Natural Area*
- Willow Bend Natural Area
- Koppees Conservation Easement
- Waterford Conservation Easement

Foothills/Mountains Open Lands (5,038 acres)
- Mariana Butte Natural Area*
- Skyline Natural Area
- Hidden Valley*
- Devil’s Backbone Open Space (Larimer County partnership)*
- Dakota Ridge Conservation Easement
- Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park Open Space*
- Hermit Park Open Space (Larimer County partnership)*
- Chimney Hollow Conservation Easement
  (Larimer County partnership)
- Sylvan Dale Conservation Easement
  (Larimer County partnership)

Neighborhood Natural Areas (101 acres)
- Meadowbrook Natural Area*
- Boedecker West
- Boedecker Bluff Natural Area
- Horseshoe-Coulson Conservation Easement
- Windemere/Von Kaenel/Trailwood

Recreation Trail Natural Areas (179 acres)
- Boyd Lake North and South*
- Emerald Glen Natural Area*
- Fairgrounds Natural Area*
- Miscellaneous lands along the recreation trail

Community Separator - North (1,495 acres)
- Prairie Ridge Natural Area
- Sunset Vista Natural Area*
- Long View Farm (Larimer County partnership)
- Soaring Vista Natural Area (Fort Collins partnership)
- Walden West Conservation Easement

Community Separator - South (667 acres)
- Eagle Vista Natural Area
- Lazy J Bar S (Raptor Ridge) Conservation Easement
- Hopkins Conservation Easement
- Dunkin Conservation Easement
- Heron Lakes CE (Larimer County & Berthoud partnership)

*Open for public access (1,081 acres managed by Loveland)
2018 Acquisitions & New Opportunities

**Old St. Louis Additions** The City of Loveland received two inholding parcels from Larimer County to provide a connection for a neighborhood access trail from Madison Ave. to Old St. Louis Natural Area. A new bridge over the Farmer’s Ditch and a multipurpose trail to be constructed in 2019 will allow residents, local school groups and residents of Mirasol Senior Community to safely access the Big Thompson River corridor. The east Big Thompson Trail is planned to connect this area east to Willow Bend Natural Area and eventually to an underpass at I-25 connecting communities to the east.

**Sunset Vista Natural Area** Purchased in 2014 as part of the 2,100-acre open space separating Loveland and Fort Collins, Sunset Vista provides a site for the new Long View Trail to connect the two communities’ paved trail systems. The 4.4-mile regional off-street trail completed in 2018 offers opportunities for non-motorized recreation and alternative transportation long-awaited by citizens. Additional site improvements included significant enhancement of wetland areas with native trees, shrubs and grasses with assistance from local volunteer students, families and groups. Additional improvements are planned to restore native short-grass prairie and an historic structure as well as provide interpretive signage about the site’s natural and cultural history. Sunset Vista officially opened to the public with the grand opening of the Long View Trail on August 18 (see additional information on 2018 Trail Projects on Page 13).

**Oxbow Natural Area** New trails and amenities at Oxbow Natural Area improved this site to provide access to the 12-acre east parcel, including a paved trail connection from Rossum Drive to the city’s 22-mile recreation trail system. A soft-surface spur trail into Oxbow East was constructed by citizen volunteers and members of Colorado Addicted Trailbuilders Society (CATS) during a National Trails Day celebration - the Bike, Hike and Build event. The new 0.3-mile section of trail runs along the Big Thompson River corridor and through a riparian cottonwood gallery. Volunteer cleanup events also helped enhance and prepare the site for public access with additional removal of debris from the 2013 Big Thompson flood. Structures and invasive tree species on the site were removed to improve public safety and restore native vegetation. A river restoration project in collaboration with the Big Thompson Watershed Coalition will further improve Oxbow East in 2019 with construction of a new overflow channel to minimize future flood impacts and return the river corridor to more natural conditions. At Oxbow West, a local Eagle Scout project included installation of a new bench near the river as well as river habitat interpretive signage and a cottonwood tree planting to enhance visitor experience.

**Boise Bend Natural Area** Acquired in 2017 as an addition to Old St. Louis Natural Area, Boise Bend conserves riparian habitat and provides new public access in the east Big Thompson River corridor. Volunteers contributed hundreds of hours to help remove flood debris and build a 0.25-mile soft-surface trail, enabling river access and views of an active heron rookery (communal nesting area). With funding from a Great Outdoors Colorado grant, crews from the Larimer County Youth Conservation Corps spent two weeks removing hundreds of invasive Russian olive, Siberian elm and tamarisk trees, which will allow native vegetation to flourish. A new trailhead area provides vehicle parking, a signature kiosk with site map and regulations, a dog bag dispenser and an animal-proof trash receptacle. Boise Bend opened for public access in December.
Site Improvements

Willow Bend Natural Area

New opportunities for youth fishing, trail access and wildlife viewing will be available soon in east Loveland along the Big Thompson River corridor at Willow Bend. Funding from a Colorado Parks & Wildlife Fishing is Fun grant will be used to install an accessible fishing dock at the four-acre pond. In preparation for public access, members of Colorado Addicted Trailbuilders Society have helped build and improve soft-surface trails at the site, and students from Front Range Community College’s Exotic Species Elimination Project have helped remove and treat hundreds of Russian olive, Siberian elm and tamarisk trees. Additional stewardship projects planned for 2019 include a volunteer trail-building event on National Trails Day (June 1), continuing removal of invasive trees by Larimer County Youth Conservation Corps and volunteer cleanup and weed warrior events throughout the year.

Boedecker Bluff Natural Area

A new neighborhood natural area will soon open in west Loveland along the north shore of Boedecker Reservoir. Volunteers and members of Colorado Addicted Trailbuilders Society have helped build one-half mile of soft-surface trail along the reservoir, providing scenic views and opportunities for wildlife viewing. Access from Mariana Butte neighborhoods will be provided via a trail to W. First St. at Rossum Drive and a pedestrian bridge over the Buckingham Ditch connecting the two sides of the property.

Namaqua Bridge Replacement Project

The Namaqua Ave. bridge replacement project by Larimer County will improve safety for vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists as well as provide resiliency for future flooding. Additional right-of-way from adjacent properties was required for this improvement project, including small portions of Namaqua Natural Area, Namaqua Park and Medina’s Crossing. The new larger bridge will include wider vehicle travel lanes along with bike lanes and sidewalks on both sides in addition to a trail underpass for a future trail connection.
With an inventory of more than 2,700 acres actively managed by the Open Lands & Trails Division, site management and stewardship projects are key to maintaining and improving resources to benefit natural resources and improve conditions for visitors.

- Vegetation management - planting, weed management, mowing and restoration
- Removal of structures, fencing and debris to improve public safety
- Sustainable trail construction and maintenance
- Installation of signage and other visitor amenities
- Coordination and oversight of volunteer stewardship projects
- Leases for agricultural uses and structures
- License agreements for public and municipal use of lands
- Intergovernmental agreements for funding, construction and maintenance of shared projects
- Restoration of flood-damaged properties
- Removal of Russian olive trees and other invasive species via grant funding and volunteer projects
- Wildland fire suppression and mitigation

Stewardship and Resource Protection

Stewardship of the public’s natural resources requires balancing recreation and resource protection to ensure sustainability and long-term health of the system. Many partners and volunteer efforts provide assistance and expertise to enable a well-rounded approach.

- **Raptor Nest Boxes and Banding** Nest boxes for barn owls and kestrels provided habitat for these important raptor species. Live webcams in both boxes provided hours of entertainment as well as scientific data about nest timing and productivity, raptor feeding habits and interactions with other species. A total of five barn owls and five kestrels successfully fledged from the nest boxes, providing natural rodent control and wildlife viewing opportunities for the public. Fledglings and adult females were banded with unique leg bands to track and identify each bird for ongoing research on nesting, habitat use, migration and other purposes.

- **Fish Research and Stocking** Colorado Parks & Wildlife conducted fish surveys at River’s Edge and Willow Bend ponds, providing important data about the health of these fisheries and recommendations for stocking with additional fish for angler enjoyment and pond health. CPW stocked a total of 21,762 fish in River’s Edge ponds, including large and small-mouth bass, catfish, trout, crappie and bluegill.

- **Raptor Nest Monitoring** A team of experienced birders volunteered to observe and monitor raptor nests on open lands throughout the nesting season. This effort provided valuable data about raptor nest timing, productivity, behavior, interactions with other species and abiotic conditions. Seven active raptor nests were monitored on open lands including bald and golden eagle, red-tailed hawk and osprey species; thirteen young successfully fledged from these nests.

- **Fish Habitat Stewardship** Community volunteers assisted with a Colorado Parks & Wildlife stewardship project to provide additional structure for fish habitat in Bass Pond. Recycled Christmas trees were bundled and secured to weights before being submerged in the pond by CPW personnel. The material will provide habitat for reproduction, foraging and cover for a variety of fish species to improve angler experiences.

- **Pollinator Projects** Habitat for pollinators was improved through several volunteer stewardship projects including milkweed planting for Monarch butterfly larvae at River’s Edge, wetland grass and shrub plantings at Sunset Vista and native grass and forb planting at Kings Crossing.
Community Outreach and Education

The Open Lands outreach and education team offer numerous opportunities for citizens to connect with nature through a variety of outdoor activities at natural areas. These experiences encourage people to be more aware of the natural world around them, appreciate the beauty and value of nature and cultivate a sense of personal stewardship for their natural areas. Programs and activities available to engage and learn about nature include environmental education for preschool through middle school grades, guided walks, astronomy and evening activities, outdoor skills courses and community events.

Environmental Education

- **Monthly Preschool Environmental Education Programs (PEEPs)** for ages 2-5 hosted at natural areas, parks and the Loveland Library reached 349 children and 222 adults.
- **Urban Wilderness, Plants & Places** and **Wildlife Around Us** programs were hosted at River’s Edge Natural Area for local grade-school children. New in 2018 were Critter Scene Investigations for kindergarten and first grades and middle school programs including Navigation & Orienteering and Citizen Science: GPS Mapping of Invasive Plants. Just over 1,300 students participated in these free field trips along with 275 supporting adults.

Engaging Loveland in the Outdoors

- **Seasonal Guided Walks, Critter Scene Investigations, Outdoor Skills** and **Astronomy Nights** engaged 607 participants to interpret the night skies, identify birds, explore nature and learn about local wildlife.
- **Annual events and volunteer opportunities** such as Bike Month with Bike to Work Day, Dog Days of Summer, National Trails Day and habitat fairs with our partner, High Plains Environmental Center, engaged hundreds of people in outdoor pursuits.

New in 2018

- **Our first Orienteering event** engaged 62 participants with compasses and guidance to check-in points and educational stations to explore.
- **Fishing Loveland Open Lands** gathered 98 anglers of all ages to learn about fishing with Loveland Fishing Club and Open Lands volunteers.
- **Storytelling evenings** entertained 96 folks at the River’s Edge amphitheater.
- A monthly **Art in Nature journaling group** began in June and included 49 participants.
- The **Open Lands & Trails Community Picnic** was a great way to start a new tradition and have fun outdoors.
- **Training partnerships** expanded training and certification opportunities for those interested in providing environmental education to local youth and adults. A Project Learning Tree teacher workshop was offered, and Certified Interpretive Guide training will be offered in 2019. Training sessions for volunteer educators and trail hosts are offered twice yearly.

Visit offero.cityofloveland.org to view our calendar and sign up for programs and activities!
Resource Planning

Planning Initiatives

Resource management and stewardship plans help guide the management and use of open lands based on existing conditions, natural and cultural resources and proposed uses and improvements. Plans are developed in collaboration with partners, stakeholders, technical experts and the public. The planning process includes evaluating resources, developing draft concepts, inviting citizen and stakeholder input and incorporating feedback into a preferred plan.

Planning initiatives in 2018 included:

- The Sunset Vista Natural Area Management Plan was finalized from a planning process initiated in 2017. The plan includes provisions for habitat restoration, historical interpretation, multiuse trails and connections, visitor amenities and public safety. The paved Long View Trail and Recreation Trail connection were constructed and opened in 2018 along with a trailhead parking area. A future connection to the east recreation trail is in the planning stages with adjacent property owners and transportation authorities. Habitat restoration is underway with the planting of thousands of wetland grasses, native shrubs and trees. Additional improvements to be implemented in 2019 include interpretive signage and initiation of upland restoration efforts to include native grasses and forbs.

- The Prairie Ridge Natural Area Management Plan was developed and finalized in 2018 through a public planning process. Inventories of natural and cultural resources helped guide the plan for public access and trail sustainability. Grants for access and trail construction will help develop this property in 2019 with a new trailhead parking area and multiuse trails. Prairie Ridge will provide Loveland’s first accessible foothills trails for a new user experience and also will provide a connection to Fort Collins’ Coyote Ridge trail system. Connections to the Loveland Recreation Trail System are included in the plan for future development.

- The East Big Thompson Concept Plan provides the framework for an east river trail from the existing recreation trail system to I-25 through conserved properties, easements, rights-of-way and state lands. The concept has been developed as a result of years of research, collaboration, conservation and easement acquisitions. Planning for future use is key to conserving a corridor of open lands for wildlife habitat as well as trails and public access.

- The City’s 402 Corridor Plan includes land in the Big Thompson River corridor adjacent to Hwy 402. Open Lands has participated in the planning process to provide input with respect to potential future use of these lands as open space for scenic views, wildlife habitat and public access.
Open Lands partners with other agencies, local community coalitions, volunteer groups, nonprofit organizations and other city departments to carry out its mission. These partnerships along with grants and donations help leverage Open Lands dollars to improve efficiencies, provide technical expertise and add additional capacity.

**Partnering With the Community**
- Colorado Addicted Trailbuilders Society (CATS)
- Big Thompson Watershed Coalition
- High Plains Environmental Center
- Colorado Avian Research & Rehabilitation Institute
- Foothills Audubon
- Loveland Fishing Club
- Loveland Initiative for Monarch Butterflies
- Colorado Native Plant Society

**Agency Partnerships**
- Larimer County, Fort Collins, Berthoud
- Colorado Parks & Wildlife
- Front Range Community College
- Colorado Open Lands
- Trust for Public Lands
- Larimer County Conservation Corps
- Colorado State University
- Thompson School District & local schools
- Colorado Natural Heritage Program
- Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Loveland Parks & Recreation Foundation

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*Loveland Fishing Club volunteer*

*CATS volunteers building trail at Boedecker Bluff Natural Area*

*Invasive species removal by Larimer County Conservation Corps*
Volunteers

The success of the Open Lands & Trails program is due in large part to the volunteers who contribute their time and talents. The support of these volunteers ranges from providing environmental education and public outreach programs to building trails, assisting with administrative tasks, greeting visitors as trail hosts, removing troublesome weeds and planting native trees. Nearly 6,000 hours of volunteer time was generously donated by community volunteers and service groups in 2018. Thank you to the more than 650 volunteers who helped make Loveland’s Open Lands & Trails shine! If you are interested in volunteering but haven’t signed up yet, visit offero.cityofloveland.org to learn more.

Open Lands Advisory Commission (OLAC)
OLAC makes recommendations regarding the attributable revenue share to the City of Loveland from the Larimer County Open Space Sales & Use Tax as well as any funds designated by the City for open lands and trail purposes.

Environmental education volunteer at kindergarten
Critter Scene Investigation

Stewardship Projects 3,507
Environmental Education 969
Community Outreach 713
Trail Hosts 682
Administrative & Program Support 92
Total Volunteer Hours 5,963

Dollar Value of Volunteer Hours $149,075

- Gale Bernhardt
- Rick Brent
- Andy Hawbaker
- Michael Hinterberg
- Ross Livingston, Chair
- Darren Pape, Vice Chair
- Jim Roode
- Jean Whittaker
- William Zawacki
- Don Overcash, City Council Liaison
- Marilyn Hilgenberg, Staff Liaison

American Kestrel bird banding
Weed Warrior volunteers at King’s Crossing Natural Area
Eagle Scout project at Oxbow Natural Area
Trails

Loveland’s Trail System

The 2014 Parks and Recreation Master Plan identified one of the top priorities for citizens is access to trails. To meet that citizen expectation, Loveland provides residents and visitors with a 22-mile paved recreation trail which encircles the city as well as 16 miles of soft-surface trail opportunities at natural areas and parks throughout town. Citizens highly value and rate trails as one of Loveland’s top amenities. Trails connect neighborhoods, community amenities and outdoor opportunities in a unique way and significantly contribute to the quality of life in Loveland.

Parks & Recreation Master Plan Trail Goals

• More trail opportunities to connect with nature
• Complete the recreation trail loop
• Make regional trail connections
• Provide more soft-surface trails

Soft-Surface Trail Opportunities

• Boise Bend Natural Area
• Devil’s Backbone Open Space
• King’s Crossing Natural Area
• Mariana Butte
• Meadowbrook Natural Area
• Mehaffey Park
• Morey Wildlife Reserve
• Old St. Louis Natural Area
• Oxbow Natural Area
• River’s Edge Natural Area
2018 Trail Projects

Namaqua to Wilson Avenue Trail Improvement Project
- Grading, resurfacing and compaction of crusher fine materials
- 0.5-mile trail section along Barnes Ditch
- Improve user safety and multiuse trail function
- Completed December 2018

Rossum Drive Trail Connection
- Extension of the recreation trail system from W. Hwy 34 underpass area to Rossum Drive
- Paved 0.6-mile trail connection from Mariana Butte neighborhoods to parks, trails and downtown
- New access to west Loveland natural areas (Oxbow Natural Area, Mariana Butte Trail, Morey Wildlife Reserve)
- Opened May 2018

Long View Trail
- Joint project by Loveland, Fort Collins and Larimer County
- Regional trail connection from Loveland’s Sunset Vista Natural Area to Fort Collins’ Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area
- 4.4-mile paved multi-use trail through four natural areas
- Opened August 2018
- Grants included Colorado Dept. of Transportation and Great Outdoors Colorado
Open Lands Financial Overview

**OPEN LANDS REVENUE $3,396,861***

The Open Lands Program is funded primarily by Loveland’s share of the Larimer County ¼-cent Open Space Sales Tax, which provided $2,731,182 in revenue in 2018. The City’s Open Lands Capital Expansion Fees are collected on new residential housing units and generated $375,350 for acquisitions and capital improvements. Miscellaneous revenue came from utility, property and agricultural leases and reimbursements. Investment earnings amounted to $128,743.

**OPEN LANDS EXPENDITURES $1,111,552***

Although the Division spent a great deal of time in 2018 preparing for future land acquisitions, no land was acquired in 2018. Capital expenditures in 2018 were the result of site-development projects, including new and rebuilt public access amenities, demolition of structures and soft-surface trails, totaling $144,979. Operations and maintenance, encompassing professional services, personnel and supplies required $966,573.

**OPEN LANDS YEAR-END BALANCE $11,908,636**

*2018 unaudited year-end figures

**GRANTS & DONATIONS**

Grants and donations significantly contribute to the success of Loveland’s Open Lands Program:

- Colorado Parks & Wildlife Fishing is Fun Grant of $30,000 to build a youth fishing dock at Willow Bend Natural Area.
- Colorado Health Foundation Grant of $129,000 for Capital Infrastructure and Intergenerational Physical Activity to construct a new bridge and pedestrian trail from South Madison Avenue into Old St. Louis Natural Area and promote new intergenerational programming.
- Great Outdoors Colorado Habitat Restoration Grant of $84,309 for re-establishment of riparian habitat severely impacted by the 2013 Big Thompson River flood at Medina’s Crossing.
- Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District contributed $50,000 for habitat restoration at Medina’s Crossing.
- Colorado Youth Corps Association and Great Outdoors Colorado Grant of $18,000 for removal of invasive species at Willow Bend.
- A local benefactor donated a new van to support the Environmental Education program as well as $200,000 to assist with land acquisitions and a future trail at Skyline Natural Area.

**OPEN SPACE SALES TAX**

Thank you for supporting the Larimer County Open Space Sales Tax!

The primary funding source for Loveland’s Open Lands Program is the county-wide ¼-cent Open Space Sales Tax, originally passed in 1995. In 2014, voters supported the extension of the county tax until 2043, passing the referendum with 82% approval. Loveland’s share of this revenue is used for acquisition, development, public access, stewardship and management of open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat and trails in and around Loveland.
**TRAILS REVENUE $1,070,884**

The Trails Program is funded primarily by Loveland’s share of Colorado Lottery Dollars, which provided $769,395 in revenue in 2018. The City’s Trails Capital Expansion Fees are collected on new residential housing units and generated $226,996 for acquisitions and capital improvements. Investment earnings increased in 2018 amounting to $74,493.

**TRAILS EXPENDITURES $2,571,041**

Capital expenditures in 2018 for trails construction totaled $2,321,551, including the Colorado Front Range Trail, Long View Trail and trails west of Namaqua Avenue. Operations and maintenance, encompassing professional services, personnel and supplies required $249,490.

**YEAR-END BALANCE FOR TRAIL PROJECTS & OPERATIONS $5,572,556**

*2018 unaudited year-end figures*

**GRANTS**

- A $200,000 Land and Water Conservation Fund grant through Colorado Parks & Wildlife as well as a $260,000 Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant to construct a new trailhead, parking lot and soft-surface trail at Prairie Ridge Natural Area.
- GOCO Planning grant for the design of the Namaqua Avenue underpass for $97,000. Additionally, the City has secured $600,000 in Transportation Alternative funding for a future underpass at Namaqua Avenue if appropriate easements can be obtained.

**COLORADO LOTTERY**

Thank you for supporting the Colorado Lottery!

The primary funding source for Loveland’s Recreation Trail program has been lottery dollars received in the Conservation Trust Fund. Loveland’s share of revenues derived from State Lottery games are restricted for recreation sites, facilities and projects.
Oxbow Trail at Oxbow Natural Area