



CONSERVATION

# Larimer County Natural Resources

2020 ANNUAL REPORT





# Thank You Citizen Advisory Boards

## Land Stewardship Advisory Board

Laura Booth  
Tasha Carr  
Renee Galeano-Popp  
Ronald Harris (Vice Chair, November 2020)  
Ernie Marx  
Richard McCulloch  
Gordon Nuttall (Vice Chair, Jan-May 2020)  
Ed Redente (Chair)

## Open Lands Advisory Board

Gale Bernhardt  
Rick Brent  
Jason Brothers  
K-Lynn Cameron  
Mark DeGregorio  
Bob Hewson  
Peter Kelly  
David Marvin (Vice Chair)  
Tom Shoemaker  
Linda Stanley  
Sherri Valentine  
Nancy Wallace (Chair)  
Ken Zornes

## Parks Advisory Board

Steve Ambrose  
Steven Amundson  
Pete Blume  
Spencer Clark  
Russell Fruits (Chair)  
Robert Harris (Vice Chair, July 2020)  
Kristina Kachur  
Daniela Lawler  
Kathy Maher  
Amanda Peters  
Michael Robinson  
Ruthie Rollins  
Deborah Shulman (Vice Chair, Jan-July 2020)  
Jill Wuertz

Thank you to Larimer County  
Government Officials:

## Board of County Commissioners:

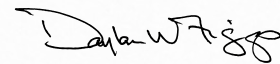
John Kefalas, Kristin Stephens, Jody Shaddock-McNally, Steve Johnson\*, Tom Donnelly\*  
\*terms expired in 2020

County Manager: Linda Hoffmann  
Community Planning, Infrastructure and  
Resources Director: Laurie Kadrach

Cover photo: Towers Vista, Photo © Brendan Bombaci.

# Nature is Open

A new decade welcomed unprecedented challenges and opportunities in the Department of Natural Resources and frankly, in our world. While public health and safety ranked priority number one, community members turned to our natural spaces in unprecedented ways in 2020. We were honored to be a haven for fresh air retreat and recreation, a safe place to connect with others and with nature. In 2020, we experienced the tragic loss of one of our own, two catastrophic wildfires, record-breaking visitation and yet – our community's resilient nature provided great moments of hope for the future. Resiliency remains our steadfast goal this year and beyond.



**Daylan Figgs**  
Director, Department of Natural Resources

# Our Mission

To establish, protect and manage significant regional parks and open lands providing quality outdoor recreational opportunities and stewardship of natural resource values.



In Memory, Never Forgotten

# Ranger Brendan Unitt

End of Watch: August 20, 2020

# 2020 at a Glance



**\$12.8M**

Total grants received to leverage department funds for land conservation, stewardship and capital projects



**SAFETY FIRST**

Covid response and  
2 Wildfires



**1,975**

Acres of land conserved



**DEVIL'S BACKBONE OPEN SPACE**

Visitor Use Study  
completed



20 ★ 20

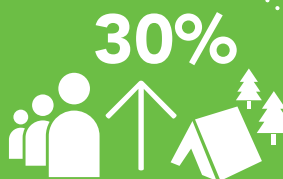
**STARBURST AWARD**

From Colorado Lottery for  
Poudre River Restoration &  
Resilience Project at River  
Bluffs Open Space



**16,113**

Volunteer service hours



**30%**

**VISITATION &  
CAMPING**

At open spaces,  
reservoir parks, and trails





# Keeping the Door Open to the Great Outdoors

Our work in 2020 reflects the Department's dedication to delivering quality visitor experiences, safe and enjoyable public access to the outdoors, and the conservation and stewardship of vital Larimer County landscapes. The following summaries highlight some of the key milestones from 2020 that represent our collective work.

## **Covid-19 Response – Safety First**

Keeping the community safe while welcoming more visitors than ever before to our parks and open spaces was focus number one in 2020. Focus shifted from “normal” operations to heightened attention on personal safety (for both public and staff) and access due to the pandemic. While we continued to serve the community in-person at our parks and open spaces, most internal operations pivoted to virtual, including new parking webcams, updating all pay station components, and converting vehicle permits to online sales. Increases in PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) supplies and processes, curbside herbicide sales, custodial operations, and remote officing all played a significant role in our attention to safety and access.

## **Visitor Experience Improvements**

Improvements completed at Hermit Park Open Space to improve visitor experiences included a newly constructed amphitheater for education programs, building a single track alignment for the Moose Meadow Trail, and improvements to Kruger Rock Trail to ensure sustainability and minimize widening. In addition, 1.1 miles of roadway were resurfaced along the cabin loops.

At Red Mountain Open Space, realignment of the Salt Lick and Big Hole Wash trails was completed – resulting in better route navigation for visitors.

## **Conserving Vital Landscapes**

Conservation of two working ranches, totaling 1,975-acres in the Laramie Foothills, were both finalized in 2020, providing significant visual and wildlife habitat buffers to Red Mountain Open Space. The lands were conserved in partnership between Larimer County, the City of Fort Collins and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), with a generous donation from the Steputis family to ensure perpetual conservation of their family ranch.

## **Restoration & Land Stewardship**

At Devil's Backbone Open Space, 316 acres of mixed grass plant communities were restored, and at River Bluffs Open Space, fifteen native trees were planted in the place of non-native species.

A new noxious weed, plumeless thistle (*Carduus acanthoides*), was discovered for the first time in Larimer County (near Drake), and department staff is working to eliminate this new invader before it becomes established.

Restoration of the Herrington/Soderberg ranch buildings at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space was completed in 2020 in partnership with HistoriCorps, a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit.



## Capital Improvements & Regional Trail Connections

Ten road and infrastructure improvement projects will move forward at Horsetooth and Carter Lake reservoirs, thanks to \$8.6 million of federal funding from the Colorado Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP). Sky View Campground at Carter Lake will be constructed in 2021 thanks to a \$475,334 GOCO grant bolstering Department funds.

Regional trail connections were also solidified in 2020. A new 1-mile, 10-foot concrete connector trail was completed bridging the Town of Windsor's Kyger Open Space with River Bluffs Open Space. Likewise, the City of Loveland's Prairie Ridge Natural Area opened in May 2020, connecting to Devil's Backbone Open Space and Fort Collins' Coyote Ridge Natural Area.



Pinewood Reservoir © Jeanie Sumrall-Ajero

## NATURE IS OPEN

Connection to nature and open spaces is proven to improve a person's physical, mental, and emotional well-being, but with fresh air freedom comes responsibility.



Practice Social Distance –  
Keep SIX feet between each  
other – even on the trail



Keep groups fewer  
than TEN people



Don't congregate in  
groups at overlooks, rest  
areas, or trailheads



Wear a mask to protect  
yourself and others



Feeling sick? Stay home  
and visit us virtually for  
daily doses of nature



Know BEFORE you go  
Check Colorado Trail Explorer  
(COTREX)  
[trails.colorado.gov](https://trails.colorado.gov)  
for crowd and trail status

Let's all do our part in keeping our parks and open spaces  
open while stopping the spread of COVID-19.



[larimer.org/coronavirus](https://larimer.org/coronavirus)

## Meeting You Where You Are

New group gathering protocols and required social distancing forced much of our community engagement and volunteer interactions in 2020 to behind a Zoom screen. New innovations and engagement strategies were deployed to continue to connect with community while staying safe during the pandemic.

New strategies included:

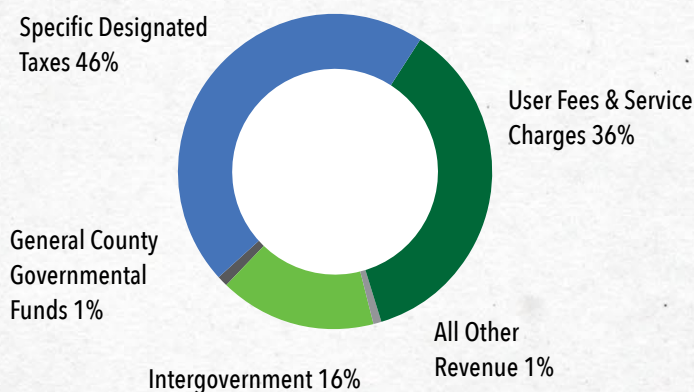
- Virtual Geology Field Trip Series
- Coffee with Volunteers – Zoom Edition
- Hands-free trailhead tables and roving education
- Self-guided, Volunteer Litter Clean Up Days
- New parking webcams at Horsetooth Mountain & Devil's Backbone open spaces



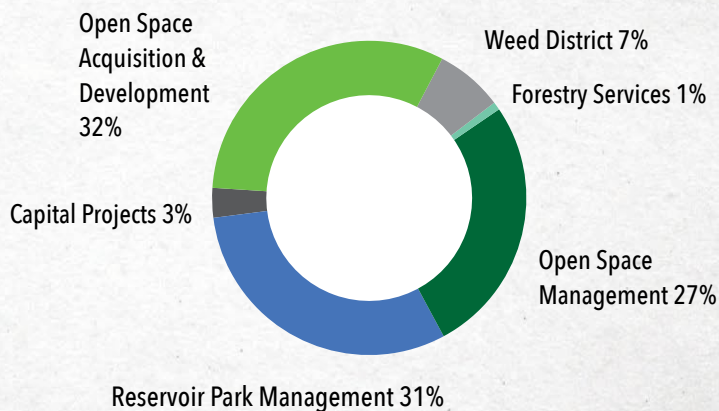
# Financial Summary

The Larimer County Department of Natural Resources manages over 40,000 acres of lands for public recreation and land conservation as well as provides county-wide stewardship outreach on weed and forest management. Revenues are realized from a number of sources and totaled **\$19.5 million** in 2020. Expenses for 2020 were **\$15.3 million**. Land acquisition and capital improvement projects are funded through the difference between annual revenue and expenses.

## 2020 Revenues



## 2020 Expenses



\*These figures are not audited. Audit will be completed in mid-2020. Figures in this chart have been rounded where appropriate.

# 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 eight municipalities. The tax was extended in 2014 and sunsets in 2043. It is not imposed on food or prescription drugs. The total revenue collected to date is more than \$265 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.

Total tax revenue collected in 2020 was \$18,002,787. This graphic illustrates how the tax was distributed per entity in 2020.

**Larimer County**  
\$9,001,393

Estes Park  
\$489,312

Fort Collins  
\$4,807,945

Wellington  
\$284,258

Timnath  
\$265,912

Loveland  
\$2,453,667

Windsor  
\$210,565

Berthoud  
\$219,270

Johnstown  
\$270,461

### Connect With Us:

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