

FOOTHILLS

CONSERVATION

ADVISORY

COMMITTEE



ANNUAL REPORT

2012



WELCOME

The Foothills Conservation Advisory Committee (FCAC) was busy in 2012 concluding efforts to transfer to Idaho Fish & Game the 700+ acre Hammer Flat property. After Hammer Flat sold to Idaho Department of Fish and Game in July, the Foothills fund was augmented with an additional \$4.2 million. Now land negotiations for several key parcels are in the works. We hope to conclude one acquisition very soon.

The foothills program staff continues to be active on many projects important to the citizens of Boise: reducing the risk of wildfire along Boise's urban interface, applying for grant funds to build new trails, seeking feedback from trail users, engaging volunteers in restoration projects, quantifying the value of open space conservation to the community, and educating people of all ages about a range of foothills resources.

A few of the FCAC members are participating in the monthly meetings of the revision to the Boise Foothills Open Space Management Plan.

With new funds to work with, updates to the Foothills Plan in progress, and the ongoing work of the education, trails and open space programs, 2013 looks to be a busy and productive year in the Boise Foothills.

Sincerely,

Chas. F. McDevitt

Chairman, Foothills Conservation Advisory Committee



HAMMER FLAT SOLD

Both Boise City and Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) have been interested in preserving the 701-acre Hammer Flat property in the Boise Foothills as wildlife habitat. The property is adjacent to the 35,000-acre Boise River Wildlife Management Area and is important winter range for big game. In 2010, the City bought the land for \$4.1 million. Since then, IDFG has been working with Bonneville Power Administration to use wildlife mitigation funds to purchase Hammer Flat and add it permanently to IDFG's Boise River Wildlife Management Area. On July 9th, 2012, all their efforts paid off and IDFG paid \$4.2 million to the City for Hammer Flat. These funds will replenish the Foothills Serial Levy Fund for future land acquisitions. IDFG will continue restoration efforts on Hammer Flat and assess types of recreational use permitted on the property.



MILITARY RESERVE FENCE REMOVAL

Brendon French has completed the largest and most labor intensive Eagle Award Project that a scout has ever done for us. We had nearly a mile of chain link fence in the Military Reserve that separated two parcels of property owned by the City. Brendon and his volunteers spent days meticulously removing the fence fabric, carefully taking down the support posts, and loading it all onto a trailer, so that we could transport the fence material to another park for reuse. In total, Brendon and his team put in an astounding 341 hours removing the fence. Thanks so much, Brendon! The wildlife appreciate your hard work.

WHO IS USING THE TRAILS?

For the fourth year volunteers staffed 12 trailheads for 12 hours on a Saturday to gather information from trail users. 1,361 trail users completed the questionnaire on May 19th. The heaviest use was at 9th Street while the least was at Veterans. Bicyclists (35%) were the most frequent respondents with hikers (30%) close behind. 25% of respondents had a dog with them. Other information gathered included zip codes and ages of users, where trail users get information about the Ridge to Rivers trail system, feedback on possible trail management strategies and users' willingness to financially contribute to the maintenance of the trails. A summary of the report can be found on the City of Boise's foothills program website.



ECONOMIC IMPACT OF OPEN SPACE

This year brought an unexpected summer intern to the Foothills program. Niall Garrahan, a rising junior at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, received funding from the Monroe Scholars Fund to do an independent research study on the economic impact the Ridge to Rivers Trail System and Open Space Conservation in the Boise Foothills has on the community. He based his study on a Trust for Public Land report titled "Measuring the Economic Value of a City Park System." The Boise Study looks at the economic benefits of factors including: Ecosystem services, direct use, health and recreational opportunities, social capital, property values, public utility savings, and direct and indirect value to local businesses. The study will be officially released in Winter 2012/13; look for the link to the document on the City of Boise Parks and Recreation website.

FOOTHILLS OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

The Boise Foothills Open Space Management Plan was completed in 2000 and was a collaboration between the City of Boise, Ada County, Boise County, Idaho Department of Fish & Game, Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service. The plan describes the location and importance of plants, wildlife, riparian corridors, soils, slopes, recreation and public open spaces. Goals and recommendations are outlined in the plan for long-term protection of each resource. The plan laid the foundation for the 2001 Foothills Serial Levy and the building of the Jim Hall Foothills Learning Center in 2005. Now, twelve years later, with many of the original recommendations completed, it is time to review the plan. The same agencies along with representatives from the Foothills Conservation Advisory Committee and a few private foothills landowners are meeting monthly to update the document and make new recommendations for the next decade. The public will have several opportunities to review the updated recommendations at public meetings or through online comment forms. Public meetings are organized by topic areas on the following schedule:

- September 2012** -- Water, soils, plant communities, weeds and wildlife.
- December 2012** -- Recreation, hunting & trapping, transportation, solid waste, cultural resources, grazing and visual resources.
- March 2013** -- Funding, public involvement, environmental education, acquisition of open space, and public safety issues.
- Early Summer 2013** -- Completed draft document for final review



WILDFIRE MITIGATION PROJECTS

Over the last few years, the City of Boise has taken several steps to reduce the risk of wildfire at the urban interface. In March of this year, an interdepartmental team that included Julia Grant (Parks), Jerry McAdams (Fire) and Jennifer Tomlinson (Planning), received approval from City Council to move forward on several wildland urban interface wildfire mitigation projects. These projects were funded through the Southwest Idaho Resource Conservation and Development Council (SWIRC&D) and included:

- Home ignition zone (HIZ) training class for neighborhood leaders and firefighters
- A roaming chipper in the Warm Springs Mesa, Boise Heights, Central Foothills, High lands and East Foothills neighborhoods
- Briarhill/Quail Ridge goat grazing
- Military Reserve fuel reduction and restoration
- Oregon Trail/Homestead Rim sagebrush thinning

Many citizens participated in these projects and provided positive feedback about the contractors performing the tasks and the incentive these projects provided to make their property less at risk for fire. The city does not currently have a budget for wildfire mitigation projects, so the \$170k the SWIRC&D granted the City was much appreciated. New projects are on the horizon for 2013 to encourage more neighborhoods to become official Firewise Communities.



A LITTLE HISTORY

On May 22, 2001, 59% of Boise voters supported a two-year serial levy (2002 and 2003) in order to raise \$10 million for foothills land preservation efforts. At the onset of the preservation effort, the 80,000 acres in the Boise Foothills, from Highway 21 to Highway 55, were a scattered mixture of public and private ownerships. 38,000 acres were owned by various state and federal agencies, while the remaining 42,000 acres were in private hands. Since that time, the volunteers serving on the FCAC have been working to efficiently utilize the serial levy funds to conserve foothills land using a variety of tools including fee title ownership, conservation and trail easements and land exchanges amongst federal and state agencies.

Three priority areas for conservation were identified in the 2000 Boise Foothills Open Space Plan for Public Lands. These included:

- Table Rock
- Hulls Gulch/Military Reserve
- Dry Creek/West Foothills

STAFF

Boise City's Foothills Conservation and Management Program staff is made up of:

Julia Kertz Grant, Foothills & Open Space Manager
David Gordon, Ridge to Rivers Coordinator
Bart Johnson, Trail Crew Foreman
Will Taliaferro, Trail Maintenance Worker
Todd Graeff, Part-time Trail Ranger
Jennie Rylee, Environmental Education Coordinator
Carolyn Volk, Part-time Environmental Education Specialist
Kristin Lundstrom, Part-time Environmental Educator and Volunteer Coordinator

All staff members are housed at the Foothills Learning Center and workshop at 3188 Sunset Peak Road in Boise (mailing address - 1104 Royal Blvd. Boise, ID 83706 and phone number 208-493-2530).

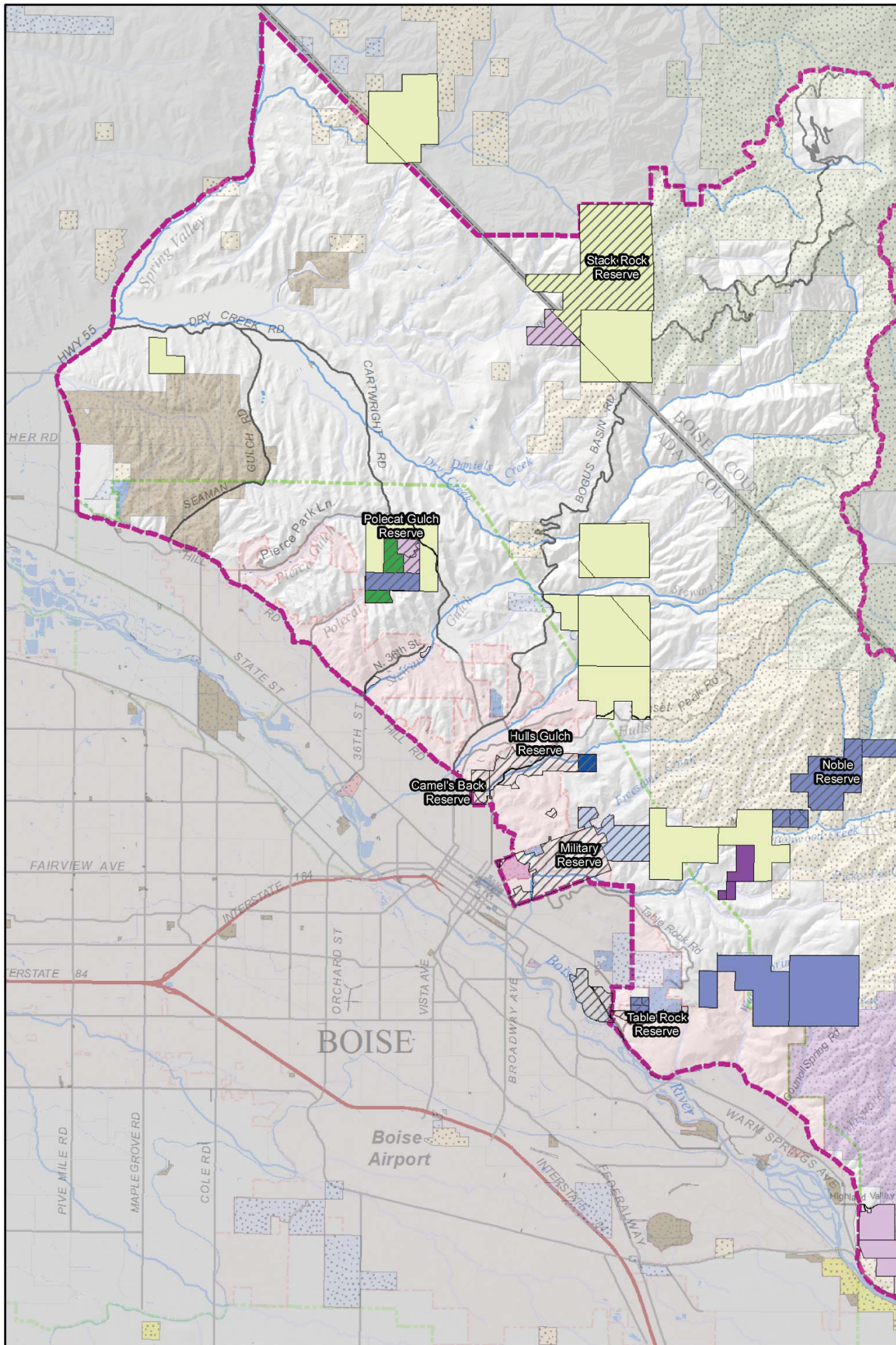
THE FOOTHILLS CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The 12-member committee was created in 2001. Members are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council. Their mission is to "... make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council for permanent protection of natural open space in the Boise Foothills, consistent with the open space serial levy passed by the voters on May 22, 2001, and will work to ensure that the levy funds are spent wisely." Committee members are selected for their interest in public recreation and natural resource management issues, leadership and individual areas of expertise. Committee members are volunteers who meet on the first Wednesday of the month at 7:30 am in the Foothills Learning Center Conference Room. The public is always welcome at these meetings.

The following is a complete list of Committee members:

Charles F. McDevitt, Chair
Suki Molina, Vice-Chair
Bill Eastlake
Milt Gillespie
Anne Hausrath
Ester Ceja
Shirley Randolph
Mike Reynoldson
Betsy Roberts
Brett Adler
Sylvia Cooper
Merritt Salathe, Youth Member FY12
Cassidy Thomas, Youth Member FY12

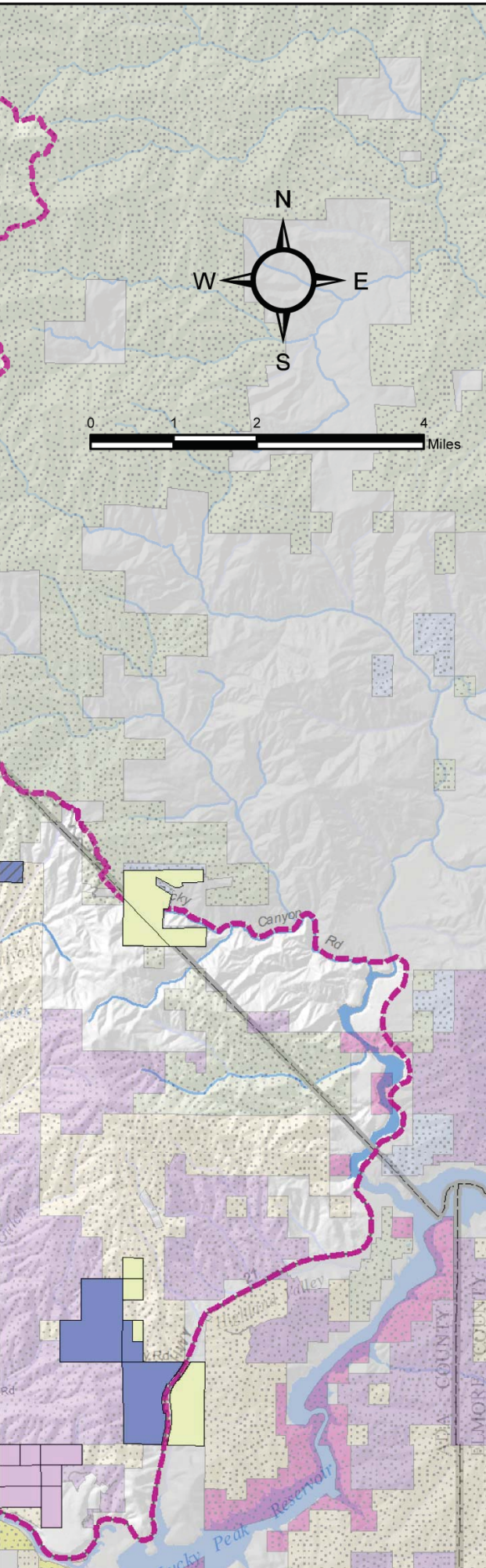




Boise Foothills Serial Levy Fund Acquisitions 2002 - 2012



City of Boise
Parks & Recreation
GIS Services



- Foothills Management Area
- Boise City Limits
- Boise Area of Impact
- Boise Parks & Rec Property

Public Lands

- US Bureau of Land Management
- US Bureau of Reclamation
- US Department of Defense
- US Forest Service
- Idaho Department of Lands
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game
- Idaho State Agencies
- Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation
- Ada County Owner Land

Levy Fund Land Acquisitions

- 2002
- 2003
- 2004
- 2005
- 2008
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011

This drawing is to be used only for reference purposes; Boise city is not responsible for any inaccuracies herein contained. This map is made in part from data prepared or compiled by Ada County. Ada County shall not be liable for inaccuracies or misuse of this map or data.

Date: 1/28/2013

OUR VISION

In 2000, the Boise Foothills Open Space Management Plan (online link to <http://www.cityofboise.org/Departments/Parks/Foothills/Conservation/Accomplishments/page12098.aspx>) was completed. The plan outlined the need for conserving natural resource values, educating the public, and providing sustainable recreation and resource use. It was created with input from the following seven city, county, state and federal agencies with public land management roles in the Foothills project area:

- City of Boise
- Ada County
- Boise County
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG)
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- United States Forest Service (USFS)
- Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) –
(Not included in the 2012 update because they traded out of the majority of their land in the foothills.)



These agencies support the vision of the Boise Foothills Open Space Management Plan to create an interconnected system of natural areas, recreation trails, and wildlife corridors that protect the integrity of public land values in the Foothills through:

- A long-term commitment to protect open space to preserve the character and diversity of the Boise Foothills public lands.
- Conservation and enhancement of the ecosystems for wildlife habitat that rely so heavily on open space.
- Partnerships between private and public entities to take equal responsibility in maintaining open space in the Foothills as an important place for people to learn, recreate, and rejuvenate.
- Education of those who use the open space so that they protect the resources associated with it.
- Adherence to recommendations and policies contained within this plan to perpetuate the character of the Foothills.

SERIAL LEVY MAP

The map shows how the \$10.8 million from the Foothills fund has been used to conserve land within the Boise Foothills planning area. The funds have been used to conserve land through acquisition, donation, or land exchange. The FCAC continues to have discussions with foothill landowners regarding possible new trail connections, protection of wildlife habitat and riparian corridors, and preservation of rare plants and historically significant sites all while looking at how best to leverage the \$4.3 million left in the fund.

FOOTHILLS LEARNING CENTER

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

2012 was another busy year for the education staff. They provide environmental lessons and programs to children and adults both at the Foothills Learning Center and in classrooms and meeting rooms around the City. Programs are funded by the City of Boise's Parks and Recreation Department with assistance from Boise Public Works.

LESSONS AND OUTREACH

A new tracking system provides more detailed data on students reached with our field trips, in-class lessons and outreach. During the 2011-2012 school year, we reached a total of 9803 students. This number represents 268 lessons for 335 classrooms. In addition, we hosted over 2000 visitors at our Second Saturday and other special programs for a total of over 12,214 contact hours for the year. For the first time this year, we also tracked schools and teachers who were new to Foothills Learning Center programs and lessons. Thirty-two new teachers participated, and 10 schools or agencies used our services for the first time.

Several schools took advantage of our bus scholarship program. We offer subsidies to schools who otherwise would not be able to participate in field trips because of budget restrictions imposed by the Idaho Department of Education. Funding for these subsidies comes from education-targeted donations to our Heritage Trust Fund.

OUR FELLOWS

2012 was the fourth year of a 5-year ongoing partnership with Boise State University. Through a GK-12 grant awarded by the National Science Foundation, we have had graduate fellows working with our staff developing and delivering science lessons, and sharing their expertise with students and the community. This year's fellows were Matt Schmasow (Entymology), Emerald Shirley (Geochemistry), and Bryant Ware (Geology). Thanks to the fellows, we added the following new lessons to our catalog: The Buzz on Bees, Geologic Time, and Plate Tectonics. The fellows continue to add depth and energy to our lessons and programs and have been a wonderful addition to our team.



EMERALD SHIRLEY



MATT SCHMASOW



BRYANT WARE



THE BEES!

Thanks to graduate fellow Matt Schmasow, the Foothills Learning Center is now home to a colony of bees that live in our conference room. The enclosed indoor hive has glass walls, allowing us to observe the inner workings of a productive bee hive. Students and staff alike are fascinated by watching the bees building and maintaining their hive, doing the “waggle dance”, tending the queen, making honey, and generally doing what bees do. It has become a great teaching tool, and a popular attraction at the Center.

STORY TRAIL

The Story Trail continues to be a big attraction, especially for families with young children. It is a quarter-mile trail with 10 reading platforms featuring a different nature-related book each month. This year, we added a new program- the Story Trail Adventure- a monthly event for preschool-aged kids that includes a guided walk to read the book and a craft related to the story. Attendance is limited but the program is free and a fun way for parents and kids to spend a morning together outside.

SECOND SATURDAYS

Another year of successful Second Saturday programs brought a diversity of activities to the Foothills Learning Center. Over 2000 people attended our programs on a range of topics including: Composting, wolves, stars, bats, winter adaptations, geology, owls, colony insects, meet a scientist, art in the foothills and our all-time favorites- owls and Green Christmas. Second Saturdays continue to be a great success story for the Foothills Learning Center. We have a great combination of repeat customers – some families come every time- and new participants each month.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are a key to successful programs at the Foothills Learning Centers. They serve many functions including: doing presentations and running stations at Second Saturday; weeding and landscape maintenance; data entry; and lesson preparations. This year, volunteers logged 795 hours at the Center.



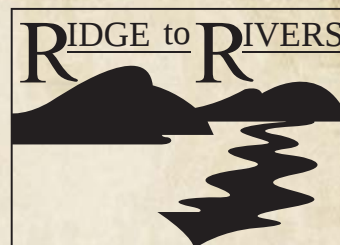
PARTNERSHIPS

As always, we partnered with several other programs this year. For the Idaho Master Naturalist program, we work closely with the Idaho Botanical Garden and the MK Nature Center. Obviously the Boise School District is an important learning partner. Boise State University partners in several ways: the GK-12 Fellowship program; BSU Service Learning brings students to the FLC; volunteers from the BSU Volunteer Board do projects with us. We partner with the local Boy Scout Council for Eagle Scout projects, community service, and service learning.

Each winter we work with the Bogus Basin Snow School, providing in-class lessons before students go up the mountain. We participate in Teachers' Night Out, a program hosted by the local Cultural Network. Idaho Bird Observatory is another partner, along with Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Zoo Boise, Boise Community Forestry, City Recreation, Grace Jordan, Morley Nelson and Whitney Community Centers, Idaho Science Teachers Association, Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission, FarWest Garden Center, Project Learning Tree, The Cabin Literary Center, University of Idaho Extension, and many more.



RIDGE TO RIVERS



"I visited the neighborhood of my childhood in Boise (Hillview Drive) last month. I was so glad to see the foothills have been preserved. I am amazed at the connectivity of neighborhoods, trails and parks in Boise. I had many adventures as a young man hiking to Castle Rock and Table Rock. This was during the wonder years of the 60's and 70's. I am so glad that tradition is secure for all to enjoy."

2012 continued to see a steady increase in visitor use along Ridge to Rivers trails, along with the impacts associated with that increase. A number of projects were undertaken in an attempt to mitigate these impacts. In addition, much time was spent, as always, performing annual maintenance on our trail system. Notable items include:

FREESTONE CREEK TRAIL NO. 22B TURNPIKE

The section of Freestone Creek Trail, leading from Freestone Trailhead to Central Ridge, has been in deteriorating condition for many years. The trail climbed the fall line at a sustained grade in excess of 25%, making it difficult to divert water from the trail tread during rain events. Ridge to Rivers crews spent an inordinate amount of time over the years on this section of trail, attempting to mitigate the continual erosion.

On National Trails Day this year, a crew of over 40 volunteers worked with Ridge to Rivers staff to construct a reroute of this section of trail, and to close and rehabilitate the old trail tread. The project appears to have been very successful, as the old tread shows little evidence of continued use. Our hope is that with re-seeding efforts, the old section of trail will largely disappear over the next two to three years.

FREESTONE CREEK TRAIL NO. 22B REROUTE

Spring run-off routinely keeps the southernmost portion of Freestone Creek Trail under four to six inches of water for up to four weeks, as Freestone Creek sheet floods across the bottom of the drainage. In July, the Ridge to Rivers trail crew constructed a 120-foot stone-lined turnpike along this section of trail. A turnpike is an elevated trail tread used to cross through boggy areas. The turnpike will not only allow dry passage through this area during the wet spring months, but will also lead to improved riparian health as it will concentrate use in the appropriate location – on the turnpike tread. Users were routinely forging new paths through the adjacent riparian vegetation in attempts to avoid the wet section of trail and this will no longer be necessary.



ROCK ARMORING

A number of short sections of trail that had been suffering from long-term erosion were armored in 2012 using native stone. These were located on Shindig Trail No. 92, Elk Meadows Trail No. 94, Eastside Trail No. 120, and Cottonwood Creek Trail No. 27.

VOLUNTEERS

Ridge to Rivers saw a 13% increase in volunteer numbers in 2012. While most volunteer hours were again related to the Trail Ranger program, projects such as the Adopt-A-Trail program, the Freestone Creek Trail reroute and the shrub planting efforts also provided interested individuals with opportunities to give back to the trail system.

TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Unusual weather conditions during the 2012-2013 winter left big maintenance challenges for crews on many trails in the Shafer Butte area. Significant windfall occurred along these trails, lengthening the time that it typically takes to maintain these trails from a number of days, to weeks. On many stretches of trail, downed trees were encountered every 100 feet over distances in excess of one mile.

"FYI, nice work on 3 Bears, I climbed it yesterday and was happy that the ruts were gone on the last stretch. It looks like you guys have been doing a lot of winter-prep out there. You probably don't hear it too often, but we appreciate it."

POLECAT TRAIL HARDENING

Ridge to Rivers crews worked with the Student Conservation Association to implement mitigation measures on a section of the Polecat Loop Trail No. 81, that had widened to over twice its original width in recent years. By constructing a split cedar retaining wall, and importing clay-based soil to lay over the existing deep sand, this section of trail was both narrowed and hardened.

SHRUB PLANTING

For the second year in a row, Ridge to Rivers crews spent a portion of the spring planting bitterbrush and sagebrush seedlings along trails in an effort to curtail trail tread widening. Planting was done with significant assistance from REI volunteers and Timberline High School students. Over 300 seedlings were planted during a two-week period in late March along Red Cliffs Trail No. 39, Central Ridge Spurs No. 22A, and Bucktail Trail No. 20A. While it is very evident that the seedling placement is effective at fighting trail widening, unfortunately mortality was quite high due to the very hot and dry summer in 2012. Discussions with Idaho Fish and Game staff indicated that their annual re-planting efforts saw similar mortality rates. We will resume these efforts in March, 2013.



TRAIL RANGER PROGRAM

The Trail Ranger program again comprised the largest portion of our volunteer hours. We started the season with 14 Volunteer Rangers, and finished with 11 committed individuals. Along with Ridge to Rivers staff, the Volunteer Trail Rangers racked up 554 patrols from April through October. In addition to providing trail etiquette-related messages and informing staff of maintenance needs, Rangers recorded the numbers of each user group that they encounter while on their patrols. In comparing these numbers from June – October 2011 to June – October 2012, the increase in observed users was staggering: 78% increase in pedestrians (hikers and trail runners); 68% increase in mountain bikers; 74% increase in dogs. It should also be noted that in those 554 patrols, only 33 equestrians and 44 motorcyclists were observed.

AROUND THE MOUNTAIN TRAIL

Ridge to Rivers obtained a \$65,000 Non-motorized Recreational Trails Program grant to construct the 7-mile Around the Mountain Trail at Bogus Basin. Grant funds will be augmented by matching funds from the following: \$5,000 from the Southwest Idaho Mountain Bike Association; \$1,000 from 10 area bike and running shops who pledged \$100 apiece; \$3,000 from Bogus Basin Mountain Resort; \$1,000 from the Boise National Forest; and \$25,000 from Ridge to Rivers map sales and general donations to the program that are kept in our Heritage Trust account.

The Around the Mountain Trail will be constructed by a qualified professional trail contractor. The layout was flagged during the month of September, and the project is currently in the bid process. Plans are for the selected contractor to begin construction on the trail in spring 2013, and to have construction completed by the end of the fiscal year.



"I just finished a wonderful cycling season on some of the best trails in the US. I thank you for your dedication and trail advocacy, and for the wonderful new and dynamic trails. I feel blessed to live in Boise because of the trails, and I fully recognize that without Ridges to Rivers, we'd have no trails. Thanks to the Foothills Levy and people like yourselves, we live a short distance from a brilliant and well-maintained recreational area."

THERE WERE A NUMBER OF PROBLEMATIC ISSUES THAT CROPPED UP IN 2012 – SOME NEW, SOME RECURRENCES FROM PREVIOUS YEARS.

ILLEGAL DUMPING

The past year saw a significant increase in large trash being dumped in the Foothills. Whereas in the past large items were generally found along Rocky Canyon Road, this year we saw much more trash being dumped along upper 8th Street Road, and even down in the Lower Hulls Gulch Reserve. Numerous couches, chairs and televisions were removed from the Foothills on an almost weekly basis during much of the summer.



GRAFFITI

The past spring saw a renewal of various types of graffiti in the Foothills.

Tagging was prevalent on many signs and directional posts in the Lower Hulls Gulch Reserve as well as in the Table Rock area. We have also observed an

increase in spray paint tagging on natural features – most notably on Elephant Rock and on the cliffs in the upper Table Rock area. These are unfortunately difficult if not impossible for our crews to remove.

SOCIAL TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

Despite signage and placement of dead vegetation to dissuade this, the past year saw a surprising increase in social trails being pioneered in various locations, as well as switchbacks being cut. This was most noticeable on our western trails – those in the Seamans Gulch area and the Big Springs area.



LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

As 2012 comes to a close, the Ridge to Rivers trail system seems poised on a major threshold. Significantly increasing trail use, combined with an apparent warming and drying trend in our climate, are both taking their toll on our trail system.

Mild winters are allowing for easier trail accessibility during months when, in the past, use was light to non-existent. This use often occurs when trails are wet and muddy, leading to failure of drainage features and loss of trailside vegetation. Hot, increasingly dry summers are leading to a breakdown of the properties that hold our soils together, resulting in soil movement and soil loss when combined with high trail use and the occasional thunder storm. Increasing use among mountain bikers, runners, hikers and dogs exacerbate each of the above-mentioned concerns.

In short, we are facing a concerning deterioration of trail tread conditions – soil loss that is causing cupping and erosion of the trails, as well as increased wash boarding of the busier sections of many trails. These conditions lead to users choosing to run, hike or ride on the flatter adjacent surfaces where possible, leading to increased vegetation loss as trails are widened and braided. These problems are not easily remedied, due to the very limited natural materials available to us in the Foothills (problems such as these are typically mitigated with rock and large woody material in more forested climates), and the degree of difficulty involved with importing necessary materials.



The Ridge to Rivers trail system has expanded by 30% in the past eight years. This increase, along with the increase in use and associated impacts, has put the program close to capacity with our current budget. However, we continue to receive requests to consider additional trails for inclusion into the Ridge to Rivers system. Before we expand the current system much further, we will need to identify effective means of maintaining those trails that we do have, so that we don't continue to see a downward trend in overall trail conditions.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY:

Darci Niles, Julia Grant, Amy Stahl, Kristin Lundstrom, Bart Johnson, David Gordon, Andy Burnelle, Sylvia Cooper





Foothills Learning Center



Foothills Learning Center

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www.cityofboise.org/departments/parks/foothills

<http://ridgetorivers.cityofboise.org>



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