

2016

Larimer County Natural Resources Annual Report



Visitor Services | Open Lands | Weeds | Forestry



OUR MISSION

To establish, protect and manage significant regional parks and open lands providing quality outdoor recreational opportunities and stewardship of natural resource values. We are committed to fostering a sense of community and appreciation for the natural and agricultural heritage of Larimer County for present and future generations.



Guided hike at Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch Conservation Easement, Photo © Jonathan Rayeski

CONNECTING YOU TO THE GREAT OUTDOORS

How do you enjoy Larimer County’s parks, open spaces and trails? From boating to biking and hiking to horseback riding, we all enjoy the great outdoors in different ways. I’m proud to work alongside so many amazing people at Larimer County Department of Natural Resources who strive every day to offer diverse, fun, safe opportunities for you to connect with the best of our county’s outdoor resources.

Last year, we opened a visitor information center at Horsetooth Reservoir to help the many people who visit the Horsetooth area every year better connect to recreational activities in the area. If you have not already, stop by the center to discover new ways to play at Horsetooth.

We also purchased a 211-acre farm near Berthoud to conserve its myriad of values. As more farmland gets converted to other uses in Larimer County, this farm will remain in production in perpetuity and will one day be a place where people can connect to the county’s rich agricultural heritage.

I encourage you to flip through this report and discover other ways we’re advancing conservation and recreation and connecting people to nature. Then, head outside and hike through the canyons at Red Mountain Open Space, ride your bike along the Poudre River Trail, go fishing at Carter Lake or camping at Hermit Park Open Space, or join us for a guided hike at one of your parks and open spaces.

As always, thank you to our professional staff, our outstanding citizen advisory boards and especially to our Board of County Commissioners for your guidance and support.

Now, however you choose to do it, get outdoors and play!

Handwritten signature of Gary Buffington in black ink.

Gary Buffington

Director, Department of Natural Resources

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources 2016 Annual Report

Published: May 2017

Cover photo: New open space farm © Charlie Johnson

Larimer County Government Officials

Board of County Commissioners: Lew Gaiter III, Steve Johnson, Tom Donnelly

County Manager: Linda Hoffmann

Public Works Director: Todd Blomstrom

THANK YOU to Our Citizen Advisory Boards

Open Lands Advisory Board

Back: Chris Fleming*, Steve Gibson*, Sherri Valentine, Carl Sorrentino, David Marvin, Commissioner Tom Donnelly

Middle: Meegan Flenniken*, Suzan Fritchel, Nancy Wallace (chair), Gerry Horak

Front: Trudy Haines, Kerri Rollins*, Jeff Hindman, Marilyn Hilgenberg

Not pictured: Jason Brothers, Gary Buffington*, Peter Kelly, Ward Nelson

*Staff



Photo © Sandy Werkmeister

Parks Advisory Board

Back: Pat McCusker, Steve Ambrose, Dan Rieves*, Russell Fruits (chair)

Middle: Chris Klaas, Lori Smith*, Stephanie Van Dyken, Rob Harris, Nick Clark, Mark DeGregorio, Frank Gillespie, Ron Kainer, Commissioner Steve Johnson

Front: Gary Buffington*, Deborah Shulman, Ken Brink*

Not pictured: Mark Caughlan*, John Tipton

*Staff



Photo © Kim Butler

Land Stewardship Advisory Board

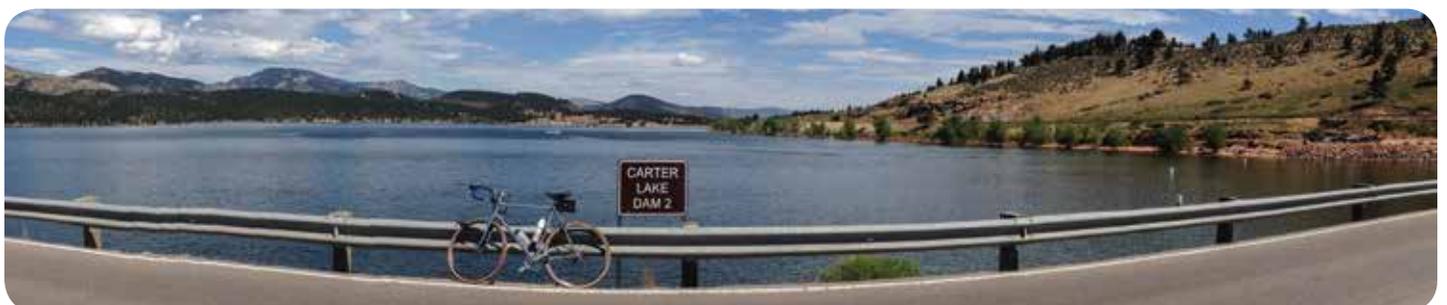
Left to right: Richard "Hitch" McCulloch, Gary Buffington*, Commissioner Lew Gaiter III, Meegan Flenniken*, Ernie Marx (chair), Timothy Koski, Ken Mathias, Casey Cisneros*, Dave Lentz*, Alex Wendorf*

Not pictured: Kim Obele, Carmen Weston

*Staff



Photo © Chris Metz



Carter Lake, Photo © Rod Cerkoney



CONSERVATION



With funding from the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax and the Town of Berthoud, Larimer County purchased this farm to conserve working lands in the county. Photo © Charlie Johnson



The farm's big red barn can be seen for miles. General public access to the farm is not permitted at this time, although public tours are being planned. Photo © Charlie Johnson

PRESERVING HISTORIC FARMLAND

A big red barn greets visitors to Larimer County as they drive north on U.S. Highway 287. The barn is symbolic of the county's agricultural heritage, which is in jeopardy as farmland and water rights are continually converted for other uses.

Last August, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources purchased the 211-acre farm where this barn resides, along with the farm's valuable water rights, from the Malchow family. Located southwest of Berthoud, the farm is leased to a local farmer who grew corn and hay on the property last year.

Along with agricultural values, the farm offers stunning views of Longs Peak and the Front Range, helps maintain a community separator between Berthoud and Longmont, and offers a potential future location for agricultural education in southern Larimer County. In addition, the farm contains several historic features, including a pioneer grave site from the mid-1800s and the barn built in 1907. The Overland Trail once crossed the property.

Larimer County acquired the water rights along with the farm, which include 240 units of Colorado-Big Thompson, or C-BT, water. The department is seeking partners to share the farm's water to help offset the overall cost of the purchase.

SUPPORTING FARMING AND RANCHING

Larimer County leases land on its open spaces for farming and ranching. In 2016, open spaces produced the following crops and supported the following livestock:

293 tons of alfalfa and **120** tons of hay at River Bluffs Open Space

10,080 bushels of wheat at Long View Farm Open Space

29,600 bushels of corn and **70** tons of hay at the new farm near Berthoud

181 tons of hay at Red Mountain Open Space

300+ head of livestock at Eagle's Nest and Red Mountain open spaces



Whether preserving historic farmland, aiding in species restoration or protecting native ecosystems, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources is working to further conservation across our great county for the benefit of present and future generations.

SAVING OUR STATE FISH

Greenback cutthroat trout were once near extinction, but efforts are underway to restore the species across its native range in Colorado.

Last year, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Larimer County Department of Natural Resources stocked greenback cutthroat trout in a section of Sand Creek on Red Mountain Open Space. This experimental stocking effort will help CPW biologists determine if greenback cutthroat trout, Colorado's State Fish, can thrive in this spring-fed creek and outcompete non-native brook trout.

Fishing is not allowed in Sand Creek, and the section of creek with greenback cutthroat trout is closed to the public to protect sensitive plants and wildlife.



About 270 1-year-old and 2,000 young-of-year greenback cutthroat trout were placed in Sand Creek in 2016 as part of an experimental stocking effort. Photo © Charlie Johnson

CURBING A 'LIST A' WEED

In 2010, an attractive plant with showy pink flowers was first found in Larimer County near the junction of Trilby Road and Lemay Avenue. The plant, called hairy willow-herb, spread voraciously through the Spring Creek drainage in Fort Collins and other wetland areas in the county, clogging small waterways, displacing native plants, degrading wildlife habitat and increasing bank erosion.

In 2015, hairy willow-herb was named a "List A" species under the Colorado Noxious Weed Act. With support from the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Larimer County's Land Stewardship Program has been working to curb the spread of hairy willow-herb across the county through mapping, monitoring and treating this colorful – but troublesome – noxious weed.



Hairy willow-herb has been found on only one of Larimer County's parks and open spaces: Devil's Backbone Open Space. Efforts to eradicate the species there are underway. Photo © Steve Priest

LOOKING AHEAD

In 2017, Larimer County is seeking funds to implement sections of a plan developed last year to begin restoring areas along the Cache la Poudre River at River Bluffs Open Space. Work is needed to make the river and surrounding lands more resilient during flooding and ensure they provide healthy habitat for fish and wildlife.

Larimer County is continuing efforts to find partners to share water purchased with the new farm southwest of Berthoud. This water sharing agreement, known as an Alternative Transfer Mechanism, is an innovative, cooperative solution encouraged by the 2016 Colorado Water Plan to share water across uses without permanently drying up high-quality working farms.

In 2017, Larimer County has been preparing for a possible invasion of the emerald ash borer, an insect that kills ash trees and poses a threat to economic and environmental health and public safety. Select ash trees are being removed from county properties and replaced with other tree species.



RECREATION



OPENING AN INFO CENTER AT HORSETOOTH RESERVOIR

Horsetooth Reservoir is one of the most popular boating destinations in Colorado, and the open spaces, natural areas, parks and trails around the reservoir receive tens of thousands of visitors annually.

To better serve an increasing number of visitors, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources opened the Horsetooth Area Information Center in the South Bay area of Horsetooth Reservoir in September. The center serves as a one-stop shop for info on recreation areas, trails, camping, boating, fishing and more. It is open daily from March to October and weekdays during the colder months.

Along with serving visitors, the Horsetooth Area Information Center is the new home for staff who works at Horsetooth Reservoir. In addition to the center, a new maintenance building was also constructed in the South Bay area to provide a place to service vehicles, store equipment and support crews.

The new Horsetooth Area Information Center provides a one-stop shop for visitors. Front desk staff can be reached at (970) 498-5610. Photo © Bill Gentry



MEETING THE DEMAND FOR TRAIL INFORMATION

Citizens enjoy an extensive network of paved and natural surface trails in Larimer County, but getting information on trail conditions and closures is challenging, especially with so many agencies managing trails in the county. To make this info more easily accessible, Larimer County and the City of Fort Collins partnered to develop NoCo Trail Report, a web-based application that provides real-time info on trails managed by Larimer County Natural Resources, City of Fort Collins Parks and City of Fort Collins Natural Areas.

The app can be accessed at www.NoCoTrailReport.org.

BUILDING AND ENHANCING TRAILS

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources maintains more than 90 miles of natural surface and paved trails. In 2016, the department completed the following trail work:

1.8-mile Hidden Valley Trail built at Devil's Backbone Open Space

515-foot section of the Pleasant Valley Trail repaired at Lions Open Space

2.6 miles of new trails built at Hermit Park Open Space



With input from citizens, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources strives to offer top-notch services and amenities on its parks and open spaces, regularly improving its facilities, parking areas and trails to provide the best possible experience for its visitors.

MITIGATING PARKING ISSUES AT POPULAR TRAILHEADS

Trailheads close to urban areas often hit capacity on weekends and holidays. To address this issue, parking lots were enhanced in 2016 at the Devil's Backbone and Soderberg trailheads.

At Devil's Backbone, the trailhead was reconfigured to add more single-vehicle parking spaces and enhance traffic flow. In addition, a webcam on the parking area and dog-friendly water fountain were added to the trailhead in 2017, and interpretive materials are coming soon.

At Soderberg, which accesses Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, a separate parking lot for horse trailers was constructed at the trailhead, with five spaces for a vehicle and trailer. In addition, the existing parking lot was improved to include more single-vehicle spaces, angled parking and better traffic flow.



Larimer County crews completed most of the work on the remodeled Soderberg Trailhead, saving taxpayers thousands of dollars. Photo © Steve McCorkel

PROVIDING QUICKER ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE

Last year, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources partnered with UHealth and Poudre Fire Authority to staff a ranger boat with medical personnel during busy summer months at Horsetooth Reservoir. That way, visitors with medical emergencies could receive care much faster, when minutes can save lives.

From Memorial Day to Labor Day weekends, paramedics from UHealth and emergency medical technicians from PFA responded to 28 incidents, ranging from heat exhaustion to a boat fire to a broken ankle. The partnership will continue in 2017 with medical personnel staffing two ranger boats every weekend during the summer.

In addition, Larimer County acquired four 21-foot Relentless Metal Shark ranger boats for its reservoir parks. The boats are more fuel efficient and durable and provide more work space than the boats they replaced.



Braden Applegate, of UHealth, and Jim Hawkins, of Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, prepare to hit the water at Horsetooth Reservoir. Photo © Jim Hawkins

LOOKING AHEAD

In September of 2017, Larimer County is expected to complete an update to the existing Parks Master Plan for its four reservoir parks. With input from the public and stakeholder groups, the new plan will identify specific projects to implement and address visitor use, current conditions and demands at the four parks. More info about the planning process is available at www.onegreatcountytoplay.com.

Larimer County and its partners are slated to break ground in 2017 on two new paved trails linking Loveland and Fort Collins and each city's existing trail networks. The 4.4-mile Long View Corridor Trail will connect to trail networks on the west side of the cities, while the 2.2-mile Colorado Front Range Trail will link with trails on the east side.

In April, Larimer County wrapped up a project at Lions Open Space to repair damage caused during previous flooding of the Cache la Poudre River, which flows adjacent to the open space in Laporte. Trees and shrubs were planted in the spring along the east riverbank, which was stabilized last year to make it more resilient to future floods. Fish habitat was also enhanced in the river.



EDUCATION, VOLUNTEERS AND OUTREACH



Nearly two dozen people take a tour of ancient sites at Roberts Ranch Conservation Easement to learn about the prehistoric peoples who once dwelled there, during a special program hosted for the 20th anniversary of Help Preserve Open Spaces. Photo © Brendan Bombaci



Volunteers remove noxious weeds along the Blue Sky Trail at Devil's Backbone Open Space as part of a special 20th anniversary project. Photo © Pam Mayhew

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF HELP PRESERVE OPEN SPACES

From wildlife to trails to breathtaking views, natural resources are a big part of what makes Larimer County such a great place to live. Many of the natural amenities we all enjoy in the county have been conserved thanks to funding from the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax.

In 2016, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources celebrated 20 years of Help Preserve Open Spaces and the impact its funding has had on all of us in Larimer County. Community members enjoyed outdoor programs, volunteer projects and events on lands conserved with open spaces tax funds.

As part of the 20th anniversary celebration, people participated in special programs on cultural history, wildlife, plants and art; got their hands dirty restoring the land and building new trails; and explored their amazing open spaces with a new passport program (see story on page 8). In addition, a party was held on Sept. 22 with more than 80 partners, staff and supporters of Help Preserve Open Spaces.

Visit www.larimer.org/openspaces20th, or search #openspaces20th on Facebook and Twitter, to see more photos and learn about the open spaces tax.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: 2016 BY THE NUMBERS



342 volunteers donated **25,396 hours of service** to Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

7,206 people participated in 150 activities including guided hikes, school field trips, campground programs, community events, trailhead tables, trainings and more.



Larimer County Department of Natural Resources offers educational and volunteer opportunities for people of all ages to learn about the natural world, make a difference on their parks and open spaces, and get into the great outdoors.

EXPLORING OPEN SPACES WITH THE NEW PASSPORT



In 2016, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources launched a passport program as part of the 20th anniversary of Help Preserve Open Spaces to encourage people to explore Larimer County's diverse, scenic open spaces.

For the program, posts were installed on eight open spaces across the county. Two posts were placed on each open space in easy (short hike) and hard (long hike) locations. Each post had a plaque affixed to it with a unique image. People could place their passport brochure over the plaque

and make a rubbing of the image to "stamp" their passport. If they collected enough rubbings, they won prizes!

Thousands of people participated in the program, with more than 200 people submitting a completed passport in 2016. The program continues in 2017. People can continue collecting rubbings and finish their passports! To learn more about the program, visit www.larimer.org/passport.



Larimer County Commissioner Tom Donnelly leads a hike in October to the "hard" passport post on Ramsay-Shockey Open Space. Photo © Kerri Rollins

VOLUNTEERING TO BUILD A BETTER LARIMER COUNTY

Volunteers add tremendous capacity to Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. In 2016, 342 volunteers donated 25,396 hours to the department to enhance programs and services: monitoring wildlife, taking pictures, leading education programs, assisting rangers, hosting campgrounds, building and patrolling trails, removing invasive plants, helping at events and performing many other duties. Thank you to these individuals, organizations and corporate groups for their time and talents!



Volunteers help build new trail at Hermit Park Open Space during a project in October organized with Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado. Photo © Pam Mayhew

LOOKING AHEAD

Larimer County and a coalition of agencies, school districts and nonprofits have been working on a project through Great Outdoors Colorado's Inspire Initiative to connect more kids with nature in northwest Fort Collins and southeast Loveland. After much community engagement, they are nearly finished with the planning phase and will apply for implementation funding in 2017. For more information on Project Outdoors: Plug in to Nature, visit www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/project-outdoors and www.cityofloveland.org/projectoutdoors.

In 2017, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources launched a new event registration and volunteer management system, called Offero. Through Offero, people can view a calendar of programs, guided hikes, volunteer projects and more; register for these activities; request a special program or school field trip; and apply to be a volunteer with the department. Volunteers can use Offero to sign up for opportunities and track their hours. To access the new system, visit offerol.arimer.org.



COLLABORATION

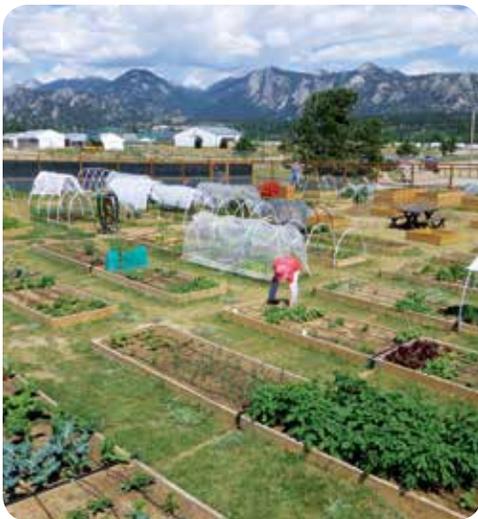


Larimer County helped the City of Loveland to acquire this working farm in west Loveland. Photo © City of Loveland Open Lands and Trails

FURTHERING LAND CONSERVATION THROUGH DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS

With a county-wide perspective, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources is positioned to assist partners across the entire county with projects that advance conservation and recreation. Last year, the department:

- Provided **\$250,000** to the City of Loveland to help acquire a **77-acre working farm** and hayfield south of the Big Thompson River in the west Loveland priority area, with additional funding from Great Outdoors Colorado, and agreed to hold a conservation easement on the property
- Agreed to hold conservation easements on **properties totaling 206 acres** along the Cache la Poudre River east of Windsor through a partnership with the Town of Windsor and City of Greeley, with funding from Great Outdoors Colorado
- Provided **\$5,000** to the Estes Valley Land Trust to help cover the transaction costs to acquire a conservation easement on a **35-acre property** in the Estes Park area
- Agreed to hold a conservation easement on a **362-acre property** northwest of Lory State Park through a partnership with the City of Fort Collins
- Provided **\$5,000** to the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust to help cover the transaction costs to purchase a **1,360-acre working ranch** in the Laramie River Valley priority area



Peas, lettuces, onions, beans, potatoes, herbs, tomatoes and squashes grew well in the mountain climate last year at the Estes Valley Community Garden. Photo © EVCG

SMALL GRANTS SPOTLIGHT: ESTES VALLEY COMMUNITY GARDEN

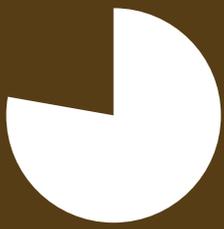
Annually through its Small Grants for Community Partnering program, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources gives back a portion of funds from the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax to support projects that connect people to the land.

For the last three years, the department has awarded Small Grants funding to a community garden in Estes Park that has sprouted up thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers. The Estes Valley Community Garden offers plots for residents and organizations to grow fruits, vegetables and herbs in an area of the county where wildlife, HOA rules and apartment living make home gardening a challenge.

The nonprofit community garden, located inside of Stanley Park, broke ground in the fall of 2015 and had its first growing season in 2016. Funds from the Small Grants program supported the building of 68 raised beds and a drip irrigation system, as well as a gathering area that will be constructed later this year. "I don't think we could have done it without the Small Grants program," said garden board vice president Connie Dedon.

Demand for the garden has been high: All 68 plots are either dedicated to groups, such as Crossroads Ministry food pantry, the nearby elementary school and the Girl Scouts, or rented by citizens. To learn more about the garden, visit www.evcg.org.

Applications for Small Grants are typically due in the fall. To learn more about the program, visit www.larimer.org/openlands/smallgrants.htm.



FINANCIALS

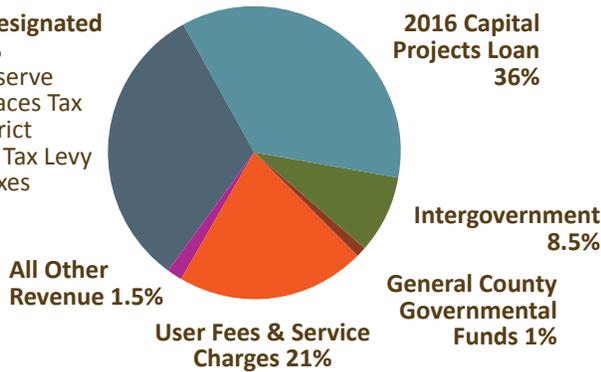
DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES SUMMARY OF FINANCES

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources includes the Parks Program, Open Lands Program, and Weeds and Forestry Program. Revenues are realized from a number of sources and totaled \$21 million in 2016. Expenses for 2016 were \$23 million including a number of one-time capital development projects for both Parks and Open Lands. Major capital projects in 2016 included a new visitor service facility and maintenance shop at Horsetooth Reservoir.

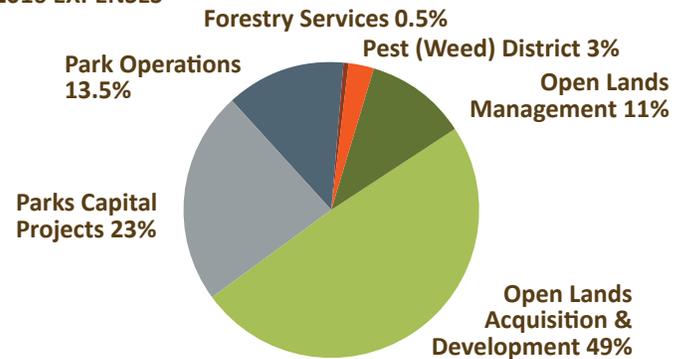
2016 REVENUES

Specific Designated Taxes 32%

- Help Preserve Open Spaces Tax
- Pest District Property Tax Levy
- Other Taxes



2016 EXPENSES



* These figures are not audited. Audit will be completed in mid-2017.

HELP PRESERVE OPEN SPACES TAX REVENUES

Revenue from the 1/4-cent Help Preserve Open Spaces sales and use tax is shared among Larimer County and the eight municipalities in the county. The tax was extended in 2014 and will sunset in 2043. It is not imposed on food or prescription drugs. The total revenue collected to date is more than \$196 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 Larimer County receive benefits from the Help Preserve Open Spaces tax.

* These figures are not audited. Audit will be completed in mid-2017. 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	49,957
2010	3,920,058	118,288	244,384	3,058,106	55,501	1,558,011	6,746	123,466	59,200
2011	4,114,913	120,393	265,441	3,227,847	62,688	1,592,744	48,317	129,817	71,406
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
2015	5,718,927	160,117	366,203	4,555,811	88,500	2,368,947	99,959	202,066	151,192
2016	6,021,598	174,706	358,252	4,782,068	105,249	2,500,949	130,089	222,412	173,375
Total	82,186,107	2,556,123	5,270,310	69,855,426	693,360	31,780,440	642,257	2,185,478	1,045,481
% Total	41.89%	1.30%	2.69%	35.60%	.35%	16.20%	.33%	1.11%	.53%

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources

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