

# OPEN LANDS ANNUAL REPORT 2014



Sunset Vista Natural Area at 57th Street & Taft Avenue

## Sunset Vista Natural Area Acquired

In August 2014, a key property in north Loveland was acquired at the northeast corner of 57th Street & Taft Avenue. The purchase preserves scenic vistas, wildlife habitat, and agricultural land in the 3,500-acre community separator between Loveland & Fort Collins. Connections for two long-awaited off-street trails also became possible with this acquisition: the Long View Corridor Trail linking Loveland & Fort Collins and a gap in the Loveland Recreation Trail.

The 87-acre parcel was purchased for \$1.5 million, including water rights consisting of 10 units of C-BT and 3 shares of Loudon Ditch. A partnership from Larimer County Open Lands provided \$200,000 towards the acquisition. The property contains several tributary wetlands and a section of the Loudon Ditch, providing valuable wildlife habitat & movement corridors. Views of the foothills & mountains are outstanding.

A public naming contest generated over 300 name suggestions from more than 150 individuals. The winning name, *Sunset Vista*, is fitting since the site offers “the best sunsets in Loveland,” as the submitters noted.

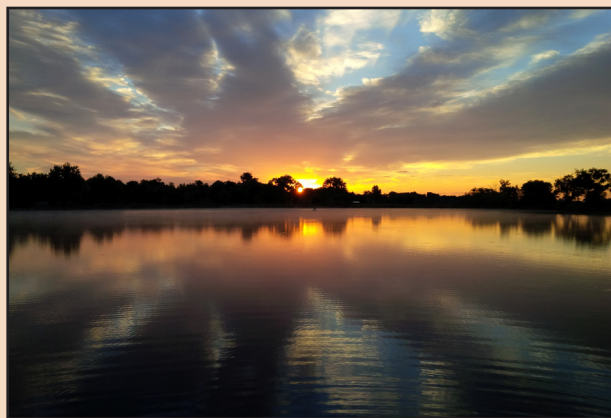
Anticipated uses of the property include construction of trails for recreation and wildlife viewing, development of a trailhead parking lot, and continued use as a working farm. Coordinating with our partners in Fort Collins and Larimer County, Loveland is pursuing \$2 million in grants from GOCO and CDOT for the construction of the Long View Corridor Trail, which will connect the two cities.

## River's Edge Natural Area Opened

Although River's Edge Natural Area sustained over \$1 million in flood damage just two weeks prior to its scheduled opening in 2013, temporary repairs were completed and the site was opened for public access in July 2014. With five ponds and 152 acres, including the Jayhawker Ponds, River's Edge has proven to be popular with hikers, joggers, bicyclists, and particularly fishermen.

Once permanent repairs are complete, visitors can look forward to picnic shelters, vehicle parking access and expanded environmental education opportunities. Loveland was fortunate to secure both FEMA funding in the amount of \$920,000 as well as a GOCO Flood Recovery Grant for \$180,000 to complete permanent repairs in 2015.

Determined Park Planners, Open Lands staff and consultants have re-designed the site to better withstand possible future flood events by incorporating a realigned parking lot, flood cut-off walls and turf-reinforced matting. Visitors will also see the reconstruction of the boardwalk, amphitheater, wetland areas and other revegetation as part of the project.



Sunrise at River's Edge Natural Area

## Morey Wildlife Reserve Flood Recovery

The 2013 Big Thompson Flood completely filled in the 8-acre Morey Pond, depositing sediment where once was a magnificent waterfowl habitat and riparian area along the river. The floodwaters also caused significant damage to the adjacent Mariana Butte Golf Course. Temporary repairs in early 2014 prevented further flooding and damage during spring runoff.

Park planners worked with FEMA to obtain funding for sediment removal, but full reconstruction will depend on flood modeling and analysis to be completed. A hydrologic study of this stretch of the Big Thompson River is in progress and in 2015, redesign of the open space may include: river bank repairs and stabilization, an overbank channel through the former pond area, and intermittent pools allowing willow re-establishment and a self-perpetuating cottonwood gallery. These goals also provide additional flood hazard mitigation to the golf course and adjacent homeowners in the range of a 5-10 year flood event.

## Environmental Education Update

Due to the flood damage at its long-time locale Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park, the Environmental Education Program introduced a new curriculum at a new location in 2014 – the **Urban Wilderness Program at Namaqua Park**. Based on the successful structure of the Wildlife Program at Viestenz-Smith, the program includes rotations through five new interactive stations throughout the park and along the Big Thompson River. The full-day field trip supports 4th & 5th grade Colorado science standards and includes topics and activities such as *Animal Adaptations*, *Cottonwood Trees*, and a hands-on *River Lab* with macro-invertebrate investigations. Program materials were developed to be portable for use at other natural areas, parks and by roving interpreters.

Several other environmental education offerings were also launched in 2014: in-school programs for elementary schools, *River Ecology* programs offered to the public, *School's Out Science* at the Loveland Public Library, and the Northern Colorado *Get Outdoors Day* event in Fort Collins. In total, environmental education programming was presented to over 1,100 children and adults in 2014.



*The Urban Wilderness Program at Namaqua Park*



*Comcast Cares Volunteer Project at River's Edge*

## Volunteer Projects

Open Lands education and outreach programs would not be possible without a dedicated corps of more than 30 volunteers who generously give their time and energy to inform, educate, and guide the public. Significant assistance was also provided by a local Eagle Scout, who helped coordinate and construct new facilities for environmental education at Namaqua Park. Other volunteer projects throughout the year included ongoing flood recovery, cleanup and seasonal stewardship projects. A volunteer group of Comcast employees helped to construct a 2,200-foot section of soft-surface trail at River's Edge Natural Area, providing access from the Thompson School District parking lot on S. Taft Avenue. In total, nearly 600 hours of volunteer time were contributed to the Open Lands Program in 2014. To sign up or for more information, please contact: [Michele.VanHare@CityofLoveland.org](mailto:Michele.VanHare@CityofLoveland.org) or visit us online: [www.CityofLoveland.org/OpenLands](http://www.CityofLoveland.org/OpenLands).

As part of an ongoing project, Biology Professor Jim Choun and his students from Front Range Community College assisted the Open Lands Division with the removal of Russian olive trees around the Jayhawker Ponds at River's Edge Natural Area. Russian olives were brought to this country in the late 1800's in an effort to control erosion and provide decorative landscaping; however, it was soon discovered that the water-loving, fast-growing trees cause much more damage than any benefits they provide. Student volunteer efforts include removal of the trees at different times of the year as well as various treatments to the stumps and root systems to eliminate regrowth. Students then analyze the data in an attempt to determine the best management practices for eradication of this invasive species.

## Technology Update

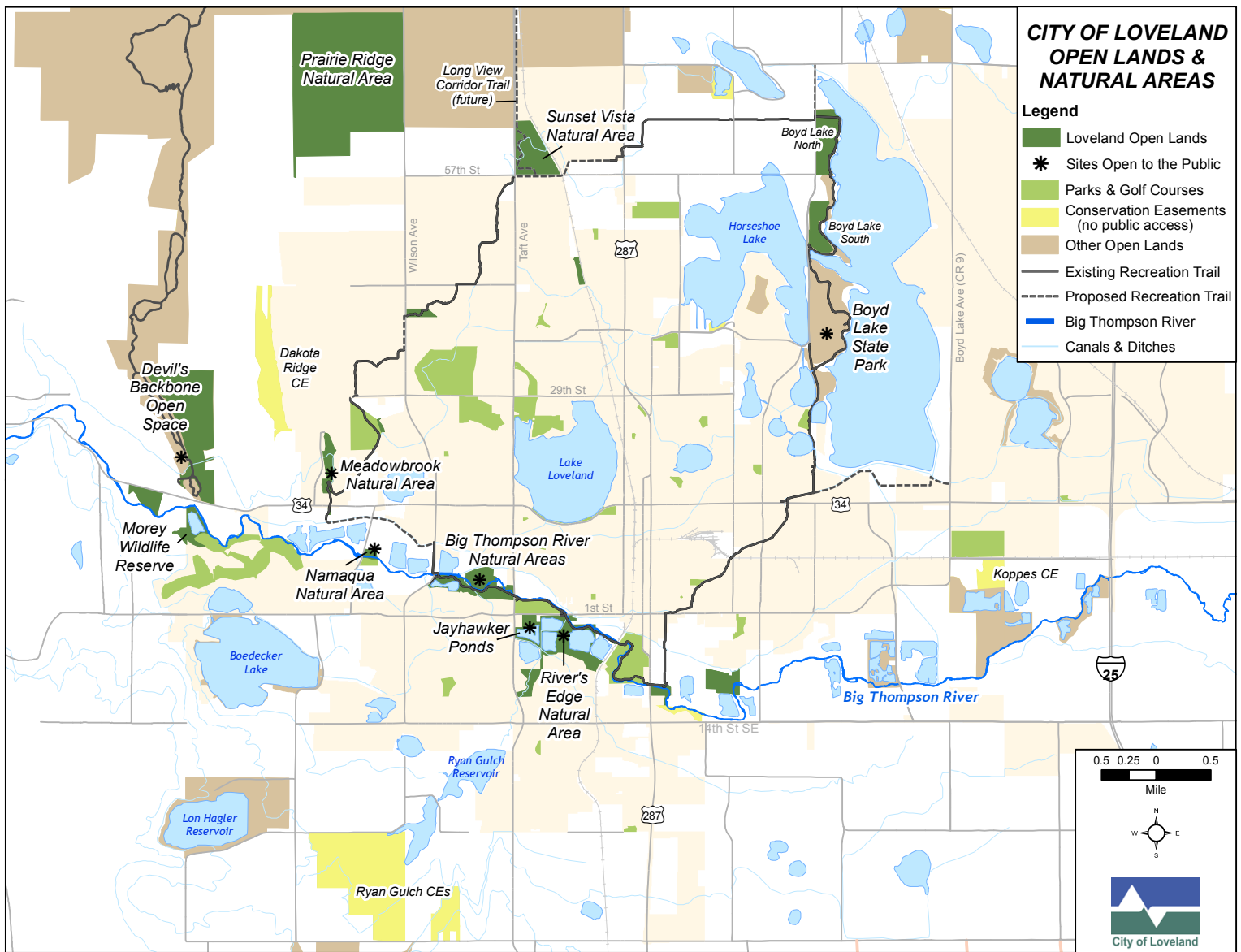
Open Lands purchased an iPad tablet to assist with numerous Parks & Recreation tasks and projects using GIS/GPS. The iPad will become an integral tool for Conservation Easement monitoring, including mapping resource data, collecting geo-referenced photo points, and creating site maps with GPS-collected data. The new device will also be helpful to inventory Open Lands resources, such as signs, trails and amenities. Park Planning staff will use the iPad for development review projects as well, to geospatially locate features in the field and create maps to provide feedback to applicants. Advantages of the new system include secure data that is automatically streamed to the City's network as it is collected. Data cannot be compromised due to equipment or battery failure. In addition, map products and reports can be created more efficiently, without the time associated with downloading photos and GPS data independently.

## 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, which was set to expire in 2018. In 2014, voters overwhelmingly 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.





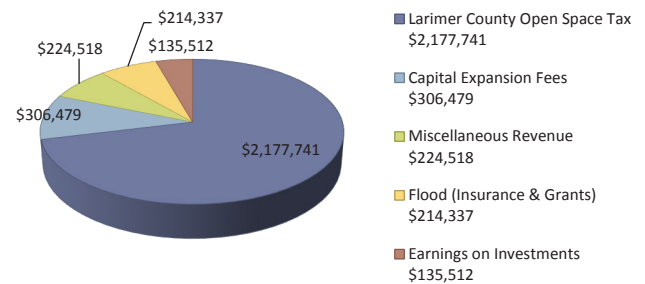
### OPEN LANDS REVENUE – \$3,058,587

The Open Lands Program is funded primarily by Loveland's share of the Larimer County ¼-cent Open Space Sales Tax, which provided \$2,177,741 in revenue in 2014. The City's Open Lands Capital Expansion Fees are collected on new residential housing units and generated \$306,479 for acquisitions & capital improvements. The majority of funding received as Miscellaneous Revenue came from a \$200,000 partnership from Larimer County Open Lands towards the purchase of Sunset Vista Natural Area, in addition to agricultural lease income. Flood recovery funding in the form of insurance payments and grant reimbursements totaled \$214,337. Investment earnings increased in 2014, amounting to \$135,512.

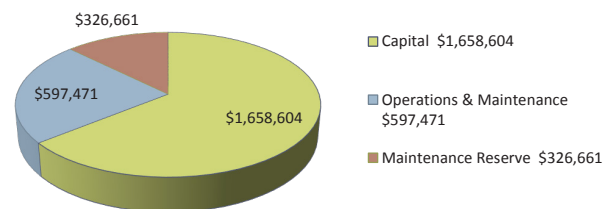
### OPEN LANDS EXPENDITURES – \$2,582,736

Capital Expenditures in 2014 totaled \$1,658,604, with the majority spent on the acquisition of Sunset Vista Natural Area (\$1.5M). Operations and Maintenance, encompassing professional services, personnel, and supplies, required \$597,471. Professional services included the Open Lands Division share of the Parks & Recreation Master Plan and the Big Thompson Recreation & Conservation Assessment, as well as flood recovery and repair projects. Division policy reserves 15% of annual open space sales tax revenues for future management and maintenance of open lands properties, resulting in the transfer of \$326,661 into the Maintenance Reserve account in 2014.

#### Loveland Open Lands Revenue 2014



#### Loveland Open Lands Expenditures 2014



## From the Open Lands Advisory Commission Chair

As a long-standing member and 2015 Chair of the Loveland Open Lands Advisory Commission, I am proud to present the 2014 year in review, showcasing our program accomplishments as well as looking forward to what we plan to achieve in 2015.

Opening River's Edge Natural Area for public access in July after the September 2013 flood was a significant achievement, considering that the site sustained over \$1 million in damage. Permanent repairs are underway and a full re-opening is planned for summer 2015.

Loveland's newest open space, Sunset Vista Natural Area, added valuable land to the community separator between Loveland and Fort Collins and provides connections for long-awaited trails linking the two cities and helping to complete Loveland's recreation trail loop. The 2003 Open Lands Plan was updated as a component of the 2014 Parks & Recreation Master Plan, and with substantial public review & input, priority areas for preservation & trails have been updated to reflect current needs and funding realities.

Based on this plan, a number of acquisitions are anticipated for 2015, including several in the high-priority Big Thompson River corridor and others augmenting existing protected lands. Additional priorities for 2015 include restoration of flood-damaged properties and opening several sites for public access. These accomplishments and future goals would not be possible without the funding provided by the Larimer County Open Space Sales Tax. Loveland's share of this tax helps fund the acquisition, preservation, restoration, enhancement and development of natural areas, open space, and trails in and around Loveland. In November 2014, voters overwhelmingly supported the extension of the tax until 2043.

With guidance from City Council, the talented open lands staff and dedicated OLAC members will continue to work hard to be the best possible stewards of Loveland's natural resources by acquiring, conserving and maintaining additional natural areas and open lands for the ongoing use and enjoyment of the citizens of Loveland. As always, we welcome public attendance and comment at monthly OLAC meetings and encourage increased citizen collaboration regarding the City's Open Lands program.

*William Zawacki, Loveland Open Lands Advisory Commission, 2015 Chair*

## Big Thompson River Recreation and Conservation Assessment



*Big Thompson River*

As a result of changes in the Big Thompson Canyon from the 2013 flood, Loveland and Larimer County are leading an effort to assess recreation and conservation opportunities along the river from Loveland to Estes Park. A robust public involvement process will include landowners, citizens and user groups, the Big Thompson River Restoration Coalition, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, US Forest Service, and CDOT.

Goals of the project include working with the public in a cooperative fashion to enhance access to public lands, restore some of the historical recreation opportunities along the river, improve water quality, improve river function and resiliency by maximizing the land available for the river and its floodplain benches, enhance the scenic qualities of the river corridor, strengthen partnerships and management efficiencies, and increase appreciation, respect, and understanding of the river corridor's function and values. This visionary plan was initiated in 2014 with assistance from a GOCO Flood Recovery Grant and will be completed in mid-2015.



*Northern Oriole at River's Edge Natural Area*

## 2015 OPEN LANDS ADVISORY COMMISSION

The Open Lands Advisory Commission is comprised of volunteers who live in or near the City and represent the City's diverse land use interests. Meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month. The Commission advises City Council regarding open lands issues.

### Members:

*Gale Bernhardt  
Rick Brent  
Andy Hawbaker  
Ross Livingston, Vice Chair  
Darren Pape  
Jim Roode  
Nathan Thompson  
Jean Whittaker  
William Zawacki, Chair  
Hugh McKean, City Council Liaison  
Kerri Rollins, Larimer County Liaison*

## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the City of Loveland Open Lands Program is to identify, preserve, protect and enhance open space, natural areas and other significant lands. This ongoing process 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.