

# Visitors to Arapaho Bend Natural Area

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CONSERVATION AND PLANNING TEAM  
OCTOBER 2024

## Executive Summary

Natural Areas staff and volunteers administered visitor exit interviews ( $n = 325$ ) at Arapaho Bend Natural Area in 2024. Interviews were conducted on both weekdays and weekends in two shifts (i.e., 9 am to 12 pm and 2:00 pm to 5 pm). Shift times and days were selected using a stratified random sampling procedure.

The purpose of this effort was to gain a better understanding of visitors to Arapaho Bend Natural Area. Survey questions gathered demographics, group and visitation characteristics, activity types, as well as information about visitor experience. This report is intended to support Natural Areas staff development of a comprehensive site plan for Arapaho Bend.

Given the population of Fort Collins, the sample size, and random selection procedures the findings here have a 95% confidence interval with a  $\pm 5\%$  margin of error.

### Demographics (Table 2)

- More than three quarters of respondents were residents of Larimer County having lived there for an average of 18 years.
- More respondents identified as female (57%) than male (43%).
- The average age of respondents was 50 years old.
- Over 86% of all respondents reported identifying as non-Hispanic, and most were White (91%).

### Visitation Characteristics (Table 3)

- Respondents reported visiting the site up to three times per month on average ( $M = 36$ ).

### Primary Activity (Table 4)

- Hiking/walking (40%) was the most reported primary activity, followed by dog walking (27%), and trail running (13%).

### Group Characteristics (Table 5)

- 62% of respondents reported visiting alone, while twenty-seven percent visited with one other individual.
- 23% of respondents reported at least one child was present in their group.

### Motivations for Visiting (Table 6)

- Respondents most often selected “to be in nature” (25%), “it’s close to home” (24%), and to get exercise (24%) as their reason for visiting the site.

### **Visitor Satisfaction (Tables 7 & 8)**

- Trails, both paved (86%) and natural surface (87%), rated highest for visitor satisfaction. While parking areas, trash receptacles, and signage had a combined rating of 69%. Restroom ratings ranked lowest, with only 18% of respondents assigning them a “good” or “very good” rating, and 64% of all respondents reported not using the restrooms.
- Overall perceived quality of experience at Arapaho Bend was very high with 97% of all respondents reporting “good” to “excellent” ratings.

### **Perceived Safety (Table 9)**

- 97% of respondents reported feeling either “very safe” or “usually safe” at Arapaho Bend, and no one reported feeling “not very safe”.

### **Perceived Access (Table 10)**

- Perceived ease of access was high with nearly all (97%) of respondents reporting access being either “very” or “somewhat easy”.

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## Introduction

The Natural Areas Department is focused on providing high quality experiences for its visitors. Along with continual community engagement and events, the department frequently polls its visitors to understand their experience, improve service delivery, and inform decision-making.

Polling occurs through various methods including mail-in surveys, quick response (QR) codes, focus groups, and on-site intercept surveys (exit interviews). The method selected is often determined by the goals of the research, site conditions, and the level of reliability desired from the data collected.

To support site planning at Arapaho Bend Natural Area, on-site, self-report intercept surveys were used to gather visitor information. Intercept surveys are a proven method for gathering large amounts of information directly from the visitor in an expedient way. When grounded in theory and paired with a stratified random sampling process, self-report surveys can yield valid, representative, and generalizable data for decision-making.

The objectives of this study were to gather data on:

1. Demographic characteristics
2. Visitation and group characteristics
3. Visitor satisfaction
4. Motivations for visiting
5. Perceived safety
6. Perceived accessibility

## Methods

### Data Collection

Natural Areas staff and volunteers conducted visitor exit interviews ( $n = 325$ ) at Arapaho Bend Natural Area between March and October 2024.

The interview site was located at 4109 East Horsetooth Rd. at the trailhead that serves both visitors to Rigden Reservoir and Arapaho Bend. While this location was selected to capture most visitors to the site, it may have limited the following results. This report acknowledges that responses, especially to primary activity type, may be different on the south end of Arapaho Bend Natural Area where water related activities (e.g., paddleboarding) are more accessible.

Theoretical concepts and tested typologies informed survey development. Faculty from Colorado State University's Human Dimensions of Natural Resources school further guided its development. Data gathered through this effort seeks to build off previous research related to indicators and standards for quality visitor experiences (Vaske, 2019).

A stratified random sampling procedure was used to ensure representativeness and generalizability to the Fort Collins community. Survey days and times were selected using a random number generator (stattrek.com). Interviews were conducted on both weekdays and weekends in two shifts (i.e., 8 am to 12 pm and 2 pm to 5 pm). Table 1 summarizes this data collection effort.

**Table 1. Visitor survey data collection effort at Arapaho Bend Natural Area**

Season	
Winter	22%
Spring	47%
Summer	31%
Day of Week	
Weekday	61%
Weekend	39%
Shift	
8:00 – 12 pm	68%
2:00 – 5 pm	32%

## Results

### Demographics

Most visitors (77%) to Arapaho Bend are residents of Larimer County and have lived there for an average of 18 years. More females (57%) than males (43%) responded to the survey, and most identified as non-Hispanic (86%), White (91%), and had an average age of fifty years young.

**Table 2. Demographic profile of visitors to Arapaho Bend Natural Area**

Do you live in Larimer County?	%
Yes	77
No	23
Gender	%
Female	57
Male	43
Gender non-conforming	0.3
Age	%
<20	6
21 to 25	4
26 to 35	12
36 to 45	14
46 to 55	19
56 to 65	20
Over 65	25
Mean age	50
Ethnicity	%
Hispanic/Latinx	10

Non-Hispanic/Latinx	86
Prefer to self-identify	4
Race	%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1
Asian	1
Black	1
White	91
Two or more races	6
Years of Residency	%
One year or less	6
2 to 3	9
4 to 5	7
6 to 10	16
11 to 20	26
21 to 30	20
More than 30 years	17

An analysis of respondent zip codes found that forty percent of responses came from residents of southeast Fort Collins and Windsor. While another forty percent were from other parts of Fort Collins.

**Table 3. Residency of Visitors to Arapaho Bend Natural Area**

Residence	%
Southeast Fort Collins	34
Other Fort Collins	40
Windsor	6
Other Colorado	16
Other US	3

### Visitation Characteristics

Visitation to the site is high, with respondents reporting visiting an average of three times per month. Less than ten percent of respondents were first time visitors.

**Table 4. Number of visits to Arapaho Bend Natural Area in the past twelve months**

Visits	%
First time visiting	7
1 to 2 visits	11
3 to 5 visits	17
6 to 10 visits	18
11 to 20 visits	14

21 to 50 visits	16
Over 50 visits	18
Mean	36

### Primary Activity

Pedestrian use predominates activity types at Arapaho Bend, though this may be influenced by the interview location. Hiking and walking (40%) were the most selected primary activities followed by dog walking (27%), and trail running (13%). Fishing (7%) was the next most popular activity type. Responses catalogued as “other” (3%) often reflect trash clean-up activities or horseback riding.

**Table 5. Primary activity**

Primary Activity	%
Hiking/walking	40
Dog walking	27
Trail Running	13
Fishing	7
Mountain Biking	5
Wildlife Viewing	4
Other	3
Photography/Art	1

### Group Characteristics

62% of respondents reported visiting alone and the average group size was two people. 23% of respondents reported at least one child being present in their group.

**Table 6. Group characteristics of visitors to Arapaho Bend Natural Area**

Number of people in group	%
1	62
2	27
3	4
4 to 5	5
6 or more	3
Mean	2
Range	1 to 30
Number of adults in group	%
1	62
2	31
3	2
4 to 5	3
6 or more	2



Mean	2
Range	1 to 15
Number of children in group	%
0	77
1	11
2	5
3 or more	6
Mean	3
Range	1 to 20

**Motivations for Visiting**

In a question asking respondents to select their primary two reasons for visiting Arapaho Bend Natural Area, respondents most often selected “to be in nature” (25%), “it’s close to home” (24%), and to get exercise (24%).

**Table 7. Two main reasons for visiting Arapaho Bend Natural Area**

Motivations	%
To be in nature.	25
It's close to home.	24
To get exercise.	24
It's less crowded than other natural areas.	6
For relaxation.	5
Other.	5
To spend time with friends or family.	4
To feel better spiritually.	2
To escape from everyday responsibilities or pressure.	2
I feel safe here.	2

**Visitor Satisfaction**

Satisfaction with some facilities at Arapaho Bend Natural Area was below the standard of 80% from human dimensions of natural resources literature (Vaske, 2019). These include restrooms (18%), informational signage (62%), trash receptacles (64%), and parking areas (72%). Trails, both paved (86%) and natural surface (87%) ranked highest in terms of satisfaction with facilities.

Open ended responses to a question asking why respondents rated facilities a certain way included that they were well maintained (*n* = 30) and that there were issues with the restroom (*n* = 18) and with the parking area (*n* = 11).

However, respondents rated a high level of satisfaction (97%) with their overall experience at Arapaho Bend. Open ended responses to a question about overall experience yielded

comments about having a positive experience ( $n = 58$ ), expressing love and appreciation for the area ( $n = 22$ ), and remarks about the views and scenery ( $n = 21$ ).

**Table 8. Perceived quality of facilities and overall experience at Arapaho Bend Natural Area.**

Facility Type	%
Restrooms	18
Parking areas	72
Trash receptacles	64
Kiosk information	62
Paved Trails	86
Natural Surface Trails	87
Overall Quality of Experience	%
Average	3
Good	30
Excellent	67

*\*Percentages reflect combined “very good” and “good” responses.*

### Perceived Safety

In a question asking respondents to rate how safe they feel at Arapaho Bend Natural Area, ninety-seven percent of respondents reported feeling “always” or “usually safe”. No respondents reported ever feeling “not very safe”.

An open-ended question asking respondents to explain safety ratings included comments about persons experiencing homelessness ( $n = 10$ ), and the needs for more ranger patrols ( $n = 9$ ) and an emergency call box ( $n = 5$ ).

**Table 9. Perceived safety at Arapaho Bend Natural Area**

Overall Safety	%
Not very safe	0
Somewhat safe	3
Usually safe	34
Always safe	63

### Perceived Access

Respondents were asked to rate the relative ease of access at Arapaho Bend Natural Area to which over three quarters felt it was “very easy”.

Open ended responses to a question asking about ways to improve accessibility most often included that “nothing” ( $n = 11$ ) was needed or expressed issues with the road ( $n = 5$ ) including potholes and the need to pave it.

**Table 9. Perceived access at Arapaho Bend Natural Area**

Ease of Access	%
Very easy	82
Somewhat easy	15
Neither easy or difficult	2
Somewhat difficult	1

## Conclusion

A random sampling of Arapaho Bend Natural Area visitors between March and October of 2024 yield 325 responses. Aggregated demographic data revealed the average visitor is a white female, aged fifty, who has lived in Larimer County for a total of 18 years.

Visitors were most often pedestrians, at the area alone for a walk or with friends, family, or dogs. One in five of these groups included children. The average respondent reported visiting the site three times per month and were motivated to visit out of a desire “to be in nature”, because the site was “close to home”, or “to get exercise”.

While the overall quality of the visitor experience at Arapaho Bend rated very high, respondents did note issues with some of the visitor amenities provided. Most of these concerns focus on restroom facilities and parking areas and capacities. Still, the overall perception of safety at the site rated high, as did feelings about accessibility of the site.

Arapaho Bend is clearly treasured by the community for a variety of reasons. Open ended responses most often reflect a love and appreciation for the area, its views, and scenery. The abundance of recreational opportunities on the site and its proximity are also factors. Though it is evident that the visitor experience at the site is resoundingly positive, Natural Areas can improve site conditions through upgraded visitor amenities. The Natural Areas department is currently developing a comprehensive site plan for Arapaho Bend that will inform an upcoming restoration project and guide future visitor amenities projects. Data from this report will help aid decision-making about those developments.

## Appendix – Survey Instrument



This survey will help **City of Fort Collins Natural Areas** staff better understand visitors' views and improve service delivery. Your participation is completely voluntary, and your answers will remain anonymous.

**Thank you for your help- your input is greatly appreciated!**

### TODAY'S VISIT

1. About how many visits have you made to this natural area in the past 12 months?  
*(If this is your first visit or you come here less than once per year, write 0)* \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please check the **TWO** main reasons you chose to visit **THIS** natural area instead of others.

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> It's close to home.    | <input type="checkbox"/> To be in nature.                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> It's less crowded than other natural areas. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To get exercise.       | <input type="checkbox"/> For relaxation.                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> To develop my skills and abilities.         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel safe here.      | <input type="checkbox"/> To escape from everyday responsibilities or pressure. | <input type="checkbox"/> To spend time with friends or family.       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To learn about nature. | <input type="checkbox"/> To feel better spiritually.                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                                 |

3. What was your primary activity **TODAY** during your visit? (Check only one)

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking        | <input type="checkbox"/> Dog walking      | <input type="checkbox"/> Photography/Art   | <input type="checkbox"/> Paddleboarding  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biking        | <input type="checkbox"/> Picnicking       | <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing           | <input type="checkbox"/> Swimming/Wading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trail running | <input type="checkbox"/> Wildlife Viewing | <input type="checkbox"/> Kayaking/Canoeing | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____     |

4. WHO were you travelling with today?  
*(Check one, and write in the number of people in your group, if more than just you today.)*

\_\_\_ Just me!    \_\_\_ Group ( \_\_\_ # adults, \_\_\_ # children)

5. Please rate the quality of each of the facilities that you used today by circling the appropriate number for each facility.

	Did Not Use	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very Good
Restrooms	0	1	2	3	4	5
Parking Areas	0	1	2	3	4	5
Trash Receptacles	0	1	2	3	4	5
Kiosk Materials & Signs	0	1	2	3	4	5
Paved Trails	0	1	2	3	4	5

Natural Surface Trails      0      1      2      3      4      5

Please explain why you rated the facilities this way:

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6. How would you rate your overall experience at this natural area? *(Circle one number)*

Poor		Neutral		Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Please explain why you rated it this way:

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7. Please rate how safe you feel at this natural area:

Not very safe     Somewhat safe     Usually safe     Always safe

If you feel unsafe, what could the City do to make you feel safer at this natural area?

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8. How easy, if at all, do you feel it is to access this natural area?

Very easy                       Somewhat easy                       Neither easy or difficult  
 Somewhat difficult             Very difficult

What can the Natural Areas Department do to make accessing this natural area easier for you?

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**Please tell us about yourself (All responses will be kept confidential).**

9. Which best describes your gender?

Female                       Male                       Gender non-conforming

10. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ (Years)

11. What is your ethnicity?

Hispanic/Latinx             Non-Hispanic/Latinx             Prefer to self-identify \_\_\_\_\_

12. What is your race?

American Indian/Alaska Native                       Asian                       Black/African American

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

White

Two or more races

13. What is your Zip Code for your PRIMARY residence? \_\_\_\_\_

14. If you live in Larimer County, how long have you lived here? \_\_\_\_\_ (Years)

**COMMENTS**

