



# 2022 ANNUAL REPORT



## LOVELAND OPEN LANDS & TRAILS



*Centennial Village property acquired in September*



*New TCM open lands property along the Big Thompson River*



*Heaven's Door Ranch partnership with Larimer County and Fort Collins*

### SECURING PROPERTIES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Significant additions to Loveland's Open Lands portfolio were made in 2022 that account for an additional 1,600 acres of newly preserved lands in and around Loveland. These acquisitions conserve valuable habitat for a variety of wildlife, are critical in the long-term sustainability of the Big Thompson River corridor, promote better air and water quality, and offer the potential for more recreation opportunities to help alleviate crowding on existing open spaces experiencing record visitation.

The Centennial Village property acquired in September is a 21-acre open lands parcel located on the northwest corner of First Street and Taft Avenue, providing excellent viewsheds, wildlife habitat and a buffer adjacent to existing open lands in the Big Thompson River corridor. This property will be managed as part of Cottonwood Run Natural Area to provide additional opportunities for passive outdoor recreation and access to the Recreation Trail. Funding for the acquisition came from Open Lands Funds (\$597K).

The Martin Marietta property acquired in October is a 28.5-acre riparian natural area located off St. Louis Avenue that conserves ½ mile of Big Thompson River frontage. The property was previously owned for gravel mining operations but the site itself was never mined. The land is adjacent to King's Crossing Natural Area and provides an excellent opportunity for future trail connectivity to east Loveland utilizing City open land properties. Funding for the acquisition came from Open Lands Capital Expansion Fees (\$785K).

In November, the City successfully traded an open lands property on County Road 20E for the 48.5-acre TCM parcel along the Big Thompson River east of Boise Avenue, conserving nearly ¾ mile of river frontage and two ponds for future recreational access. The acquisition also allows for connectivity of the East Big Thompson Trail to the planned Willow Bend Natural Area and Park. As part of the trade agreement, the City retains a conservation easement on the County Road 20E property that allows for a future trailhead and regional trail corridor. There was no cash outlay for this property exchange.

Also in November, Larimer County successfully acquired the 1,547-acre Heaven's Door Ranch with partner funding from Loveland and Fort Collins. Loveland contributed \$500K toward the \$9M property, which is located west of Loveland at the gateway to the Big Thompson Canyon. This property possesses significant conservation values including diverse wildlife habitats, iconic scenic vistas, buffers to conserved lands, and future public nature-based recreation opportunities. Loveland and Fort Collins will co-hold the conservation easement on the property to assure that it is preserved, maintained and managed to protect the natural resource values. Funding for this partnership came from Open Lands Funds.

## NEW TRAILS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Trails consistently rank high in community outreach and citizens regularly voice their desire for additional trail access. In 2022, volunteers from Colorado Addicted Trailbuilders Society (CATS) were able to complete a new 0.3-mile trail along the Big Thompson River at Old St. Louis Natural Area allowing for new river access. CATS also began installing new fishing access points at River's Edge Natural Area, as a matching component for a CPW Fishing is Fun grant that will help fund an ADA fishing dock at Bass Pond.

At Oxbow Natural Area, a major improvement project was completed to provide safe parking and trail access, fencing, bike racks, signage, drainage and restroom facilities. A trail connection to Hwy 34 was also installed to connect to the Recreation Trail at Oxbow. A GOCO Resilient Communities Grant helped fund these much-needed improvements at the busy Oxbow trailhead.

In addition, final design was completed on the Centerra Trail and staff worked with City of Greeley and Greeley-Loveland Irrigation Company to secure easements for trail construction that began in fall 2022. This new 1.3-mile paved trail leg between Denver and Boyd Lake Avenues will give users the ability to connect from Centerra trails to the Loveland Recreation Trail and regional trail opportunities. Funding for this project was provided by transportation grants and Trail Capital Expansion Fees.

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Much of 2022 was dedicated to planning of future trails in the Loveland area that will allow for connections along the east Big Thompson River to I-25 and Johnstown, the Colorado Front Range Trail connecting Loveland and Berthoud, and trails in northwest Loveland from Skyline Natural Area to Prairie Ridge Natural Area. Planning and securing these trail corridors is critical to the future success of an inter-connected trail system, but requires a great deal of design and coordination effort before the trail can be constructed.

The department also made significant strides on the design of a paved trail connection along the Barnes Ditch between Wilson and Namaqua Avenues. This section of trail is currently soft-surface, but staff is moving forward with land negotiations and design to pave this final segment of the Loveland Loop Trail.

Other planning initiatives included public outreach for Willow Bend Natural Area and Park, to gain insight into the community's desires for the site of the City's first fully accessible park, playground, nature play area, learning zones and a trailhead for the planned east Big Thompson River Trail.

Staff also began the process to fold the Dakota Ridge Natural Area site into the Skyline management plan, assessing existing conditions and resources, potential trail alignments and public access connections. This foothills area will provide new opportunities for nature-based recreation in west Loveland and trails will eventually connect north to Prairie Ridge Natural Area at 57th Street and east into nearby neighborhoods.



*Improvements at Oxbow Natural Area*



*Construction of Centerra Trail*



*Foothills view at Dakota Ridge Natural Area*



*Willow Bend public meeting*

## 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.

## EXPLORE YOUR OPEN LANDS & TRAILS

- 31 miles of paved trails
- 28 miles of soft-surface trails
- 18 open land sites open to the public

## VOLUNTEERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Loveland engages hundreds of dedicated volunteers in education, stewardship, outreach and support to help connect citizens with nature throughout the community. As the pandemic waned and life slowly began to return to normal, most activities ramped back up and eventually exceeded pre-COVID levels of participation and attendance. **Education volunteers** inspired local children to learn about wildlife, plants and ecosystems as they returned to field trip programs in record numbers at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park, River's Edge Natural Area and Namaqua Park. Newly-trained and veteran trail host volunteers continued to be the "eyes and ears" of the program, greeting literally thousands of open lands visitors and trail users, answering questions, encouraging compliance with regulations and reporting site use and maintenance issues, to help staff assess and address resource needs across the system. **Stewardship volunteers** helped restore habitat, build and maintain trails, remove weeds, monitor wildlife, document native plants and pollinators, install fishing access points and clean up natural areas, to improve conditions for both humans and wildlife co-existing on these lands. **Outreach volunteers** helped spread the open lands and trails message, inspire stewardship, encourage volunteerism and celebrate nature all around us, during interpretive guided walks, public programs and community events such as Celebrate Loveland Trails Day, Trek the Thompson, Dog Day of Summer, Earth Day, Children's Day, Everybody Bike Day and Nature Cabin Open House days. Comprehensive training is offered for environmental educators, trail hosts, Certified Interpretive Guides (CIG) and stewardship volunteers, scheduled through the City's Offero system online.

### BY THE NUMBERS

- Environmental Education = 33 volunteers donated 798 hours, presenting 49 programs attended by 1,894 adults and children
- Stewardship = 367 volunteers contributed 4,356 hours to 32 projects
- Community Outreach = 56 volunteers donated 680 hours during 134 events that reached 3,956 participants
- Trail Hosting = 46 trail hosts completed 1,973 visits, donating 1,923 hours of their time and engaging 4,572 visitors
- Administrative & Program Support = 19 volunteers contributed 417 hours in 19 projects

**Total volunteer hours given in 2022 = 8,174 hours by 521 active volunteers**

### STEWARDSHIP & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Stewardship to maintain and improve resources at Open Lands & Trails is a key initiative and ongoing focus for the division. Projects were completed at many sites in 2022 including restoration efforts with native vegetation, bridge repairs, ADA and drainage improvements along trails, invasive species management, trail building and repairs, parking lot improvements, additional wayfinding & interpretive signage, additional benches, a new spotting scope at Old St. Louis, new fishing input areas at River's Edge Natural Area, installation of nature play features and native plant garden care. Staff and volunteers take great pride in providing and maintaining quality outdoor experiences and facilities for the community.

### CURRENT CHALLENGES

Dealing with illegal encampments has been an ongoing challenge on Loveland's open lands and trails for the last three years, but major progress occurred in 2022 when Loveland City Council approved an emergency unauthorized encampment ban to reduce the risk of fire, improve public safety and preserve public and private property. As a result of the comprehensive efforts of the City, there are additional resources to help the homeless, and more than one hundred camp sites have been cleaned up from Loveland's open lands, trails and park sites.



*Education volunteer at a Critter Scene Investigation*



*Children's Day outreach event*



*Trail bridge plank replacement*



*New fishing access at River's Edge Natural Area by CATS*

## 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 at Martin Marietta Natural Area

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

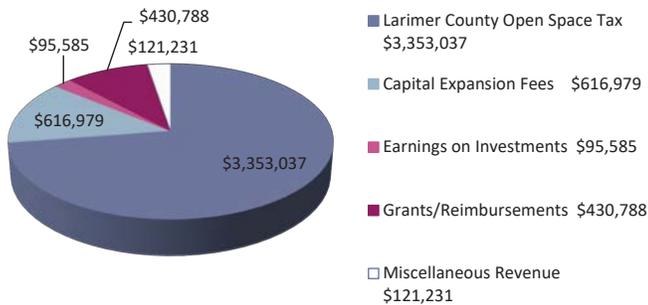
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|-------------------------------|--|
| Adam Beeco, <i>Vice Chair</i> | Barb Schultz                             |
| Gale Bernhardt                | Jean Whittaker                           |
| Jim Edmiston                  | William Zawacki, <i>Chair</i>            |
| Michael Hinterberg            | Jacki Marsh, <i>City Council Liaison</i> |
| David LaGreca                 | Jon Mallo, <i>Alternate Liaison</i>      |
| Jim Roode                     | Marilyn Hilgenberg, <i>Staff Liaison</i> |



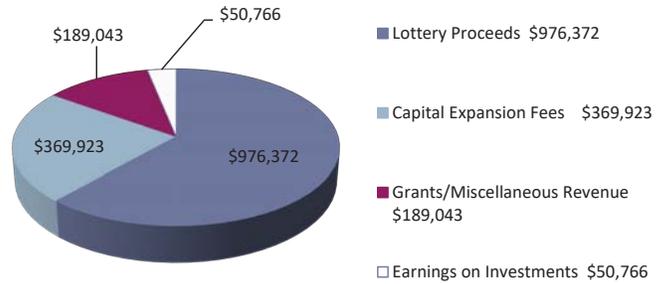
River's Edge Natural Area sunset

## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

### Loveland Open Lands Revenue 2022



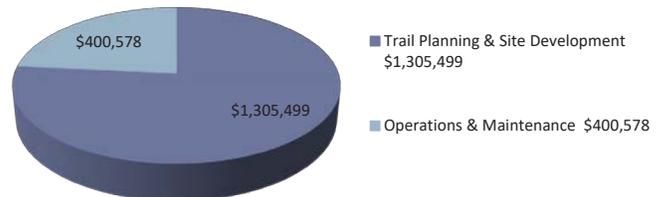
### Loveland Trails Revenue 2022



### Loveland Open Lands Expenditures 2022



### Loveland Trails Expenditures 2022



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

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