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Photo by Norman Keally

Mountains to Plains 2022 Zone Update



September 21 2022

Mountains to Plains

2022 Zone Update

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Acronyms:

| | |
|----------|---|
| ADA | Americans with Disabilities Act |
| ARO | Adaptive Recreation Opportunities |
| BIPOC | Black, Indigenous, and People of Color |
| CPW | Colorado Parks and Wildlife |
| CSP | Conservation and Stewardship Planning |
| CSU | Colorado State University |
| DEI | Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion |
| FCNAD | Fort Collins Natural Areas Department |
| FC Moves | Fort Collins Moves (City department) |
| IDF | Impact and Decision Framework |
| IGA | Intergovernmental Agreement |
| MTP | Mountains to Plains |
| USFWS | United States Fish and Wildlife Service |



A Message from the Director

I am pleased to present the Mountains to Plains (MTP) Zone Update. In 2022, we invited the community to help the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department shape the future of Soapstone Prairie Natural Areas. We are pleased to report that you responded and enriched our planning process. We heard community voices, in English and Spanish, through our online portal or 12 public engagement events. This document reflects community feedback and the changing needs of MTP's vast landscape, while remaining true to the department's goals, mission, and ballot language. Unlike previous management plans, this zone update is part of an adaptive management method which allows for modifications based on scientific assessment as well as feedback from our community received through FCNAD's online feedback portal, staff expertise, and partner engagement.

Soapstone Prairie, the focal point of this update, was a bold purchase made by the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department (FCNAD) in 2004. Its value rings true today with its breathtaking skyline, incredible wildlife, and outstanding cultural resources that have inspired visitors since it opened in 2010. FCNAD, its partners, and the community have spent 18 years leveraging applied science and community engagement to understand the values and challenges of Soapstone Prairie. This zone update defines how FCNAD will continue protecting these community values. It addresses major challenges: loss of biodiversity, impacts from the climate crisis, and a gap in understanding of visitor needs for historically under-represented and under-resourced community members. While we may not have the perfect answers to solve these challenges in our Northern Colorado region, we are confident this zone update is part of the solution.

Thank you for supporting FCNAD's efforts to keep Soapstone extraordinary.



Katie Donahue, Natural Areas Director

September 21, 2022

Date

Executive Summary

The Mountains to Plains Zone Update will guide the responsible stewardship of the unique and spectacular Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. Building on ten years of community feedback, staff expertise, and partner input, the Zone Update articulates how four main goals will be implemented:

- Conserve and protect lands and water
- Protect and improve ecosystem health and resilience
- Provide meaningful education and appropriate recreation opportunities
- Responsibly steward the community's resources

The Zone Update's key highlights include creating an inclusive experience for historically under-represented and under-resourced community members, mitigating impacts from the climate crisis, and protecting biodiversity. The 44-mile trail system will continue to provide access for a variety of visitors.

The Zone Update is not a static management plan, it is part of an adaptive planning method which allows for modifications based on community feedback and changing landscape needs while remaining true to the department goals, mission, and ballot language. The Natural Areas Department will continue to work with the community to create an inclusive and resilient Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.

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Conservation and Stewardship Planning Structure

Ballot Language

Thank you to voters for supporting the community-initiated sales tax ballot measures that fund the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department. These ballot measures direct FCNAD to acquire, operate, and maintain open spaces, community separators, natural areas, wildlife habitat, riparian areas, wetlands and valued agricultural lands and to provide for the appropriate use and enjoyment of these areas by the community. [Read full ballot measures here.](#)

FCNAD uses the Conservation and Stewardship Planning (CSP) method to facilitate well-managed natural areas that provide habitat, scenic value, and appropriate recreation opportunities for the community.

Mission:



"Conserve and enhance lands with natural resource, agricultural, and scenic values, while providing meaningful education and appropriate recreation opportunities."

Goals:



The FCNAD goals work to progress community priorities as defined by the ballot and mission.

Objectives:



The breakdown of the goals into achievable parts.

Strategies:



The approach to accomplishing the objectives.

Tactics:



Specific activities to be completed.

Public Engagement

Ongoing Public Engagement



Natural Areas is always listening to feedback about management through a variety of channels.

Natural Areas is Listening

Community feedback comes in many forms, all of which are valued by the Natural Areas Department.

The Mayor and City Council members set the City's priorities and strategic direction, and approve the Natural Areas Master Plan informed by public feedback. The Land Conservation and Stewardship Board gives input to City Council and to the Natural Areas Department with community participation available at each meeting.



The adaptive management approach allows for adjustments to tactics between zone updates based on environmental conditions, public feedback, and natural area capacity.

FCNAD-sponsored public engagement activities gather specific information that will influence management via field trips, feedback forms, co-created activities with communities that have historically been underrepresented, and others. Simultaneously, feedback on natural areas management can be provided anytime at fcgov.com/naturalareas/feedback. Management is also informed by community-wide surveys and visitor interviews, as well as natural areas-related input from other agency's engagement processes. Community input shared through phone calls, emails, Access Fort Collins inquiries, and social media is also considered.

Everyone is invited to share your thoughts in the ways that work for you!

Developing Responsive Tactics

This update serves as a guide for ensuring the Mountains to Plains zone remains resilient and accessible for the entire community. For the past 18 years, the FCNAD has engaged the community, its stakeholders, scientific researchers, and City staff to understand the values, challenges, and opportunities at Soapstone Prairie. The tactics that emerged from this work reflect community and partner priorities and the FCNAD mission.

Community Voices

Engagement is ongoing. Provide your feedback here: fcgov.com/naturalareas/feedback.

Feedback from [the 2021 resident surveys](#), [2019 site surveys](#), a volunteer gathering, the Soapstone Prairie Hike Through the Ages event and ranger contacts were all used to inform MTP tactics.

Scientific and Historical Research


Extensive research has been conducted at Soapstone Prairie by staff and partners to learn more about the [plants, animals, and ecology](#). Research has informed tactics related to continuing to honor and respect the cultural heritage of the landscape and to educate visitors about its past and present cultural significance.


Alignment with City Values


The MTP Zone Update aligns with City and regional plans and departments.

- [Fort Collins Strategic Plan 2020](#)
- [Fort Collins City Plan 2019](#)
- [Air Quality Plan 2019](#)
- [Municipal Sustainability and Adaptation Plan 2019](#)
- [Our Climate Future 2021](#)
- [City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Master Plan 2014](#)
- [Fort Collins Equity Indicators 2021](#)
- [Social Sustainability Equity and Inclusion Framework](#)
- [Larimer County Open Lands Master Plan 2015](#)

Themes:

 **Community voices:** Feedback from public engagement identified a high rate of satisfaction among users and supported tactics regarding increased accessibility, regional trail connections, better wayfinding, support for a more diverse user group, and continued expansion of equitable programming.

 **Conservation priorities:** Scientific research helps identify habitat protection opportunities and continued monitoring needed to protect threatened and endangered, as well as common species of the grassland ecosystem.

 **Climate resilience:** Tactics supporting habitat protection and connectivity, access to nature, and increasing resilience in the climate crisis are supported by and reinforce City plans and departments.

 **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion:** In alignment with City values, this Zone Update includes specific tactics advancing the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Mountains to Plains Zone

Community Feedback Report

Data in this report is from the spring 2022 feedback form and community conversations in English and Spanish regarding the Mountains to Plains Zone Update.

Natural Area Goals:

| | |
|--|---|
|  1 CONSERVE LANDS & WATER |  2 ECOSYSTEM HEALTH & RESILIENCE |
|  3 EDUCATION & APPROPRIATE RECREATION |  4 STEWARD PUBLIC RESOURCES |

Key Feedback Themes at Soapstone Prairie:

- Protecting natural habitats while maintaining and increasing recreation opportunities.
- Celebrating Soapstone Prairie’s unique qualities.
- Engaging the community in management practices.

278
Responses



Common Questions & Concerns:

Why are dogs not allowed?

Dogs are not allowed to protect the many wildlife species that live at Soapstone Prairie. Several species at Soapstone Prairie are especially sensitive. Dogs can cause disruptions in wildlife behaviors like feeding, reproduction, and resting.

Will Natural Areas build more trails?

No new trails are planned beyond the existing 44-mile network at this time. Natural Areas will be identifying ways to provide regional trail connectivity and improving existing trails through new signage, maintenance, and ADA accessibility.

Will Natural Areas enhance accessibility?

Natural Areas plans to lower brochure boxes, provide hand sanitizer, add ADA picnic tables, and make other enhancements we learned about from the community at Soapstone Prairie and at other natural areas.

Please shorten the Zone Updates

Future Zone Updates will have an executive summary.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts!

The feedback portal is always open at www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/feedback.

Reasons Soapstone Prairie is Enjoyed

- #1 Trail Network
- #2 Views and Habitat
- #3 Community Buffer

Barriers to visiting Soapstone Prairie

- #1 Not nearby
- #2 Lack of free time
- #3 No dog policy



"I am so grateful for the birds and the animals, that they have a space to breathe and be."

-Soapstone Prairie visitor

About the Feedback:






Input was collected in English and Spanish through web-based and paper forms, online and at events, March-June 2022. Outreach included:

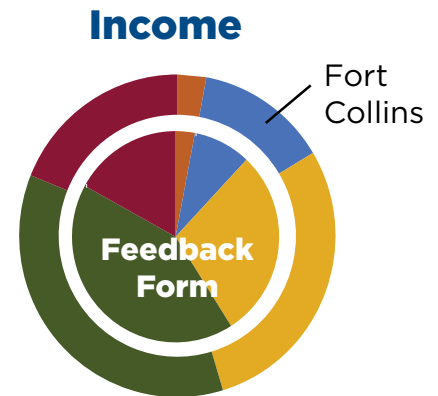
- Irish Elementary Day of the Child
- Kestrel Fields Drop-In
- Poudre River Drop-In
- Soapstone Prairie Drop-In
- Consultant-led Accessibility Assessment at Soapstone Prairie
- Natural Areas E-news
- Land Conservation and Stewardship Board
- Social Media
- Trailhead Signs
- Mailing to Neighbors
- Volunteer Coffee Talk
- Presentations to Poudre School District Teachers and a PSD English Language Learners Group








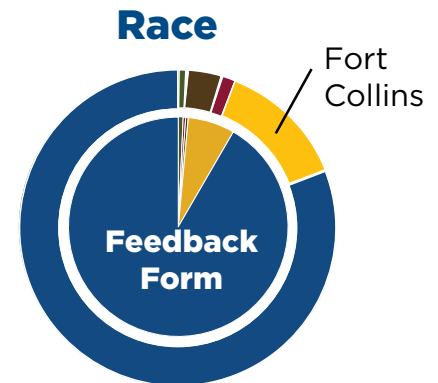
Feedback Demographics

The Natural Areas Department strives to conduct inclusive public engagement that matches the demographics of our community, and is always evolving its processes to meet this goal. The demographics of the 278 respondents were generally older, wealthier, and more educated than the general population. Nine percent of feedback form respondents self-identified their ethnicity as hispanic/latinx compared with 14% city-wide.

| Household Income | | Feedback Form | Fort Collins |
|--------------------------|---|---------------|--------------|
| Less than \$10K per year |  | 3% | 2.5% |
| \$10K-\$34.9K per year |  | 9% | 11.4% |
| \$35K-\$74.9K per year |  | 29% | 24.5% |
| \$75K-\$149.9K per year |  | 42% | 30.3% |
| \$150K+ per year |  | 17% | 16.8% |



| Race | | Feedback Form | Fort Collins |
|-------------------------------|---|---------------|--------------|
| American Indian/Alaska Native |  | 0.7% | 0.9% |
| Asian |  | 0.4% | 3.6% |
| Black/African American |  | 0.4% | 1.5% |
| Two or more races/Other |  | 6.9% | 13.2% |
| White |  | 91.6% | 80.8% |

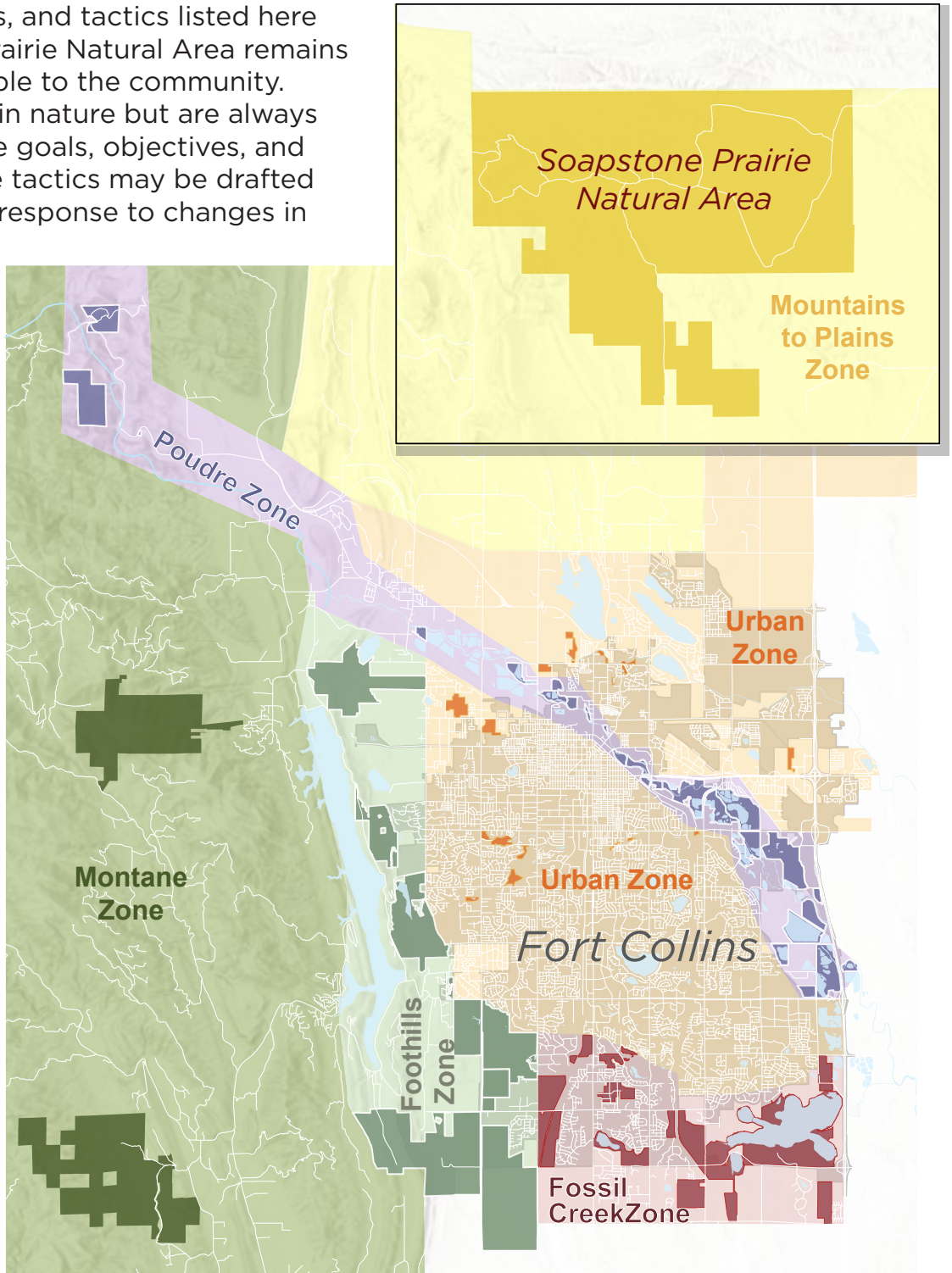


Conservation and Stewardship Planning & the Mountains to Plains Zone

This MTP Zone Update describes how FCNAD will carry out the intent of the ballot language, community priorities, FCNAD's mission, and existing approved plans at Soapstone Prairie, the only site in the MTP zone. The Zone Update defines implementation priorities for the coming years. The goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics listed here ensure Soapstone Prairie Natural Area remains resilient and accessible to the community. Tactics are dynamic in nature but are always in alignment with the goals, objectives, and strategies. New zone tactics may be drafted between updates in response to changes in condition and community priorities.

CSP uses six management zones that are roughly defined based on ecosystem type, geographic area, or a unique feature:

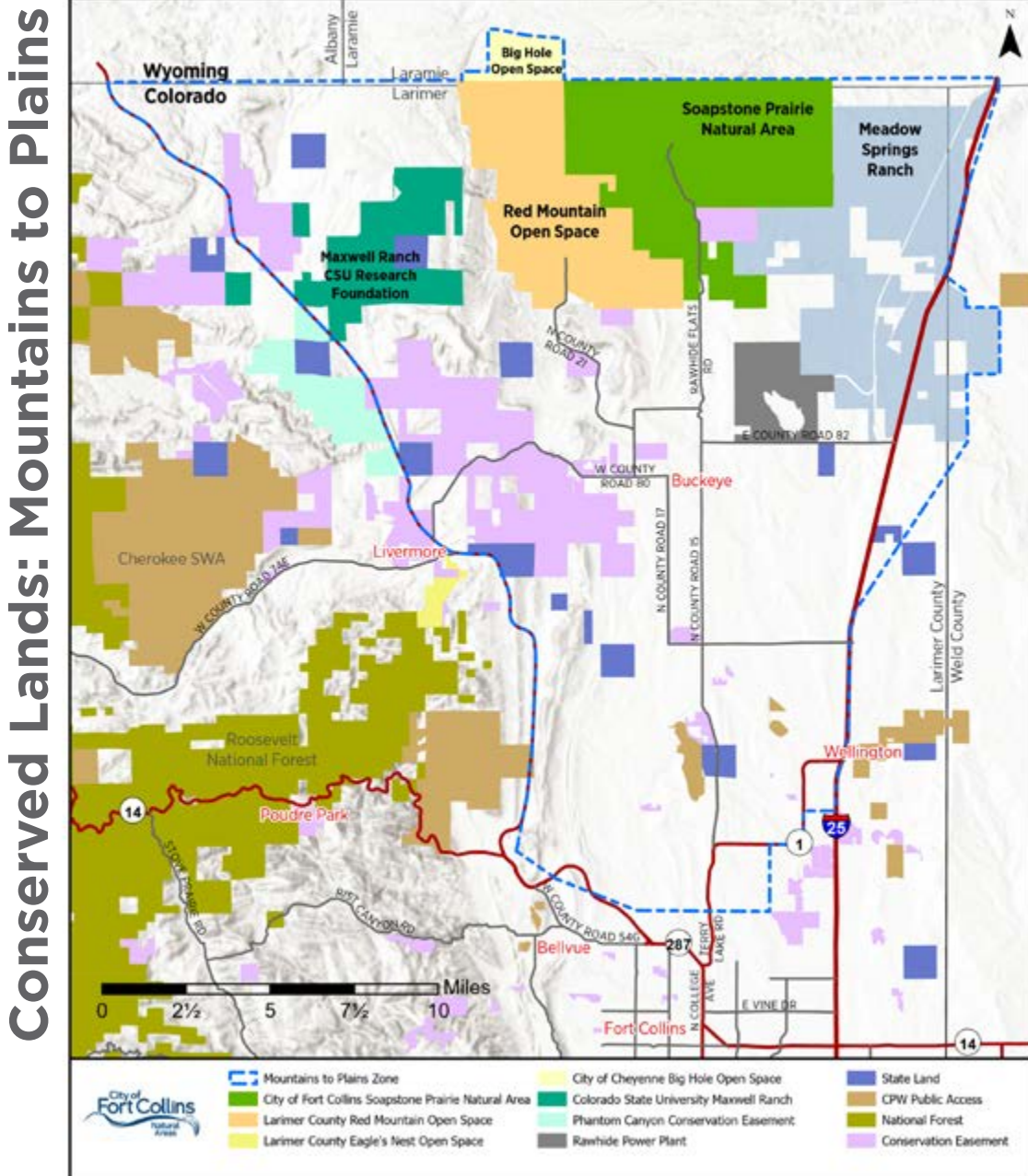
- Mountains to Plains
- Poudre River
- Urban
- Montane
- Foothills
- Fossil Creek



Mountains to Plains Overview

The MTP Zone contains some of the last remaining intact, high-quality shortgrass prairie and foothills shrublands along the Front Range of Colorado. The map below illustrates a network of conserved open space in the MTP zone, owned and managed by diverse partners including the City of Fort Collins, Larimer County, the Nature Conservancy, and conservation easements on privately-owned land.

Soapstone Prairie Natural Area is the only FCNAD-owned property in this management zone. At 22,497 acres, it is the largest natural area stewarded by the FCNAD. This area is part of the ancestral homelands of the Apache, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow, Kiowa, Lakota, Pawnee, Shoshone, and Ute tribes. Soapstone Prairie contains excellent examples of native ecosystems which provide critical habitat for wildlife and native plant species.



Mountains to Plains Conservation Priorities

Conservation priorities are plant and animal species or plant communities that require monitoring and maintenance to ensure the continuation of a natural prairie ecosystem at Soapstone Prairie. See <https://fcgov.com/naturalareas/mountains-to-plains-zone> for more information.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| Shortgrass Prairie |  |  |  |  | Shortgrass Prairie Black-footed ferrets Black-tailed prairie dogs Bison Birds of prey Buffalograss/blue grama grassland Grassland birds |
| |  |  |  |  | |
| Foothill Shrublands |  |  |  |  | Foothill Shrublands Mountain mahogany/needle-and-thread shrubland Mountain mahogany/thickspike wheatgrass shrubland |
| |  |  |  |  | |
| Riparian Zone & Wetlands |  |  |  |  | Riparian Zone & Wetlands Analogue sedge fen Northern leopard frog Colorado butterfly plant Aspen grove Common beaked sedge wet meadow |
| | Prairie Shrublands |  |  |  | |
| | | | | | Prairie Shrublands Winterfat/western wheat/blue grama dwarf shrubland Fourwing saltbrush/blue grama shrubland |

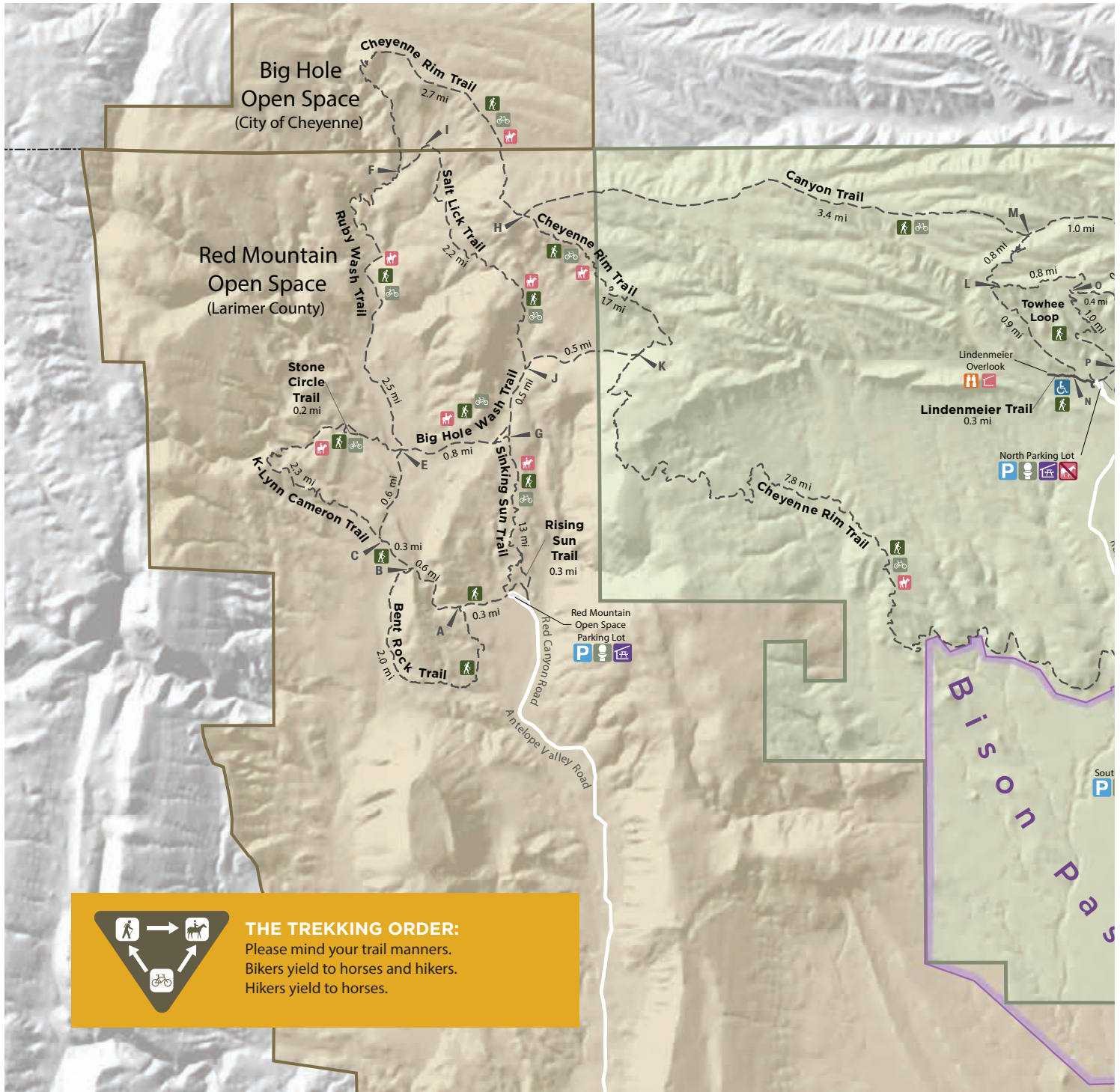


Photo by John Stokes

Mountains to Plains Trail Network

Trail Overview

Soapstone Prairie offers over 44 miles of trails, including a 0.7 mile round-trip Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-accessible paved trail that overlooks the Lindenmeier National Historic Landmark. Soapstone Prairie's trail system also connects visitors to an additional 16 miles of trails at Larimer County's Red Mountain Open Space and the City of Cheyenne's Big Hole Open Space. This connected trail network limits impacts to wildlife while connecting visitors to beautiful views.



The trail network at Soapstone Prairie was designed to:

- protect the site’s outstanding ecological resources;
- while providing a high-quality visitor experience;
- in alignment with the Natural Area mission.

Future Trail Planning

FCNAD recognizes the community’s desire for more trails and trail connections. FCNAD will continue to work with regional partners to identify trail connections to Soapstone Prairie. At this time, staff are not proposing the expansion of the existing trail network for several reasons. Surveys indicate visitors have a high quality experience with 85% rating their experience at Soapstone Prairie as excellent. Trail expansion would require additional staffing to continue providing the presence and support visitors are accustomed to from FCNAD. The central portions were avoided during the 2007 trail construction due to the presence of sensitive ecological resources such as pronghorn, elk, breeding birds,



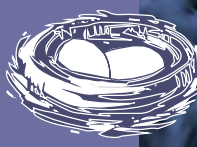
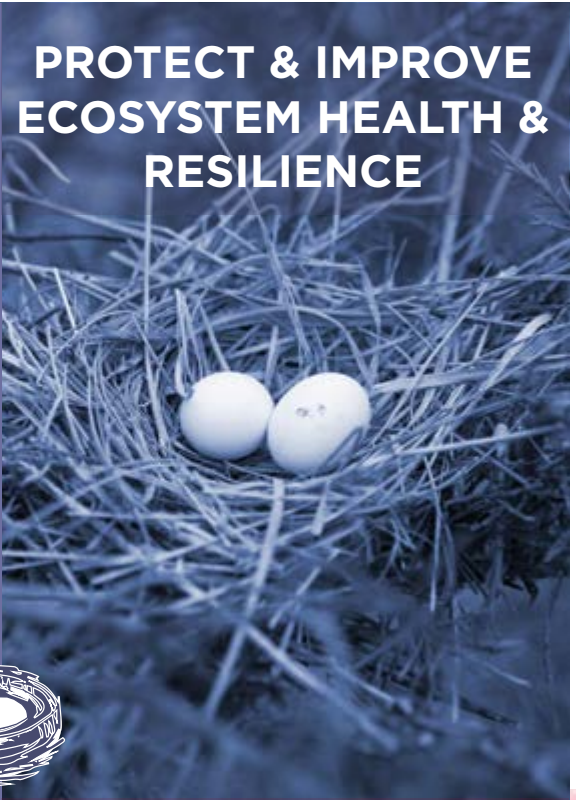




and globally rare mountain mahogany shrublands.

FCNAD will continue to pursue the purchase of lands and easements in the Mountains to Plains Zone, identify regional trail connections, and evaluate opportunities to improve the current trail system. When lands are purchased by FCNAD, opportunities for appropriate recreation uses and potential trail alignments will be determined.



Natural Area Goals

Four primary goals fulfill the intent of the current ballot language and make progress toward the FCNAD mission. The following MTP Zone Update outlines how FCNAD will work to achieve these goals.

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>Goal 1</p>  | <p>CONSERVE & PROTECT LANDS & WATER</p>  | <p>Goal 2</p>  | <p>PROTECT & IMPROVE ECOSYSTEM HEALTH & RESILIENCE</p>  |
| <p>Goal 3</p>  | <p>PROVIDE MEANINGFUL EDUCATION & APPROPRIATE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES</p>  | <p>Goal 4</p>  | <p>RESPONSIBLY STEWARD THE COMMUNITY'S RESOURCES</p>  |

Goal

1

CONSERVE & PROTECT LANDS & WATER


Northern Leopard Frog by Aran Meyer



Objective 1.1 Purchase land, water rights, and conservation easements from willing sellers with conservation, agricultural, and/or scenic values.

Strategy: FCNAD will continue to identify and protect lands across the MTP Zone with valuable habitats, species, connectivity, and viewsheds. Larimer County will continue to be a key partner for FCNAD on future easements and land purchases in the MTP Zone. This work builds on decades of land conservation by a collective of land management agencies including Colorado Parks and Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, the City of Cheyenne, and Colorado State University. FCNAD will continue to purchase lands and secure easements that reflect City strategic priorities, providing access where appropriate.

Tactics:

Continue to partner with Larimer County  on strategic purchases and easements in the MTP Zone.



Objective 1.2 Uphold and extend protections for lands and water.

Strategy: FCNAD will continue to protect lands and water resources at Soapstone Prairie and across 3,286 acres of conservation easements. In partnership with the Colorado Water Conservation Board, FCNAD will maintain valuable in-stream flow water rights at Graves Creek, Sand Creek, and Spottlewood Creek. As wind and energy development continue in the MTP zone, FCNAD will track proposals, explore best management practices, and work to influence plans, policies, and regulations to provide greater ecosystem protections.

Themes:


Community voices: 


Conservation priorities: 


Climate resilience: 

DEI: 



Tactics:


Develop data-informed best management practices and tools including a method for tracking new projects that will impact this zone, in order to respond to wind development proposals in a timely manner. 

Explore ways to influence Larimer County's wind energy policies using best management practices by partnering with CSU students and teachers. 

Review and explore revising the 'Energy By Design' report for action items and identify any gaps in protection. 

Negotiate a new mineral rights lease from State Land Board prior to expiration in 2035.

Host meetings to discuss Soapstone Prairie's water resources, watershed value, and connection to basin-wide plans.  

Protect in-stream flows using existing water rights and required reporting.  

Themes:

Community voices: 

Conservation priorities: 

Climate resilience: 

DEI: 

Goal

2

PROTECT & IMPROVE ECOSYSTEM HEALTH



Mourning dove nest by Aran Meyer



Objective 2.1: Restore and maintain native plant communities, wildlife, and ecological processes.

Strategy: FCNAD will maintain and improve the ecological connectivity, biodiversity, and resilience that makes the MTP zone invaluable. FCNAD staff and its partners will use applied science and adaptive management to meet this goal. To protect habitat connectivity and maintain biodiversity, FCNAD and its partners will implement appropriate levels of disturbance at Soapstone Prairie using prescribed fire and bison and cattle grazing. FCNAD manages grazing with its partners to ensure soil health and native vegetation at Soapstone Prairie are resilient in the face of the climate crisis.

Tactics:

Fence out fen in the bison pasture. 🦅

Identify northern leopard frog habitat 🦅 improvements including cattle exclusions and creating deep pools and upland conditions that support all phases of life history.

Explore constructing ferruginous hawk 🦅 nest platforms where appropriate on the landscape.

Explore installing cattle guards to replace interior gates.

Construct cattle exclusion around 🦅🌍 entire Brannigan springs watershed and develop monitoring metrics for watershed.

Ensure appropriate grazing levels in 🦅 mesic, wet meadow, fen, and riparian sites using cattle exclosures.

Themes:

Community voices: 🧑

Conservation priorities: 🦅

Climate resilience: 🌍

DEI: 🧑

Tactics:

Continue grazing wet meadow with Colorado Butterfly plant (*Oenothera coloradensis*) after seed drop.

Maintain water and fencing infrastructure to support bison and cattle grazing.

Install all wildlife-friendly fence at Soapstone Prairie.

Explore alternative modes-of-action for plague mitigation to address concerns with flea resistance to Deltamethrin, staff safety, and capacity to cover more acres.

Develop strategies to expand ferret recovery on Soapstone Prairie and Meadow Springs Ranch properties, focusing on funding necessary to expand plague management.

Consider implementing recommendations in the 'Fire Program Evaluation Report' from the Ember Alliance to accomplish prescribed burns.

Determine prescribed burn priority and coordinate burns with grazing and herbicide applications.

Continue seasonal closures.

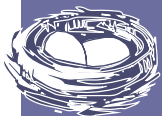
Create a road use plan to prevent damage from vehicles.

Explore possibility of reintroducing additional rare or endangered species.

Explore ways to mitigate the spread of noxious weeds at Soapstone Prairie (e.g. vehicle cleaning, boot brushes, manure bags).

Fence out the aspen stand and explore ways to improve health of the stand.

Use selective herbicide applications for Canada thistle and other invasive weeds.



Objective 2.2 Implement a data-informed approach to natural resource

Strategy: FCNAD will protect the biodiversity found in Soapstone Prairies' native plant communities, wetlands, rare plants, and wildlife. FCNAD staff will take steps to improve ecosystem health, including: installing grazing exclosures to protect wetlands, updating legacy fencing to meet wildlife-friendly guidelines, and continuing to communicate trail closures and pet use policies to visitors. In addition, FCNAD is committed to continuing the endangered, rare, and genetically valuable species' recovery and restoration practices for black-footed ferret, bison, Colorado butterfly plant, northern leopard frog, and northern redbelly dace. This work is possible due to key cross-boundary partnerships with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Colorado State University (CSU), Meadow Springs Ranch (Fort Collins Utilities), Larimer County, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW).

Themes:

Community voices:


Conservation priorities:


Climate resilience:


DEI:


Tactics:


Annually monitor leopard frog  populations at Soapstone Prairie and Meadow Springs Ranch. Continue to collect data on population conditions at both properties.


Determine if chytrid fungus (Bd)  is present in northern leopard frog populations.

Use audio technology, visual encounter  surveys, and auditory surveys to monitor for the invasion of American bullfrog.

Explore expanding movement  monitoring of amphibians, invertebrates, and other focal wildlife species using MOTUS radio telemetry or other technologies (ICCULUS).



Annually check for new raptor nest  structures and sites; monitor historic nest sites for new activity.


Follow-up on raptor nest success  study. Determine target species as it relates to management and visitor use impacts.


Conduct breeding bird surveys at  Soapstone Prairie every three years.



Use Bird Conservancy of the Rockies  monitoring data to create management tactics that support preferred habitat conditions for focal species.

Conduct a habitat analysis of preferred habitat for sharp-tailed grouse.

Use conservation targets to create   species- and community-specific goals for grazing bison and cattle.

Create a sustainable, flexible grazing  plan for bison and cattle with the National Resource Conservation Service, Folsom Grazing Association, and CSU.

Renew bison grazing intergovernmental  agreement (IGA) and lease with CSU and Larimer County.


Establish rapid grazing assessments   and adaptive management loop to prevent overgrazing and meet conservation targets.

Conduct a pilot butterfly monitoring effort to understand species diversity and contribute to the Butterfly Pavilion data set.

Delineate important butterfly habitat areas using data from butterfly monitoring.

Explore a research framework for understanding the diversity and abundance of dragonflies and damselflies.

Develop a bumble bee inventory survey in 2022, use information from Xerces Society, and other contacts, to formulate monitoring protocol.

Integrate CPW's wildlife data and  management recommendations where appropriate from their Soapstone Prairie projects and studies.

Themes:

Community voices: 

Conservation priorities: 

Climate resilience: 

DEI: 

Tactics:

Work with CPW to understand their pronghorn population data, its implication for the Soapstone Prairie hunt, and any data gaps (including movement patterns and collar data) through annual meetings.

Maintain data collection and research practices on prairie dog colonies related to management areas for black footed ferrets.

Explore feasibility of implementing management recommendations from the '2017 Natural Areas Bat Survey' report to protect bat populations.

Conduct bat monitoring approximately every ten years.

Explore a research framework for understanding the diversity and abundance of small mammal populations.

Continue monitoring Colorado Butterfly plant (*Oenothera coloradensis*).

Identify pollinator host plant species and determine status of flora. Implement actions that improve distribution, density, and abundance of host plants.

Document bryophyte diversity including mosses.

Map vegetation communities using National Vegetation Classification System and methodology developed by Jefferson County Open Space.

Continue treating cheatgrass using informed mapping.

Encourage pollinator research on rare plants at Soapstone Prairie.



Objective 2.3 Collaborate on landscape-scale initiatives to achieve regional conservation objectives and support long-term resilience.

Strategy: FCNAD and its partners will continue to use long-term monitoring and baseline surveys to better understand the biological resources of Soapstone Prairie. Inventorying will include creating a vegetation map of Soapstone Prairie for use by staff and external research partners at Colorado State University. Soapstone Prairie bird monitoring will continue, building on a 13-year data set. Additional monitoring will build baseline information for the following wildlife groups: small mammals, butterflies, Odonates, bumblebees, amphibians, and reptiles.

Tactics:

Continue bison herd discussions with the Native American community and CSU.

Continue pronghorn hunt in partnership with CPW.

Continue to collaborate with USFWS, CPW, and non-governmental organizations to sustain black-footed ferrets and black-tailed prairie dogs at Soapstone Prairie and Meadow Springs Ranch.

Themes:

Community voices:

Conservation priorities:

Climate resilience:

DEI:

Tactics:

Continue to manage plague at prairie dog colonies through the application of deltamethrin in USFWS Conservation Zones per Safe Harbor Agreement with USFWS.

Meet with CPW to determine research needs and staff support relative to future plague vaccine trials for prairie dogs.

Explore assisting the CSU bison pasture, Folsom, and Natural Fort grazing associations enrollment in the CPW prairie dog conservation program.

Continue partnership with Ember Alliance, Forest Stewards Guild, Wellington Fire Department, and Folsom Grazing Association on prescribed burns that support ecosystem health.

Identify ways to support Meadow Springs Ranch and Larimer County with cross-boundary resource management.

Explore working with Soundscape Lab at CSU and the National Park Service to establish a soundscape baseline at Soapstone Prairie.

Create a need statement and plan for seed preservation using the CSU cryogenic lab.

Build understanding of values and visitor use needs of Native American and Indigenous community members.

Co-create grazing strategies with Native American and Indigenous partners

Themes:

Community voices: 

Conservation priorities: 

Climate resilience: 

DEI: 

Goal

3

PROVIDE MEANINGFUL EDUCATION & APPROPRIATE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES



Youth Outdoor Education photo by Natural Areas Staff

Objective 3.1: Provide a diverse array of meaningful engagement opportunities for all ages.

Objective 3.2 Evaluate and monitor effectiveness to continually improve engagement efforts.



Objective 3.3 Inspire stewardship actions across the community.

Strategy: FCNAD staff will continue to bring the stories of Soapstone Prairie to the community by offering inclusive programming and the creation of digital, self-guided media content. The department will continue to offer meaningful engagement opportunities, evaluate the visitor experience, and inspire stewardship actions to engage the community.

Tactics:

Explore possibilities for project-based learning for middle and high schoolers from Poudre School District, with a focus on Wellington schools.

Continue to offer behind-the-scenes educational activities.

Allow and promote partners to lead educational programming that aligns with the FCNAD mission.

Provide self-guided learning experiences through a variety of educational products.

Themes:

Community voices:

Conservation priorities:

Climate resilience:


DEI:





Objective 3.4 Provide opportunities for safe and responsible use of sites.

Strategy: Since its opening in 2009, Soapstone Prairie has offered visitors a chance to connect to the landscape through the 44-mile trail system and to the story of ancient Paleo-Indian people at the Lindenmeier Archaeological Overlook. Regional trail connections will continue to be explored with partners as opportunities arise. FCNAD will continue to maintain a sustainable trail system that encourages on-trail visitor use, safety, stewardship action, and the protection of sensitive habitat areas.


Tactics

Continue existing regulations including  no dogs, e-bikes, overnight use, rock climbing, or horse-drawn carriages.

Use the Visitor Use Impact and Decision  Framework (IDF) process for evaluating potential changes to the trail network.

Provide updated safety information and  a "what to expect" for visitors using social media and website.

Continue to explore regional trail  connections to Soapstone Prairie with local partners.

Work with contractor to maintain  Soapstone Prairie roads and parking lots to ensure travel safety.

Continue the on-trail use policy. 

Improve drainage of south parking lot. 




Objective 3.5 Enhance accessibility to and provide for inclusive, passive recreation opportunities.

Objective 3.6 Recognize, honor, and enhance past and present black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)

Strategy: The FCNAD is committed to ensuring that the community has an opportunity to experience the wide open, scenic vistas of Soapstone Prairie. The human connection to Soapstone Prairie runs deep. The site has been occupied by people for the past 12,000 years. It is part of the ancestral homelands of the Apache, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow, Kiowa, Lakota, Pawnee, Shoshone, and Ute tribes. The Lindenmeier Overlook provides information on the Paleo-Indian people who lived at Soapstone Prairie. FCNAD is working with Native American and Indigenous partners, along with the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, to understand how to honor past and present connections of Native American and Indigenous communities at the site. The Department will also work to improve ADA accessibility and better understand mobility access opportunities through focus group engagement.

Tactics:

Represent community transportation  to natural areas needs during the FC Moves Active Modes plan update in 2022-23.

Install kiosk, rustic sign, and sign with miles to parking lot at entrance gate.

Themes:



Community voices: 



Conservation priorities: 


Climate resilience: 


DEI: 


Tactics:


Determine Soapstone Prairie-specific  
visitor use survey timing and questions.


Create clearer trail signage with  
directional indicators and mileage from
key junctions.



Engage with indigenous community to 
find shared goals.



Create public outreach content for 
Soapstone Prairie that is inclusive and
reflects the diversity of the community.



Explore feasibility of incorporating 
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)
principles into hunting at Soapstone
Prairie with CPW and DEI team.


Inspect sensitive areas around cultural 
sites for signs of use or damage.

Monitor parking lots to ensure ADA, 
horse trailer, vehicle parking, and bike
infrastructure supports visitor use
needs.

Identify repairs and improvements  
that can be implemented to improve
accessibility and ADA-compliant
access.

Consider ADA accessibility for bison  
viewing options with feedback from
focus groups.

Partner with City of Fort Collins  
Recreation Department and Adaptive
Recreation Opportunities (ARO)
program to bring community members
to Soapstone Prairie.

Continue discussions about 
archaeological dig permitting with Fort
Collins Museum of Discovery.

Themes:

Community voices: 

Conservation priorities: 

Climate resilience: 

DEI: 

Goal

4

RESPONSIBLY STEWARD THE COMMUNITY'S RESOURCES







Boundary Marker Volunteer Event 2019



Objective 4.1 Integrate equity and inclusion practices.



Strategy: The FCNAD will continue working to integrate equity and inclusion practices for its visitors and workforce at Soapstone Prairie and throughout the natural areas system. This will be achieved through developing expanded tactics with communities that historically have been marginalized, DEI professional development, and strengthening relationships with underrepresented audiences.



Tactics:

Develop additional co-created  
DEI tactics with FCNAD staff and community.

Continue to build an understanding  
visitor use needs of Spanish-speaking community members.

Work with Native American and  
Indigenous partners, along with the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, to understand how to honor past and present connections of Native American and Indigenous communities at the site.

Intentionally work towards policies,  
ideas, and actions that create a community where everyone enjoys equitable access to diverse and inclusive experiences in nature, feels safe and welcome to be themselves, and has an opportunity to engage in nature-based decision making.

Understand and co-create ways  
to reduce barriers that currently keep community members from experiencing Soapstone Prairie.

Themes:

Community voices: 

Conservation priorities: 

Climate resilience: 

DEI:  





world class workforce.

Objective 4.3 Manage the department’s resources and operations responsibly.

Strategy: Soapstone Prairie is a remote site that requires dedicated FCNAD staffing and funding to operate. FCNAD staff will continue tracking yearly spending at Soapstone Prairie to better understand resource allocation, infrastructure improvement needs, and identify opportunities for cost savings. The Conservation and Stewardship Planning process will be used to ensure activities at Soapstone Prairie align with the mission of FCNAD and the community’s values.

Tactics:

Cultivate and model a successful work environment that appropriately supports flexibility. 

Explore ways to best inform visitors of closures and conditions before they reach regional properties. 


Continue staffing site regularly to ensure resource protection and public safety.

Continue annual tracking of Soapstone Prairie expenses for maintenance, improvements, and programming.

Maintain first aid equipment in gatehouse.

Update and maintain unified capital replacement plan for the department.

Model and support DEI-focused professional development. 

Improve stairs, flooring, and deck at Roman House for potential overnight occupancy to reduce travel time and emissions. 

Model scenarios and maintain an adaptable long-range plan that reflects these scenarios and supports future operation and growth.

Ensure department operations account for asset investment and improvements.

Seek out and apply for grants that support department and zone priorities.

Explore cost of remotely operated entrance gate.

Themes:

Community voices: 

Conservation priorities: 

Climate resilience: 

DEI: 

Mountains to Plains

Visit <https://fcgov.com/naturalareas/mountains-to-plains-zone> to learn more about the Mountains to Plains zone and to find opportunities for providing feedback.

Thank you to the taxpayers of the City of Fort Collins and Larimer County and to the partners and staff who work to ensure open lands in the MTP zone are preserved for generations to come.

Photo credit page iv:

Justin Fredrickson- bison
Bernadette Kuhn-mountain bikers, prairie
Cisco Mora- child running
Walter Wehtje- horned larks
Mark Yoder- running horses
Others by Natural Areas staff

Photo credit page 6:

Andy Bankert- Baird's sparrow
Aran Meyer- northern leopard frog
Crystal Strouse - western wheat, Colorado butterfly plant
David Morse- bison, mountain mahogany
Ellyn B (flickr)- aspen leaf
Ernie Marx- buffalo grass, fourwing saltbush, needle-and-thread grass
Greatbasinseed.com-thickspike wheatgrass
Kimberly Fraser- black-footed ferrets
Max Licher- fen sedge
Norman Keally- owl
Susan McDougall- beaked sedge
Natural Areas Staff-prairie dogs

Related plans, policies, and reports

[Wildlife Conservation Guidelines](#)

[Soapstone Prairie Management Plan 2007](#)

[Laramie Foothills Bison Conservation Herd](#)

[Mountains to Plains Energy by Design 2013](#)

[Bird Conservancy Report 2018](#)

[CNHP Rare Plant Community Survey of Soapstone Prairie 2018](#)

[In-Stream Flow Decree Graves Creek](#)

[In-Stream Flow Decree Spottlewood Creek](#)

[Pioneer History of Soapstone Prairie](#)

[Homesteads of Soapstone Natural Area Story Map](#)

[Soapstone Natural Area Plant List](#)

[Soapstone Natural Area Mammal List](#)

