

2014

Larimer County

Natural Resources

ANNUAL REPORT



Visitor Services | Open Lands | Weeds | Forestry





Thank You

To Our Citizen Advisory Boards

Parks Advisory Board: Top

Back: David Hattis, Steve Ambrose, Gary Buffington*, Ron Kainer, Mark Caughlan*, Chris Klaas; Front: Dan Rieves*, Rob Harris, Stephanie Van Dyken, Frank Gillespie, Mark DeGregorio, John Gaffney; Not pictured: Russell Fruit (Chair), Deborah Shulman, John Tipton

Land Stewardship Board: Middle

Left to right: Gary Buffington*, Tim D'Amato*, Charles Miller, Mike Mason, Ken Mathias, Ernie Marx, Meegan Flenniken*, Carmen Weston, Vic Day(resigned), Bob Zimdahl (resigned), and Dave Lentz*.

Open Lands Advisory Board: Bottom

Back: Gary Buffington*, Kerri Rollins*, Ward Nelson, Suzan Fritchel, Gerry Horak, Paul Alaback; Middle: Trudi Haines, Nancy Wallace, Mary Banken, Carl Sorrentino, Commissioner Tom Donnelly; Front: Travis Rollins*, Alex Castino*, Sandy Werkmeister*, Meegan Flenniken*, Zac Wiebe*, Charlie Johnson*; Not pictured: Peter Kast (chair), Ladonna Lee, Hugh McKean

*Staff

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Photos - Cover:
Brendan Bombaci,
Top: Harry Strharsky

We Heard You!

Dear Larimer County visitors and citizens,

During the November 2014 elections, we heard a resounding 82% of you say YES to your continued sales tax support of open spaces, parks, agriculture, rivers and trails. Wow, a historic number of voters support what has happened in the past 18 years with your ¼-cent sales tax dollars. Through collaboration, partnerships and citizen participation we have accomplished so much together.

We certainly understand with this support comes responsibility and accountability for the future of how we manage these special places and programs in Larimer County. We promise to continue to listen to your input, provide safe and adventurous recreation opportunities and practice excellent conservation of these lands we all truly love.

Larimer County Natural Resources is fortunate to have three awesome Citizen Advisory Boards that guide our programs, raising the bar each step of the way. Thank you so much for your input and inspiration.

Finally, a huge thank you to our Board of County Commissioners for their support this year, as well as their continued support of our efforts with our open spaces, parks and the stewardship of our special places in Larimer County.

Go Hike an Open Space Today!

Gary Buffington

Director, Department of Natural Resources



Photos - Top: Charlie Johnson Middle:
Casey Cisneros Bottom: Charlie Johnson



The overwhelming community support of the Help Preserve Open Spaces funding this year was astounding. We heard you, and are excited to continue this important work.

-Tom Donnelly, County Commissioner, District 3



Supporting this funding source for parks and open spaces in the Larimer County community is a no-brainer. These areas are an integral part of what makes living here so special.

-Steve Johnson, County Commissioner, District 2



Preserving Open Space for the Next 25 Years

Since 1996 Larimer County residents have enjoyed the benefits of the ¼-cent Help Preserve Open Spaces (HPOS) sales and use tax, a ballot measure initiated by citizens in 1995 to create a fund for the purpose of preserving open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, parks, and trails.

In 1999 the citizens extended the end of the tax from 2003 to 2018. Since its inception two decades ago, Larimer County has matured into a vibrant and robust open space program that is often used as a model around the state. Through the proceeds of HPOS, County residents now enjoy over 25,000 acres of publicly accessible land in addition to 8,000 acres of conservation easements. Additional lands in the County have been protected by municipalities and other partners using HPOS funds. This initial tax structure has worked well for the County and its residents and allowed the County to acquire numerous land and recreational assets such as the Devil's Backbone, Red Mountain and Hermit Park open spaces.

Several groups worked together to discuss and ascertain needs of the County's Open

Lands Program for the future. These included a citizens' advisory group, members of the Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board, and the Board of County Commissioners, using data collected by the Trust for Public Land and prior planning processes such as Larimer County's *Our Lands, Our Future*.

In recognition of the increasing management costs of these land and recreational assets, and in response to the scheduled expiration of the tax at the end of the year 2018, an extension of Help Preserve Open Spaces was referred to the ballot in November 2014 with the following changes:

Larimer County voters overwhelmingly (82%) supported an extension of the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax to 2043, a statewide, if not nationwide, record for open spaces!

Photos: Left to right: Rich Ernst, Jim Janicki, Kerri Rollins

Changes in the Help Preserve Open Spaces Sales and Use Tax

	Current Sales Tax (1995-2018)	Approved Extension (2019-2043)
Funding split between Larimer County and Cities and Towns	County receives 42% of funds Cities split 58% of funds	County receives 50% of funds Cities split 50% of funds
Larimer County Internal Splits	Over the life of the tax funds must be spent per the ballot language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 70% for Acquisition and Improvement · 15% for Long-term Management · 15% Discretionary 	Over the life of the tax funds must be spent per the ballot language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 35% for Acquisition and Restoration · 50% for Long-term Management and Improvement · 15% Discretionary
Open Lands Board Appointments	Use of sales tax funds is governed by a citizen board of at least 9 members with one member each appointed by the cities of Fort Collins and Loveland and the towns of Estes Park and Berthoud and one member from the County Planning Commission	Use of sales tax funds is governed by a citizen board of at least 9 members all appointed by the County Commissioners with substantial geographic balance based on population or sales tax revenue generation

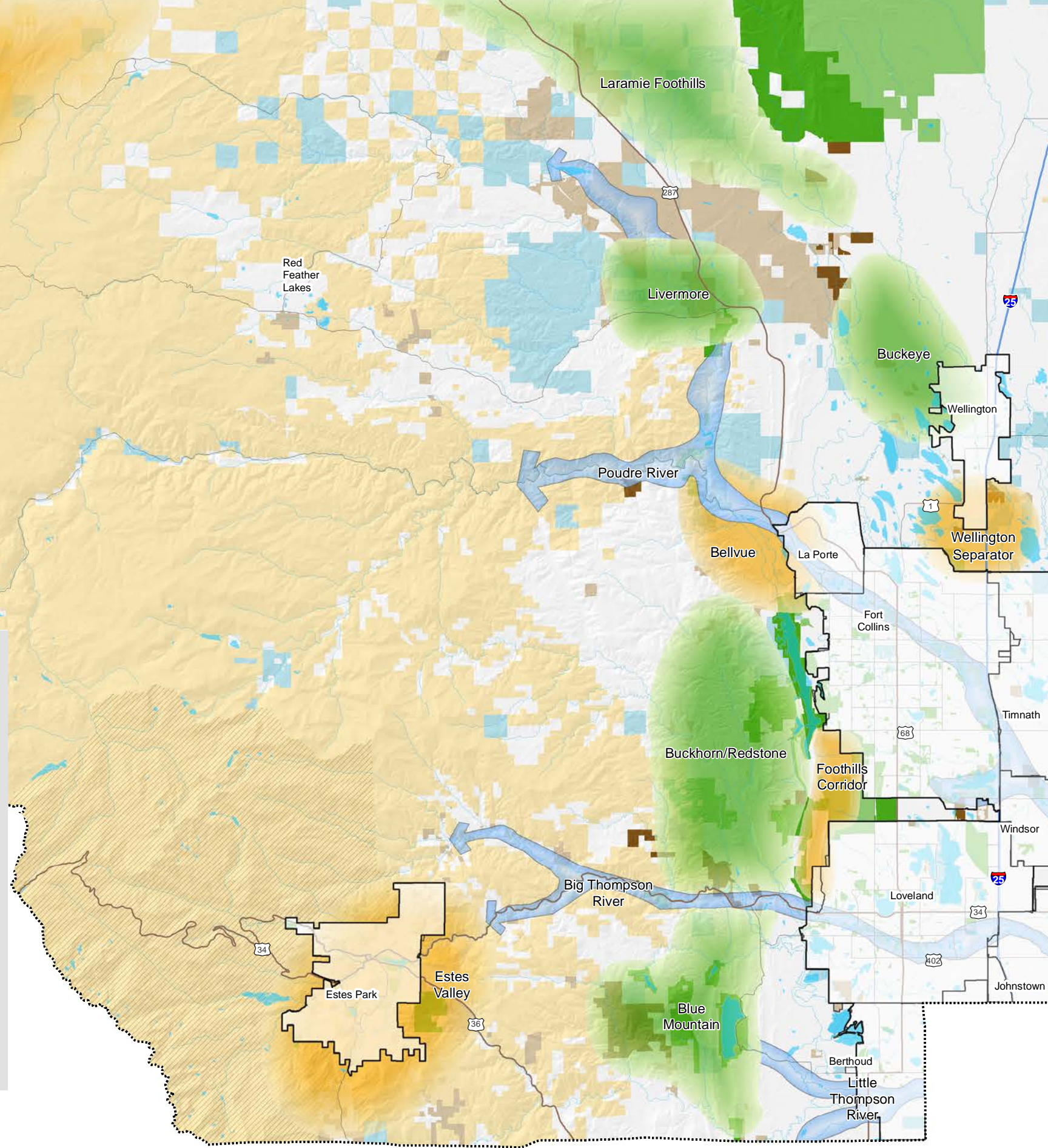
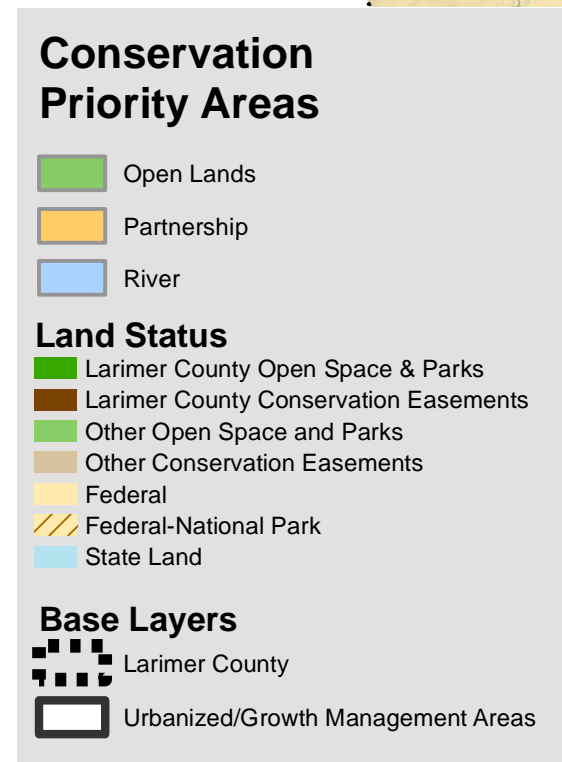


Planning for the Future: Open Lands Master Plan

Larimer County is privileged to enjoy some of the most intact and diverse landscapes within the Front Range of Colorado. For more than 20 years, Larimer County and its citizens have been working to conserve these valued landscapes that define our sense of place. Much progress has been made, yet many areas remain in need of protection. With consideration of continued population growth and the overwhelming support and extension of the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax, the county looked towards the future in 2014 by updating the *Open Lands Master Plan*.

The updated Open Lands Master Plan uses extensive public input to guide future conservation efforts and optimize the available funding dedicated for this purpose. It provides a focused vision for the Larimer County Open Lands Program in continuing to conserve and restore natural resources, conserve agricultural lands and working landscapes, protect and improve healthy river corridors, and enhance appropriate outdoor recreation opportunities.

Photo: Jim Janicki





“ *The Big Thompson River is vital to the health and well-being of Loveland’s citizens, economy and quality of life. River restoration will benefit residents and visitors alike by providing world-class opportunities throughout the community’s most significant natural corridor.* ”
 -Hugh McKean, Loveland City Council

Recovering from the Floods

Big Thompson Canyon

One of the most impacted and heavily damaged areas from the 2013 flood event was the Big Thompson Canyon. Larimer County’s four parks in the canyon were substantially damaged, if not completely destroyed, and wildlife habitat, vegetation, and riparian ecosystems will be recovering for many years. In addition, private homes and recreation areas managed by other agencies were dramatically affected or destroyed. While the widespread damage has been devastating, it also presents an opportunity for Larimer County and its partners to evaluate the Big Thompson canyon for possible future conservation and outdoor recreation.

In 2014 Larimer County, in partnership with the City of Loveland and the Big Thompson River Restoration Coalition, received Great Outdoors Colorado grant funding to complete the Big Thompson Canyon Recreation and Conservation Assessment. The project began in late 2014 and will engage Larimer County citizens to provide a regional vision for restoring and enhancing public recreational opportunities and conserving additional land along the river corridor. After

completion in 2015, the assessment will help guide land management entities in future efforts to mitigate flooding, strengthen tourism, improve and restore a resilient river ecosystem, and benefit the people who live in and visit the Big Thompson Canyon.

Hermit Park Open Space

Although a long road to recovery, repairs to Hermit Park Open Space’s main road, Kruger Campground, Cabin Road and the Homestead Meadows connector trail were completed in time for Independence Day, 2014. Staff overcame obstacles with access to damaged areas and securing funding, with minimal impact to visitors. Repair work improved roads and campgrounds with minimal effect on the surrounding open space.

Photos: Left to right: Staff, Christine Fleming, Christine Fleming, Jeff Andersen

Sprucing Up Those Campgrounds

Pinewood Reservoir is Getting a Facelift

This small lake has its fair share of loyal followers and updating this beautiful spot has been a priority since 2006. Construction was planned to begin during the fall of 2012, but the High Park Fire, followed by the 2013 Flood pushed this project down the priority list. With a lot of patience and persistence, construction finally began in September of 2014. The newly designed park will feature a completely new campground with pull-through and back-in electrical campsites, newly remodeled walk-in campsites, completion of the Besant Point Trail all the way around the lake, new restrooms, an extended boat ramp, day-use area, outdoor classroom, and our first ever nature playscape. Recreational facilities at Pinewood will finally align with the amazing location and backdrop this beautiful reservoir has always had. We cannot wait to unveil this newly remodeled gem to our visitors on Memorial Day weekend of 2015!

Tipis Make Camping More Fun at Flatiron Campground

Larimer County Natural Resources is always looking for opportunities to expand our recreational portfolio. With the additions of three new tipis at Flatiron Reservoir, the county now offers another great camping experience. Campers are able to spend the night in one of our large canvas tipis that sleep up to 4 adults and 2 children. The tipis have been slightly modernized to allow for visitors to plug into an electrical outlet inside. Tipis are available for reservations May-October.



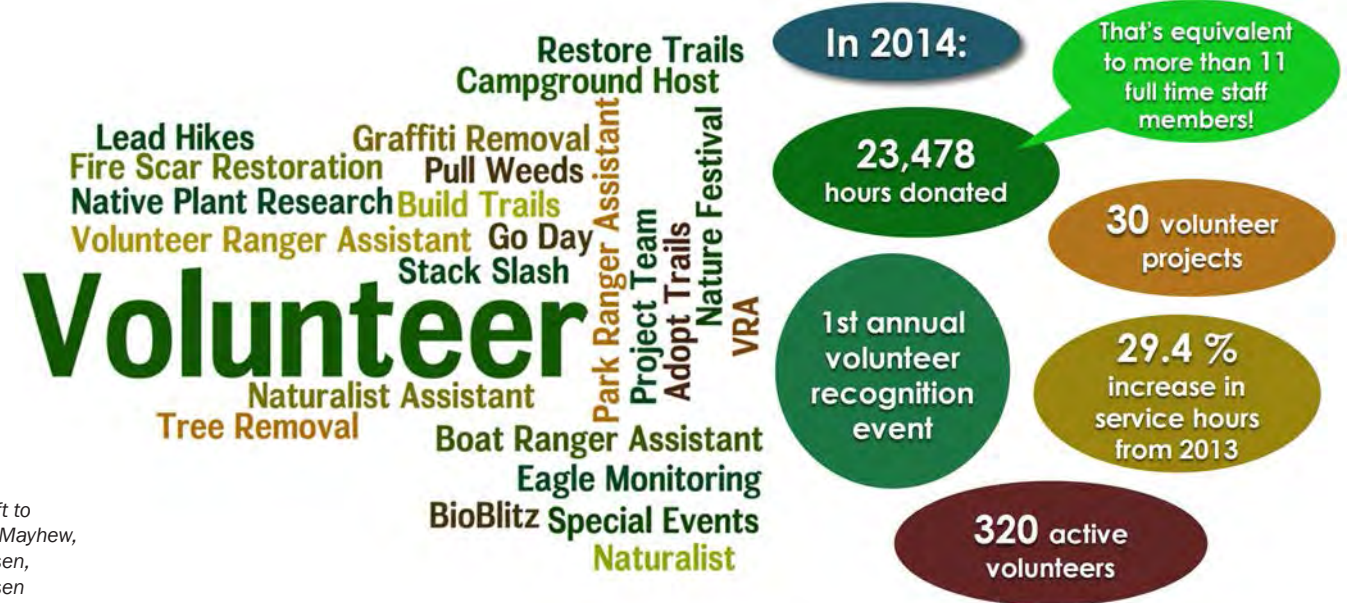
From photographing the scenery, to helping keep our trails in tip top shape, to learning about fire safety from our friend 'Smokey', there are many opportunities to get involved with and enjoy our amazing parks and open spaces!

-Lew Gaiter, County Commissioner, District 1

Volunteers Building a Better Larimer County

Over 300 volunteers shared their time and talent to enhance natural resources programs and services. From the individual volunteers at the boat ramps to the corporate groups working a day on the trails, volunteers across the county engaged in activities to make Larimer County a special place.

In 2014, volunteers donated 23,478 hours which is equal to \$529,428 (22.55/hr independentsector.org) Larimer County Natural Resources thanks our volunteers for being an intricate part of our success.



Photos: Left to right: Pam Mayhew, Jeff Andersen, Jeff Andersen

Spreading the Word Through Education

Events

The Community Engagement team launched three new events in 2014 to spread the word about getting outside, science and nature!

- National Get Outdoors Day: Get Outdoors Day-Northern Colorado is a fun, free, active day with a zillion things for everyone to do - fishing, biking, climbing, paddling, learning, dancing and playing! Over 1,600 people came out to City Park in Fort Collins to celebrate outdoor recreation and try something new.
- Chimney Hollow Open Space Bioblitz: A Bioblitz is a 24-hour species survey where scientists and members of the public join forces to explore an open space. Participants discovered over 300 species of plants, animals, and fungi at Chimney Hollow Open Space in July 2014. Families also learned about the methods scientists use to do their jobs.
- NoCo Nature Festival: Formerly the Northern Colorado Birding Fair, this event connected families to nature in September 2014. Hands-on exhibits, presentations, and live animals were some of the highlights during this event's first year.

Products

Have you ever wanted to learn about Larimer County's parks and open spaces but could not attend a guided hike? We have two great guides for you!

- Junior Ranger Guide: Now your 7-12 year old can become a Larimer County Junior Ranger! This guide is a great way to explore the parks and open spaces by learning about ecology, safety, and using your senses to discover the natural world.
- Wildflowers and Other Plants of the Larimer County Foothills Region: This new wildflower guide is a local field guide produced by staff and volunteers that is geared toward the amateur and expert alike. Highlights include over 100 species of local wildflowers, grasses and woody plants, comparison pages of similar species and group genus pages.



Devil's Backbone Open Space Update

New Plan Protects the Backbone

A new Devil's Backbone Open Space Management Plan was developed in 2014 to identify the key features that make the Backbone special and the actions needed to make sure they are protected for the next generation of nature lovers.

After nearly 12 months, four public meetings and hundreds of citizen comments, a new plan was approved. The major changes you'll see at the Backbone, coming in 2016 and 2017, include:

- Designation of the Wild Loop Trail as foot-traffic only, to reduce trail congestion.
- Development of a new multi-use trail through Hidden Valley, to reduce social trail development and protect sensitive wildlife habitat.
- Reconfiguration of the trailhead, to more safely accommodate parking and improve visitor experience.

Patio Building is for the Birds

Next time you're hiking Devil's Backbone and Horsetooth Mountain open spaces, look for the hard-to-find Rock wren. This small, ground-nesting bird is easily overlooked, with its pale grey plumage and habit for staying near the rocks. While the bird may look a little dull, its knack for building large rock nest patios is anything but boring.

The female Rock wren does most of the heaving lifting. Her patios can include hundreds of stones that weigh more than 1 kilogram (70 times her weight). Researchers think the patios act as a predator alarm system and improve nest dryness. Now that's one innovative bird!

Photos: Left to right: Harry Strharsky, Nat Warning, Maxine Guill, Staff

Protecting Our Resources

Forestry

The Larimer County Forester serves as the county's pest inspector and outreach specialist for tree and forest issues. In 2014, the County Forester conducted 145 site visits throughout the county, most relating to mountain pine beetle, spruce ips, pine needle scale, and general plant health issues. Pine beetle occurrence decreased last year and that trend is expected to continue. Emerald ash borer (EAB) was identified in Boulder in 2013, and today it is assumed to have infested the entire city of Boulder. It is now a major concern in surrounding counties. Though any movement from Boulder is not known at this time, movement of infested wood throughout Boulder County is allowed with disposal sites in the town of Erie and south of Boulder County in Jefferson County. We know where it is but do not know where it is not. There is a high probability that EAB will be discovered outside Boulder County this year or next, but hopefully there will be several more years to get ready here.

Parks & Open Lands Weed Management

The Parks & Open Lands Weed Management Program stays active with noxious weed control

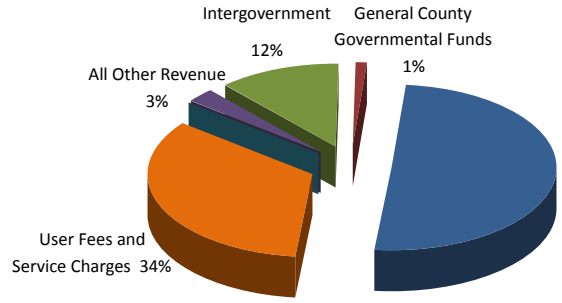
and native plant restoration projects on over 33,000 acres. The weed program organized a Russian olive removal project in and around Horsetooth Reservoir campsites in 2014. The project included planting of more desirable trees as replacements in the campgrounds.

Larimer County Weed District

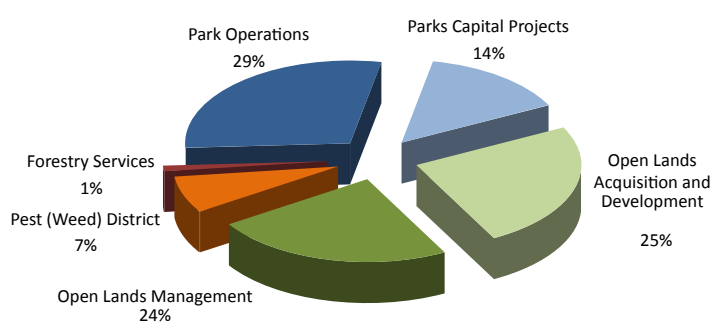
The Larimer County Weed District continued working in partnership with federal, state, and local landowners in the county. Major projects included weed management in Estes Park, Lory State Park, and wildfire burn areas within the Canyon Lakes Ranger District of the U.S. Forest Service. The Weed District collaborates closely with Colorado State University on field research and conducts plot tours to demonstrate best management practices. In October of 2014, the District led a Russian olive removal project with Colorado Youth Outdoors at Swift Ponds. The four-week undertaking resulted in removal and chipping of approximately 6,000 trees. In addition to noxious weed issues the Weed District provides grass seeding/pasture restoration to landowners and conducts over 300 site visits each year, helping landowners with plant identification and management recommendations.



2014 Revenues



2014 Expenses



Acquisitions and Partnerships Help Us Do More

The Backbone Grows

While the Devil's Backbone Open Space Management Plan was being developed, Larimer County acquired a 6.88-acre parcel adjacent to the keyhole. The keyhole is the most popular destination at the Backbone and this acquisition buffers the keyhole from neighboring development, and protects wildlife habitat and the stunning view through the keyhole.

Big Thompson Playscape

Larimer County Natural Resources partnered with Big Thompson Elementary School and lottery-funded Great Outdoors Colorado to revitalize the elementary school play yard. This project transformed acres of pea gravel and steel structures into a more naturalized, green schoolyard to engage students on a day-to-day basis with their natural surroundings. Improvements included an ecopath and

sensory gardens, climbing wall, embankment slide, educational messaging, use of recycled materials, bioswayle, ADA compliant trail and outdoor classroom. Larimer County and Great Outdoors Colorado both provided funds and expertise to make this project possible for the local school.

Hornbein Conservation Easement

The Hornbein Conservation Easement is a project spearheaded by Estes Valley Land Trust. The parcel is small but picturesque and provides an open space view corridor from County Road 43 past a lovely aspen grove to the magnificent Lumpy Ridge area in Rocky Mountain National Park. In a time of rising fees and project costs that can challenge the financial feasibility of this kind of conservation, Larimer County Natural Resources contributed to the transaction costs and thus to the preservation of this treasure.

Photos: Left to right: Rich Ernst, Pam Mayhew, Jeff Andersen

Tax Revenues

The 1/4-cent Help Preserve Open Spaces and use tax revenue is shared with the County's eight municipalities. The tax was extended in 2014 for the next 25 years and is not imposed on food or prescription drugs. The total revenue collected to date is over \$167 million.

Distributions to municipalities are based upon the highest yield of either population or sales tax generation. This revenue sharing agreement ensures that residents throughout the county receive benefits from the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax.

* These figures are unaudited. Audit to be completed in mid-2015. Figures in this chart have been rounded where appropriate.

	Larimer Co	Berthoud	Estes Park	Fort Collins	Johnstown	Loveland	Timnath	Wellington	Windsor
1996	2,259,975	71,154	161,905	2,107,473	—	847,210	4,221	29,848	—
1997	2,485,421	80,969	178,198	2,319,562	—	932,139	4,646	32,520	—
1998	2,707,553	87,574	193,453	2,487,606	—	1,003,872	5,025	40,557	—
1999	3,067,810	101,539	224,779	2,850,066	—	1,146,823	5,732	47,494	—
2000	3,294,869	110,862	222,608	3,109,001	—	1,234,060	5,742	53,444	—
2001	3,565,146	122,889	229,886	3,323,372	—	1,321,205	5,887	64,589	—
2002	3,527,084	124,139	218,802	3,235,748	—	1,304,378	5,599	67,642	—
2003	3,532,580	123,913	218,445	3,205,119	—	1,314,655	7,083	66,730	—
2004	3,750,211	126,810	234,908	3,374,671	9,457	1,405,098	11,480	75,185	17,416
2005	3,811,306	127,480	239,502	3,417,517	8,932	1,432,898	11,684	79,698	20,115
2006	4,033,795	136,930	250,110	3,599,786	11,965	1,506,477	13,196	77,782	13,379
2007	4,152,187	129,513	252,524	3,529,570	34,285	1,554,153	10,563	122,196	54,760
2008	3,956,426	120,359	240,167	3,189,107	38,772	1,470,884	9,121	122,125	55,744
2009	3,614,183	109,178	224,318	2,824,574	45,847	1,410,859	7,103	114,630	49,847
2010	3,920,058	118,288	244,384	3,058,106	55,501	1,558,011	6,746	123,466	59,200
2011	3,734,616	109,266	240,910	2,929,532	56,894	1,445,545	43,851	117,820	64,807
2012	4,485,954	124,545	288,754	3,554,623	75,886	1,740,460	73,910	155,336	113,641
2013	4,777,403	133,751	309,913	3,814,068	74,128	1,904,909	81,646	167,553	124,097
2014	5,388,708	151,014	347,758	4,289,731	82,150	2,229,709	94,508	190,388	141,199
Total	70,065,285	2,210,173	4,173,566	60,219,232	493,817	26,763,345	407,743	1,779,003	1,729,814
%Total	41.74%	1.32%	2.49%	35.88%	0.29%	15.95%	0.24%	1.06%	1.03%

