



2024 ANNUAL REPORT



LOVELAND OPEN LANDS & TRAILS



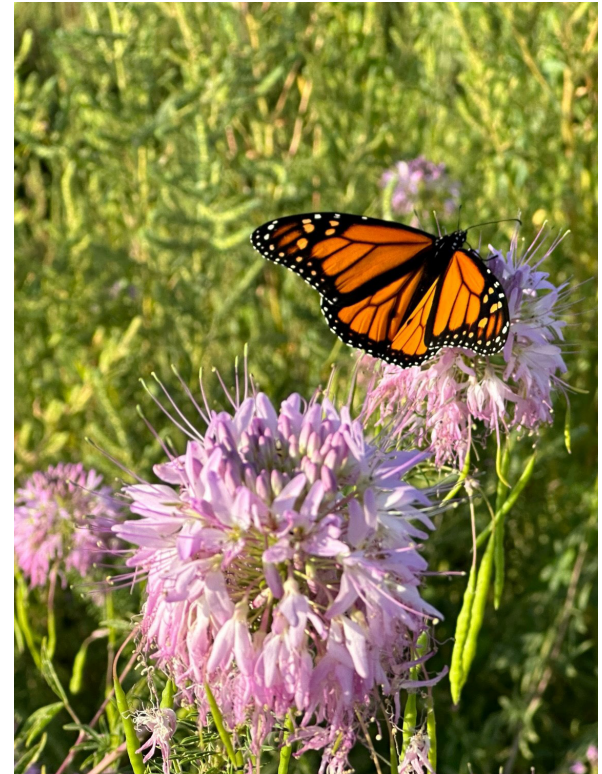
Prairie Ridge Natural Area

SECURING PROPERTIES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The Open Lands & Trails Division aims to protect priority open lands to benefit the community and conserve valuable habitat. A 142-acre open space buffer was acquired adjacent to Prairie Ridge, increasing the northwestern foothills natural area to 926 acres. The transaction also secured an easement to provide additional off-street public access connecting to the City's trail system in the future. The project preserves productive agricultural land and beneficial habitat for birds, mammals and other wildlife. The acquisition utilized funds from Loveland's share of the Larimer County Open Space Tax, partner funding from City of Fort Collins, Larimer County, High Plains Environmental Center, a private donor, and a \$1.1 million Land Acquisition grant from Great Outdoors Colorado.

Two key inholding parcels were also acquired as additions to existing natural areas. A 0.77-acre addition to East Big Thompson Natural Area and a 0.32-acre addition to Skyline Natural Area will both improve access and future management of these two properties.

Loveland continued to work with Fort Collins and Larimer County on stewardship of the Canyon Edge Natural Area (formerly known as the Heaven's Door Ranch property), which was acquired in late 2022. Under an Intergovernmental Agreement established by Loveland and Fort Collins, the cities collaborated as co-holders of the Conservation Easement to develop a Baseline Inventory Report for the 1,547-acre property located at the gateway to the Big Thompson Canyon, assuring the land is planned and managed to protect its current condition in perpetuity.



Rocky Mountain beeplant with Monarch butterfly

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

- 34.9 miles of paved trails
- 28.5 miles of soft-surface trails
- 18 open land sites open to the public

NEW TRAILS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Loveland citizens highly value the City's trail systems, including paved and soft-surface trails throughout the community. Trails offer a variety of user experiences and transportation options for regional connections. Community engagement through the Department's Master Plan Update showed that the community amenity identified most often by residents is a need for more trails, pathways and bike routes (61%). Planning trails in the Loveland area and regional connections allows for more opportunities for public access to Loveland's outdoor spaces. As part of the initiative to provide more access, staff constructed new soft-surface trails at both Cottonwood Run and Wild Natural Areas.

In addition, significant progress was made on the construction of Willow Bend Natural Area and a new 1.1-mile segment of the East Big Thompson Trail known as the Boise to Willow Bend Trail. Willow Bend Park, Natural Area and Trail are planned for opening in summer 2025. The new concrete trail segment will provide safe, off-street access along the Big Thompson River corridor, connecting the existing paved trail at Old St. Louis Natural Area to Willow Bend. Funding for this trail project primarily came from state and regional transportation grants totaling \$2,042,000, helping to cover the cost of design and construction. The balance of funding was provided by Loveland's share of Colorado Lottery dollars and the city's Trails Capital Expansion Fees.

The project to pave the final segment of the Loveland Loop Trail began in fall 2024, utilizing grant funding from the Transportation Alternatives Program and Loveland's Conservation Trust Fund dollars. This project will greatly improve user safety and trail sustainability along the 1-mile stretch between Wilson and Namaqua Avenue and is planned to re-open in early 2025.

Other site improvements included a new accessible fishing dock on Bass Pond at River's Edge, with funding from a Colorado Parks & Wildlife Fishing is Fun grant, adding a much-needed amenity to increase angler access. Concrete repairs on paved trails and the installation of new benches improved ADA accessibility throughout the system.

STEWARDSHIP & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Stewardship to maintain and improve resources at open lands and trails is a high priority for the Division, to manage lands sustainably, restore valuable wildlife habitat, and enrich visitor experiences. Partnerships with other local agencies and organizations improved efficiencies, utilized best management practices and offered engaging volunteer opportunities.

Funding from a Great Outdoors Colorado Stewardship Impact grant provided the opportunity to partner with Wildlands Restoration Volunteers and High Plains Environmental Center to host volunteer projects and promote community stewardship of natural areas. Projects included seed collections and greenhouse propagation of native plants for habitat restoration, invasive weed control, river clean-ups, and barbed-wire fence removal, all of which improve habitat for wildlife and pollinators. Other resource projects throughout the community included trail improvements, additional wayfinding and interpretive signage and vegetation management. Staff and volunteers take great pride in providing and maintaining quality outdoor experiences and amenities for the community.



New Cottonwood Run Nature Trail



Accessible fishing dock at Bass Pond at River's Edge



Juvenile Kestrel being fitted with identifying leg band



Habitat restoration project at Boise Bend Natural Area

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Staff was dedicated to planning for development of natural areas and trails, including Eagle Vista Natural Area in southwest Loveland, Dakota Ridge/Skyline in the foothills west of town and the east Big Thompson River corridor. A key component in these planning efforts is balancing conservation and recreation, to preserve and enhance resource values while providing for sustainable public access and trail connections. At Eagle Vista, the management plan was approved, laying the groundwork for a new regional trail between Loveland and Berthoud to be known as the South Front Range Trail. Designs have been developed for the project's first trail segment, between County Road 14 and County Road 16, including a key connection to the Town of Berthoud's trail network to the south. Design is underway for the Dakota Ridge/Skyline Natural Area, spanning 450 acres along the first ridge of Loveland's west side foothills. The combined natural area stretches from Hwy 34 to 43rd Street and will be accessed by parking areas and trailheads to be constructed at the north and south ends of the site. Construction will begin in 2025 on a five-mile natural-surface trail system, including hiking, mountain biking and multi-use trails across a variety of ecosystems with expansive views of the great plains to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west. The project will be funded by city Capital Expansion Fees and county Open Lands sales tax revenues.

Loveland also partnered with Larimer County to plan and design new access to Wild Natural Area, in conjunction with a county transportation project to install a new traffic signal at Hwy 34 and Glade Road. Construction of both projects is scheduled to be complete in early 2025.

Staff actively collaborated on Larimer County's Chimney Hollow Open Space Management Plan, the Hwy 402 Flood Mitigation Feasibility Project and the Hwy 287 Bridge Project, ensuring that future site developments balance conservation with new recreational opportunities.

VOLUNTEERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Open Lands & Trails Division offers a wide variety of opportunities for volunteers to engage in meaningful activities and share their love of nature with people of all ages. Volunteers are vital to the success of the Division, contributing 8,791 hours through education, outreach, stewardship and monitoring efforts. Training is offered throughout the year for volunteers to support environmental education programs, host visitors to the Nature Cabin and local trails, promote Open Lands & Trails at outreach events, monitor raptor nest activity and implement habitat enhancement projects.

Education volunteers inspired local school children to learn about wildlife, plants, ecosystems and local history during field trip programs at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park, River's Edge Natural Area and Namaqua Park.

Trail Hosts are the eyes and ears of Open Lands & Trails, greeting visitors, answering questions, encouraging compliance with regulations and reporting site use and maintenance concerns.

Nature Cabin Docents hosted visitors from around the world at the historic Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park cabin to share information about wildlife found in Colorado.

Stewardship volunteers helped restore habitat, remove weeds, monitor nesting raptors, maintain trails, create and care for pollinator habitat and clean up natural areas.

Outreach volunteers connected with the community during interpretive walks, public programs and special events, including Loveland Bike & Trails Day, Trek the Thompson, Dog Day of Summer and Everybody Bike Day.



Big Thompson River through Wild Natural Area



Native plant greenhouse project



Nature walk with Certified Interpretive Guide

BY THE NUMBERS

- Environmental Education = 42 volunteers donated 1,083 hours, presenting 55 programs attended by 1,474 adults and children
 - Stewardship = 277 volunteers contributed 4,836 hours
 - Community Outreach = 136 volunteers donated 954 hours during 77 programs that reached 1,677 participants
 - Administrative & Program Support = 39 volunteers contributed 481 hours in 15 projects
 - Trail Hosts = 32 volunteers completed 1,144 visits & counted 20,203 visitors at 18 different open lands & trails, donating 1,454 hours
 - Nature Cabin = 11 docents hosted 93 Open House days with 4,641 visitors to the VSMP Nature Cabin, donating 549 hours
- Total Volunteer Hours = 8,791 hours by 628 active volunteers**

OPEN LANDS & TRAILS 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	Andy McRoberts
Gale Bernhardt, <i>Vice Chair</i>	Jim Roode
Jim Edmiston	Andrew Snow
Michael Hinterberg, <i>Chair</i>	Jacki Marsh, <i>City Council Liaison</i>
Scott James	Laura Light-Kovacs, <i>Alternate Liaison</i>
David LaGreca	Daylan Figgs, <i>Larimer County Liaison</i>



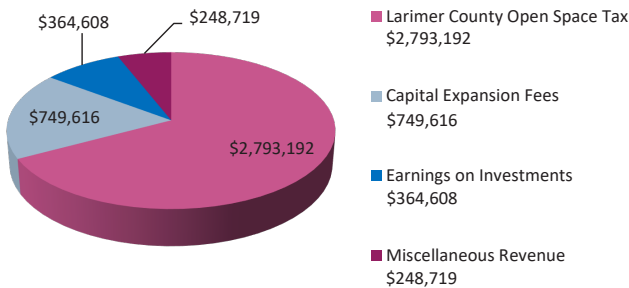
Open Lands & Trails Advisory Commission



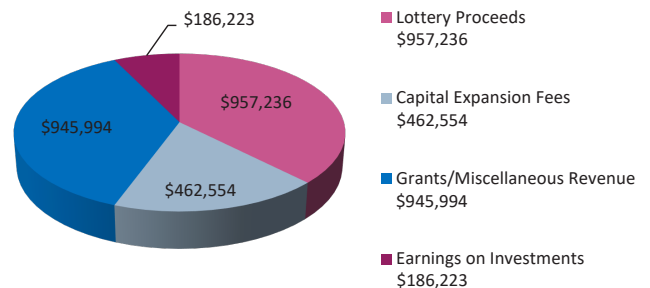
Great Blue Heron at River's Edge Natural Area

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

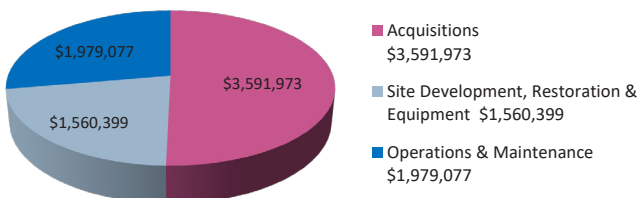
Loveland Open Lands Revenue 2024



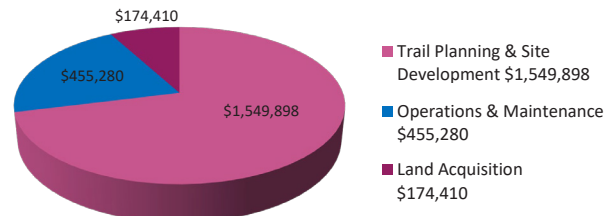
Loveland Trails Revenue 2024



Loveland Open Lands Expenditures 2024



Loveland Trails Expenditures 2024



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

500 E. Third St., Suite 200 | Loveland, CO 80537
970.962.2727 | OpenLands@CityofLoveland.org



lovgov.org/OpenLands