



# Urban Natural Areas 2024 Zone Update

# City of Fort Collins Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and honor the lands situated within the City of Fort Collins as the original homelands of the Hinono'eiteen (Arapaho), Tsétséhéstáhese (Cheyenne), Nəmənən (Comanche), Caiugu (Kiowa), Čariks i Čariks (Pawnee), Sosonih (Shoshone), Oc'eti S'akowin (Lakota) and Núuchiu (Ute) Peoples.

This area is an important site of trade, gathering, and healing for these Native Nations. These lands are home to a diverse urban Native community representing multiple Native Nations and Indigenous Peoples. Despite forced removal and land dispossession, they continue to thrive as resilient members of our community. We are grateful for Native community members and honor the rich cultural heritage they bring to our collective community. We further recognize and value their social, intellectual, economic, and cultural contributions. The City of Fort Collins is committed to supporting, partnering, and working with the Native and Indigenous community.





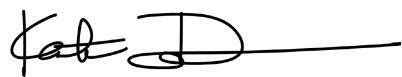
# A Message from the Director

*Our community's natural spaces uniquely define Fort Collins, with a diverse matrix of habitat types and natural experiences woven through the urban landscape. Urban natural areas provide habitat and trail connectivity, allowing for both wildlife and human movement. These are the spaces we see on our way to work, explore with our families on the weekend, or seek moments of quiet reflection. Working in partnership with the community, the conserved natural environments we steward together create a desirable place to live for both people and wildlife alike. I am proud to present this holistic update to guide management of urban natural areas and influence the community landscape that makes Fort Collins special.*

*Urban natural areas provide Fort Collins community members with a place of respite and rejuvenation, where they can observe seasonal changes of nature and watch wildlife during their daily dog-walk, commute, or exercise routine. The community's input on this update shapes how the Fort Collins Natural Areas Department (FCNAD) will increase biodiversity and enhance wildlife habitat, while increasing accessibility and cultivating family-friendly visitor experiences. This plan provides a roadmap for continuing to thoughtfully engage with neighbors as new natural areas are prepared for public enjoyment and FCNAD works to increase access to nature.*

*Voters, the community, and City leaders, have charged the FCNAD with proactively conserving and managing the natural areas throughout Fort Collins. We are guided by ballot language and community-informed plans such as this one. This plan prioritizes increasing ecological understanding, diversifying visitor experiences, and empowering neighborhood stewardship. The actions recommended in this plan build on FCNAD's many partnerships to ensure that natural spaces remain a prominent feature for wildlife habitat as well as natural respites for human wellbeing. This fundamental characteristic of Fort Collins will remain as the city grows and the community continues to conserve and care for nature.*

*I look forward to seeing you out in a natural area near your home, school, or workplace sometime soon!*



December 18, 2024

**Katie Donahue, Natural Areas Director**

**Date**



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## Acronyms:

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
CSP	Conservation and Stewardship Planning
CSU	Colorado State University
DIY	Do It Yourself
FCMOD	Fort Collins Museum of Discovery
FCNAD	Fort Collins Natural Areas Department
GMA	Growth Management Area
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and more
MCDA	Multi Criteria Decision Analysis
N2N	Neighbor To Neighbor
PTO	Parent Teacher Organization



# Executive Summary

The Urban Zone Update will guide the responsible stewardship of the unique and valuable natural areas in the Urban Zone. Building on ten years of community feedback, staff expertise, and partner input, the Zone Update identifies implementation priorities, grounded in FCNAD’s four goals:



Conserve and protect lands and water



Protect and improve ecosystem health and resilience



Provide meaningful education and appropriate recreation opportunities



Responsibly steward the community’s resources

This Zone Update is part of an adaptive planning method which allows for modifications based on changing landscape needs, and community feedback while remaining true to the department goals, mission, and ballot language.

Highlights from the Urban Zone Update include increasing the wildlife habitat acreage and quality in urban natural areas, leveraging key partnerships for habitat and trail connectivity, increasing accessibility for people with varying abilities, expanding family experiences and opportunities for nature appreciation, and protecting natural resources by inspiring community stewardship. Priorities and tactics identified in this Zone Update will also apply to newly acquired natural areas within the Urban Zone. Many tactics point to the thoughtful assessments and planning that are needed to open new natural areas for public enjoyment.



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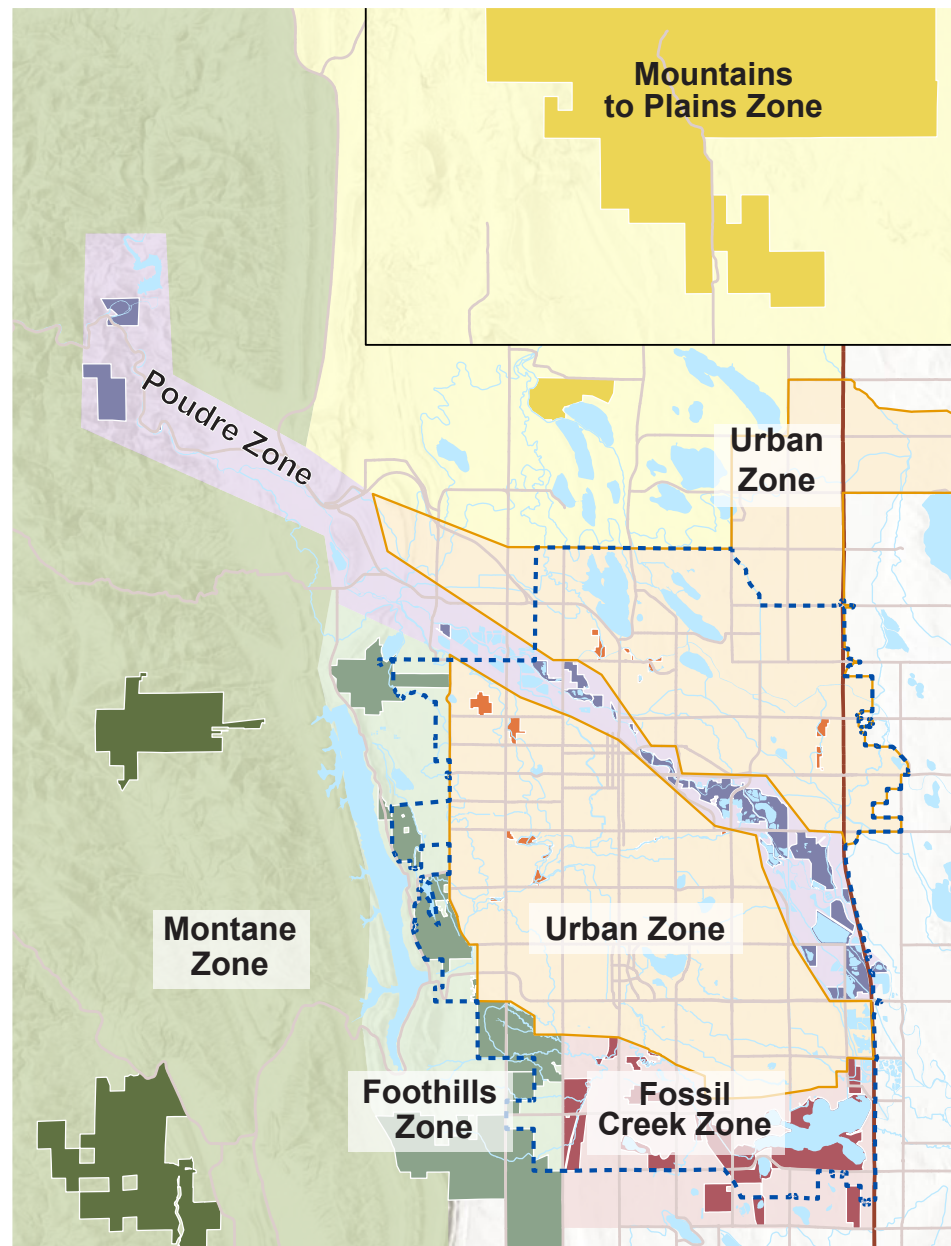


# Conservation and Stewardship Planning Zones

FCNAD's Conservation and Stewardship Planning (CSP) process categorizes land into six management zones that are defined by ecosystem type, geographic area, or special features. The Urban Zone encompasses valuable wildlife habitat within the City's Growth Management Area. The land is typically surrounded by urban development or will likely be surrounded by urban development as the City continues building out. The Urban Zone natural areas are critical in contributing to the City's overall urban ecosystem, providing habitat connectivity and opportunities for humans to connect with nature.

Each zone is regularly evaluated in-depth to identify management updates and priorities. Zone Updates work to ensure alignment between FCNAD management actions and Natural Areas ballot language, community priorities, and FCNAD's mission. Priorities and tactics developed in this Zone Update highlight the unique work in the Urban Zone and are in addition to the existing system-wide standard operating procedures and best management practices already employed by FCNAD.

- Mountains to Plains
- Poudre River
- Urban
- Montane
- Foothills
- Fossil Creek



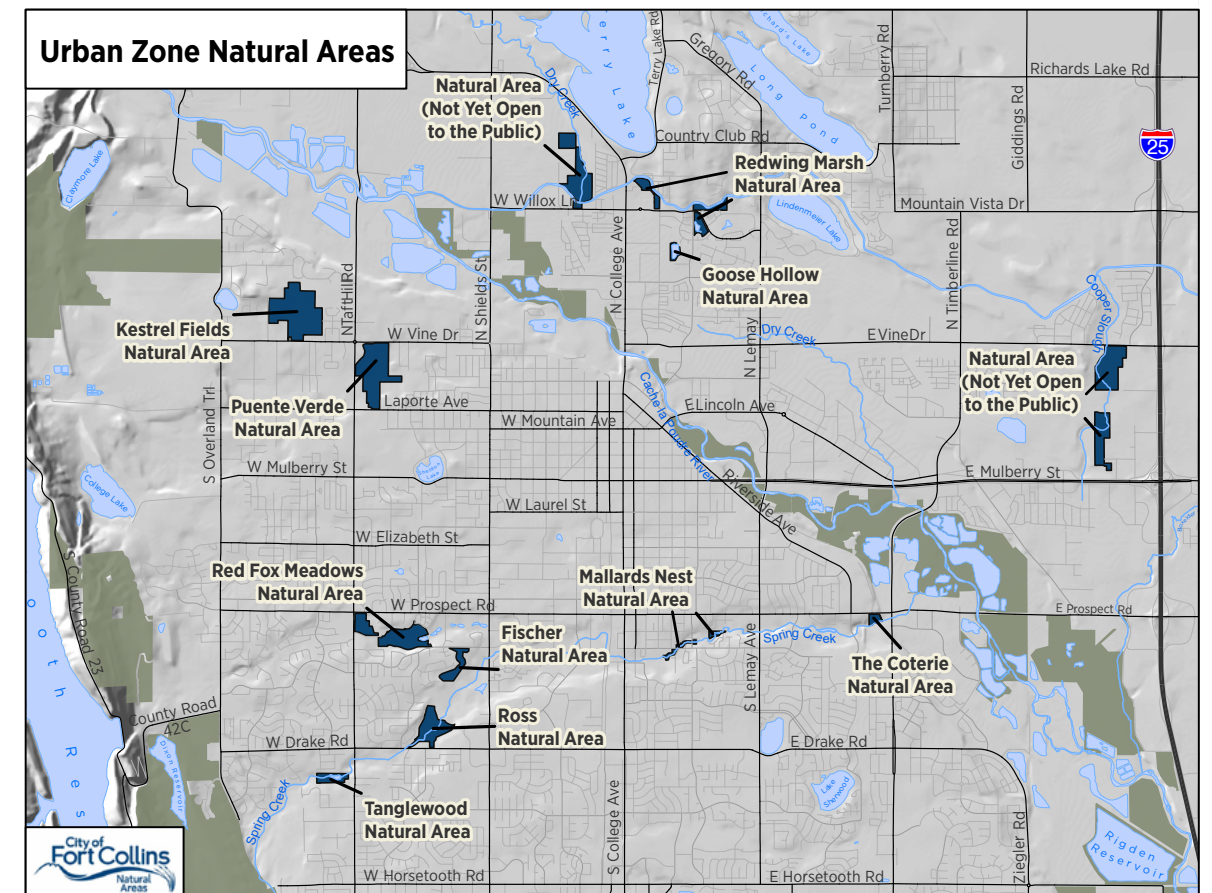
# Urban Zone Overview

For many, the vast network of nature interwoven within the built environment defines the Fort Collins community's sense of place. This connectivity of people and nature is possible thanks to the combined efforts of multiple city initiatives, landowners, and agencies that aim to protect natural features and ecosystem services as the city continues to grow. The Urban Zone offers unique opportunities to increase wildlife habitat, leverage partnerships, and support physical and mental wellbeing.

The Urban Zone currently encompasses 12 natural areas and seven conservation easements that total nearly 1,500 acres of conserved land within the City's Growth Management Area. Five natural areas run along the Spring Creek corridor while the

remaining sites are located throughout town, north of Spring Creek, totaling 352 acres of natural area. Most conservation easements are located in the northeast between Fort Collins and Wellington.

The newly acquired natural areas, not yet open to the public, are located along two tributaries of the Poudre River: Dry Creek and the Cooper Slough. This Zone Update sets the priorities and outlines the required planning steps to prepare these new natural areas for habitat improvements and public enjoyment. In addition, this update considers a holistic approach with partnering departments to steward natural spaces to further nature's contributions in adapting to climate change, continued urban development, and regional population growth.





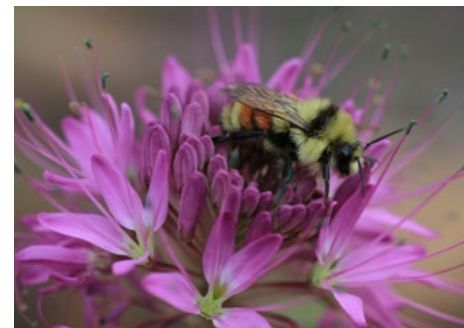
# Community Engagement

Outreach efforts from the spring and summer of 2023 resulted in 303 responses to feedback questions that were available in English and Spanish. Ongoing feedback is welcome anytime at [fcgov.com/naturalareas/feedback](https://fcgov.com/naturalareas/feedback).

## What people said they appreciate about urban natural areas:

1. Spending time in nature close to home
2. Nature and wildlife watching
3. Therapeutic and recreation opportunities

**303 Responses**



## Key feedback themes for urban natural areas:

- Continuing to conserve urban natural areas
- Enhancing accessibility for more inclusivity
- Infrastructure for passive enjoyment
- Enhancing habitat value
- Managing visitor use issues (e.g. pets, litter, and bike speeds)

People appreciate the natural areas throughout Fort Collins and often cite the abundance and diversity of natural spaces as a key reason they choose to live in Fort Collins. People note the peace and quiet, the joy of listening to birds, and observing the seasons as qualities they appreciate about the Urban Zone. Connecting with nature so close to home is especially appreciated. In the Urban Zone, most respondents regularly visit a natural area daily or weekly. Community members feel a sense of knowing these areas and treasure them as part of how they define home.

## About the Feedback:

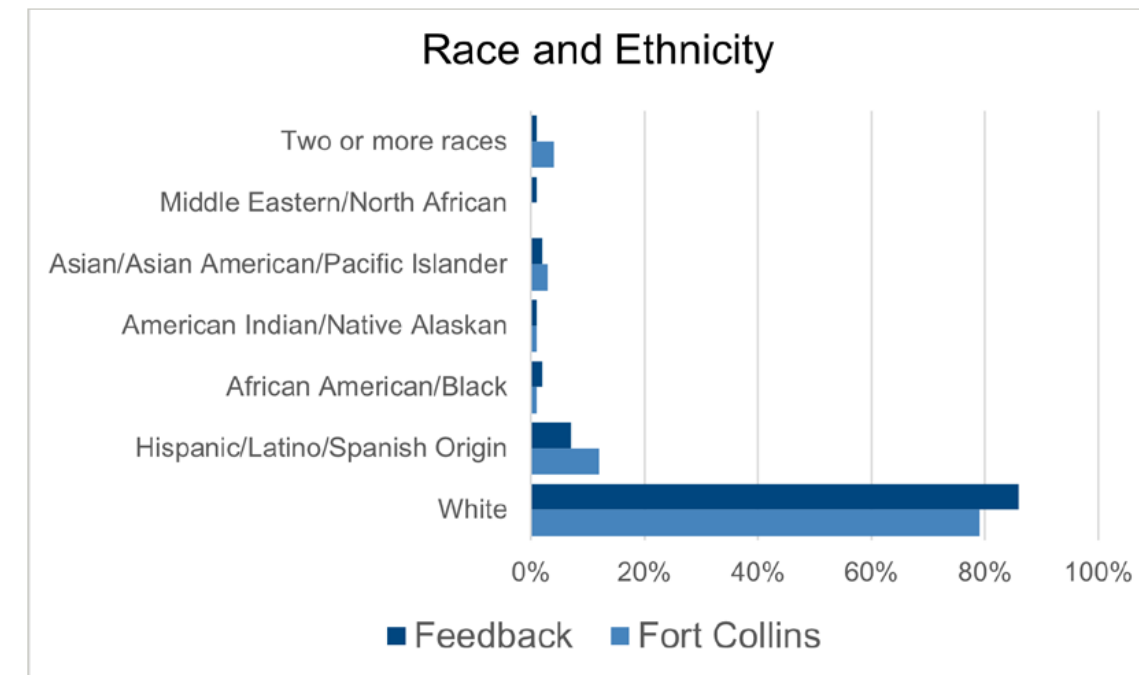
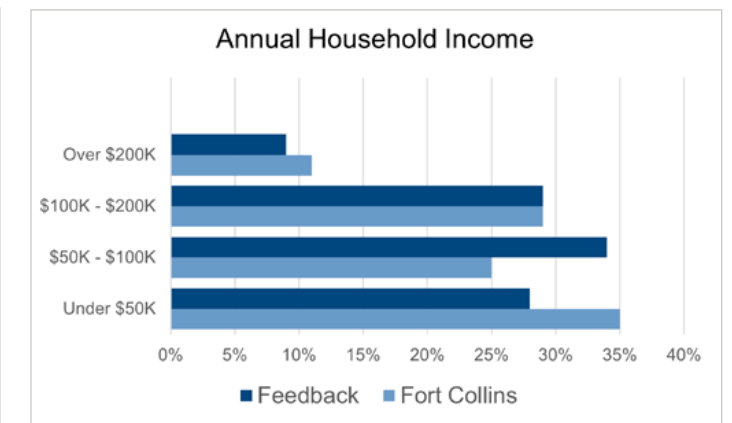
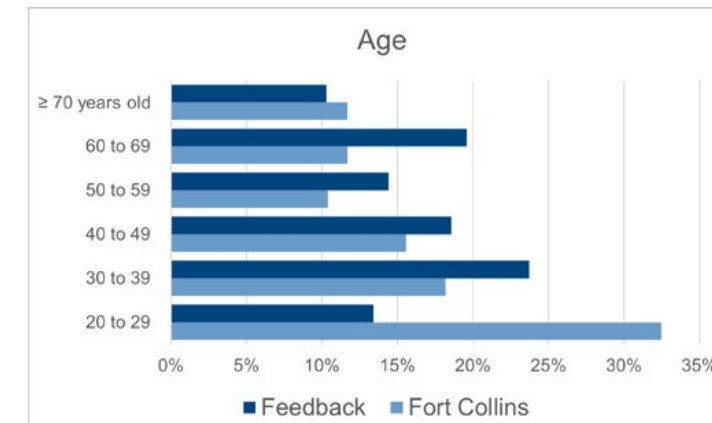
Input was collected in English and Spanish, March 2023 - June 2023. Outreach included:

- Mailing to neighbors
- Land Conservation and Stewardship Board meetings
- Irish Elementary, Day of the Child
- Lightening Talks at the Lyric
- Kids in the Park
- Bauder Elementary School PTO event
- Drop-in at Red Fox Meadows
- Kestrel Fields planting
- LBGTQIA+ Hike at Red Fox Meadows
- Trash Clean-Up at Goose Hollow
- Out and About Library Program
- Youth Event at N2N
- Natural Areas E-news
- Social media
- Trailhead signs
- Volunteer Coffee Talk
- Bike to Wherever Day

## Feedback Demographics:

The demographics of feedback responders is close to, but does not exactly match the Fort Collins community demographics. The Natural Areas Department continually strives to conduct inclusive engagement that reflects the diverse demographics of the community and is always evolving its process.

In addition to the feedback form, community input is expressed in many ways, all of which are valued by the Natural Areas Department. Feedback on natural areas management can be provided anytime at [fcgov.com/naturalareas/feedback](https://fcgov.com/naturalareas/feedback).





# How Community Feedback Shapes Zone Priorities and Tactics:

A key function of the Urban Zone Update is to identify and define the community's priorities for the Urban Zone natural areas. From this input, actionable tactics were developed to implement work towards the established priorities. Here are several ways community feedback shaped this update:

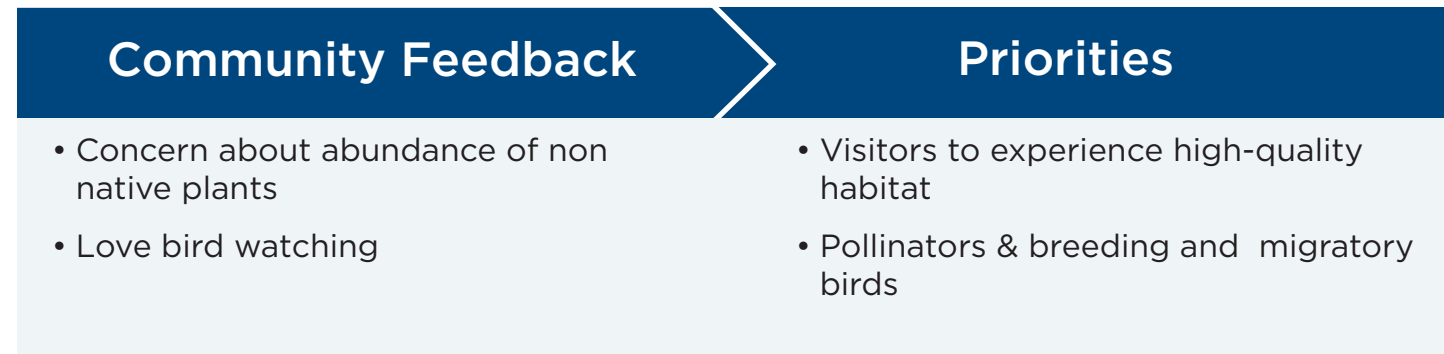
**Urban wildlife watching:** Feedback on how much the community enjoys bird and wildlife watching in the Urban Zone reinforces priorities and tactics that promote habitat and wildlife conservation. Community members indicate an interest in learning more about the birds and plants in natural areas. FCNAD offers year-round free guided activities and DIY resources including bird and plant checklists and community science programs. Learn more at [fcgov.com/naturalareas/learn](https://fcgov.com/naturalareas/learn) and [fcgov.com/register](https://fcgov.com/register).

**Neighborhood stewardship:** There are many regular visitors who deeply know and appreciate the urban natural areas. Feedback concerning litter renews FCNAD's commitment to providing volunteer stewardship opportunities such as Adopt a Natural Area and encouraging participation in Pick It Up FoCo. Learn more at [fcgov.com/naturalareas/volunteers](https://fcgov.com/naturalareas/volunteers) and [fcgov.com/volunteer/trashpickup](https://fcgov.com/volunteer/trashpickup).

**Off-leash pets:** Roaming cats and dogs can leave waste and disturb or kill native wildlife, reducing populations, and contributing to water quality issues. Feedback about off-leash pets confirms that Ranger staff and Volunteer Ranger Assistants should continue to patrol urban natural areas and educate visitors on resource protection. Pet waste bags will continue to be provided.

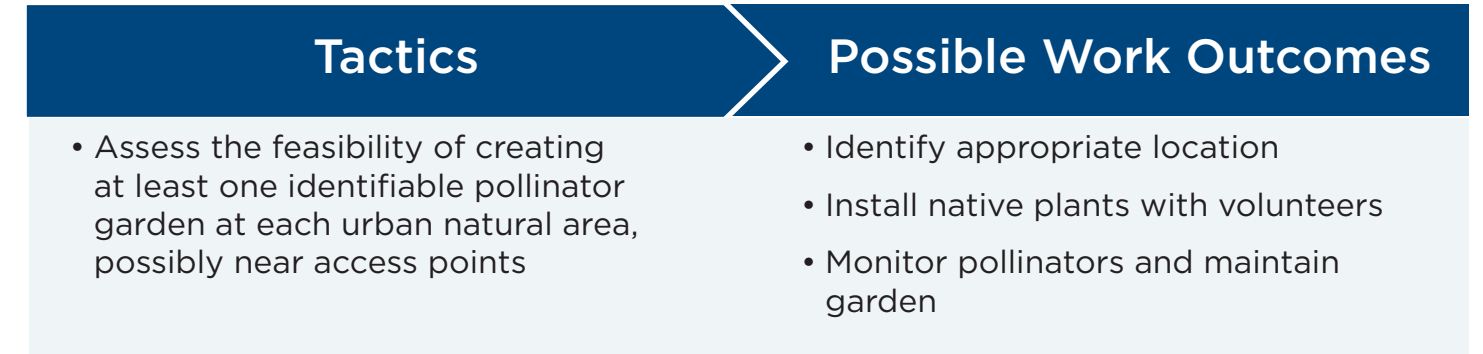
**Non-native vegetation:** Fields of non-native grass, such as smooth brome, are a challenge to effectively restore and maintain as diverse native ecosystems due to the tendency for reinvasion in the urban environment. Feedback concerning non-native plants supports FCNAD's commitment to restoration efforts and inspired tactics to enhance the diversity in urban natural areas by creating mosaics of native shrubs in appropriate locations.

**Increasing accessibility:** Many people in Fort Collins can access natural spaces in the Urban Zone because of the proximity to the places where they live, learn, and work. However, feedback indicates that these areas could be more inclusive and accessible to people of a variety of abilities with visitor amenity improvements. This reinforces prioritizing that FCNAD will continue to assess and implement improvements that make natural areas more welcoming for a diversity of visitors and abilities.



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# Urban Zone Priorities

The Urban Zone natural areas are critical patches of habitat that, combined with other urban natural features, provide connectivity for both wildlife and people alike. The urban natural areas are frequently visited by nearby neighbors who appreciate the peace and quiet that close by nature offers.

In alignment with the Natural Areas mission, ballot language, city-wide strategic efforts, and community feedback, this plan establishes both people and conservation priorities for the Urban Zone. The following priorities will guide the work of the Natural Areas Department's management efforts over the next decade. The tactics outlined in this Zone Update were specifically developed around the conservation and people priorities established in this update.

## Conservation Priorities

Conservation priorities focus on ecological processes, plant and animal communities and species that require protection, monitoring, and maintenance to sustain functioning, healthy, and resilient natural areas.

### Ecological processes

- Water quality and flood control functions
- Soil health
- Habitat connectivity

### Plant and animal communities

- Riparian forests
- Tributary streams
- Wetlands
- Pollinators
- Native amphibians
- Breeding and migratory birds
- Waterfowl and wading birds
- Urban-adapted mammals

### Rare Species

- Sweetflag (*Acorus calamus*)



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*“They are beautiful spots teeming with wildlife. I love hearing birds, seeing creatures skitter by, and smelling the fresh air. They make for a nice break from the busy pace of everyday life.”*  
- Community member

*“Fort Collins is a special place because of the green space and open space in it. It's why I live here.”*  
- Community member

## People Priorities

People priorities focus on creating equitable, welcoming, and safe natural areas, enhancing visitor experiences, and ensuring resource protection. Addressing these topics allows all community members to participate in natural areas and be part of protecting conservation values. FCNAD strives to nurture the unique and diverse relationships that Fort Collins community members have with nature.

### Equitable, welcoming, and safe

- Access for nearby neighborhoods
- Trail connectivity
- Accessibility for all abilities

### Resource protection

- Neighborhood stewardship
- Nature in the City program
- Climate resiliency

### Visitor experience

- Family and group experiences
- Opportunities for respite and nature therapy
- High-quality habitat



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# Habitat Connectivity: City Partnerships and Programs

Multiple City departments and programs have contributed to the protection of natural resources and the creation of wildlife habitat in the Urban Zone. The following map illustrates the layers of habitat created by these City programs that create a sense of place, habitat connectivity, and opportunities for humans to connect with nature. Most of the conserved lands are concentrated along natural and human-made waterways, such as irrigation canals, creeks, and tributaries of the Poudre River. Some programs, such as Nature in the City and Stormwater Utilities, have projects that permeate into the built environment by offering pockets of habitat in developed areas. Note, the map does not depict land conserved by FCNAD in other management zones.

## Map Legend

### URBAN ZONE NATURAL AREAS

Urban Zone natural areas conserve habitat within the urban core of Fort Collins. While they consist of smaller properties within FCNAD's portfolio, the natural areas play a critical role in creating habitat within Fort Collins' urban and suburban development.

### CITY PARKS DEPARTMENT

City parks, golf courses, the urban forest and cemeteries were traditionally comprised of non-native species. Over the past decade the City Parks Department has been incorporating native landscapes into their system to improve habitat value and conserve water. Parks and Forestry are key partners in improving habitat quality citywide.

### CITY STORMWATER PONDS

The City's Utilities Department adopted the Stormwater Criteria Manual that requires consideration of habitat and plant conservation when designing stormwater ponds. Because this standard aligns with the mission of the Natural Areas Department, FCNAD and Utilities often partner to jointly conserve properties with habitat value that could also double as regional stormwater detention.

### NATURE IN THE CITY PROJECTS

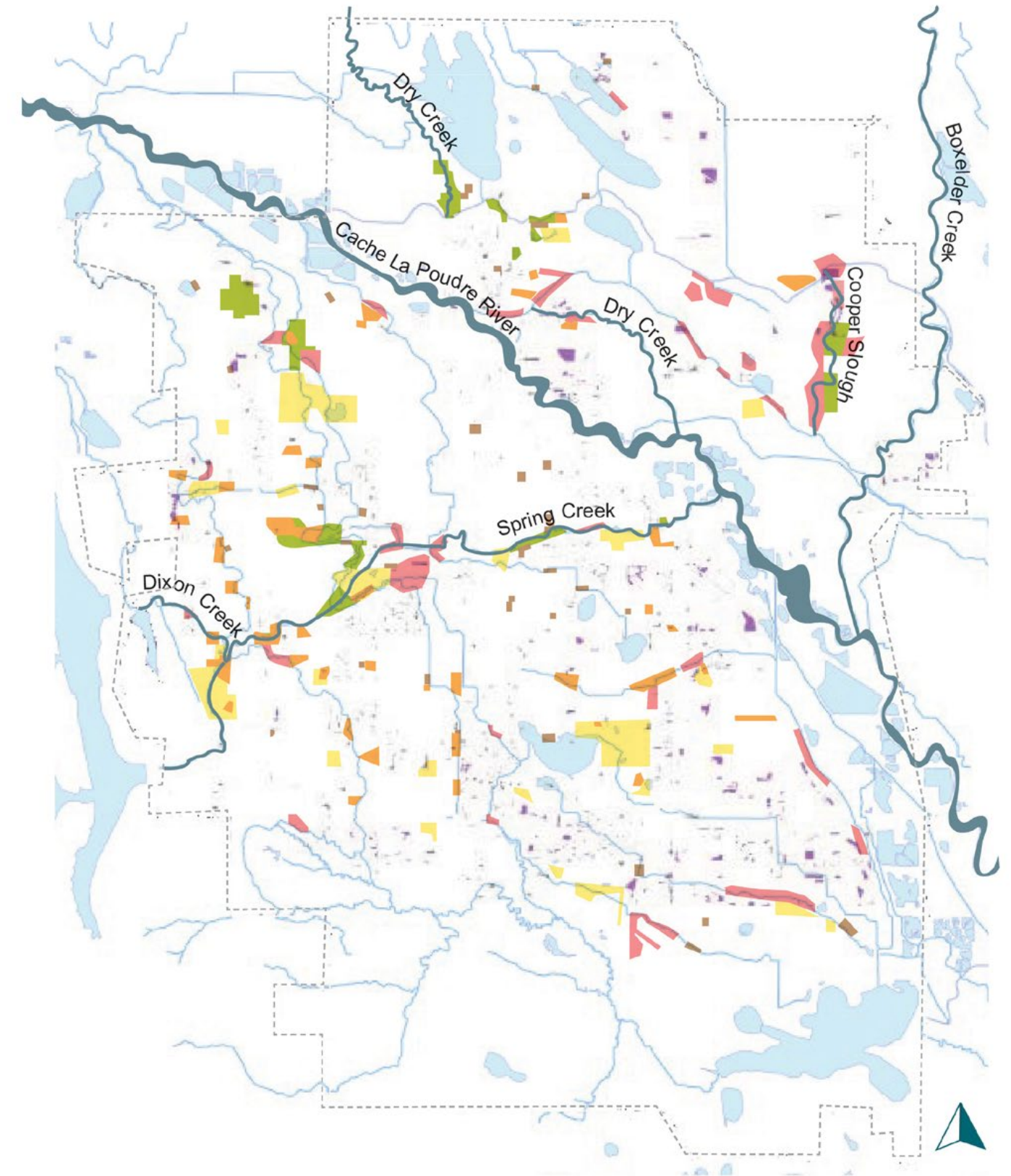
Nature in the City is a program within the Natural Areas Department that awards grant funding to landowners to transform landscapes into native habitat. As of year 2024, the program transitioned over 25 acres to native landscape.

### NATURAL HABITAT BUFFER

The City's Land Use Code requires private development to protect sensitive resources by buffering habitat from development. Buffer distances are required for many resources, including creeks, rivers, wetlands, and ditch corridors. Buffers range between 50 to 300 feet depending on resource sensitivity. Buffers can only be replanted with native species and must be preserved in perpetuity.

### PRIVATE STORMWATER PONDS

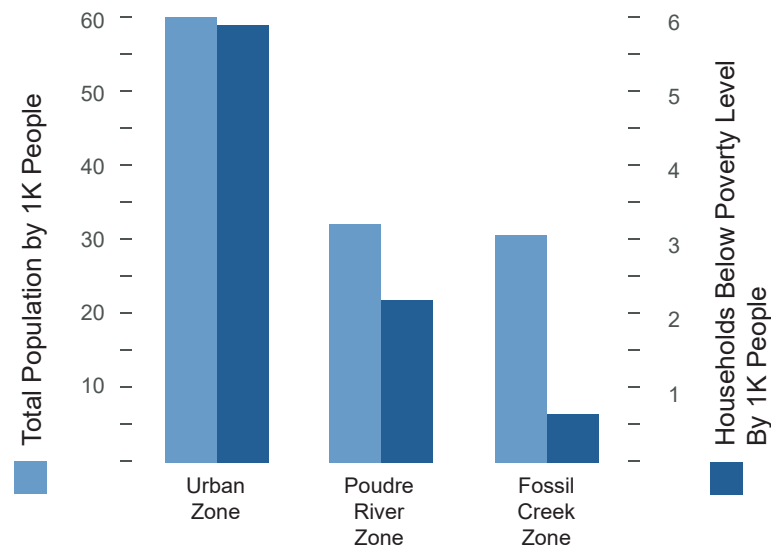
The City's Utilities Department adopted the Stormwater Criteria Manual that requires private developers to incorporate habitat and plant conservation when designing stormwater ponds. These ponds are located on development sites throughout the City, softening urban development and providing habitat to wildlife.



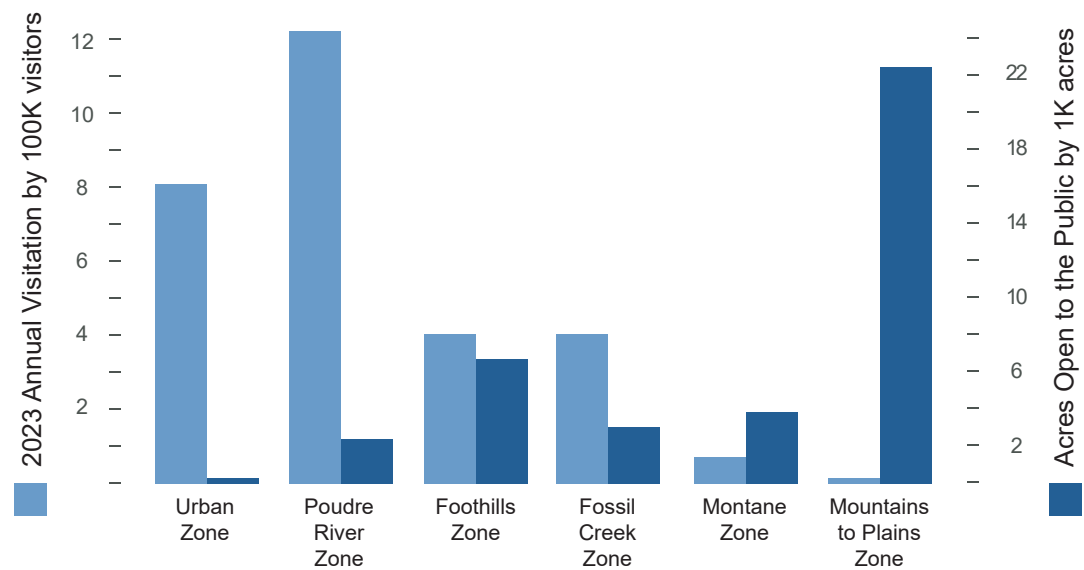


# Human Connectivity: The 15-Minute City

One of Fort Collins City Council's priorities is to initiate and advance the 15-minute city concept. The 15-minute city aims to make daily needs and services accessible within a 15-minute commute by foot, bicycle or other active travel modes, which amounts to a 3/4-mile distance. Natural areas and city parks are considered key destinations within this framework and implementation will be rolling out over the next several years. The data below illustrates the vital role the Urban natural areas play in providing access to nearby nature.

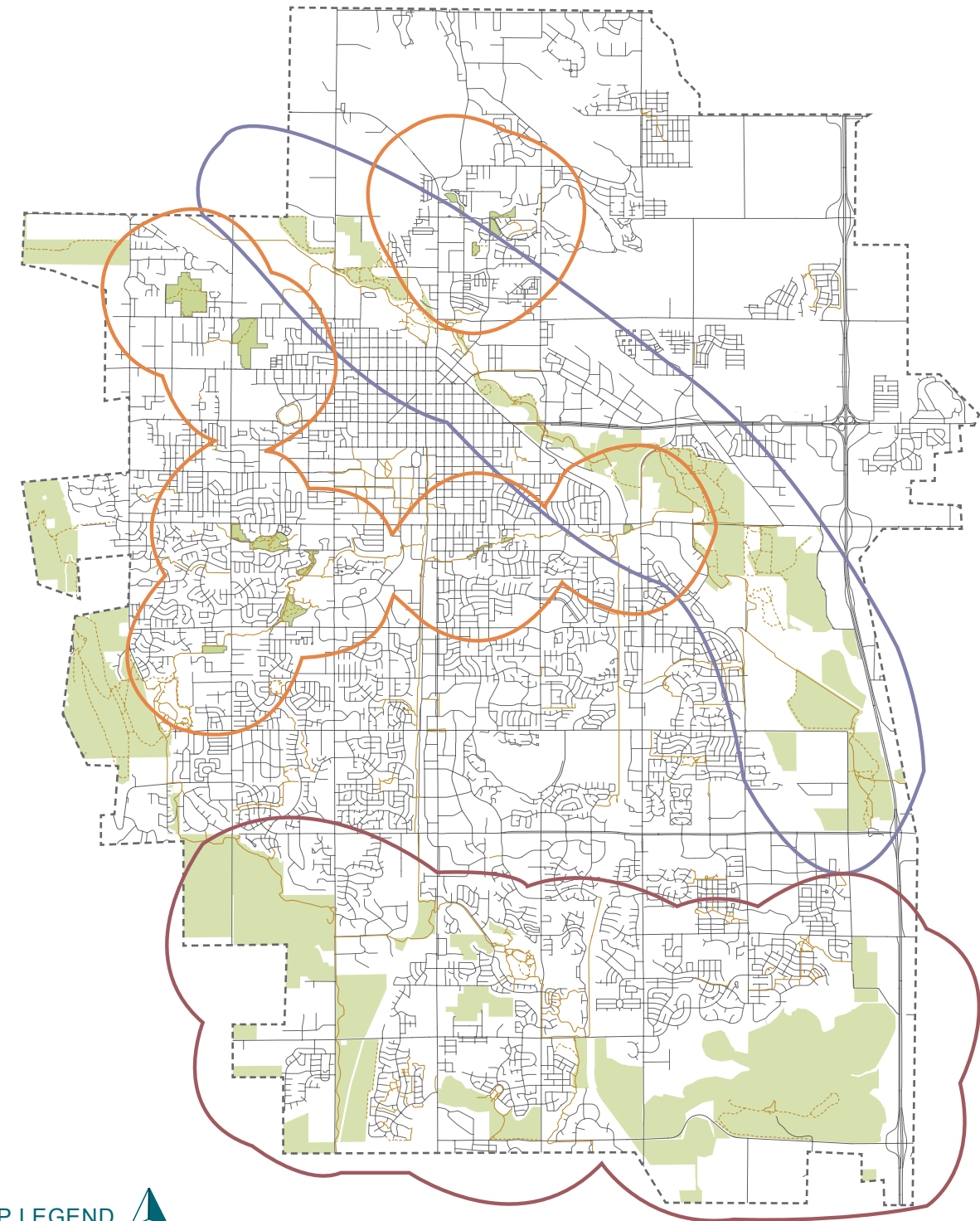


*The Urban Zone has nearly double the population and over triple the number of households below the poverty level within the 3/4-mile 15-minute city buffer than the Poudre River and Fossil Creek Zones.*



*The Urban Zone has the second highest annual visitation rate (800,000 visits)*

The Urban, Poudre and Fossil Creek Zones are within Fort Collins Growth Management Area and support the 15-minute city. The map below shows each of these management zones with 3/4-mile buffers. Multiple City departments and divisions, such as FCMoves, Park Planning and Development, Natural Areas, Safe Routes to School, and Engineering, collaboratively plan and develop pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure for safe travel corridors. The map demonstrates the impact FCNAD has made thus far and the partnerships needed across City departments to achieve the 15-minute city objectives.





# Natural Area Goals and Tactics

Four primary goals fulfill the intent of the current ballot language and make progress toward the Fort Collins Natural Areas' mission. The Urban Zone Update outlines how FCNAD will work to achieve these goals.

## Goals

1. Conserve and protect lands and water
2. Protect and improve ecosystem health and resilience
3. Provide meaningful education & appropriate recreation opportunities
4. Responsibly steward the community's resources



## Tactics

Tactics are dynamic in nature and new zone tactics may be drafted between updates in response to changes in condition and current events. Tactics presented in this update are specific to the Urban Zone and are in addition to ongoing, system-wide management activities such as:

- Land acquisition
- Trail maintenance
- Public engagement and education
- Weed control
- Ranger patrol



## 1 Conserve and Protect Lands and Water

Land conservation in the urban area is of utmost importance to protect wildlife habitat and ensure nature remains accessible to community members of all abilities as the city grows. Conserving and protecting land and water in the Urban Zone is a continued goal of FCNAD and will aid in the city's climate resiliency.



**Strategies** FCNAD will continue to protect lands through fee title purchase and conservation easements with willing sellers to promote connected habitats, increase accessibility, and reflect City strategic priorities. As well, FCNAD will partner with other land managers or regulatory entities to influence habitat connectivity and trail connections on properties beyond natural areas. FCNAD will seek opportunities to protect and restore water resources in the Urban Zone tributaries and local stormwater basins.

### Tactics:

Continue targeted land conservation efforts throughout Fort Collins that make progress on Urban Zone priorities, especially riparian forest, tributary streams, wetlands, waterfowl and wading birds, access for nearby neighborhoods, trail connectivity, and habitat values.

Continue annual cross-departmental collaboration to explore opportunities to leverage land conservation efforts within the City GMA that address multiple community priorities such as equitable access to nature, stormwater management, and affordable housing.

Make progress on protecting established urban natural areas with conservation easements in partnership with external conservation organizations and agencies.

Pursue conservation opportunities on properties as the northern section of the urban zone continues to develop, to maintain character, habitat values, and connectivity.

Regularly review and update land conservation priorities for the Urban Zone and foster relationships accordingly.



# 2

## Protect and Improve Ecosystem Health and Resilience



Much of the natural ecosystem in the urban environment has been greatly altered and displaced. Yet urban natural areas continue to support a variety of habitat types including riparian forests along multiple tributaries of the Poudre River, upland grasslands, and wetlands. These areas provide valuable wildlife habitat in an urban setting along with the benefits of ecological services such as detention and flow for floodwaters, water filtration, improved air quality, urban heat mitigation, night sky protection, and reduced water consumption. In conjunction with local partners, FCNAD will work to improve habitat health and function of Fort Collins unique urban ecosystem.



**Strategy:** To better protect, manage, and enhance habitat in the urban setting, FCNAD will collect data to gain a better understanding of current ecological value, and continue monitoring to allow for adaptive management of healthy ecosystems. FCNAD will apply the best available science and management practices while leveraging local partnerships to improve urban habitat value and water quality.

**Tactics:**

Determine the best method to monitor breeding birds in urban natural areas and integrate into department’s systematic monitoring process.

Complete baseline ecological surveys at the newly acquired natural areas along Dry Creek and the Cooper Slough.

Design a scorecard and assess stream and tributary health utilizing the River Health Assessment Framework.

Partner with Colorado Natural Heritage Program and the Environmental Protection Agency to conduct Level II Urban Wetland Assessments across the zone.

Work with night sky partners to conduct monitoring within natural areas and encourage responsible outdoor lighting practices, with a focus on areas adjacent to natural areas.

Explore partnerships to support education about and possible monitoring of native amphibians.

Research the disturbance needs of the rare plant Sweetflag (*Acorus calamus*) and determine appropriate management actions to maintain or improve the current plant population.

**Strategy:** FCNAD will work to protect and enhance urban wildlife habitat to improve habitat quality and connectivity throughout Fort Collins by implementing appropriate enhancement projects thereby enhancing ecosystem resilience. Work will focus on increasing native plant communities as well as enhancing migratory and breeding bird, pollinator, and urban-adapted mammal habitats.

**Tactics:**

Prioritize habitat enhancement projects in heavily used areas to increase community access to higher-quality habitat experiences, including along Spring Creek and in upland grasslands at Ross and Fisher natural areas.

Continue to implement the phased approach to habitat enhancements at Kestrel Fields Natural Area by installing additional shrub and tree plantings with community involvement.

Re-establish vegetation along the west side of Goose Hollow Natural Areas to replace non-native kochia and weeds.

Continue to support efforts to increase the age diversity of cottonwoods at Red Fox Meadows and take action to protect the health of previously planted trees.

Assess opportunities to enhance wetland plant diversity throughout the zone.

Explore the feasibility and priority of restoring the riparian area and upland fields at the natural areas along Dry Creek.

Add Low Impact Development water swale features to the edge of the parking lot at Ross Natural Area to clean runoff from the parking lot.

Assess water quality data and monitoring needs at ponds to determine management priorities and be responsive to new water quality issues as they arise across the Urban Zone.

Design and implement a community-involved restoration plan at the recently acquired natural area along Dry Creek.

Conduct near-term vegetation management to preserve and increase the high-quality vegetation species in the wetlands at the recently acquired natural area along the Cooper Slough.

Assess the need for multiple paralleling trails at Fisher Natural Area and consider reclamation of one soft-surface trail to provide more natural buffer for wildlife travel.

Assess the feasibility of creating at least one identifiable pollinator garden at each urban natural area, possibly near access points.

Complete an audit of how peer communities utilize wildlife crossings to support movement corridors across their communities; assess feasibility of integrating this approach in Fort Collins.



**Strategy:** The interconnected network of natural spaces in Fort Collins means there are many shared boundaries with natural areas that allow for collaborative management. In the face of climate change and population growth, FCNAD will promote the ecological resilience of the urban ecosystem by leveraging partnerships with other City of Fort Collins departments, agencies, and the engaged Fort Collins community to extend our collective reach.

**Tactics:**

Coordinate with Operational Services, other departments, and non-profits to plan for bat roost conservation and monitoring in city-owned buildings across the Urban Zone.

Continue the existing pilot conservation agriculture project in collaboration with partners at Kestrel Fields Natural Area and evaluate impacts to soil health and pollinator populations.

Support the Urban Forest Strategic Plan and identify priorities for FCNAD and Nature in the City actions.

Develop partnerships for grazing at urban natural areas to assist with vegetation management goals.

Coordinate with City Forestry to include natural area trees in data collection and inventory.

Continue to influence habitat connectivity in the community landscape through Nature in the City project investment across the Urban Zone.

Explore management options with Parks, Utilities, and others to minimize prairie dog's negative impacts to nearby infrastructure and maximize the ecological and community values of The Coterie Natural Area.

Partner with the City's Stormwater Utility and Nature in the City to co-manage urban stormwater detention facilities to increase habitat values and potentially allow visitor use.

Coordinate with the City's Stormwater Utility, City Parks, and local ditch companies to support ditch maintenance that maintains natural area resource protection objectives across the Urban Zone.

Work with City Parks and Wildland Restoration Volunteers to engage Poudre School District students in growing native seeds for Nature in the City planting projects.

Work with the City's Stormwater Utility to manage vegetation as appropriate until further planning is complete for Puente Verde Natural Area.





# 3

## Provide Meaningful Education and Appropriate Recreation Opportunities



People have a deep-rooted connection with nature and Fort Collins residents share an appreciation of nature throughout this city. This diverse community has a variety of ways to experience the benefits daily nature can provide. FCNAD will continue to strive towards ensuring all visitors feel welcome through meaningful engagement and can find ways to safely and appropriately recreate and experience nature in their daily lives.

**Strategy:** FCNAD is committed to engaging with Fort Collins’ diverse community in meaningful ways. Through programming and outreach, FCNAD can inspire community stewardship which extends positive impacts in the urban ecosystem. FCNAD is dedicated to listening to all community voices and prioritizing historically underrepresented perspectives. FCNAD will protect and/or document historically significant features, infrastructure, and stories. FCNAD will evaluate visitor use trends through data and neighborhood and community engagement.

**Tactics:**

Continue to increase partnership with the neighborhoods surrounding Goose Hollow Natural Area by building trust-based relationships, offering programming, and providing stewardship opportunities.

Assess interests of closeby neighborhood residents for future visitor amenities at recently acquired natural area along Dry Creek to inform comprehensive site plan and site naming.

Conduct visitor use studies along existing corridors to estimate current use and inform site planning for recently acquired natural area along Dry Creek.

Nurture relationships with Native American & Indigenous community members to better understand and support historic ties to land within the urban context.

Document historic buildings and cultural resources at new natural areas as part of site planning and preparation to open for public enjoyment.

Collaborate with FCMOD on appropriate exhibits that highlight urban ecology and the human connection to land.

Explore partnerships to support education about native pollinators.

**Strategy:** FCNAD will provide visitor amenities, improve trail connectivity, and expand visitor experiences and access in the Urban Zone through implementing projects and fostering cross-City partnerships. To determine the best locations and appropriate amenities, FCNAD will conduct assessments and begin to implement priority projects in the coming years, including necessary amenities to open a new natural area. FCNAD will use a Visitor Use Multi-Criteria Decision Assessment (MCDA) tool to make data informed decisions about project priorities.

**Tactics:**

Evaluate and prioritize visitor amenity needs such as parking, bike racks, and toilets, with consideration of adjacent City Park facilities.

Support the Gardens on Spring Creek and Native American & Indigenous communities to grow culturally relevant native plants at the Gardens on Spring Creek.

Foster a partnership with Colorado State University for data sharing to identify future project opportunities for trail and habitat connectivity.

Collaborate with Transfort to highlight bus routes that get visitors to natural areas.

Assess which sites would be most feasible to start increasing availability of ADA access within the Urban Zone and integrate projects with citywide ADA efforts and Visitor Use MCDA.

Audit all urban natural areas to create a plan for accommodating increased family and group activities and best management practices for nature play amenities.

Assess the quality of fisheries and fishing viability within Urban Zone, and improve infrastructure as needed and promote the opportunity.

Consider methods to diversify types of experiences to engage families and diverse audiences.

Determine feasibility of purpose-built ADA trails; including bus access, wheelchair, and vision-impaired purposes at Ross Natural Area.

Support trail connectivity between paved and soft surface trails by participating in the Trails Strategic Plan.

Assess access opportunities to further connect neighborhoods that are currently adjacent to natural areas yet lacking trail connectivity.

Explore the feasibility of completing the loop around the pond at Goose Hollow Natural Area via a boardwalk and adding a floating fishing pier.

Explore the feasibility of installing a bridge across the ditch to complete a trail loop at Red Fox Meadows Natural Area.

Address where parking can occur along Longworth Road at Red Fox Meadows Natural Area to allow more participation in programs.



Explore feasibility of and, if appropriate, plan and develop a trail at Redwing Marsh to direct traffic away from the Larimer/Weld ditch road, possibly including collaboration with the City's Stormwater Utility and neighboring community members to redevelop trails through the adjacent wetland.

Assess safety and visitor amenities at Tanglewood Natural Area.

Improve the natural surface trail connecting the Senior Center with the Spring Creek Trail at Ross Natural Area.

Plan for and implement a safe vehicle and pedestrian bridge crossing of the ditch to gain visitor and maintenance access to the new natural area along Dry Creek.

Construct visitor amenities as determined and prioritized in the site plan and Visitor Use MCDA tool at new natural area along Dry Creek and open site for public enjoyment.



**Strategy:** FCNAD will continue working with key partners to improve safety for all visitors and to protect natural resources. FCNAD will continue routine site clean-ups as well as remove unneeded infrastructure to support conservation efforts in an urban setting. FCNAD will work with partners to provide safe access to sites and possible opportunities to improve habitat.

**Tactics:**

Assess trails and visitor amenities at Red Fox Meadows to identify improvement needs for both visitor experiences and resource protection.

To support wildlife, reduce the presence of fishing line caught in trees through both staff and volunteer efforts.

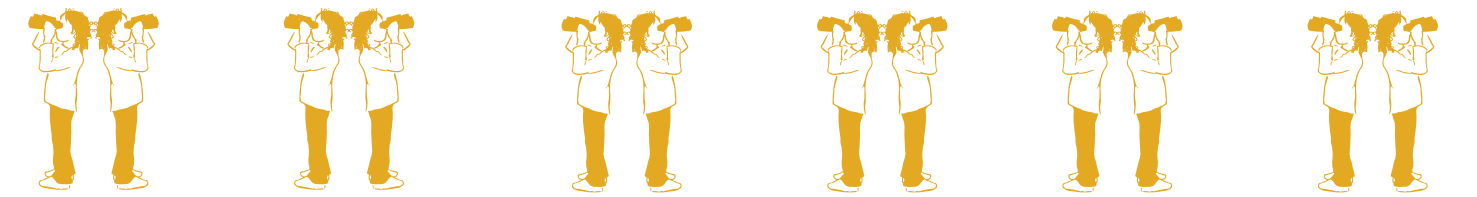
Continue ongoing site clean ups as needed, with a focus on Goose Hollow and Redwing Marsh natural areas, as well as conserved properties along Dry Creek and the Cooper Slough.

Remove unneeded infrastructure at recently acquired natural areas along the Cooper Slough.

Establish a plan for a safe crossing of Willox Street to the new natural area along Dry Creek by partnering with the City's Safe Routes and Active Modes programs.

Collaborate with the City's Safe Routes and Active Modes for safe crossings of Vine to Puente Verde and Kestrel Fields natural areas.

Explore needs and opportunities to install trash collection systems in culverts on drainages leading into natural areas to reduce trash and debris build-up.





# 4

## Responsibly Steward the Community's Resources



Nature throughout the city is a well-appreciated feature of the Fort Collins community. FCNAD will continue routine, ongoing, system-wide work to maintain visitor amenities, provide relevant public programming, and ensure vegetation complies with regulations. FCNAD will ensure staff have the resources, training, and support to promote native urban habitat as well as welcoming and accessible recreation and nature appreciation opportunities for the diverse Fort Collins community.



**Strategy:** Empower and invest in FCNAD staff by creating a workplace with a culture of innovation and mutual respect that responsibly manages assets in accordance with FCNAD and City priorities. FCNAD will continue working to integrate equity and inclusion practices for its visitors and workforce. The Conservation and Stewardship Planning process will be used to regularly review tactics in the Urban Zone and ensure they are aligned with the mission of FCNAD and the community's values.

**Tactics:**

Complete comprehensive site plan that considers ecological, cultural, and social conditions to guide design and implementation of restoration and visitor amenities at the recently acquired natural area along Dry Creek.

Scope opportunities and create a plan for long-term use of large infrastructure at new natural area along Dry Creek.

Conduct planning process for the recently acquired properties along the Cooper Slough to identify and plan for restoration opportunities and appropriate visitor amenities.

Conduct planning process for Puente Verde Natural Area addition to determine appropriate trail connections, visitor amenities, and restoration opportunities in collaboration with the City's Stormwater Utility.

# Resources and Thank You

Visit <https://www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/urban-zone> to learn more about the Urban Zone and to find opportunities for providing feedback anytime.

Thank you to the voters and taxpayers of the City of Fort Collins and Larimer County for supporting community-initiated sales taxes that ensure open lands in the Urban Zone are preserved for generations to come.

## Resources

[Core Natural Areas Management Plan, 2015](#)

[Nature in the City Strategic Plan, 2015](#)

[Restoration Plan, 2016](#)

[Wildlife Conservation Guidelines, 2017](#)

[City Stormwater Utility and Stormwater Basins Map](#)

[Urban Forest Strategic Plan, in process](#)

## Volunteer Photo Credits

Ken Eis, *Mallards at Mallards Nest*, pg v

Bill Walton, *Nature photographer*, pg v

All other photos take by City or Natural Areas Department staff.

Thank you for your contributions!





