From the Chairperson of the Open Lands Advisory Commission

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

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

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

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

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

OLAC encourages you to get out and enjoy your open lands.

Gale Bernhardt, Chairperson, Open Lands Advisory Commission

Our Lands - Our Future Regional Open Space Study

In preparation for updating the 2003 Open Lands Plan, Loveland partnered in Our Lands – Our Future, a collaborative regional open space study, Larimer County and all of its municipalities joined together to evaluate the region’s land conservation and nature-based recreation programs, to help shape the vision and planning for the region’s critical landscapes and outdoor recreation opportunities. The study assessed citizens’ uses, needs and preferences related to recreation, stewardship and conservation of public lands and will help guide how future open space and natural area tax dollars are spent.

The project included public surveys and outreach, analysis of open space acquisition and management costs, and a Geographic Information System (GIS) model available online (http://ilpogis.org/OurLands-OurFuture/). Preliminary results of the study indicate a preference for an “equal balance” in prioritization toward preservation of open lands and public access for outdoor recreation opportunities. Loveland residents favored preservation of neighborhood natural areas, ecologically sensitive lands, and regional trail corridors.

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

Mission Statement

The mission of the City of Loveland Open Lands Program is to identify, preserve, protect and enhance open space, natural areas and other significant lands. This ongoing process is accomplished through cooperation with and respect for private and public landowners, surrounding municipalities and counties, natural resource agencies, and other organizations with similar interests.

Open Lands Annual Report 2012

River’s Edge Natural Area Planned for Public Access

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

The property is adjacent to Jayhawker Ponds and a new bridge over Ryan Gulch will connect the two sites, for a combined 155-acre natural area with 5 ponds. Two miles of new trails throughout the site will provide ample opportunities for bird watching and wildlife viewing in a natural setting, as well as provide connections to the existing Recreation Trail to the north. Trails will lead to fishing and float tube access points on 3 ponds, an ADA-accessible fishing dock on Dragonfly Pond, and a dock on Bass Pond. Funding for fishing access was leveraged with a $90,000 Fishing is Fun grant awarded by Colorado Parks & Wildlife. A new boardwalk that incorporates natural wetland filtration will provide a unique up-close experience at the water’s edge of Bass Pond. Wetland creation and shoreline improvement on the ponds is a significant project.

City staff and volunteer crews have removed hundreds of invasive Russian olive trees, and wetland enhancement establishing native species is underway, creating beneficial habitat for fish, waterfowl, songbirds, and mammals.

The Loveland Open Lands Program was successful in receiving a Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant for $18,872 to fund the Larimer County Youth Corps, providing installation of new boundary fencing. Wildlife-friendly split-rail fencing and walk-through access points will replace the existing chain link fencing along West 1st Street and the Recreation Trail. The Open Lands Program will be recruiting Volunteer Trail Hosts to provide stewardship of the site and to assist and educate visitors.

The Environmental Education Program is developing a new curriculum specifically for River’s Edge, to be offered to school groups, organizations and individuals. Providing such diverse recreation close to downtown, along with the extensive habitat restoration efforts underway, River’s Edge Natural Area will be the crown jewel of the Loveland Open Lands Program.

The much-anticipated opening of River’s Edge is planned for September 28, 2013.

Updated information can be found at: www.Cityofloveland.org/RiverSEdge.
Voluntary Jobs

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

Environmental Education

Loveland’s Environmental Education Program served nearly 1,200 area students in 2012, including the Wildlife Program at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park and the Colorado Parks & Wildlife Program at Morey Wildlife Reserve. Students from 18 different schools attended the Viestenz-Smith program, where they learned about Colorado life zones, native vegetation, wildlife classification and management, and wetlands, while rotating through interactive exhibits, learning stations and a foot-hills hike. This full-day field trip is offered primarily to 4th & 5th grade classes during the spring & fall seasons. Colorado Parks & Wildlife facilitates a program for 3rd graders at Morey Wildlife Reserve, providing training and materials for teachers to lead their classes with the help of volunteers utilizing curriculum guides from Project WILD, Project Learning Tree, and local resources. Topics covered at Morey include wetland and pond habitats, wildlife adaptations, and invertebrates, corresponding to 3rd grade science curriculum standards.

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

Looking to the Future

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

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

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

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### History

In 1995, Larimer County voters passed the Help Preserve Open Space (HPOS) initiative, approving a quarter-cent sales and use tax to protect open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, regional parks and trails. HPOS revenues provide the majority of the Loveland Open Lands Program funding. In 1996, the Loveland Open Lands Plan was adopted, giving City staff direction to form an Open Lands Advisory Commission. Larimer County voters extended the open space sales tax in 1999, to sunset in 2018. Loveland Open Lands resources were augmented in 2002 with the City’s adoption of an Open Lands Capital Expansion Fee (CEF). This CEF of $246,078 for each new dwelling unit provides additional funding for open lands capital expenditures, based on residential building activity.
Parks & Recreation Master Plan, completed in 2013 and results will be used for integrating Loveland’s Open Lands Plan making that reflects each community’s priorities and needs. The study will generate a regional framework for strategic decision-making.

Preliminary results of the study indicate a preference for an “equal balance” in open space views, wildlife habitats and outdoor recreation opportunities. The study assessed citizens’ uses, needs and preferences related to recreation, stewardship and evolution of public lands and will help guide how future open space and natural area tax dollars are spent. The project included public surveys and outreach, analysis and design consultant to develop a Master Plan and design for public use of the property. Planned recreational opportunities include hiking, bicycling, fishing, wildlife viewing, and environmental education.

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Saw-whet Owl photo by Chuck Hundermark

Gale Bernhardt, Chairperson, Open Lands Advisory Commission

Our Lands Advisory Commission

The Open Lands Advisory Commission is comprised of volunteers who live in or near the City and represent the City’s diverse land use interests. Meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month. The Commission advises City Council regarding open lands issues.

Members:
Lori Bell, Vice Chair
Gale Bernhardt, Chair
Rick Brent
Andy Hasebaker
Ross Livingston
M. Stephen McMillan
Ted Moduzski
Darren Pape
William Zawacki
Rob Burdine, Staff Liaison
Hugh McKean, City Council Liaison
Karen Rolins, Larimer Co. Liaison

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