



# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



## LOVELAND OPEN LANDS & TRAILS



*Willow Bend Natural Area - Turtle Pond*



*Nuttall's sunflower at Sunset Vista Natural Area*

### NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT WITH NATURE

Two new sites opened to the public in 2025, providing significant additional access for visitors to explore nature and recreate on trails in Loveland.

**Willow Bend Park & Natural Area** opened in June, the City's first universal access park, playground and natural area. The new site provides public access to 167 acres along the east Big Thompson River, with valued pond access and incredible wildlife viewing. The natural area is accessible from East 1st Street and offers ADA parking, restrooms and access to a 1-mile soft-surface trail loop and environmental education amphitheater. An ADA accessible fishing dock is available on the 4-acre Willow Bend Pond and new fishing access is also offered on the property at Kingfisher and Turtle ponds. A new pedestrian-activated crossing signal at Boise Avenue connects Willow Bend to Old St. Louis Natural Area. Willow Bend Natural Area was acquired in several parcels between 2016 and 2023, with funding from the City's dedicated share of the Larimer County Open Space Tax and High Plains Environmental Fund dollars.

On the west side of Loveland, **Wild Natural Area** opened in February, offering a new 1-mile trail loop through the site's 26 acres of upland meadows and riparian habitat along the Big Thompson River. The natural-surface trail, constructed by Open Lands & Trails staff, provides access for nature exploration, hiking, wildlife viewing, leashed dog-walking and fishing on the north side of the river. The trailhead parking area is accessible from Hwy 34 at Glade Road, where a new traffic signal was installed in partnership with Larimer County using transportation grants, county funding and Loveland's share of the county-wide Open Space Tax, which also funded acquisition and development of the Wild property. The land was purchased in 2012 to conserve wildlife habitat, open space, scenic viewsheds and public access for nature-based recreation. Following the 2013 Big Thompson flood, numerous stewardship and cleanup projects helped remove flood debris and restore the site with native species. In 2018, the Big Thompson Watershed Coalition managed several grants and collaborated with the City and neighboring property owners to reconnect this reach of the river to its floodplain and improve the overall health of the river corridor. Native cottonwoods, willows and other species provide key habitat for birds and mammals including migratory songbirds, raptors, wild turkey, elk and white-tailed deer.

### MISSION STATEMENT

To identify, preserve, protect, connect and enhance open space, natural areas, trails and wildlife habitat to promote the enjoyment of outdoor activities while advancing environmental stewardship, environmental education and outdoor experiences.

### EXPLORE YOUR OPEN LANDS & TRAILS

- 33 mi of paved trails
- 29 mi of soft-surface trails
- 20 open land sites open to the public

## NEW TRAILS AND IMPROVEMENTS

The newest segment of the paved East Big Thompson Trail, known as the **Boise to Willow Bend Trail**, opened in June with access from the Willow Bend trailhead. The 1.5-mile trail extends from East 1st Street to Boise Avenue, where a pedestrian-activated crossing provides a connection to Old St. Louis Natural Area. The trail supports the aims of connecting the City's existing Recreation Trail System to neighboring communities and providing safe, non-motorized transportation options as part of a regional trail network. This segment offers access along the river corridor for nature-based recreation, wildlife viewing and sweeping scenic views of the Front Range and foothills. The Boise to Willow Bend Trail was funded by Conservation Trust dollars, the City's Trails Capital Expansion Fees and State and Federal grants.

Also in June, the final segment of the **Loveland Loop Trail** was paved with concrete surfacing and reopened for use. Prior to this project, the 0.7-mile trail between Wilson and Namaqua avenues was the final remaining section of soft-surface trail on the 21-mile loop. The concrete surface, railings and other features improve safety and long-term sustainability of this narrow and historic corridor along the Big Barnes Ditch. Loveland's Recreation Trail Loop is now paved through all sections, making it a great alternative for multi-modal transportation and connecting to regional trail systems. The \$1.3 million project was funded by Loveland's share of Colorado Lottery dollars and a \$600,000 federal Transportation Alternatives Program grant.

The project to construct new trails at **Dakota Ridge and Skyline Natural Areas** began in fall 2025. This project will provide incredible new access to the foothills of west Loveland on more than 7 miles of soft-surface trails. The site will offer hiking, mountain biking and multi-use trails across a variety of ecosystems with expansive views of the great plains to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west. The project will be funded by the City's share of county Open Space sales tax revenues. The 415-acre property is planned to open in mid-2026, when construction of trails and other infrastructure are complete.

## STEWARDSHIP & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Stewardship to maintain and improve resources at open lands and trails is a high priority for the Division, to manage lands sustainably, restore valuable wildlife habitat and enrich visitor experiences. Partnerships with other local agencies and organizations improved efficiencies, utilized best management practices and offered engaging volunteer opportunities.

Partnering with Wildlands Restoration Volunteers, High Plains Environmental Center and other local organizations provided opportunities to promote community stewardship of natural areas. Volunteer projects included seed collections and greenhouse propagation of native species for habitat restoration, invasive weed control, river cleanups, planting projects, barbed wire fence removal, improving habitat for wildlife and pollinators. Volunteers also assisted with ongoing trail cleanups, removal of hazardous fishing line from River's Edge ponds, repairs to soft-surface trails and replacement of wayfinding markers on the Mariana Butte Trail.

Staff resource projects throughout the year included trail improvements, additional wayfinding and interpretive signage and ongoing vegetation management. Assistance with invasive species control was provided by enthusiastic volunteers, as well as trained members of the Larimer County Conservation Corps, with grant funding from Great Outdoors Colorado. New chronolog stations installed at River's Edge and Sunset Vista engage visitors in valuable citizen science and provide a resource to help monitor site conditions over time. Staff and volunteers take great pride in providing and maintaining quality outdoor experiences and amenities for the community.



*New Boise to Willow Bend Trail*



*Wilson to Namaqua Trail paving*



*American kestrel banding activity*



*Collecting native seed at Skyline Natural Area*

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Staff diligently planned for the development of new natural areas and trails including Firefly Meadow Natural Area in west Loveland, holding a public open house for input on proposed concepts. A multi-disciplinary in-house team is developing a comprehensive signage plan for Dakota-Skyline Natural Area, to implement a system for identification, wayfinding and location maps for more than 7 miles of multi-use trails connecting the two sites. At Eagle Vista Natural Area in southwest Loveland, plans for public access improvements are taking shape, including a trailhead parking area and a 1.1-mile segment of the South Front Range Trail, a planned regional connection to Berthoud. A key component in these planning efforts is balancing conservation and recreation, to preserve and enhance resource values while providing for sustainable public access and trail opportunities.

Loveland also actively collaborated with Larimer County to plan new recreational access, trails and improvements at Chimney Hollow Open Space, and partnered on conservation easements at the county's Canyon Edge Open Space and new Red-tail Ridge Addition southwest of Berthoud.

Staff provided key input on the City's Hwy 287 Bridge Project and the Hwy 402 Flood Mitigation Feasibility Project, ensuring that future site developments include conservation of resources and new recreational opportunities.

## VOLUNTEERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Open Lands & Trails Division offers meaningful volunteer opportunities for citizens to help care for local natural areas and share their love of nature with people of all ages. Volunteers are vital to the success of the Division and contributed a record 10,485 hours in 2025 through education, outreach, restoration and monitoring efforts. Training is offered throughout the year for volunteers to support environmental education programs, host visitors to the Nature Cabin and local trails, promote Open Lands & Trails at outreach events, monitor raptor nest activity and implement habitat enhancement projects.

**Environmental Education volunteers** inspired local school children to learn about wildlife, plants and ecosystems during field trip programs to Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park, River's Edge Natural Area and Namaqua Park. **Trail Hosts** are the eyes and ears of Open Lands & Trails, greeting visitors, answering questions, encouraging compliance with regulations and reporting site use and maintenance concerns. **Nature Cabin Docents** hosted visitors from around the world at the Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park cabin to share information about Colorado wildlife and habitats. **Stewardship volunteers** helped restore native habitat, remove weeds, monitor nesting raptors, maintain trails, create and care for pollinator habitat and clean up natural areas. **Outreach volunteers** connected with the community during interpretive walks, public programs and popular special events, including Loveland Bike & Trails Day, Trek the Thompson, Dog Day of Summer and the Corn Roast Festival.



*New future trail at Dakota Ridge Natural Area*



*Loveland Bike & Trails Day 2025*



*Volunteer educators at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park*

## BY THE NUMBERS

- **Environmental Education** = 36 volunteers donated 1,136 hours, presenting 59 programs attended by 1,951 adults and children
  - **Trail Hosts** = 40 volunteers completed 1,247 visits & counted 24,591 visitors at 18 different open lands & trails, donating 1,837 hours
  - **Nature Cabin** = 27 docents hosted 89 Open House days with 4,612 visitors to the VSMP Nature Cabin, donating 718 hours
  - **Stewardship** = 451 volunteers contributed 5,773 hours
  - **Community Outreach** = 115 volunteers donated 705 hours during 90 programs that reached 3,007 participants
  - **Administrative & Program Support** = 36 volunteers contributed 325 hours in 10 projects
- Total Volunteer Hours = 10,485 hours by 705 active volunteers**

## OPEN LANDS & TRAILS ADVISORY COMMISSION

The nine-member citizen advisory commission makes recommendations regarding the attributable revenue share to the City of Loveland from the Larimer County Open Space Sales & Use Tax, as well as any funds designated by the City for open lands and trail purposes.



Open Lands & Trails Advisory Commission

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

Adam Beeco	Jim Roode
Jim Edmiston	Andrew Snow
Michael Hinterberg, <i>Chair</i>	Kimberly Tyson
Scott James	Jacki Marsh, <i>City Council Liaison</i>
David LaGreca	Laura Light-Kovacs, <i>Alternate Liaison</i>
Andy McRoberts, <i>Vice Chair</i>	Daylan Figgs, <i>Larimer County Liaison</i>

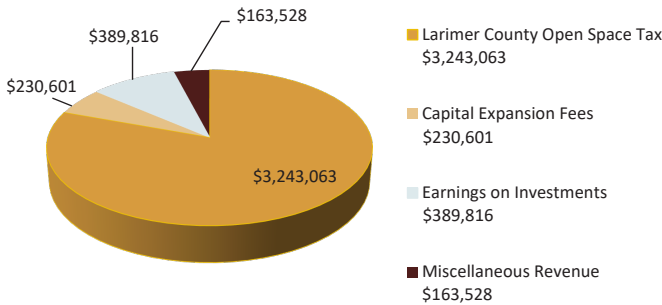


Crested pricklypoppy

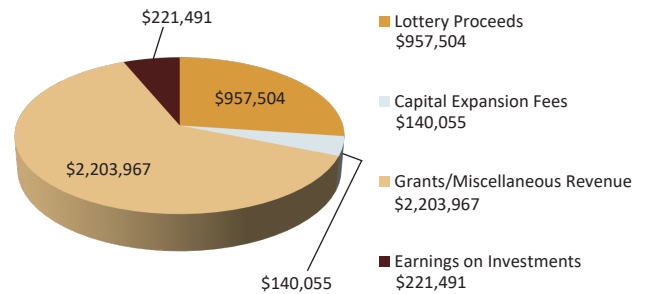
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## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

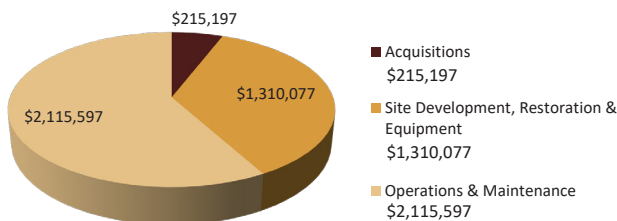
### Loveland Open Lands Revenue 2025



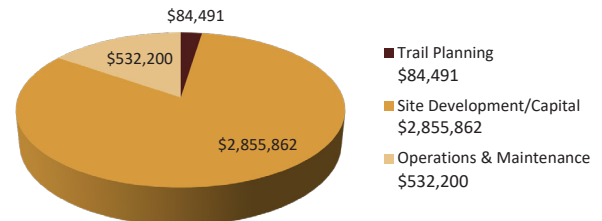
### Loveland Trails Revenue 2025



### Loveland Open Lands Expenditures 2025



### Loveland Trails Expenditures 2025



## LOVELAND OPEN LANDS & TRAILS a Division of Loveland Parks & Recreation

500 E. Third St., Suite 200 | Loveland, CO 80537  
970.962.2727 | [OpenLands@CityofLoveland.org](mailto:OpenLands@CityofLoveland.org)



[lovgov.org/OpenLands](http://lovgov.org/OpenLands)

