



# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT



## LOVELAND OPEN LANDS & TRAILS



Visitors enjoy the new 57th Street Recreation Trail connection at Sunset Vista Natural Area

### DAKOTA RIDGE NATURAL AREA ACQUIRED

A significant addition to Loveland’s Open Lands portfolio was made on June 25, 2021 with the purchase of a 245-acre foothills natural area known as Dakota Ridge. The acquisition was a partnership between the City of Loveland, Larimer County, Colorado Open Lands, a private donation and a grant from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO). Located along the City’s western foothills between 29th and 43rd Streets, the property will provide a link between the existing Skyline Natural Area purchased in 2015 and the recently opened Prairie Ridge Natural Area. Future trails on the site will connect to these areas as well as more than 40 miles of trails on surrounding public lands, neighborhoods in west Loveland and the City’s Recreation Trail system.

With demand for additional public access to open lands skyrocketing, Dakota Ridge will provide more recreation opportunities to help alleviate crowding on existing open spaces experiencing record visitation. Nearby development inching closer to the site is planned to include thousands of homes, and neighborhood sidewalks and trails eventually will connect Skyline and Prairie Ridge Natural Areas and provide walk-in access to residents. The purchase also conserves critical foothills habitat for wildlife and bird species, and protects scenic foothills views.

Funds for the acquisition came from an \$830,000 GOCO Resilient Communities grant, \$316,000 partnership from Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, a \$300,000 private donation, \$250,000 from the City’s Parks Capital Expansion Fees and \$1.3 million from Loveland open space funds. The money from expansion fees for parks will cover a 10-acre portion of the site that will serve as a neighborhood park and an access point to future trails on the open space. Colorado Open Lands, a non-profit land trust, and Larimer County co-hold a perpetual conservation easement on the land.

### 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.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 continued to reinforce 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 safe break from the pandemic. Loveland experienced record visitation, opened new areas for public access at Sunset Vista and Old St. Louis Natural Areas, built 1.3 miles of new soft-surface trails, completed the paved recreation trail loop around the City, continued restoration efforts on local open lands, planned new regional trail connections and completed a number of repair and improvement projects.

COVID-19 continued to limit 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.



Great blue heron at Boise Bend Natural Area

©Dan O'Donnell

## ADDITIONS, CONNECTIONS & PARTNERSHIPS

2021 was a year of significant growth in Open Lands & Trails, with the addition of the 245-acre Dakota Ridge property as well as several key infill parcels and easements for local and regional connections and expansions. A 12-acre property was conserved in partnership with the City's Stormwater Division for wildlife habitat and flood mitigation in the Big Thompson River corridor. The acquisition of inholding parcels at Meadowbrook and Skyline Natural Areas closed gaps in City ownership for management and access efficiencies. An easement was established along the Big Thompson River to improve access and connectivity for operations and maintenance at Medina's Crossing.

Closing the final gap in the recreation trail at 57th Street near Taft Avenue became a reality in 2021, after planning, design, coordination and negotiation with multiple stakeholders. Construction began in late 2020 on this last missing 0.5-mile paved trail connection from Sunset Vista Natural Area east to the existing trail, greatly improving safety for trail users along this narrow stretch of roadway and completing the 23-mile loop trail around the City. In addition, a new 1-mile soft-surface trail and picnic area were added at Sunset Vista to offer visitors more opportunities to rest and connect with nature.

At Old St. Louis Natural Area, a partnership project with the Stormwater Division replaced the outfall structure with an upgraded system that filters runoff before it enters the river and improves resiliency for storm events. In conjunction with the stormwater project, the first paved segment of the East Big Thompson Trail was constructed between St. Louis and Boise Avenues, to provide additional access to the Big Thompson River corridor. A new soft-surface trail loop offers more access options and wildlife viewing opportunities in wetland habitats. Nature play features were also added at Old St. Louis and Oxbow Natural Areas to inspire physical activity for all ages.

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Plans for local and regional trail connections continued with the completion of construction documents for a paved trail connection to east Loveland via the Centerra Trail, and the improvement of the recreation trail to a paved surface between Wilson and Namaqua Avenue. Construction of these trail segments is planned for 2022-23 with assistance from several state and federal grants.

Master plans were also key initiatives in 2021, with the Eagle Vista Management Plan and the department's Parks, Recreation & Open Lands Master Plan Update underway. Both plans included extensive public input and feedback that is critical to the development of draft and final plans to be completed in 2022.



*Newly acquired Dakota Ridge Natural Area*



*Open House for Eagle Vista Management Plan*



*New trail and stormwater outfall at Old St. Louis Natural Area*



*New interpretive signage at Prairie Ridge Natural Area*

### 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 & outdoor experiences.

### EXPLORE YOUR OPEN LANDS & TRAILS

- 29 miles of paved trails
- 30 miles of soft-surface trails
- 18 open land sites open to the public

## 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, 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 continued increases in visitation at all sites by all types of users. 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 activities on popular topics including native plants, birds, local geology, history and astronomy, along with self-guided activities such as nature scavenger hunts and wildflower walks. Trained docents also helped host socially-distanced tours of the nature cabin for visitors to Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park. School field trips returned in small numbers during fall programs, led by volunteers at renovated education stations and displays in the cabin at Viestenz-Smith. Restoration of the Louis Papa cabin historic site at Viestenz-Smith was made possible with assistance from volunteers, grants and donations. The dedication ceremony was attended by local historians, family members and other interested community members.

### BY THE NUMBERS

- Stewardship = 319 volunteers contributed 3,722 hours to 22 projects
- Trail Hosting = 35 trail hosts completed 1,109 host walks, donating 1,402 hours of their time
- Outreach & Education volunteers donated 761 hours presenting 128 programs attended by 2,679 people

**Total volunteer hours given in 2021 = 6,504 hours by 431 active volunteers**

### STEWARDSHIP & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Stewardship projects were completed at many sites in 2021 including restoration efforts with native vegetation, ADA and drainage improvements along trails, fencing and gate upgrades, interpretive features at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park, trail building and repairs, invasive species management, additional signage, and installation of nature play features.

The raptor monitoring program completed its fourth year of data collection, surveying 32 active nests on and near open lands and trails during nesting seasons that run from January through July. Volunteers monitored nests representing eight raptor species that successfully fledged 38 young birds. Live raptor nest cams once again offered real-time viewing of osprey, barn owls and kestrel nests, allowing the community to share in the life history of these amazing birds nesting in Loveland.

Other stewardship projects included volunteer cleanups and weed removal, native seed collection, relocation of an osprey nesting platform, native garden care and citizen science plant monitoring, bald eagle research by Colorado Parks & Wildlife, and water quality monitoring at Boise Bend and Medina's Crossing.



*Volunteer appreciation event at River's Edge*



*Volunteers help with trail work at Jayhawker Ponds*



*Students at new learning station at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park*



*Bald eagle at Boedecker Reservoir*

## 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 & trails purposes.



Open Lands Advisory Commission

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

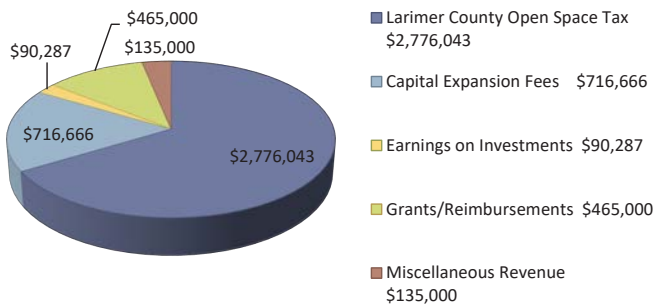
Adam Beeco, <i>Vice Chair</i>	Barb Schultz
Gale Bernhardt	Jean Whittaker
Jim Edmiston	William Zawacki, <i>Chair</i>
Michael Hinterberg	Kathi Wright, <i>City Council Liaison</i>
David LaGreca, <i>Alternate</i>	Rob Molloy, <i>City Council Alternate</i>
Jodi Radke	Marilyn Hilgenberg, <i>Staff Liaison</i>
Jim Roode	



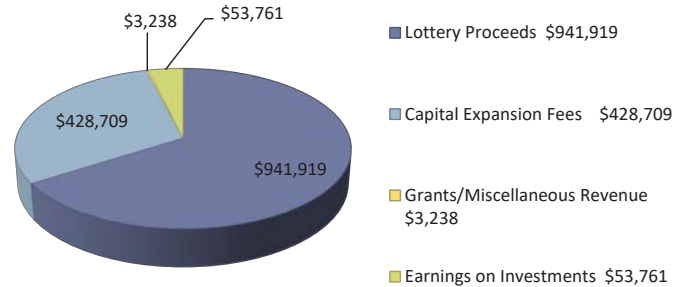
Picnic area at Sunset Vista Natural Area historic site

## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

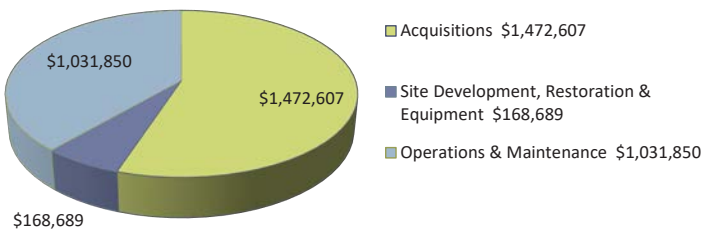
### Loveland Open Lands Revenue 2021



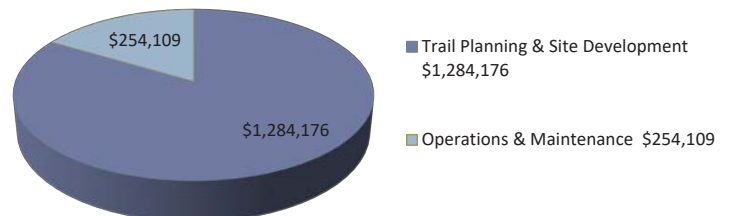
### Loveland Trails Revenue 2021



### Loveland Open Lands Expenditures 2021



### Loveland Trails Expenditures 2021



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

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