

2017

Open Lands & Trails

Annual Report



City of Loveland

Loveland Open Lands and Trails

OUR MISSION

The mission of the City of Loveland Open Lands and 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.

BE A LOVELAND OUTSIDER

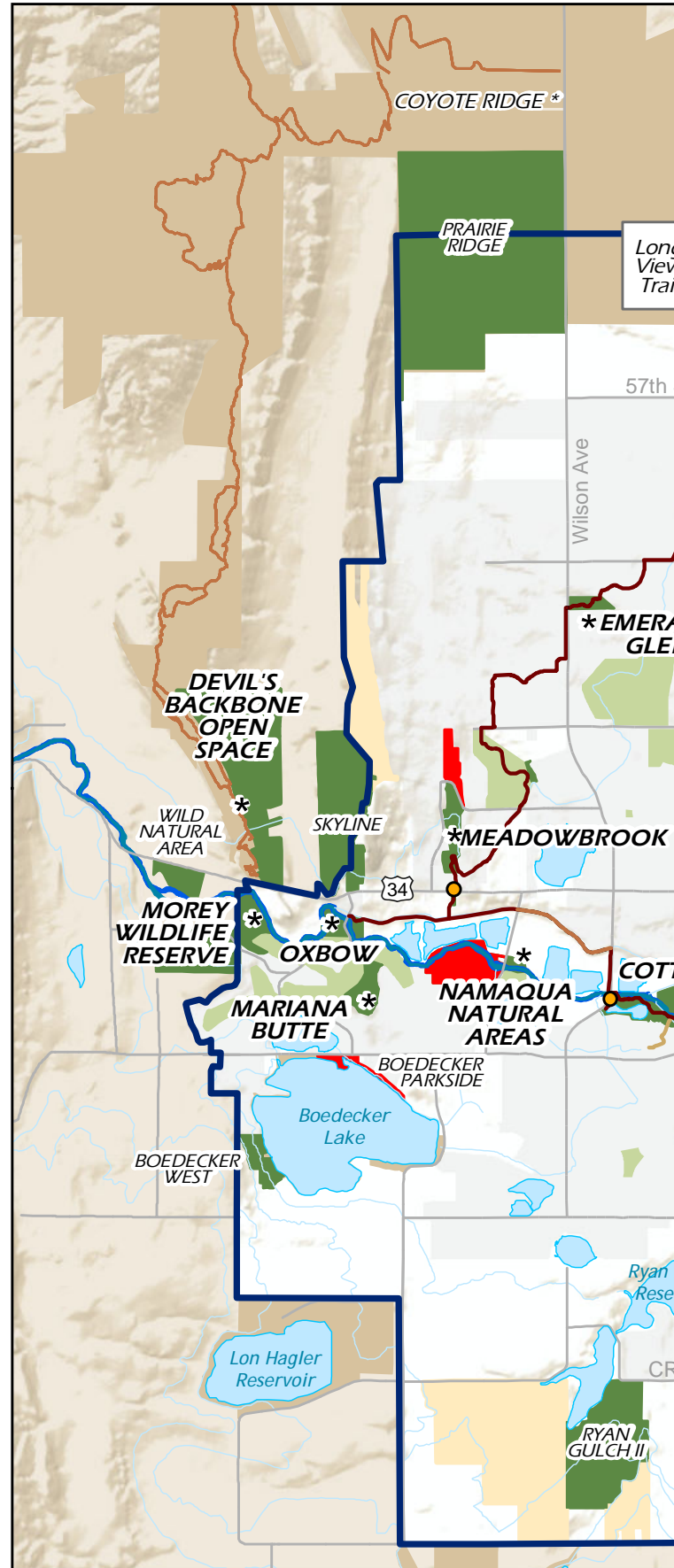
Loveland's Open Lands and Trails Division continued efforts to conserve important lands (108 new acres), provide new opportunities for public access and enjoyment, improve and maintain properties for long-term sustainability, expand our environmental program offerings and provide ways for the community to explore, discover and learn in the great outdoors.

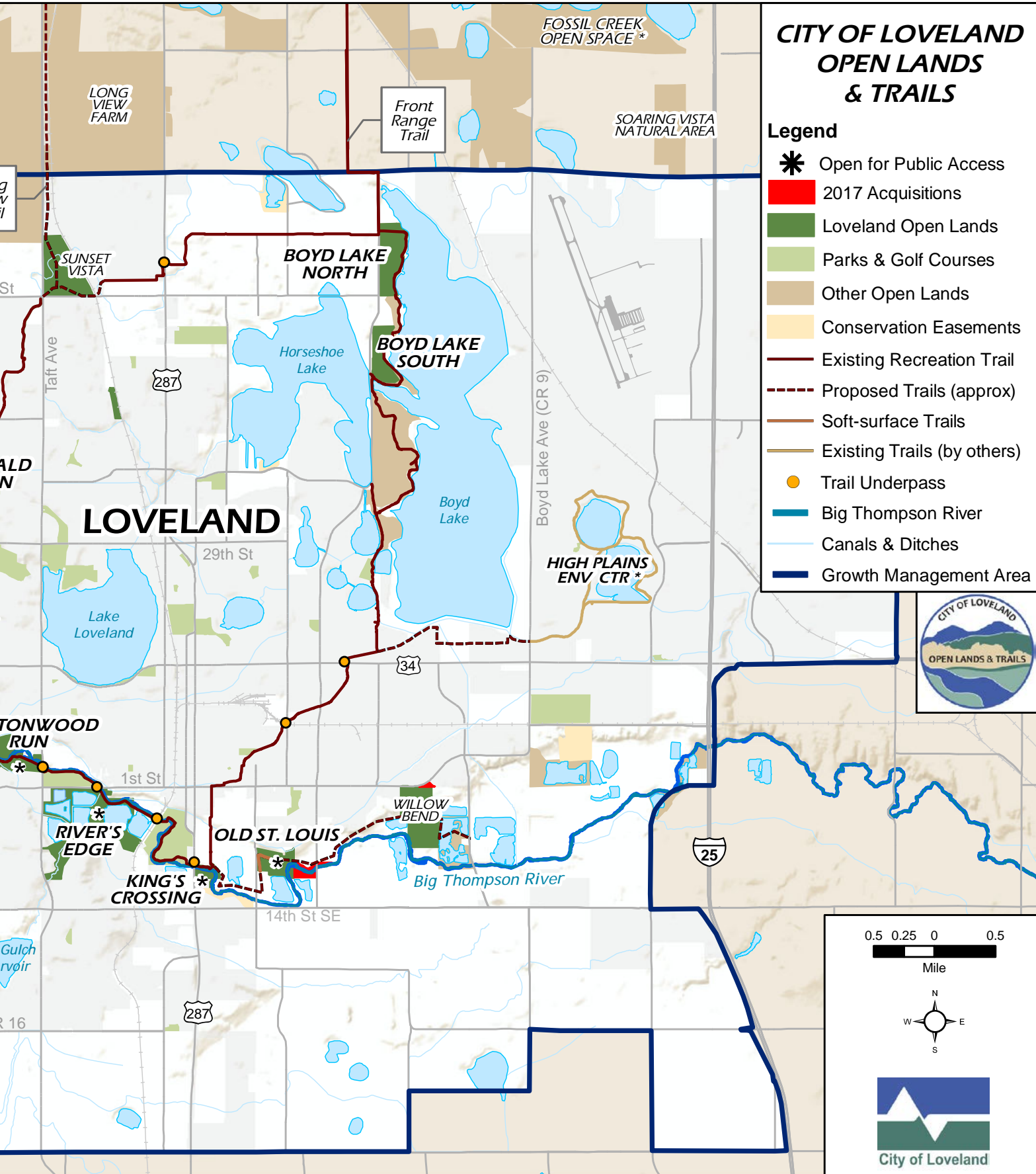
Citizens have shown an abundance of community support for natural areas, open lands and trails and the importance of wildlife habitat, land conservation and public access to lands.

We invite you to be a Loveland "Outsider"—come out and explore your open lands and natural areas, watch for wildlife, join us for a program, smell the wildflowers or volunteer for a project. Get outdoors and enjoy some of Loveland's most beautiful sites!

OPEN LANDS & TRAILS TEAM

- Elizabeth Kayl, *Parks and Recreation Director*
- Marilyn Hilgenberg, *Open Lands and Trails Manager*
- Debbie Eley, *Open Lands Specialist*
- Brian Hayes, *Open Lands Coordinator*
- Jonathan Huey, *Open Lands and Trails Crew Supervisor*
- Michele Van Hare, *Environmental Education Coordinator*
- Bree Knouse, *Open Lands and Trails Maintenance Worker*
- Kelly Smith, *Parks and Recreation Planner*
- Scott Sinn, *Parks and Recreation Planner*





Open Lands & Natural Areas (8,247 acres)

Big Thompson River Corridor (704 acres)

- Morey Wildlife Reserve*
- Wild Natural Area
- Ward Trust Natural Area
- Oxbow Natural Area*
- Namaqua Natural Areas*
- Cottonwood Run Natural Area*
- River's Edge Natural Area*
- Centennial Natural Area
- Kings Crossing Natural Area*
- Old St. Louis Natural Area*
- Willow Bend Natural Area
- Koppes Conservation Easement
- Waterford Conservation Easement



View from Mariana Butte summit

Foothills/Mountains Open Lands (4,926 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)



Boedecker Lake West

Neighborhood Natural Areas (101 acres)

- Meadowbrook Natural Area*
- Boedecker Lake West & Parkside
- Horseshoe-Coulson Conservation Easement
- Windemere/Von Kaenel/Trailwood



Mule deer at Oxbow Natural Area

Recreation Trail Natural Areas (354 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)

- Lazy J Bar S (Raptor Ridge) Conservation Easement
- Hopkins Conservation Easement
- Dunkin Conservation Easement
- Heron Lakes CE (Larimer County & Berthoud Partnership)
- Ryan Gulch II



Recreation Trail at Boyd Lake

**Open for public access*

2017 Acquisitions

Namaqua West

- 58 acres in west Big Thompson River corridor
- Notable historic site of Mariano Medina's crossing
- Provides potential river access and trail connections
- Working agricultural farm
- Big Thompson River 3rd priority water rights



East Big Thompson Additions

- 17 acres (3 parcels) in east Big Thompson River corridor
- 1-mile trail easement
- Future fishing access & wildlife viewing
- Provides trail connections for east Big Thompson Trail
- Valuable riparian wildlife habitat

Boedecker - Parkside

- 17 acres on north shore of Boedecker Reservoir
- Adjacent to Boedecker Reservoir State Wildlife Area
- Future trail access along Home Supply Ditch
- New west Loveland natural area
- Future fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities



Meadowbrook North

- 16 acres west of Mehaffey Park and new Solar Field
- Big Thompson tributary wetlands
- Future trail access and connections
- Potential native wetland and upland habitat restoration

Public Access Improvements



High Plains Environmental Center

Restoring nature where we live, work and play.

A unique partnership established with the High Plains Environmental Center (HPEC) provides opportunities for the public to learn about and enjoy the natural world at this new center in east Loveland. HPEC is a living laboratory that focuses on exploring the connection between sustainable living and ecological processes that foster personal and community well-being. Visitors can walk the trails, participate in fun educational activities and attend workshops on water, energy conservation and environmental research. The City's financial contribution to this project enables collaboration with HPEC staff for their expertise and assistance with native plant ecosystems. The new center will also be available for Open Lands public programming and education purposes. Watch for new programs and opportunities in 2018!



River's Edge Natural Area

Improvements at River's Edge provide new options for access and increased trail accessibility throughout the site. A new W. 1st Street parking area accommodates 26 vehicles and allows for convenient ADA access to Jayhawker Ponds for fishing, wildlife viewing and multi-use trail connections to the River's Edge network and the Big Thompson River. Additional trail improvements throughout the site enhance the experience for walkers, joggers, wildlife watchers and bicyclists. A variety of restoration projects continue to help the site recover from the 2013 flood, including tree donations and planting projects to improve habitat for wildlife and enrich visitors' experiences. Fishing line recycle tubes also were added to provide safe receptacles for the disposal of fishing line, which poses a serious risk to birds and other wildlife. Many of these improvements would not have been possible without the help of community volunteers.



Hidden Hogback Trail

At Mariana Butte, the new Hidden Hogback Trail offers an additional 3/4 mile of natural surface pedestrian path connecting existing trails at the Butte to the Big Thompson River corridor at Oxbow Natural Area. Members of CATS (Colorado Addicted Trailbuilders Society) led more than a dozen volunteer trail days to complete this connection that winds through the hogbacks of Mariana Butte and drops down to the river corridor via a unique spiral stone staircase. A guided hike as part of #OptOutside on Black Friday highlighted this trail system, and the public is extremely appreciative of this new opportunity to explore the Butte and connect to the paved Recreation Trail system at Rossum Drive.

Caring for Conserved Lands



Stewardship project at River's Edge

With the addition of 18 new properties totalling 856 acres in the past four years, site management and stewardship projects are continually being implemented to improve and maintain resources throughout the system and enhance conditions for users.

- 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
- Repair of flood-damaged properties
- Removal of Russian olive trees and other invasive species via grant funding and volunteer projects
- Vegetation management - planting, weed management, mowing and restoration
- Removal of unsafe structures, fencing and debris
- Wildland fire suppression and mitigation
- Coordination and oversight of volunteer stewardship projects
- Sustainable trail construction and maintenance

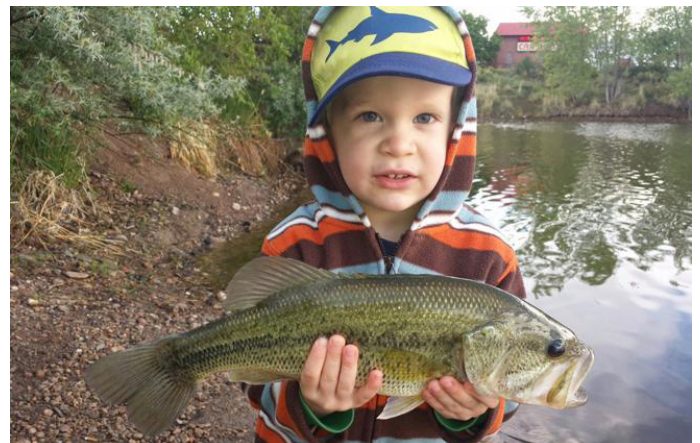
Stewardship and Resource Protection

Finding a balance between public access and resource protection results in win-win situations for people and wildlife. Partnerships with local non-profits and Colorado Parks & Wildlife benefit wildlife in a number of ways.

- **Owl Boxes and Banding** Our first barn owl box was a hit! A pair of barn owls successfully fledged one young owlet at a new nest box installed on open lands. These voracious predators can consume more than 1,000 voles and mice annually, providing a safe, non-toxic method of rodent control.
- **Fishing Line Recycle Tube Program** 25 pounds of used fishing line were collected and recycled, protecting birds, fish and other wildlife and improving aesthetics for anglers and visitors.
- **Fish Stocking and Research** CPW stocked 24,753 trout, bass, catfish, crappie and blue gill at River's Edge ponds, and managed the fishery for pond health and angler enjoyment.
- **Wildlife** Many animal species find refuge at open lands, enhancing the experience of visitors and maintaining a healthy, functioning ecosystem.
- **Raptors & Herons & Songbirds - Oh, My!** Numerous bird species also use natural areas for nesting, cover and foraging habitat. Raptor nests include eagles, hawks, owls and osprey. During the annual Christmas Bird Count, a record 119 species were observed in the Loveland count circle, including seven species found exclusively on open land sites.



Volunteers help preserve history



Anglers of all ages enjoy fishing at Jayhawker Ponds

Community Outreach and Education

Environmental Education

Interpretive and educational programs help open lands visitors better understand and appreciate their natural areas. These free programs are offered to the public year round at a variety of locations.

- **Monthly Preschool Programs (PEEPs)** for ages 2-5 at natural areas, parks and Loveland Library reached 377 preschoolers and 282 adults
- **Urban Wilderness, Plants & Places and Wildlife Around Us** programs were presented to 929 grade school students and 154 other participants at River's Edge Natural Area
- **Guided Walks** exploring nature, interpreting history and identifying birds reached 494 participants of all ages
- **Special Programs** offer opportunities to participate in unique experiential activities and include:

Dog Day Afternoon - learn about dog etiquette, exercise, nutrition and stewardship in natural areas

Astronomy Nights - night-sky viewing with telescopes

CSI - Critter Scene Investigations - gather clues along a trail and solve a wildlife mystery

#OptOutside (Black Friday) - guided hikes at various levels of difficulty - something for everyone!

National Trails Day, High Plains Environmental Center Grand Opening & Native Plant Sale, Cherry Pie Festival, Children's Day, Halloween Festival



Introducing "Offero"

A new online system for program registration and volunteer projects launched in 2017 thanks to a generous grant from the Colorado Health Foundation. The purchase and development of "Offero" (o-fair-o) offers a single site for people to easily search and sign up for guided hikes, family events, educational programs and volunteer opportunities ranging from trail hosting to hands-on stewardship projects. User interface is simple, windows-based and mobile-enabled to accommodate use from all platforms. Check it out and create your account at: offeror.cityofloveland.org



PEEPs preschool participants



Grade school Environmental Education Program



Event registration at Mariana Butte



#OptOutside

WITH US ON **BLACK FRIDAY**

Guided bird walk at Hidden Hogback Trail

Resource Planning

Planning Initiatives

Plans help guide the use and management of open lands and are developed in cooperation with partners, stakeholders, technical experts and the public. The planning process involves evaluating existing conditions, collaborating on draft concepts, soliciting citizen input and refining concepts into a preferred plan.

Planning initiatives in 2017 included:

- The Big Thompson River Master Plan was funded through a flood resiliency grant with the intent of creating a cohesive plan for the entire river corridor, regardless of land ownership. The plan envisions a future river corridor with flood resilience and amenities for public access.
- The Big Thompson River Coalition developed plans for restoration of flood-damaged lands and aquatic habitat in the river corridor with assistance from DOLA grant funding.
- Conceptual plans for Sunset Vista Natural Area were developed and presented to the public for review and feedback. Input was incorporated into a preferred plan, including wetland and upland restoration, historical interpretation and nature trails, in addition to sections of the Recreation Trail System and Long View Trail connection to Fort Collins currently under construction and planned for completion in mid-2018.
- Resource inventories, sustainable trail planning, partner collaboration and citizen input resulted in a balanced plan for public access and resource protection at Prairie Ridge Natural Area.
- Project Outdoors, a plan to connect more Loveland youth and families with the outdoors, was funded by a Great Outdoors Colorado Inspire Initiative Planning Grant. New trail connections, river access and programming opportunities were identified in the east Big Thompson River corridor, including at Willow Bend and Old St. Louis Natural Areas.
- Inventories for wildlife, vegetation and cultural resources were carried out at Skyline Natural Area with assistance from CPW officials, CSU specialists and agency partners in preparation for the development of management plans and public access.



Public participation in Project Outdoors



Botany inventory at Prairie Ridge Natural Area



Archaeology survey at Skyline Natural Area

On the Horizon...

- Implementation of management plans for Sunset Vista and Prairie Ridge will begin in 2018 with restoration of degraded areas and development of trails for new foothills and wetland experiences.
- New trail access to Willow Bend and Old St. Louis will be developed in 2018, providing safe access to the river corridor from east Loveland neighborhoods, new fishing opportunities and wildlife viewing possibilities.

Partnerships

Partnerships with local community groups, non-profit organizations, various city departments and other agencies are key to the success of the Open Lands program. Collaboration with these partners helps leverage open lands funding and capitalizes on expertise in many fields.



CATS volunteers at Hidden Hogback Trail



Russian olive tree removal at Cottonwood Run



High water mark sign at River's Edge Natural Area

Partnering With the Community

- High Plains Environmental Center
- Colorado Addicted Trailbuilders Society (CATS)
- Boys & Girls Club of Larimer County
- High Water Mark Project with Public Works Dept.
- Waterway Cleanup at Ward Boise
- Flood clean-up Projects at Oxbow
- Increased presence, trail patrol & enforcement by Police Department

Agency Partnerships

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



Volunteers

Volunteers are the heart of the Open Lands program. We could not accomplish all that we do without the support of so many generous community volunteers and service groups. This year volunteers provided thousands of hours in support of our educational programs, public outreach and stewardship efforts.



Environmental Education volunteer at River's Edge Natural Area

The **Open Lands Advisory Commission** makes recommendations regarding the attributable revenue share to the City of Loveland of the Larimer County Open Space Sales and Use Tax, as well as the use of any funds designated by the City for open lands and trail purposes. The nine member Commission makes recommendations concerning the acquisition, disposal, jurisdictional transfers, planning, preservation, development, use and management of open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, trails and other associated open land issues.

OPEN LANDS ADVISORY COMMISSION

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

PROGRAM VOLUNTEER HOURS

Environmental Education	872
Stewardship Projects	3,173
Trail Hosts	430
Special Events & Administrative	562
Total Volunteer Hours	5,037
Dollar Value of Volunteer Hours	\$126,000



Youth Advisory Council site visit research



Barn Owl banding



Weed Warrior volunteers at King's Crossing Natural Area



Trail building volunteers at River's Edge Natural Area



Public outreach on National Trails Day

Trails

Loveland's Trails 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 20-mile paved Recreation Trail which encircles the City, as well as several soft-surface trail opportunities at natural areas 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

- *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*



Trailhead at Oxbow Natural Area



Trail construction at Rossum Drive connection



Meadowbrook Natural Area trail along the Loudon Ditch

CPRA Columbine Innovation Award for Quick Win Trails



The City of Loveland was recognized by the Colorado Parks & Recreation Association with their 2017 Columbine

Award for the development of seven Quick Win public access projects. These soft-surface trails provide new opportunities to connect with nature, priorities identified in the department's 2014 Master Plan.



Elizabeth Kayl, Parks & Recreation Director and Marilyn Hilgenberg, Open Lands & Trails Manager

2017 Trails Projects

Taft to Wilson Avenue Trail Reconstruction

- Flood repair project to realign trail along the Big Thompson River to improve resiliency
- Construction completed in 2017
- Trail re-opened June 2017, celebrated on National Trails Day



Long View Trail

- A joint project by Loveland, Fort Collins and Larimer County for a regional trail from Sunset Vista Natural Area in Loveland to Cathy Fromme Natural Area in Fort Collins
- Construction began in fall 2017; anticipated completion summer 2018
- Grants will cover almost half the cost of construction
 - Colorado Department of Transportation, Transportation Enhancement (TE) Grant for \$1 million
 - Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Grant for \$999,550 from the Paths to Parks Initiative

North Colorado Front Range Trail

- A joint project by Loveland, Larimer County and Fort Collins to construct a regional trail north from Loveland's Recreation Trail at County Road 11C
- Grants covered a majority of Loveland's trail construction
 - Colorado Department of Transportation, Transportation Enhancement (TE) Grant for \$450,000
 - Colorado Front Range Trail, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Grant for \$350,000
- Construction completed in 2017
- Trail opened fall 2017



West Hwy 34 Underpass to Namaqua and Wilson Avenue

- Construction completed during 2017
- Concrete and soft-surface trail sections opened summer 2017
- Repurposed bridge from Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park
- \$98,000 GOCO Planning Grant and 2020 \$600,000 grant by CDOT Alternative Transportation Program

On the Horizon...

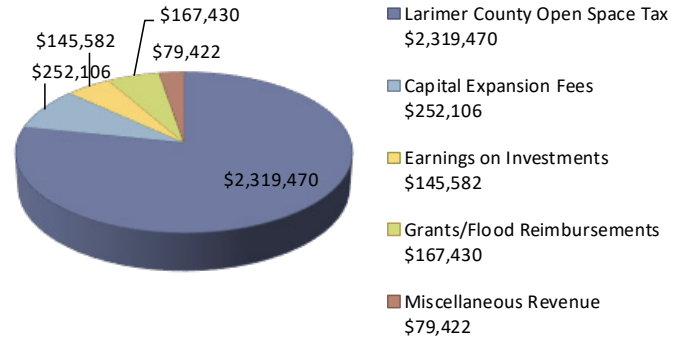
- Completion of the Long View Trail to Fort Collins through Sunset Vista Natural Area
- Rossum Drive trail connection to the Recreation Trail System for access from west Loveland
- Prairie Ridge Natural Area foothills trails and connection to Coyote Ridge Natural Area

Open Lands Financial Overview

OPEN LANDS REVENUE \$2,964,010*

The Open Lands Program is funded primarily by Loveland's share of the Larimer County ¼-cent Open Space Sales Tax, which provided \$2,319,470 in revenue in 2017. The City's Open Lands Capital Expansion Fees are collected on new residential housing units and generated \$252,106 for acquisitions & capital improvements. Miscellaneous revenue came from utility and agricultural lease income and reimbursements. Investment earnings amounted to \$145,582.

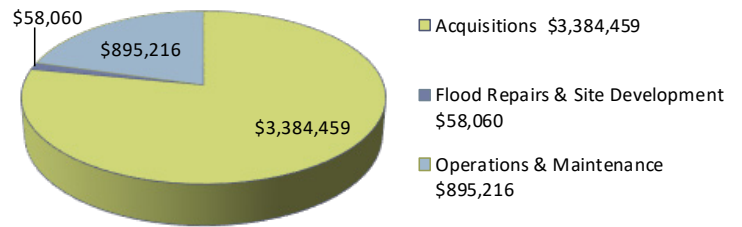
Loveland Open Lands Revenue 2017



OPEN LANDS EXPENDITURES \$4,337,735*

Capital expenditures in 2017 for acquisitions totaled \$3,384,459, including the purchase of Namaqua West, two Boise Avenue properties on the Big Thompson River and north Boedecker Reservoir. Site development expenditures, including new and rebuilt public access amenities, demolition of structures and soft-surface trails totaled \$58,060. Operations and Maintenance, encompassing professional services, personnel and supplies totalled \$895,216.

Loveland Open Lands Expenditures 2017



OPEN LANDS YEAR-END BALANCE \$6,642,047

*2017 Unaudited Year-End Figures

Grants & Donations

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

- Flood Recovery grant from GOCO for \$140,900 for the reconstruction of River's Edge Natural Area and the Recreation Trail Underpass at Hwy 287
- Colorado Health Foundation grant for \$85,200 to purchase the Offero Volunteer Management online platform and support for community outreach to connect Loveland's citizens with the outdoors
- \$45,000 grant for removal of invasive species from Colorado Water Conservation Board through Larimer County Weed District
- \$6,500 grant from Colorado Parks and Wildlife through Aloterra for Morey Wildlife Reserve restoration and plant materials



Prairie Ridge Natural Area



New Namaqua West open lands property

OPEN SPACE SALES TAX

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

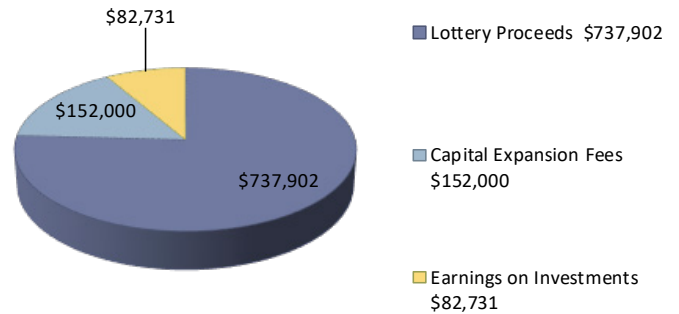
The primary funding source for Loveland's Open Lands Program is the county-wide ¼-cent Open Space Sales Tax, originally passed in 1995. In 2014, voters supported the extension of the county tax until 2043, passing the referendum with 82% approval. Loveland's share of this revenue is used for acquisition,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

Trails Financial Overview

TRAILS REVENUE \$972,633*

The Trails Program is funded primarily by Loveland's share of Colorado Lottery Dollars, which provided \$737,902 in revenue in 2017. The City's Trails Capital Expansion Fees are collected on new residential housing units and generated \$152,000 for acquisitions & capital improvements. Investment earnings increased in 2017, amounting to \$82,731.

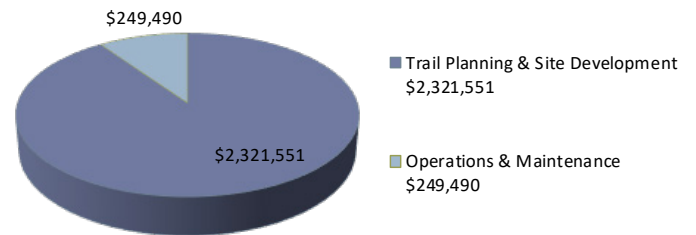
Loveland Trails Revenue 2017



TRAILS EXPENDITURES \$2,571,041*

Capital expenditures in 2017 for trails construction totalled \$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 totalled \$249,490.

Loveland Trails Expenditures 2017



YEAR-END BALANCE FOR TRAIL PROJECTS & OPERATIONS \$5,112,547

**2017 Unaudited Year-End Figures*

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.



Recreation Trail users at north Boyd Lake Trail

On the Horizon...

In the fall of 2018, the calculation of Loveland's share of the Larimer County Open Space Sales Tax will change to a lower percentage, reducing revenues by an anticipated \$260,000 annually. This change occurs as a result of the 2014 ballot language, which extends the open space tax for 25 years until 2043 but will have an impact on Loveland's funding for open land acquisitions. Similarly, the State of Colorado is evaluating the use of Lottery Funds and must reappropriate their use for recreation purposes in future funding cycles. Since Loveland funds its recreation trail system through Lottery proceeds, a change could have an impact on Loveland's paved trails.

Loveland Open Lands & Trails Division

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Cover photo credit: Darryl Carden