



2013

ANNUAL REPORT

**CITY OF BOISE
FOOTHILLS PROGRAM**



**Parks &
Recreation**



POLECAT PURCHASE AND NEW TRAILHEAD

The City purchased 154 acres of open space property at the end of North Collister Street in the Northwest Boise foothills in December 2012 using Foothills Serial Levy funds. This property protects a bountiful population of the rare and threatened endemic Aase's Onion and provides needed public access to the popular Polecat Gulch Reserve trails. The City negotiated a purchase price of \$500,000 with Bank of the Cascades.

This acquisition has spurred the planning for a long awaited public trailhead at the south end of Polecat Gulch Reserve. Currently the only legal access is from the Cartwright Trailhead on the north side of the Reserve. The 8 miles of trails and the Cartwright Trailhead were built in 2008. The funds for the trails and initial trailhead came from a \$46k state recreational trail program (RTP) grant. Under the guidance of Kelly Burrows, City of Boise Park's Project Coordinator, the public was involved in the design of the new trailhead. The tentative construction schedule is Summer 2014.

FRIENDS OF THE BOISE FOOTHILLS

Friends groups consist of citizens of all ages who volunteer their time, services and support to enhance a special place in their community. The 2000 Boise Foothills Open Space Management Plan encouraged land management agencies to establish partnerships with public and private landholders, community land trusts and "friends" groups, however a "friends" group for the Boise Foothills did not exist. Over the last year Maureen Bolton, a recent transplant to Boise and a volunteer Ridge to Rivers Ranger, became the catalyst behind creating a Friends of the Boise Foothills (FOBF) group. She understands the many values citizens place on the Boise Foothills and is working with a charter committee to craft an MOU with the City of Boise, apply for 501 (c) 3 non-profit status and draw up by-laws for the organization. The mission of FOBF is to create awareness of, provide resources to and foster community support for the Boise Foothills in order to insure that the public land and surrounding trails continue to be maintained and preserved for current and future generations of outdoor enthusiasts. FOBF received their first financial donation in June from the McCord Family, whose home was previously located on the site of the Jim Hall Foothills Learning Center. The city looks forward to the support that a group like this can provide.

HILLSIDE TO HOLLOW PURCHASE

After many years of discussions with the several different owners of the 258 acre Hillside to Hollow property, the City purchased it in May. The undeveloped property is located north of Hill Road between Bogus Basin Road and North 33rd St. About 246 acres of this acquisition will be dedicated to open space preservation. The Mayor and City Council have determined a total of 13 developable acres of the purchase may be used in the future to trade for other high conservation value open space in the Foothills. The property consists of 7 parcels previously owned by Boise Foothills LLC (formerly known as DBSI Boise Foothills LLC). Severe erosion, many public access points and a myriad of social trails can be found on the property. Parks planning staff will work with the public to master plan the property starting in early 2014.

MOTH/CHEATGRASS RESEARCH IN MILITARY RESERVE

Miller moths are unwelcome spring and fall visitors to the Front Range in Colorado. Adult moths summer in the Greater Yellowstone area, where they are an important food for grizzly bears. The insects return to the Great Plains to lay eggs that hatch the following winter. Larvae hide in the soil during the day and feed above ground on young plants at night.

Although the insects are not as common west of the Rockies, they occasionally reach high numbers. The winter of 2002-03 was unusually warm and dry around Winnemucca, NV. That spring, rangeland covered with cheatgrass for years was suddenly bare. After several months of sleuthing it was concluded that army cutworms (Miller moth larvae) were the main culprit in the disappearance of nearly a million acres of cheatgrass in the Intermountain West.

We have not had a recent outbreak of army cutworms in the Boise area, but the insects are still present and will increase with the right conditions. With climate change, the chances of another warm, dry winter increase. Researcher Cindy Salo began trapping Miller Moths in Military Reserve last fall. She collects and counts them to determine if there might be an outbreak which would provide good timing to seed areas with desirable plant species so they can have a head start on the cheatgrass as it is attacked by the army cutworms come spring. She plans to do this for many years.



WILDFIRE MITIGATION PROJECTS

For the last few years, Parks has partnered with Planning and Fire to participate in the City of Boise's Wildfire Mitigation Team. This spring, the team Julia Grant, Jennifer Tomlinson and Jerry McAdams-received the well-deserved ONE CITY ONE TEAM AWARD for their continued efforts to work with communities in the Wildland Urban Interface on wildfire mitigation projects. The team has received over \$400,000 in funding from the Southwest Idaho Resource Conservation and Development Council. Funded projects have included: Quail Ridge goat grazing and restoration, Military Reserve goat grazing and restoration, Oregon Trail Reserve sagebrush thinning, Castle Rock Reserve goat grazing and restoration, NFPA Home Ignition Zone Seminar, roaming wood chipper (Central Foothills, Boise Heights, East Foothills, Warm Springs Mesa and Highlands), Firewise landscape demonstration projects at Boise Fire Station #1 and #12, Firewise community recognition for Quail Ridge, Boise Heights, Columbia Village, Briarhill and Morningside Heights, wildfire educational signage for Ridge to Rivers trailheads and trails, and a summer graduate wildfire intern.

CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING

In January, a briefing was held for members of the Idaho Congressional Delegation and the Governor's office. It covered the *City of Boise's Foothills Program and Open Land Utility: A Study of Conservation, Ecosystem Services, and Recreation in Boise, Idaho*. This was an opportunity to provide policy makers and their representatives with information on the unique and beneficial partnerships amongst local, state and federal land managing agencies along the Boise Front. It also highlighted many of the economic benefits of open space conservation, ecosystem protection and recreation in the Foothills and spurred valuable discussion by attendees. Hopefully the participants left with an increased awareness and appreciation of the incredible asset the Foothills provide our community and the state.



Foothills Learning Center

Boise Environmental Education



LESSONS

We contacted a total of 9076 students during the 2012-13 school year. That number represents 406 lessons done both as outreach in the schools (101) and field visits to the center (139), for a total of 12,441 contact hours. We reached 52 new teachers, and 25 organizations or schools used our services for the first time. Though our outreach is limited to schools within the Boise City limits, 38 groups came to us from outlying communities in the Treasure Valley and even into Oregon.

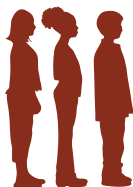
Our bus scholarship program provided support to 20 school groups. We offer subsidies to schools that otherwise wouldn't be able to participate in field trips due to lack of funding.

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SECOND SATURDAYS, SUNSET SERIES & OTHER SPECIAL EVENTS

Our ever-popular 2nd Saturday programs served over 1,700 visitors. Our Sunset Series, evening educational programs in the spring and summer, attracted over 125 visitors. Our Story Trail continues to be very popular; 340 visitors signed into the Story Trail Register during 2013, some visiting from places as far away as Alaska. 187 children and adults participated in our first full year of The Story Trail Adventure, a monthly program for toddlers and their adult buddies. All of this adds up to over 2350 additional visitors enjoying our place and our programs.

CAMPS

We had a busy year with Claudia Fernsworth's year-round pre-school nature camps, and our summer camp offerings included full sessions of Garden Camp, Boise Earth Action Camp, and Wild in the City. We also partnered with The Cabin Literary Center's nine Writing Wild camp sessions held on site at FLC.

FELLOWS

The Boise State University GK-12 National Science Foundation grant was in its fifth year and we are fortunate to receive funding for one more academic year in 2013/2014. This year's fellows were Daniel Tappa, a Hydrologist, and Neil Paparocki, a Raptor Biologist. They taught

alongside FLC staff as well as on their own and inspired students with their passion and expertise. Each developed a new lesson for us: Under Pressure, about the relationship between weather and barometric pressure; and Land Ethics, which not only explores that concept, but also gives kids some of the history of Hulls Gulch and how it came to be a reserve.

This year our
volunteers
logged in
910 hours.



VOLUNTEERS

We couldn't function without all of the dedicated volunteers who help us with public programming, teaching lessons, giving presentations, maintaining our landscaping, preparing materials, entering data and many other important tasks. One of our volunteers, Matthew Bledsoe, reached his five year mark! Peter Donovan, an Eagle Scout candidate bravely cleaned out our squirrel infested Kestrel boxes and made and installed several new ones and installed two bat boxes. He is applying for The William T. Hornaday Award, a special Boy Scouts of America conservation award, that was established in 1914 by the founder of the National Zoo in Washington D.C. Peter not only built the boxes but will have monitored them for an entire year.



A YEAR FOR SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS AT THE FLC: RETIREMENT PARTY FOR JENNIE RYLEE

In June, we bid farewell to Jennie “Recycle” Rylee in a lovely afternoon celebration. Jennie was with the City for over 21 years, and was the first education coordinator for the Foothills Learning Center after it opened in 2005. She developed most of the lessons we teach and gave a wonderfully creative shape to all of our special events and the culture of innovation here at the FLC. We miss her, but she has clearly left her mark, and we are all lucky for that.

McCord Family Celebration

In July, we hosted a McCord Family Celebration in honor of Carol and Joel McCord. They raised their family on the site of what is now the FLC. We had all four of their children here, and many of their long-time friends from far and near. We spent a wonderful day hearing them reminisce about growing up on the property and how much this place meant and still means to them all. They sold their property to the City of Boise in 1997.

ROTARY GRANT

Thanks to a generous grant from the Rotary Club of Boise – Sunrise, we were able to purchase two additional spotting scopes and tripods for viewing our resident raptors—Great Horned owls, Red-tailed and Coopers hawks, American Kestrels, and other foothills wildlife. We are so appreciative of generous community members like the Rotary!



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

✿ This year saw an increase in services to Special Needs populations, including both adult and elementary special needs students, BSU English Language Learners students, dual- language lessons with elementary students, and our first-ever program with the visually impaired.

- ✿ Our Story Trail was highlighted at this year’s American Trails International Trails Symposium in Arizona in an interpretive session put on by FLC Environmental Educator and Story Trail founder, Kristin Lundstrom.
- ✿ FLC hosted a training workshop with Parks and Rec Community Center staff: Jennie and Carolyn led a half-day training staff in team building exercises to do with their after school and summer community center kids.
- ✿ Our GK-12 program, a unique and valuable partnership between FLC/City of Boise and Boise State University, received the Outstanding Innovation Program award at the Idaho Recreation & Park Association conference in September.
- ✿ This was our first year to participate in the Assistance League “Operation School Bell” program. We trained BSU service learning students to do our recycling lesson and relay with kids waiting for their turn to be outfitted with school clothes and supplies. This program serves over 3500 elementary school students in the Treasure Valley.
- ✿ Boise 150 programs. We hosted two programs here at the FLC as part of that year-long celebration.



NATURE’S HIGHLIGHTS

Last winter was one of the coldest on record in Boise. At the FLC, the evidence was pretty obvious as we went over 6 weeks with no running water when our pipes froze! Our resident owls also noticed and delayed their nesting and breeding time. For the first time ever, neither the owls nor their owlets made an appearance at our annual owl event on the second Saturday in April. The bees in our observation hive reduced their population as usual, but survived the winter and were busily collecting pollen and making honey come Spring. The Coopers Hawks and our resident Red-tail Hawks successfully bred as well; and this summer we had reports of a badger up the creek not far from the center! The unusually hot early summer resulted in Halls Gulch creek drying up May 15th—one of the earliest dates we can remember.

PARTNERSHIPS

As always, partnerships are key to the work that we do. The following list includes many of the organizations and events we have partnered with or participated in this year:

- Anser Charter School
- Assistance League of Boise
- Operation School Bell
- Bogus Basin Snow School
- Boise Community Forestry
- Boise Department of Arts and History
- Boise 150
- Boise Parks and Recreation
- Boise Public Works
- Boise School District
- Boise State University
- Boise Watershed
- Boy Scouts of America
- FarWest Nursery and Garden Center
- Idaho Bird Observatory
- Idaho Botanical Gardens
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game
- Idaho Environmental Education Association
- Idaho Master Naturalists
- Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission Annual Sheep Day event
- Idaho Science Teachers Association
- MK Nature Center
- Project Wet, Project Wild and Project Learning Tree
- Teacher’s Night Out and Boise’s Cultural Network
- The Cabin, A Literary Center for Idaho
- The Newcomer’s Club
- University of Idaho Extension
- Zoo Boise



Ridge to Rivers

SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Around the Mountain Trail

The 7.1-mile Around the Mountain Trail was completed over the course of much of the summer and fall months. The trail features banked turns, numerous technical rock features and miles of flowy single-track. Design was completed by Ridge to Rivers staff, with construction completed through a contract with YRU Contracting of Cambridge, Idaho.



Funds for construction came from Ridge to Rivers, a Non-motorized Recreational Trails Program Grant, SWIMBA, Bogus Basin, and the following consortium of area retailers: World Cycle, Shu's Idaho Running Company, Bob's Bicycles, The Pulse Running and Fitness Shop, Ken's Bicycle Warehouse, Bandanna Running and Walking, George's Bicycles, Joyride Cycles, Reed Cycle and Eastside Cycles. Construction costs were \$99,324.75, which was almost \$700 under budget.

“ Miller rode the Around the Mountain trail last night and had a very nice ride. I love the cut of the trail especially the banked turns and the stone bridge.

I rode the open sections of the new trail last night and was very impressed. The trail flows so well and the banked turns are a blast. This is turning out to be a premier trail, everyone in our group loved it and the other riders that we came across couldn't believe what a great trail they had found.”



Highlands Trail

The 2-mile Highlands Trail was constructed by hand by the Ridge to Rivers crew during September and October. This provides a much-needed link between Bob's Trailhead and the lower Corrals Trail. Though identified as a need for many years, credit for initiation of the project goes to the Highlands, Inc. who contacted Ridge to Rivers with an offer to help fund a trail that would provide this link without trespassing on their property something that had been done for many years. The trail now lies primarily on BLM ground, with easements for 3 short sections of trail that cross onto corners Highlands Inc. property due to topographic considerations.

An additional element to this project was the closing of several unauthorized social trails that had developed in the area over the years. These have now been fenced, signed and covered in part with vegetative cloth for seed growth. Seeding of these closed routes will occur early this winter.

“ Folks are loving the new Highlands trail! I chatted with 6 mountain bikers at the top after they were climbing the trail. They dubbed it “an instant Boise classic”. I agree!

Was THRILLED to see the new trail coming down the side of the hill, so we took that and looped around and back down Bob's. That is fantastic! Nice work. And thank you.”

Trail Ranger Program

We started with 13 Volunteer Trail Rangers this season, and finished with 11 (one moved to New Zealand and another could not meet the time commitment). These individuals, along with Lead Ranger Todd Graeff and Program Coordinator David Gordon combined for 847 uniformed patrols in the Foothills. This was an 18% increase in patrols over 2012. Rangers encountered a total of 27,781 trail users while out on patrols. Trail use observed over the season (April – November) was spread as follows: Foot traffic – 57%; Mountain bikers – 43%. Observed use per patrol increased over 2012 as follows: Foot traffic – UP 32%; Mountain Bikers – UP 16%; Dog Owners – UP 32%. We hope to grow the Ranger program up to 15 individuals within the next couple of years.

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Rock Island Jump Line

There is a segment of the Boise mountain bike community that is looking for trails that allow for jumps, tabletops and other technical trail features. Ridge to Rivers was able to achieve two goals last spring by working with some of these individuals. The lower mesa of Table Rock contained a two-track paralleled Table Rock Loop Trail #16 and was unnecessary. We had discussed closing and revegetating this old two-track for a few years.

Local riders utilizing the area for the technical features of the Rock Island Trail approached us about the possibility of adding a jump-line in the vicinity. By working together, we closed two-thirds of the old two-track, and modified the remaining third into a series of jumps that tie back into the Rock Island Trail. Interested riders were on-site to assist in this project and thankful for the opportunity that the trail now provides.

Completion of Corrals Trail Bridge

The western most bridge on Corrals Trail was in need of reconstruction due to failing stringers. We opted to construct a bridge that would allow passage of our mini-excavator, so that we would no longer need to drive across the creek when maintaining the Corrals Trail. Bridge approaches were constructed with stone that was split on-site.

Volunteers

Ridge to Rivers had 2,714 volunteer hours in 2013. This was an increase of almost 600 hours over 2012. Volunteer hours contributed to a number of projects and programs including the Trail Ranger program, shrub planting, Tending the Foothills Day, WILD crew volunteer activities, Adopt-a-Trail program, the Cottonwood Trailhead Eagle Scout project, the Rock Island jump line, and various individual volunteer efforts.

SHRUB PLANTING

Ridge to Rivers combined with student volunteers from Boise High School to plant 300 shrubs along various trails in March. Though we again had a very hot and dry summer, mortality appears to be around 50%. This is actually quite good considering that the plants receive no extra watering. We will continue this effort in the hope of narrowing some of our wider trails up in the Military Reserve and Hulls Gulch area.

BUCKTAIL TRAIL TREAD IN-FILL PROJECT

A number of deeply cupped sections of the Bucktail and upper Central Ridge Trails were filled with stone, then topped with dirt this summer. This work was completed by Ridge to Rivers staff, the WILD Crew, and volunteers organized through a joint Tending the Foothills day with REI and Ridge to Rivers. The project involved transporting cobble and topsoil via wheelbarrow for distances of up to a half-mile. While the end result appears to be quite successful, the strategy for transporting material needs to be revised—this method was slow and very hard on the folks involved.

2013 PROGRAM SUMMARY

Visitor numbers reported by Trail Rangers following each patrol were statistically analyzed by volunteer Ulli Kamm, and shared trail use to be much higher than previously thought. It is now estimated that our use is in excess of 400,000 visitors per year with this number continuing to climb at a significant rate.

While an overriding goal of Ridge to Rivers is to provide quality singletrack trail experiences in perpetuity in the Boise Foothills, we are beginning to lose ground on certain trails in the face of so much use. Widening of trails due to lack of trailside vegetation, and deep cupping due to highly erosive soils are becoming commonplace on our most heavily used trails in the Hulls Gulch, Military Reserve and Table Rock areas. These are issues that we need to address in the coming years: What is an acceptable width for trails that continue to widen? How do we stop or reverse the

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trend of trail widening? What is an efficient means of filling and re-crowning trails that have become so deeply cupped that users now prefer to walk alongside the trail tread rather than in it?

Research into these problems has so far produced little in the way of cost-effective strategies. We will be addressing these issues more intensely in the coming years, and hopefully develop methods for successfully dealing with them. One primary



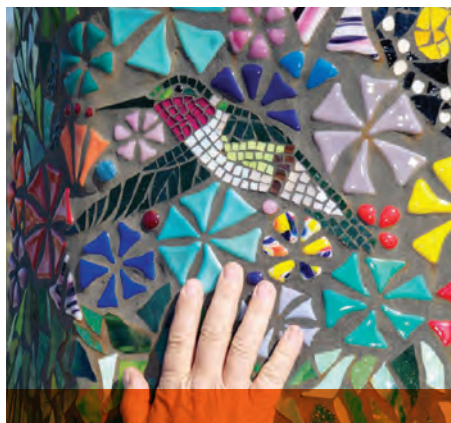
strategy continues to be education of our users in terms of proper and responsible trail use: however, this is a significant challenge in the face of so many trail users.

It should be noted that feedback regarding the trail system continues to be overwhelmingly positive. Trail users consistently rate their

experience in the Foothills quite highly, and the trails continue to be a major draw for individuals and families considering moving to the Boise area.

We continue to work on trail etiquette issues—another challenge in terms of the sheer volume of use on the trails. By utilizing Trail Rangers, our Facebook Page, signage and videos, we hope to create a positive atmosphere on the trail system where hikers, runners and cyclists relate to each other in a friendly manner, and understand the principles of basic trail etiquette.

Creation of some key trail links could also help to reduce some of the congestion, and subsequent impacts, found on our busiest trails. We hope to continue to obtain these key links through R2R Partner Agency acquisitions or revocable easements on private parcels.



STAFF

Julia Kertz Grant, *Foothills & Open Space Senior Manager*

David Gordon, *Ridge to Rivers Division Manager*

Bart Johnson, *Trail Crew Foreman*

Will Taliaferro, *Trail Maintenance Worker*

Todd Graeff, *Part-time Trail Ranger*

Carolyn Volk, *Environmental Educator*

Kristin Lundstrom, *Environmental Educator and Volunteer Coordinator*



Foothills Learning Center

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