Open Lands Annual Report 2012

City of Loveland

River's Edge Natural Area Planned for Public Access

The newest addition to Loveland's Open Lands Program is *River's Edge Natural Area*, an urban open space along the Big Thompson River corridor in central Loveland. A combination of Open Space tax dollars, Capital Expansion Fees (CEFs), and grants made the acquisition, planning, and development of River's Edge possible. Acquired from HP/Agilent in 2011, the 121-acre site had been a private recreation area for employees and their guests. In 2012, Open Lands contracted with a local design consultant to develop a Master Plan and design for public use of the property. Planned recreational opportunities include hiking, bicycling, fishing, wildlife viewing, and environmental education. Numerous opportunities for public input during planning and design engaged citizens, neighbors, stakeholders, and outside agencies in the process. Public meetings, online and mail-in responses provided feedback regarding amenities, uses, facilities, access, and design, as well as the name River's Edge, which was selected from over 200 submissions.

The property is adjacent to *Jayhawker Ponds* and a new bridge over Ryan Gulch will connect the two sites, for a combined 155-acre natural area with 5 ponds. Two miles of new trails throughout the site will provide ample opportunities for bird watching and wildlife viewing in a natural setting, as well as provide connections to the existing Recreation Trail to the north. Trails will lead to fishing and float tube access points on 3 ponds, an ADA-accessible fishing dock on Dragonfly Pond, and a dock on Bass Pond. Funding for fishing access was leveraged with a $90,000 *Fishing is Fun* grant awarded by Colorado Parks & Wildlife. A new boardwalk that incorporates natural wetland filtration will provide a unique up-close experience at the water's edge of Bass Pond. Wetland creation and shoreline improvement on the ponds is a significant project focus. City staff and volunteer crews have removed hundreds of invasive Russian olive trees, and wetland enhancement establishing native species is underway, creating beneficial habitat for fish, waterfowl, songbirds, and mammals.

The Loveland Open Lands Program was successfully awarded a Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant for $18,872 to fund the *Larimer County Youth Corps*, providing installation of new boundary fencing. Wildlife-friendly split-rail fencing and walk-through access points will replace the existing chain link fencing along West 1st Street and the Recreation Trail. The Open Lands Program will be recruiting Volunteer Trail Hosts to provide stewardship of the site and to assist and educate visitors. The Environmental Education Program is developing new curriculum specifically for River's Edge, to be offered to school groups, organizations and individuals. Providing such diverse recreation close to downtown, along with the extensive habitat restoration efforts underway, River's Edge Natural Area will be the crown jewel of the Loveland Open Lands Program. The much-anticipated opening of River's Edge is planned for September 28, 2013.

Updated information can be found at: www.CityofLoveland.org/RiversEdge.

Loveland High School volunteers plant habitat for wildlife

Valuable Volunteers

The Open Lands Program benefited from a wide range of volunteer efforts in 2012, including Environmental Education, Trail Hosts, Exotic Species Elimination, and Native Revegetation. An enthusiastic group of Environmental Education volunteers helped teach the Wildlife Program at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park, contributing more than 460 hours of time. Several volunteers have been with the program for more than 10 years! Open Lands Trail Host volunteers provided a valuable presence at Loveland Natural Areas, assisting and educating visitors while also reporting site conditions, usage statistics, and wildlife observations back to staff. River's Edge Natural Area will be added to the list of Trail Host volunteer opportunities offered in 2013. Numerous Front Range Community College faculty members and students removed hundreds of invasive Russian olive trees from River's Edge as part of the Exotic Species Elimination Project. Trees were tagged, mapped, cut, and treated to reduce future re-growth. The information collected is part of an ongoing research study evaluating non-native species control methods. This group volunteers to remove invasive species at various natural area sites throughout Loveland each year. National Honor Society students from Loveland High School volunteered to help plant native trees and shrubs at River's Edge as part of Loveland's Arbor Day celebration in April. The plantings will provide additional buffers and improved habitat for wildlife using the Big Thompson River corridor for migration, nesting, food, and shelter. A sincere THANK YOU to all of our valuable volunteers – we couldn't do it without you!

Environmental Education

Loveland's Environmental Education Program served nearly 1,200 area students in 2012, including the Wildlife Program at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park and the Colorado Parks & Wildlife Program at Morey Wildlife Reserve. Students from 18 different schools attended the Viestenz-Smith program, where they learned about Colorado life zones, native vegetation, wildlife classification and management, and watersheds, while rotating through interactive learning stations and a foothills hike. This full-day field trip is offered primarily to 4th & 5th grade classes during the spring & fall seasons.

Colorado Parks & Wildlife facilitates a program for 3rd graders at Morey Wildlife Reserve, providing training and materials for teachers to lead their classes with the help of volunteers utilizing curriculum guides from Project WILD, Project Learning Tree, and local resources. Topics covered at Morey include wetland and pond habitats, wildlife adaptations, and invertebrates, corresponding to 3rd grade science curriculum standards.

A new environmental education program for River's Edge Natural Area is currently under development. Potential plans include volunteer-guided and teacher-led programs with supporting materials and lesson plans available for checkout.

Bighorn Sheep at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park

History

In 1995, Larimer County voters passed the Help Preserve Open Spaces (HPOS) initiative, approving a quarter-cent sales and use tax to protect open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, regional parks and trails. HPOS revenues provide the majority of the Loveland Open Lands Program funding. In 1996, the Loveland Open Lands Plan was adopted, giving City staff direction to form an Open Lands Advisory Commission. Larimer County voters extended the open space sales tax in 1999, to sunset in 2018. Loveland Open Lands resources were augmented in 2002 with the City's adoption of an Open Lands Capital Expansion Fee (CEF). This CEF of $824 for each new dwelling unit provides additional funding for open lands capital expenditures, based on residential building activity.

Looking To The Future

Open Lands staffing levels were increased in 2012, with the addition of a new Open Lands Manager position to continue to expand Loveland's portfolio with additional acquisitions and new opportunities for public access to natural areas and open lands in the community. Rob Burdine has been actively planning for the growth of Loveland's program, developing a specific and achievable Capital Plan for use of projected revenues from the Open Space sales tax, Capital Expansion Fees, and other grants and donations.

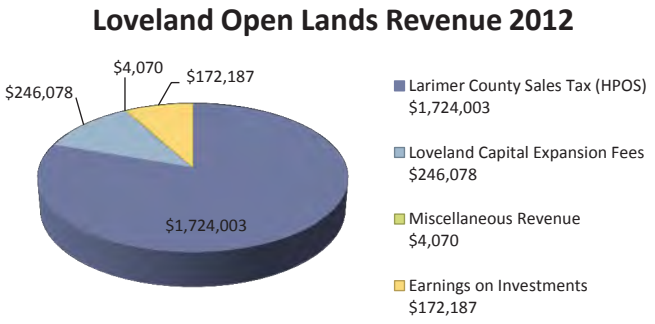
Utilizing the results of the regional open space study, *Our Lands – Our Future*, and other citizen, staff, commission and stakeholder input, the 2003 City of Loveland *Open Lands Plan* will be updated in 2013 as a component of the *Parks & Recreation Master Plan*.

Priority open lands projects have been identified for 2013-2018, including the acquisition and development of more than 1,400 acres at a total cost of more than $18 million. The Loveland Open Lands Program is poised to grow, with funds available to achieve these goals and an optimistic outlook for the future.

Open Lands	Acres	Acquisition Value $	Loveland's Funds $	Donation $	Partnerships	Public Access/ Management
Boyd Lake/Greeley Loveland Irr.	25	302,040	13,520		GOCO, State Parks	Yes/State Park
Boyd Lake North-Hirsch	40	554,064	277,032		State Parks	Yes/State Park
Boyd Lake South-Hirsch	42	558,570	279,285		State Parks	Yes/State Park
Brose Property	36	300,000	300,000		N/A	Future/Loveland
CTM Place	1	100,000		100,000	N/A	Yes/Loveland
Centennial Natural Area	1	150,000		150,000	N/A	No/Loveland
Dakota Ridge CE	112	1,885,000		1,885,000	Legacy Land Trust	Future Trail/Owner
Devil's Backbone-Hunter	248	833,000	75,000		Larimer County, Stryker Short	Yes/County
Devil's Backbone-Wild	140	472,500	75,000		Larimer County	Yes/County
Dunkin CE	52	294,635	104,635	100,000	Larimer County, Berthoud	Future Trail/ Owner
Hermit Park Open Space	1,362	8,700,000	420,000	2,200,000	Larimer County, Estes Valley Land Trust, GOCO, Town of Estes Park	Yes/County
Heron Lakes	43	1,400,000	50,000		Berthoud, Larimer County, GOCO	Future/Berthoud
Hidden Valley 1st	42	395,765	395,765		N/A	Yes/County
Hidden Valley 2nd	178	1,688,235	1,479,835		Larimer County	No/County
Hopkins CE	60	339,700	188,100	130,700	Larimer County	No/Owner
Horseshoe - Coulson CE	5	296,240		296,240	N/A	No/Owner
Koppes CE	37	378,981	378,981		N/A	Future Trail/ Owner
Lazy J Bar S CE Parcel 1	100	506,250	130,244	160,006	GOCO, Larimer County, Berthoud	No/Owner
Lazy J Bar S CE Parcel 2	191	1,112,586	678,586	100,000	GOCO, Larimer County, Berthoud	No/Owner
Lazy J Bar S CE Parcel 3	35	70,847	70,847		N/A	No/Owner
Long View Farm	479	2,464,507	410,669		GOCO, Larimer County, Fort Collins	Future Trail/ County
Meadowbrook Natural Area	26	600,000		600,000	N/A	Yes/Loveland
Morey Wildlife Reserve	28	762,142	54,142	533,000	GOCO Legacy	Yes/Loveland
Namaqua Natural Area	6	102,078	2,078		GOCO Legacy	Yes/Loveland
Prairie Ridge	785	3,139,836	1,892,829		GOCO, Larimer County, Fort Collins	Future Trail/Loveland
River's Edge Natural Area	121	889,000	889,000		N/A	Opening 2013/Loveland
Sylvan Dale Ranch CEs	766	1,702,980	140,220	546,750	GOCO Legacy, Larimer County	No/Owner
Walden West CE	31	78,000		78,000	N/A	No/Owner
Waterford Place CE	10	150,000		150,000	N/A	Future Trail/Owner
Wild Property	26	726,744	654,070	72,674	N/A	Future/Loveland
Totals	5,028	$30,953,700	$8,959,838	$7,180,370	$14,891,492	

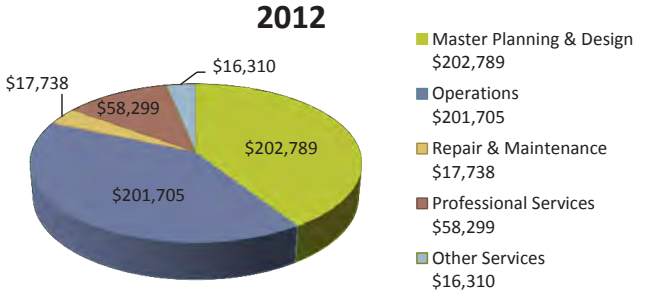
Open Lands Revenue - $2,146,338

Funding for Open Lands is received from several sources, the largest of which is the Larimer County Help Preserve Open Space (HPOS) Sales Tax, which provided a total of $1,724,003 in 2012. The City of Loveland Open Lands Capital Expansion Fee (CEF) provided $246,078 in 2012, an increase of $41,000 over 2011. Open Lands CEFs may be used for capital expenditures to purchase open space and capital improvements on open space properties, to continue to fulfill the priorities outlined in the 2003 *Open Lands Plan*. The Open Lands Division received $4,070 in miscellaneous revenue in 2012, including farm lease income from Prairie Ridge and Boyd Lake North and South agricultural properties. Earnings on investments totaled $172,187 in 2012, a decrease from $382,254 in 2011.



Open Lands Expenditures - $496,841

The River's Edge Natural Area Project was the focus of 2012. Logan Simpson Design of Fort Collins was contracted to complete the master plan and design, at a cost of $202,789. Expenditures for Operations totaled $201,705, and Repair & Maintenance costs were $17,738. Expenditures for Professional Services were $58,299, including a $13,000 partnership contribution for the *Our Lands - Our Future* regional study. There were no expenditures for land or water purchases in 2012; however, several properties were under negotiation throughout the year. The 2013 Capital Plan calls for the purchase of 4 properties with a total budget of $2.3M.



From the Chairperson of the Open Lands Advisory Commission

In my travels around the globe, I am often reminded of how fortunate we are to live in a city and county where the citizens value open space. It doesn't take long for concrete, asphalt and buildings to consume an urban area that is popular. It does take foresight, planning and investment dollars to preserve the land that makes Loveland such a great place to live.

The majority of the dollars that support Loveland Open Lands come from a quarter-cent sales tax. Back in November of 1995, the citizens of Larimer County voted overwhelmingly to support this tax to be used to protect open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, regional parks and trails. You spoke up and said that open space is important to you.

The Open Lands Advisory Commission (OLAC) members take your input seriously. We constantly refer back to the data from your participation in the regional open space study, Our Lands – Our Future. We use that information, in addition to the Open Lands Plan, to advise staff on projects. You can find links to the regional study and the Open Lands Plan on the Open Lands section of the City website.

Within the past year, the addition of Rob Burdine and Bill Wildenberg to the Open Lands staff has been of great value. Their expertise and skills have had a significant, positive impact to the program. The relatively small staff of Rob, Bill, Debbie Eley and Brian Hayes has carried a big workload to get River's Edge Natural Area open to all of us. When you see the result, I think you will agree that their work is much appreciated.

As OLAC looks to the future, we enthusiastically provide input regarding properties that provide Loveland citizens with open lands that have been deemed important. We look for opportunities to partner with Larimer County and other municipalities to provide open space views, wildlife habitats and outdoor recreation opportunities. Our goal is to create an open lands legacy for current and future citizens of Loveland.
OLAC encourages you to get out and enjoy your open lands.

Gale Bernhardt, Chairperson, Open Lands Advisory Commission

Saw-whet Owl *photo by Chuck Hundertmark*

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:
Lori Bell, Vice Chair
Gale Bernhardt, Chair
Rick Brent
Andy Hawbaker
Ross Livingston
M. Stephen McMillan
Ted Mioduski
Darren Pape
William Zawacki

Rob Burdine, Staff Liaison
Hugh McKean, City Council Liaison
Kerri Rollins, Larimer Co. Liaison

Our Lands - Our Future Regional Open Space Study

In preparation for updating the 2003 Open Lands Plan, Loveland partnered in *Our Lands – Our Future*, a collaborative regional open space study. Larimer County and all of its municipalities joined together to evaluate the region's land conservation and nature-based recreation programs, to help shape the vision and planning for the region's critical landscapes and outdoor recreation opportunities. The study assessed citizens' uses, needs and preferences related to recreation, stewardship and conservation of public lands and will help guide how future open space and natural area tax dollars are spent. The project included public surveys and outreach, analysis of open space acquisition and management costs, and a Geographic Information System (GIS) model available online (http://tplgis.org/OurLands-OurFuture/)

Preliminary results of the study indicate a preference for an "equal balance" in prioritization toward preservation of open lands and public access for outdoor recreation opportunities. Loveland residents favored preservation of neighborhood natural areas, ecologically sensitive lands, and regional trail corridors.

Our Lands – Our Future will generate a regional framework for strategic decision-making that reflects each community's priorities and needs. The study will be completed in 2013 and results will be used for integrating Loveland's *Open Lands Plan* into the update of the *Parks & Recreation Master Plan*.

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.