



2020 ANNUAL REPORT



LOVELAND OPEN LANDS & TRAILS



Visitors can enjoy miles of new trails at Prairie Ridge Natural Area

NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT WITH NATURE

A significant milestone was reached on May 1, 2020 when Prairie Ridge Natural Area was opened for public access, 20 years after being acquired as part of a 3,200-acre community separator conserved by Loveland, Fort Collins and Larimer County. Located in northwest Loveland, the 785-acre Prairie Ridge property includes active agricultural land, valuable foothills and hogback habitats and expansive views in all directions.

The new site offers a 2.4-mile multi-use trail system for passive recreation and wildlife viewing and a trail connection to Coyote Ridge Natural Area, providing access to 35 miles of regional soft-surface trails. The trailhead features a 36-vehicle parking lot, vault restroom facilities, bike racks and an information kiosk.

The virtual grand opening was a unique pandemic-style event including socially-distanced volunteer trail host greeters and self-guided activities to engage visitors, such as nature journaling and birdwatching bingo. Prairie Ridge has become very popular with pedestrians, runners, strollers and bicyclists who enjoy the area's wide open spaces, rolling hills and miles of sweeping vistas.

Later in May, Boedecker Bluff Natural Area was opened for public access, including a 1-mile soft-surface trail with shoreline access to Boedecker Reservoir. This 17-acre natural area offers walk-in access from nearby southwest Loveland neighborhoods for hiking, biking, wildlife watching and scenic lake and mountain views. Based on record high visitation at all Loveland natural areas due to the pandemic, the opening of Prairie Ridge and Boedecker Bluff provided new opportunities for outdoor recreation and social distancing when the community needed them most.

OUTDOOR SPACES FOR ALL

The Loveland Parks & Recreation Open Lands & Trails Division is committed to improving local and regional conservation and connectivity through trail access and the preservation of important wildlife habitat and natural resources for the enjoyment of our community.

With a national pandemic, 2020 has been a different year for Open Lands & Trails but it has reinforced the importance of outdoor spaces, opportunities and trails in Loveland. Our open lands and trails provided a much needed place for the community to exercise, engage, connect with nature and each other, learn, find some space and take a break from the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Loveland experienced record visitation, opened new areas for public access at Prairie Ridge and Boedecker Bluff, built 4.2 miles of new soft-surface trails, continued restoration efforts along the Big Thompson River and elsewhere, planned two new regional trail connections, and completed a number of repair and improvement projects.

COVID-19 limited environmental programming and participation but staff and volunteers found innovative ways to offer smaller, online and self-guided nature-based programs for all ages and a variety of interests to allow the community to enjoy the outdoors for learning, exploration, recreation and stewardship.



Lark sparrow at Boedecker Bluff Natural Area

ADDITIONS, EASEMENTS & COMPLETING MISSING LINKS

2020 was a year of incremental but significant growth in Open Lands & Trails, with the addition of key infill parcels and easements for local and regional connections and improvements. A 58-acre conservation easement was transferred to Loveland for management consistency in the East Big Thompson River corridor. The acquisition of an inholding parcel at Skyline Natural Area closed a gap in city ownership for management and access efficiencies. Trail easements and agreements were finalized to improve the recreation trail to a paved surface between Wilson and Namaqua Avenue and to provide missing links for a paved trail connection to east Loveland via the Centerra Trail, including a new pedestrian underpass at Boyd Lake Avenue. An easement at CR11C allowed for safety and maintenance improvements at the north Boyd Lake and Front Range Trail junction.

Closing the final gap in the recreation trail at 57th Street and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad started to become a reality in 2020, after planning, design, coordination and negotiation with multiple stakeholders. Construction began in December on this last missing 0.3-mile paved trail connection from Sunset Vista parking lot to the railroad tracks, which will greatly improve safety for trail users along this narrow stretch of roadway. BNSF will construct the final segment to connect the trail over the railroad tracks in spring 2021, to complete the 20-mile loop trail around the city.



Big Thompson River Trail

EXPLORE YOUR OPEN LANDS & TRAILS

- 23 miles of paved trails
- 24 miles of soft-surface trails
- 16 open land sites open to the public

MOUNTAIN PARK IMPROVEMENTS & AMENITIES

Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park offered a popular riverside retreat in the Big Thompson Canyon for those seeking space to enjoy fishing, picnicking and relaxing with family and friends.

Improvements in 2020 leveraged grant funding to renovate the environmental education cabin with updated materials and nature displays, which were appreciated by hundreds of visitors during guided cabin tours. New sign displays throughout the site interpret the area's unique flora and fauna, geology of the canyon and history of the park, including the municipal hydropower plant and Civilian Conservation Corps-era structures. Environmental learning areas were improved and modernized with new equipment to be ready when school programs can resume. A new nature exploration activity zone features logs, boulders and stump challenges that can be enjoyed by all ages. In addition, the connection to Round Mountain was improved with a new access trail, wayfinding signage and replacement of the vault restroom at the trailhead.



Visitors enjoy renovated displays at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park

MISSION STATEMENT

To identify, preserve, protect, connect and enhance open space, natural areas, trails and wildlife habitat to promote the enjoyment of outdoor activities while advancing environmental stewardship, environmental education and outdoor experiences.



Improved access to Round Mountain Trail

VOLUNTEERS HELP MAKE IT POSSIBLE

The success of the Open Lands & Trails program would not be possible without the valued volunteers who contribute their time and talents. Although the pandemic required changes to educational programming, public outreach and stewardship projects supported by volunteers, innovative solutions and technology offered ways to stay connected with the public and continue these volunteer efforts.

Trail hosts stayed particularly busy, with volunteers helping to address exponential increases in visitation at all sites by all types of users (an estimated 70% increase in use over 2019 levels). Stewardship volunteers included raptor monitors, habitat restoration crews, cleanup groups and trail teams who contributed to ongoing efforts to survey, restore and care for natural resources and trails throughout the open lands system. Public outreach volunteers supported COVID-revised programming for small-group guided walks on popular topics including native plants, local geology and history, along with self-guided activities such as nature scavenger hunts and Critter Scene Investigations. Volunteers also helped host socially-distanced tours of the environmental education cabin for visitors to Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park.

BY THE NUMBERS

- Stewardship = 232 volunteers contributed 4,185 hours to 17 projects
- Trail Hosting = 40 volunteers gave 1,512 hours at 18 sites and trails
- Public Outreach = 17 volunteers spent 911 hours presenting 32 programs and activities attended by 551 people

Total volunteer hours given in 2020 = 6,608 hours by 289 active volunteers

STEWARDSHIP & WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Stewardship projects were completed at many sites in 2020 including restoration efforts with native vegetation, ADA and drainage improvements along trails, fencing additions, learning stations and interpretive signage at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park, trail building and repairs, water and electrical repairs on existing open land properties, additional signage, and installation of a new ADA-accessible fishing dock.

The volunteer raptor monitoring program completed its third year of data collection, surveying 24 active nests on and near open lands and trails during nesting seasons that run from January through July. These monitored nests representing eight raptor species successfully fledged 52 young birds. The popular barn owl and American kestrel nest box cameras were also back, along with a brand new osprey nest camera, allowing the community to share in the life history of these amazing birds nesting in Loveland. These video resources provide detailed data about each species, including valuable information about birds' nesting activity, habits, timing, prey and nest success.

Other stewardship projects included volunteer wetland and upland plantings, native plant demonstration garden care and maintenance, relocation of two osprey nesting platforms, elk research by the National Park Service at Meadowbrook, a bald eagle research project by Colorado Parks & Wildlife, and water quality monitoring at Boise Bend and Medina's Crossing.



We love our Open Lands & Trails volunteers



Open Lands & Trails volunteer open house



Pollinator signage at River's Edge Natural Area native plant demonstration garden



Nest cam image of adult osprey and their first egg

OPEN LANDS ADVISORY COMMISSION

The nine-member citizen advisory commission 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.

COMMISSION MEMBERS

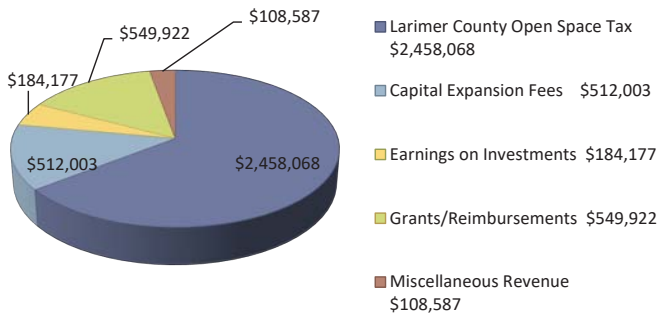
Adam Beeco	Cindy Ticer
Gale Bernhardt, <i>Chair</i>	Jean Whittaker
Jim Edmiston	William Zawacki
Michael Hinterberg	Kathi Wright, <i>City Council Liaison</i>
Ross Livingston	Rob Molloy, <i>Alternate</i>
Jim Roode, <i>Vice Chair</i>	Marilyn Hilgenberg, <i>Staff Liaison</i>



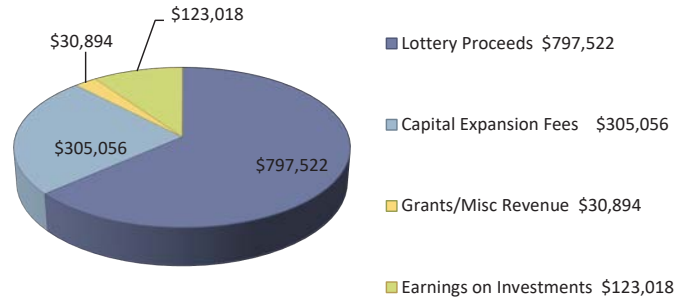
Open Lands Advisory Commission

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

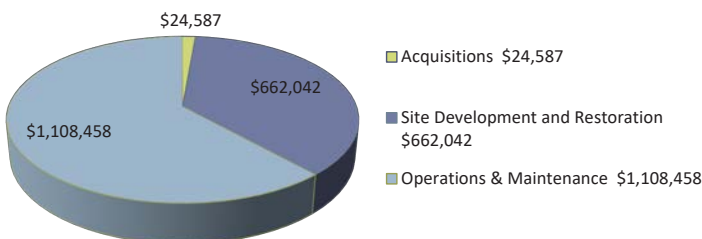
Loveland Open Lands Revenue 2020



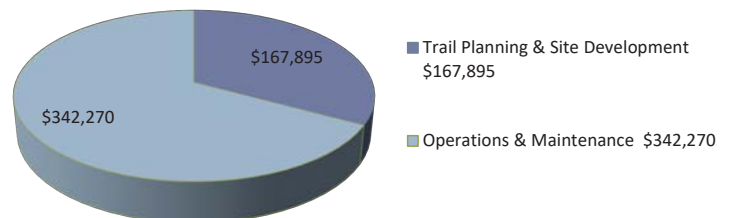
Loveland Trails Revenue 2020



Loveland Open Lands Expenditures 2020



Loveland Trails Expenditures 2020



LOVELAND OPEN LANDS & TRAILS a Division of Loveland Parks & Recreation

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