



Can Nature and Cities Co-Exist?

APA Planning Webcast Series

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City of Fort Collins, CO

January 29, 2016

TODAY'S PRESENTATION

1. Speaker Introduction
2. Nature and Cities: Setting the Stage
3. Fort Collins: History of Open Space Protection
4. Nature in the City: Looking to the Future
5. What Worked Well
6. Most Significant Challenges
7. Q & A

Photo: Molly Rosey

SPEAKER INTRODUCTION



Lindsay Ex, AICP, LEED Green Associate
Environmental Program Manager

- Initiated and led Nature in the City project through the Strategic Planning phase



Rebecca Everette, AICP
Senior Environmental Planner

- Assisting with implementation
- Managing Land Use Code changes & design guidelines

Photo: Molly Rosey

80%



Urban

20%



Rural

BENEFITS OF NATURE IN URBAN AREAS



NATURE IN THE CITY PRECEDENTS

1. International coalitions:

- Biophilic Cities Project
- WILD Cities Project
- Children & Nature Network

2. Cities on the leading edge:

- New York City – “Forever Wild”
- Vancouver – “Greenest City in the World”
- Singapore – “Gardens by the Bay”

Could Fort Collins be next?

FORT COLLINS

- ~160,000 people
- 55 square mile Growth Management Area
- Colorado State University and diverse industries...Beer, bikes, and bands...



FORT COLLINS HISTORY

- First open space sales tax in passed in 1972
- Over 41,000 acres protected and enhanced by Natural Areas department
- City's commitment recently extended to Stormwater and Parks departments
- Since 1997, Land Use Code requires protection of natural features on private lands

Photo: Kas Perriman



Spring Canyon Park (Hines Inc.)



Red Fox Meadows (Matt Fater)



Wetlands adjacent to the Mason Trail (Lindsay Ex)



Odell Brewery Entryway (Odell)

WHAT SPURRED THIS PROJECT?

Community Perspective:

- Rapidly changing development patterns
- Concerns about access to nature
- Concerns about preserving quality of life for people and wildlife

City Staff:

- Commitment to continuous improvement
- Interest in the next evolution of open space protection

City Leadership:

- City Council Work Plan (2014-2015)
- City Manager and Chief Sustainability Officer support

Max Flats (Oz Architecture)

FOCUS OF NATURE IN THE CITY

- Complement existing programs by **identifying linkages** between **public and private lands**.
- **Ensuring access to nature** in the urban environment;
- **Enhance or restore places** throughout the City;
- Seek a **variety of experiences at all scales**; and
- **Illustrate** how to incorporate nature into the urban environment

Nashville Naturally Plan for Downtown
(The Conservation Fund)

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Interdisciplinary staff team (17 Departments)
- 15-member Citizen Advisory Committee
- City Boards and Commissions, City Council, and local stakeholder groups
- More than 1,000 residents engaged
 - Visual preference survey
 - Online questionnaires
 - Photo contest
 - Interactive “Wikimap”
 - 2 open houses, 1 visioning workshop

Photo:
Lindsay Ex

THREE PROJECT PHASES

1 INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT

2 DEVELOP STRATEGIC PLAN

3 IMPLEMENT ACTION ITEMS



Photo: Molly Rosey

INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT: SOCIAL

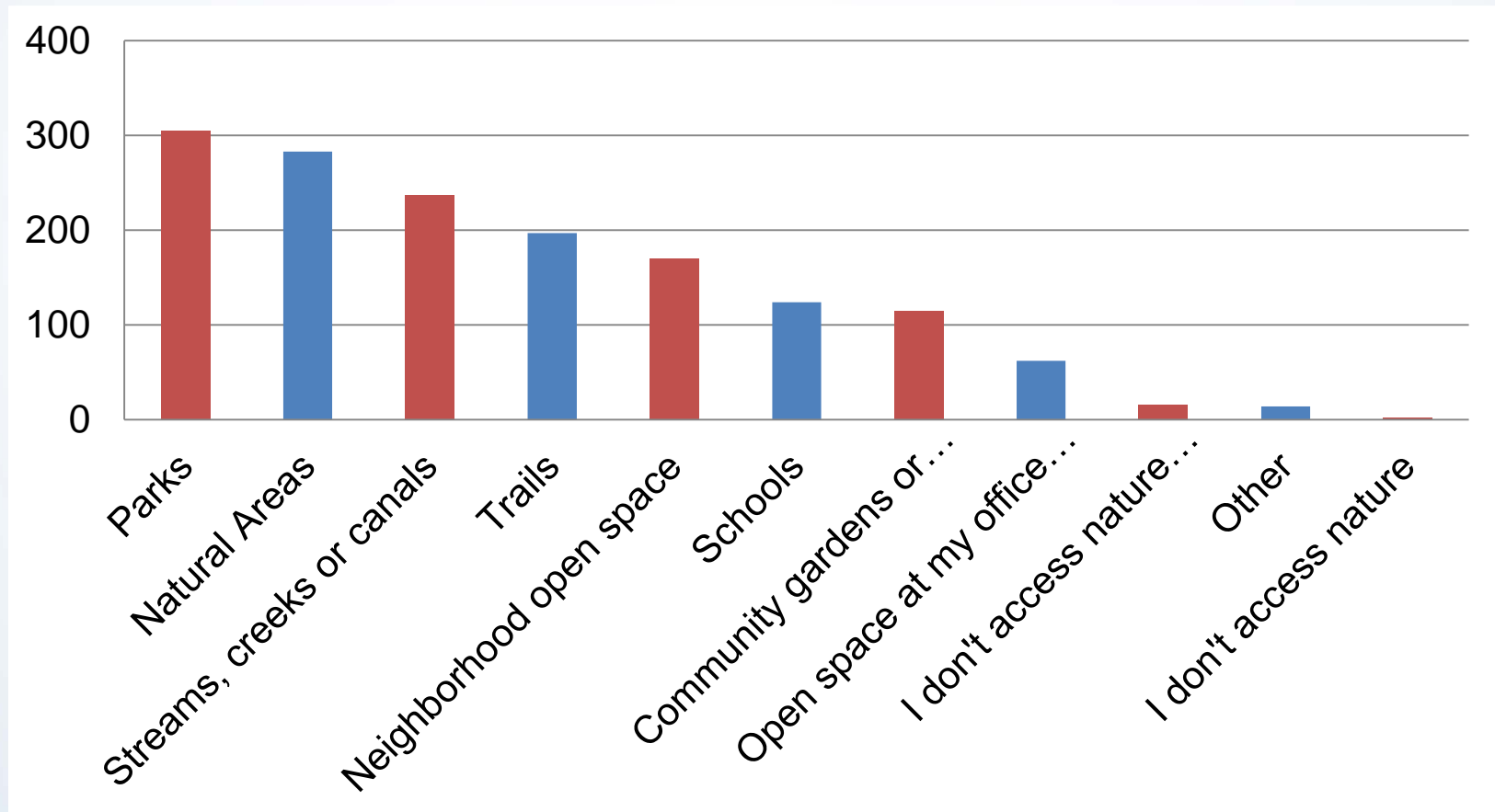
VALUE TO PEOPLE (SOCIAL)

- What are the benefits of nature (physical and mental health, social interactions, etc.)?
- How do people use and value nature?
 - Build on existing work
 - Informal and formal natural spaces



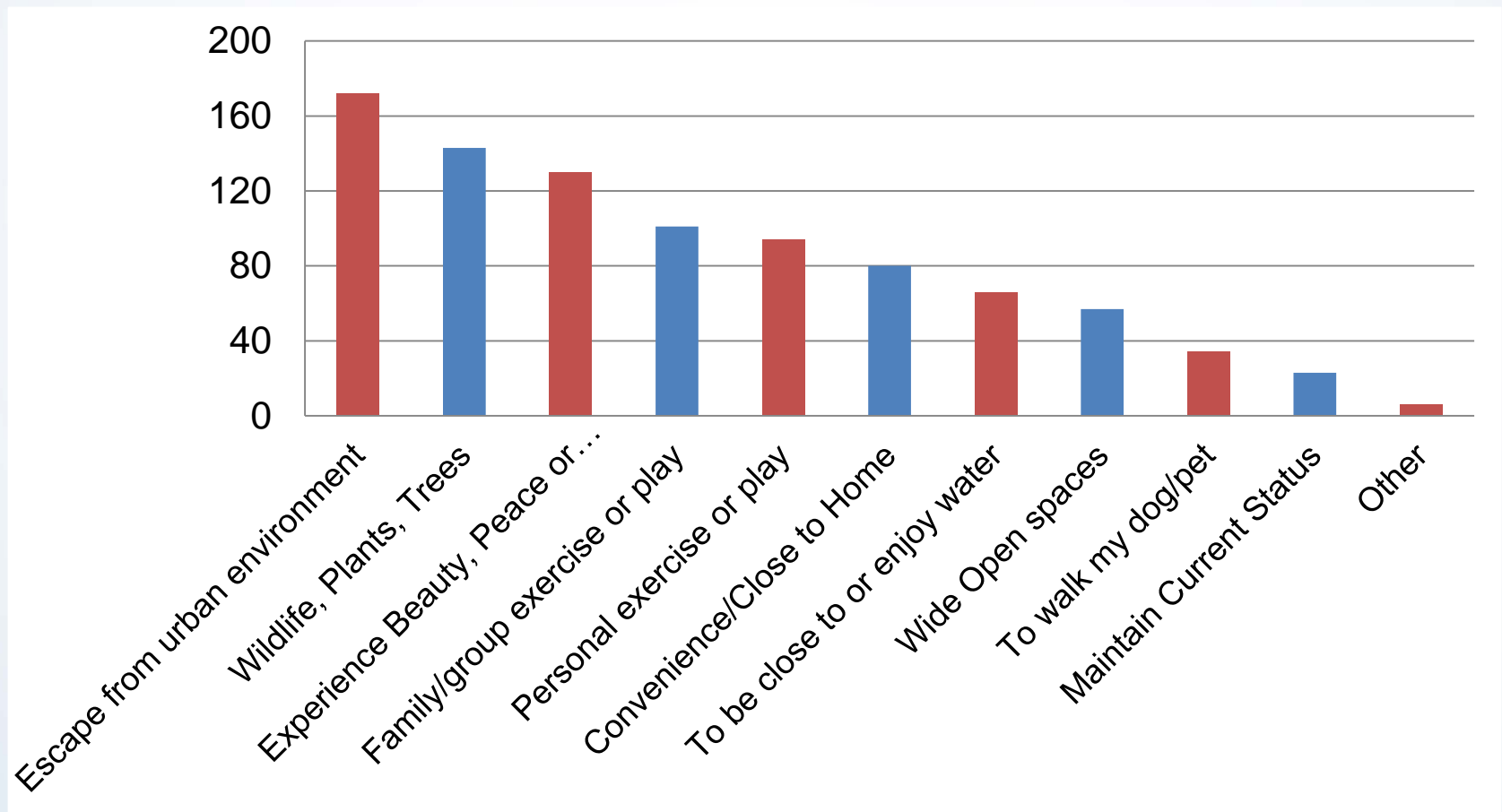
INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT: SOCIAL

INITIAL FINDINGS: Where do people access nature in the city?



INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT: SOCIAL

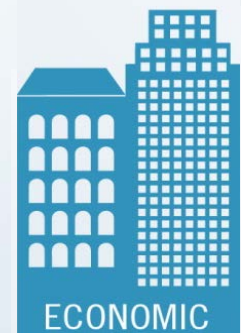
INITIAL FINDINGS: What is most important for this project to focus on?



INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT: ECONOMIC

KEY QUESTIONS: VALUE TO PEOPLE (ECONOMIC)

- How does access to nature affect property values?
- How does access to nature affect business attraction, retention, etc.?
- What ecosystem services do these spaces provide?



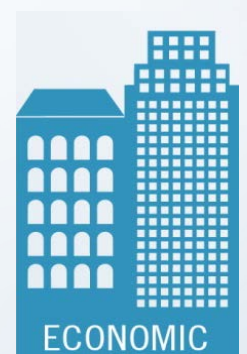
INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT: ECONOMIC

LOCAL FEEDBACK:

- Fort Collins commitment to nature has paid off
- Be mindful of added costs to development/business
- Seek ways to “soften” commercial areas
- Identify incentives and other partnerships to beautify urban areas
- Connections to natural spaces/recreation are important

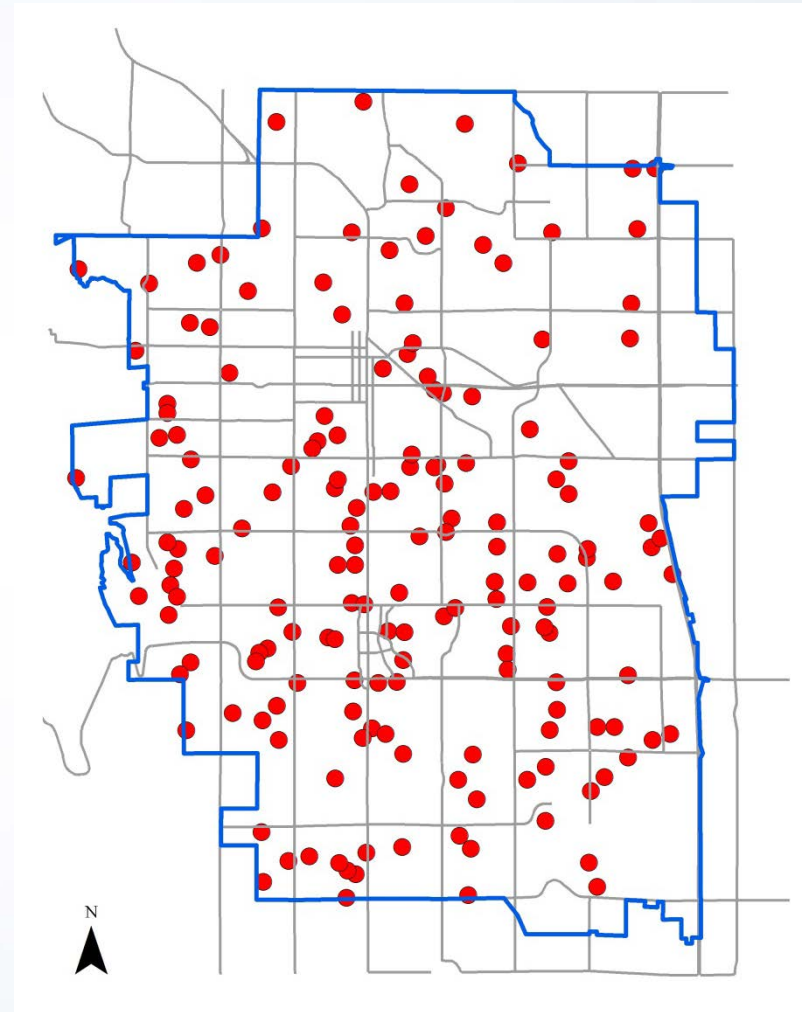


Photo Credit: Mrp 2863198



INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT: ENVIRONMENTAL

- How do various sites contribute to the City's wildlife habitat?
- How does site size, landscape position, land use, etc. affect wildlife in the City?



166 sampling sites – assessing birds, butterflies, and vegetation

INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT: ENVIRONMENTAL

INITIAL FINDINGS:

33 species of butterflies



Painted Lady

88 species of birds

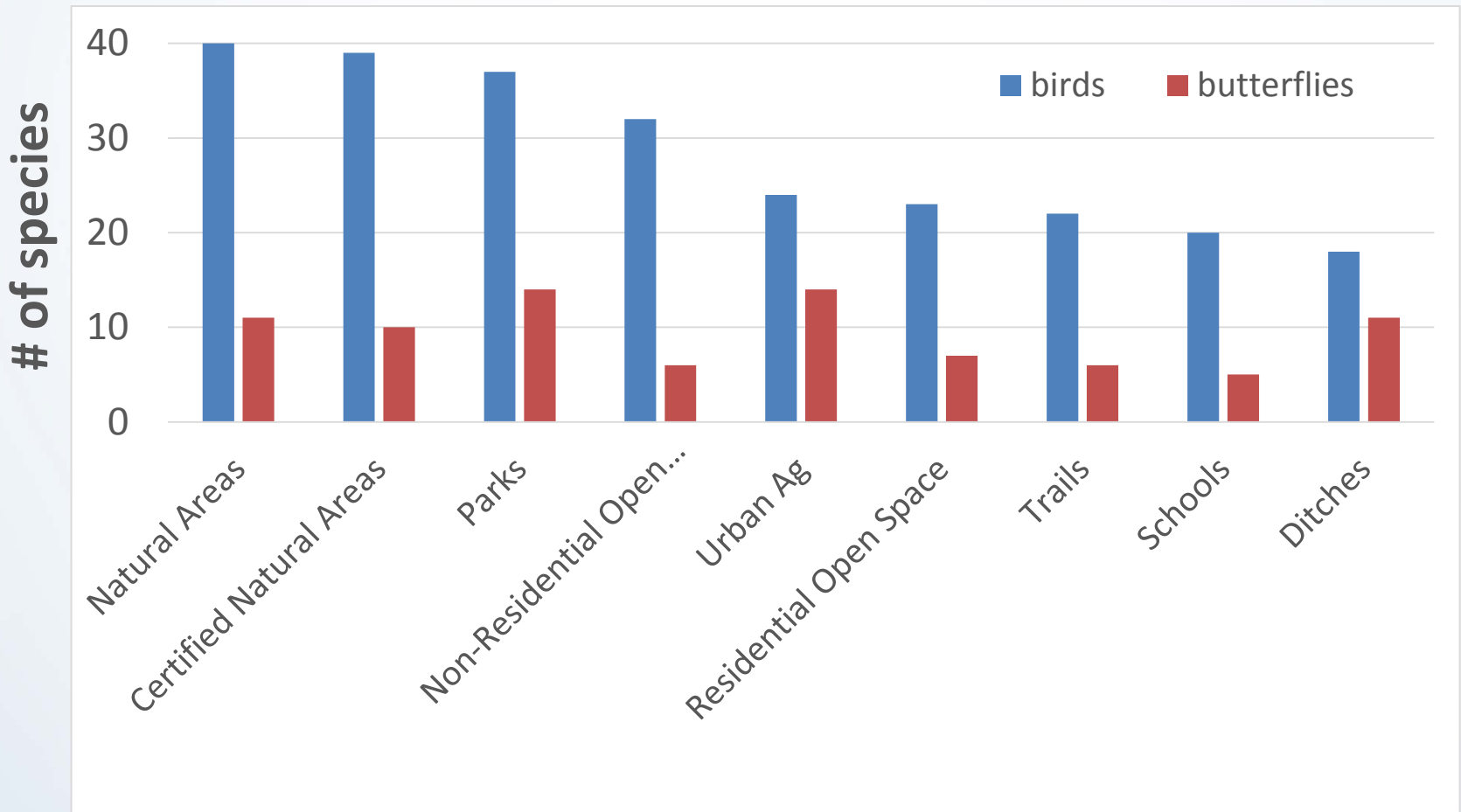


Western Tanager

INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT: ENVIRONMENTAL

INITIAL FINDINGS

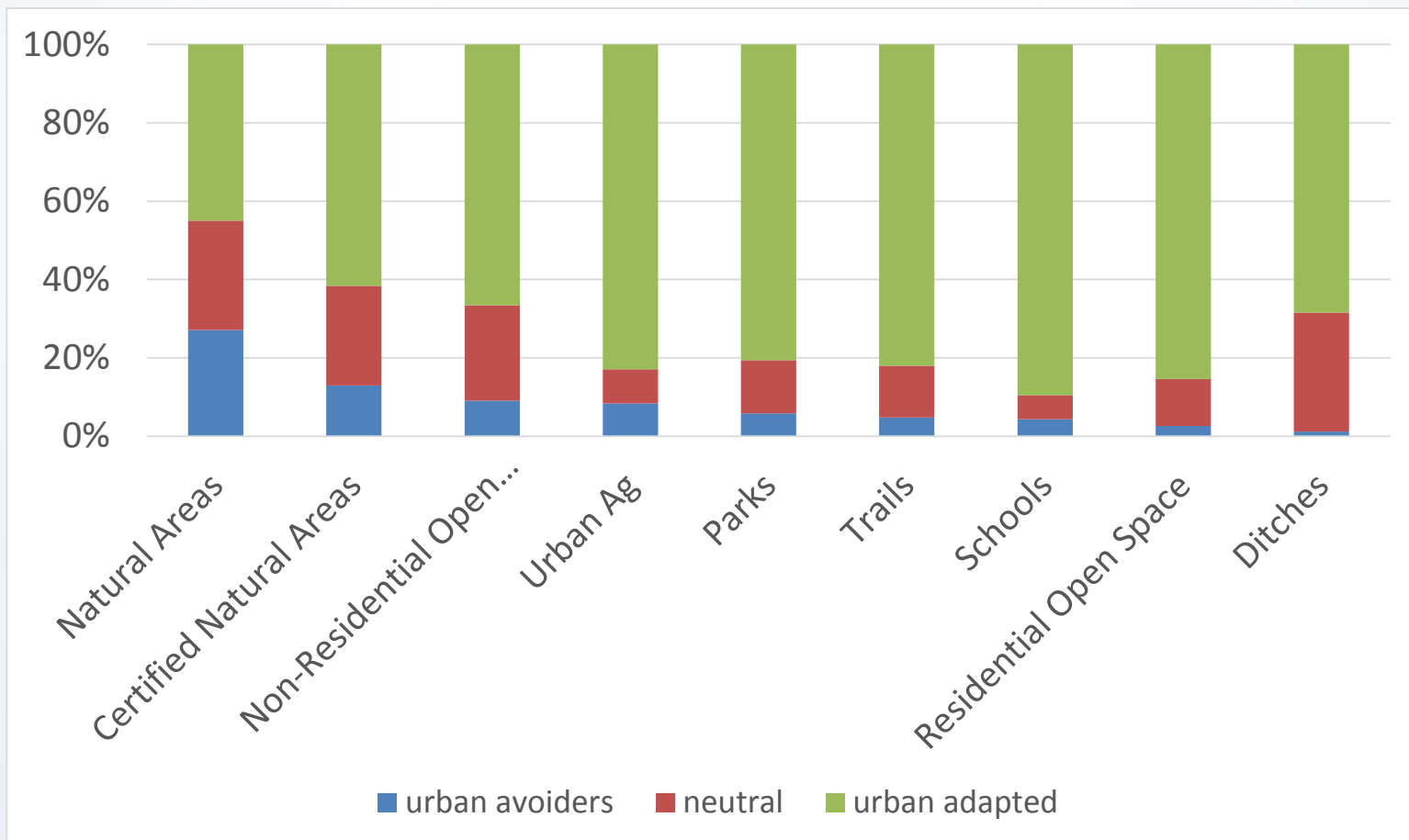
- Land use is a strong driver for species diversity



INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT: ENVIRONMENTAL

INITIAL FINDINGS

- Land use also affects types of birds observed



PHASE 1: INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT

- **Environmental:** Strong biodiversity throughout the City is dependent on land use and management objectives
- **Social:** Priorities should emphasize (1) findings ways to escape from the urban environment; (2) wildlife, plants and trees, and (3) recreation opportunities;
- **Social and Economic:** Strategies should emphasize connectivity and be cautious about overall costs



Photo: Julia Solveight Lagunes

PHASE 2: STRATEGIC PLAN

What's Included:

- Plan vision, goals and objectives
- Policy recommendations
- Plan evaluation and implementation

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Goal:
Easy Access to
Nature

Policy:
Increase
connectivity for
residents
(10-minute walk)

Implementation:
Conduct a
connectivity analysis
to assess gaps

Vision:

A connected open space network accessible to the entire community that provides a variety of experiences and functional habitat for people, plants, and wildlife

Goals:

- **Easy Access to Nature:** Ensure every resident is within a 10-minute walk to nature from their home or workplace.
- **High Quality Natural Spaces:** Conserve, create and enhance natural spaces to provide diverse social and ecological opportunities.
- **Land Stewardship:** Shift the landscape aesthetic to more diverse forms that support healthy environments for people and wildlife.

Photo: John Bartholow

FIVE POLICY AREAS

- Connectivity
- Land Use and Development
- City Practices and Policy Coordination
- Long-term Monitoring
- Funding and Incentives

Photo: Rosemarie Russo

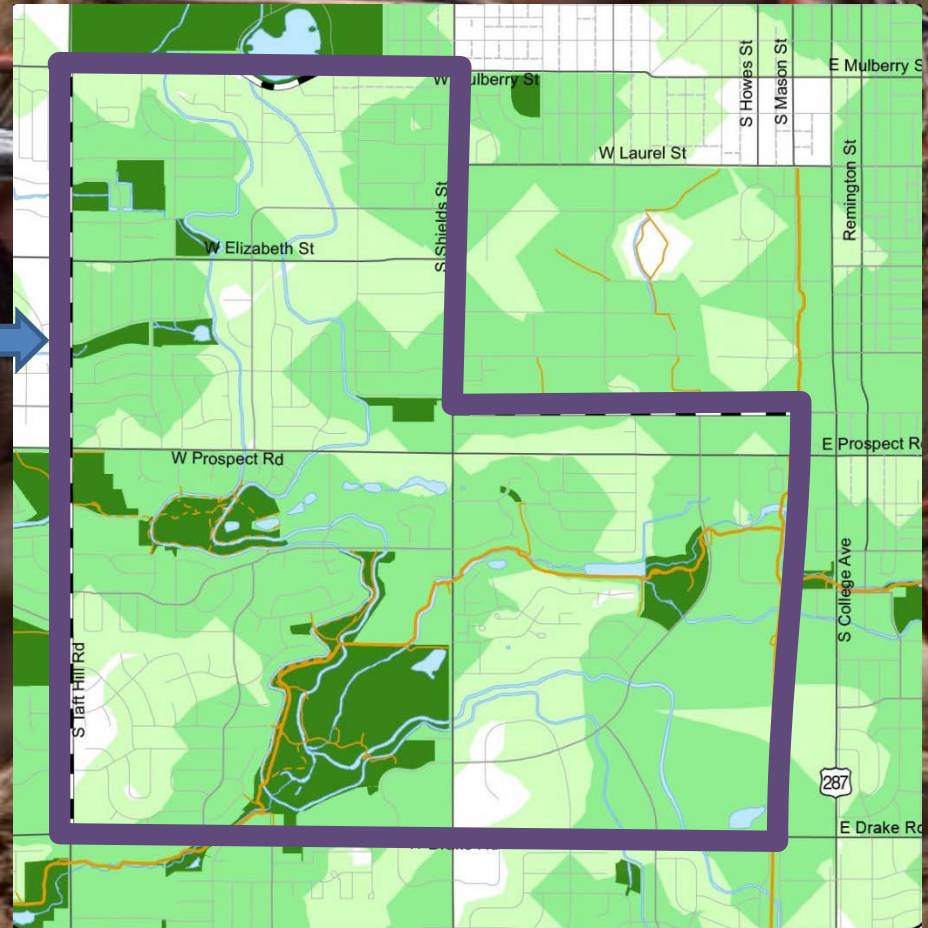
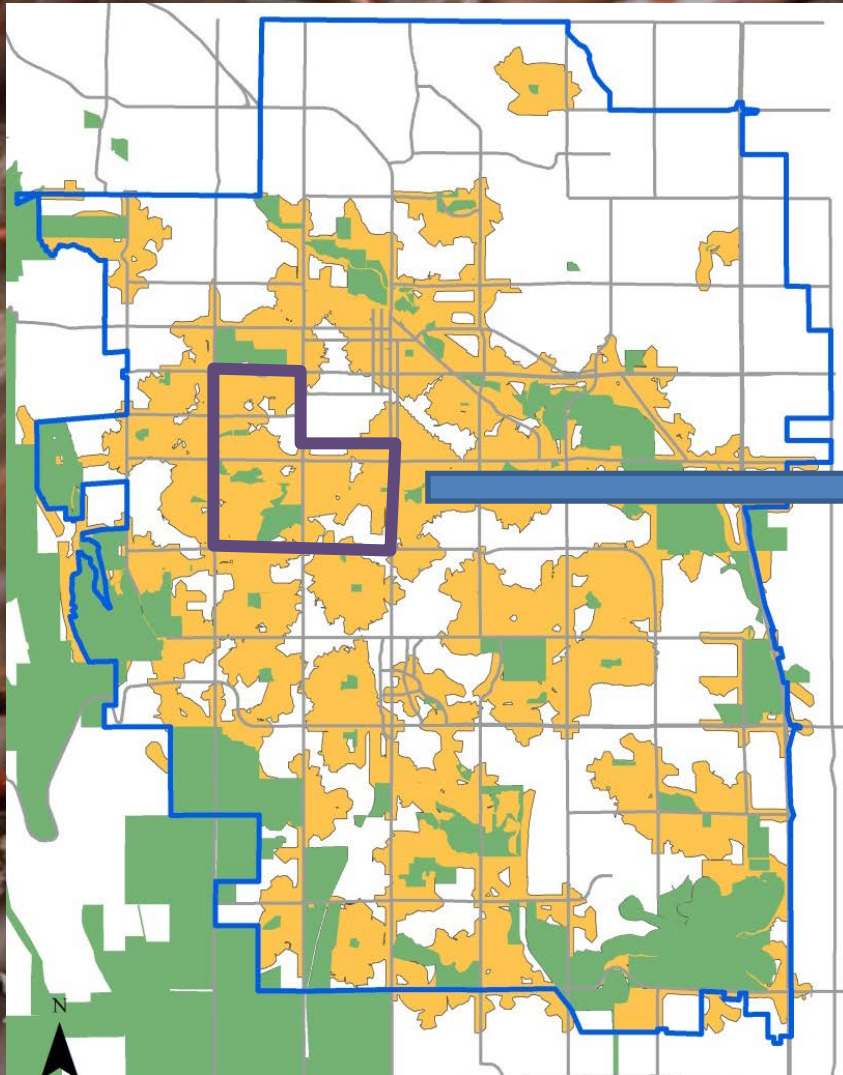
CONNECTIVITY

Key Outcomes:

- A connected system of nature for people and wildlife
- Access to nature via public transportation
- Innovative wayfinding and interpretation information
- A vibrant, connected Poudre River

Photo: bextradinaryu

Policy: A connected system of nature for *people*: 10-minute walk

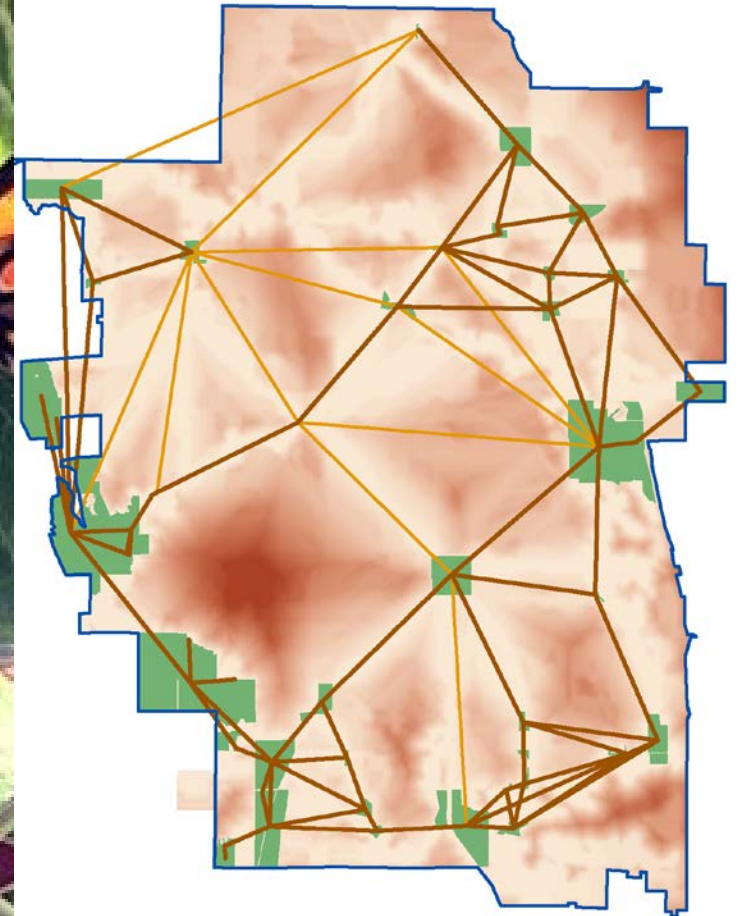


Policy: A connected system of nature for *wildlife*: Indicator Species

Approach:

- Partnered with CSU wildlife researchers
- Developed methodology for evaluating connectivity for 10 indicator species (birds and butterflies)
- Modeled connectivity and gaps
- Revise/update models using citizen science data

Connectivity for orange sulfur butterflies



LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

Key Outcomes:

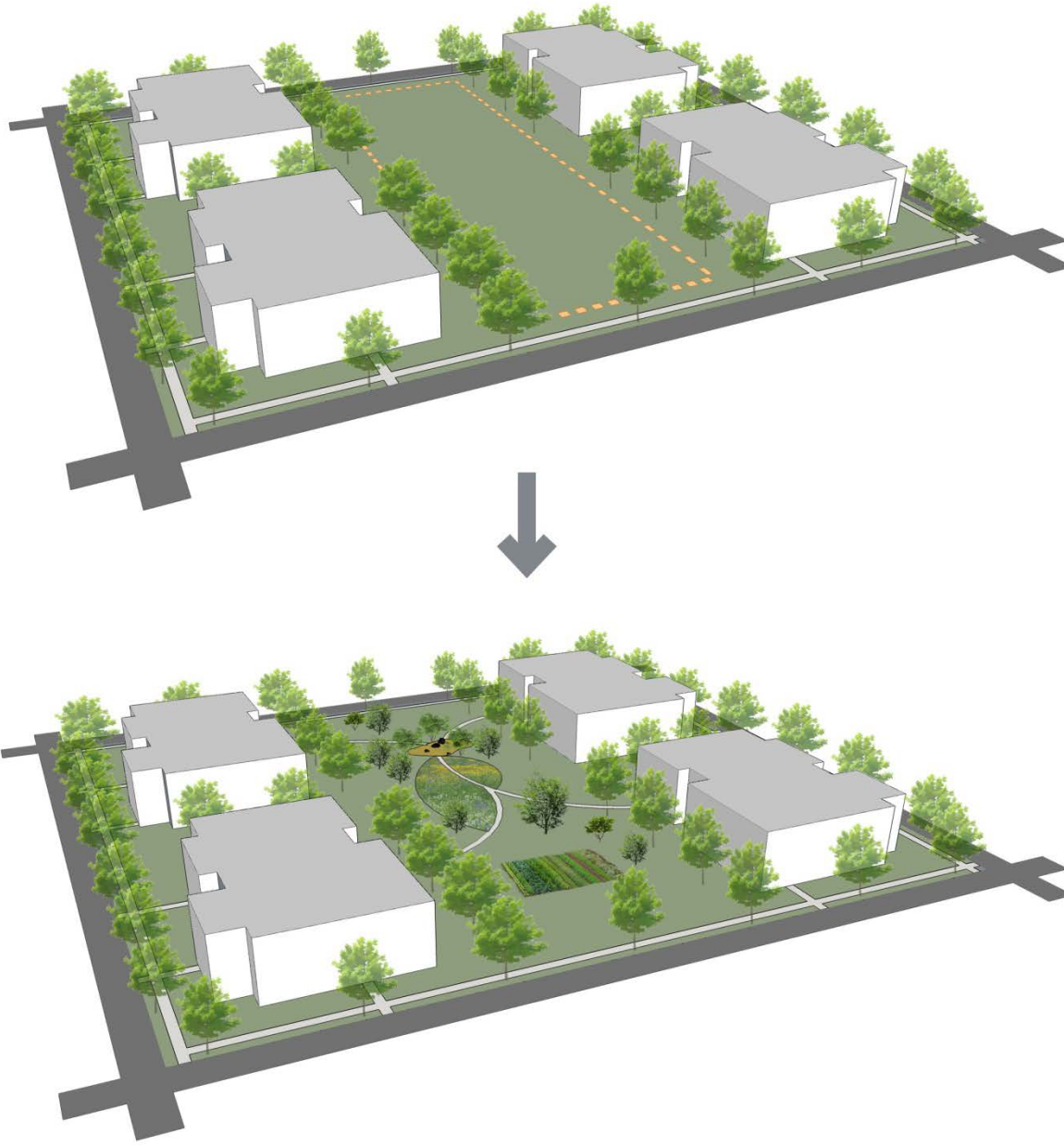
- Flexible Land Use Code requirements for open space and vegetation structure and composition
- Design guidelines and training resources to install and maintain natural spaces
- Neighborhood-scale projects to create or enhance natural spaces
- Partnerships with ditch companies to acknowledge the multiple value of ditches
- Sustainable urban agricultural operations

Photo: Michelle Finchum

PROPOSED LAND USE CODE AMENDMENTS

Three Areas:

1. Flexible open space requirements
2. Flexible tree sizing and composition when objective is a more naturalized landscape
3. Encourage ditches to remain open (daylighted)





Policy: Create design guidelines

- 25 tools for increasing nature on sites
- Evaluated by ecological, social & economic criteria
- Includes guidelines on establishment and maintenance
- Collaboration with Colorado State University

ECOLOGICAL

Habitat (Wildlife and Vegetation)	●●●○○
Water Quality and Quantity	●○○○○
Sequesters Carbon	●●●○○
Decreases Urban Heat Island	●●●○○

SOCIAL

Supports Recreation	●○○○○
Beauty and Aesthetics	●●●●○
Peace and Relaxation	●●○○○
Education and Stewardship	●●○○○
Increases Safety	●○○○○

ECONOMIC

Cost to Install	●●○○○
Cost to Maintain	●●●○○
Property Value Payback	●●●○○
Ecosystem Services and Goals	●●○○○

Photo: Megan Bolin

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION

Timeline:

- Short-term actions (2015-16)
- Mid-term actions (2017-2020)
- Longer-term actions (2021 and beyond)

Ultimately... this is a 100-year plan!

Photo: Eva Diamond

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION

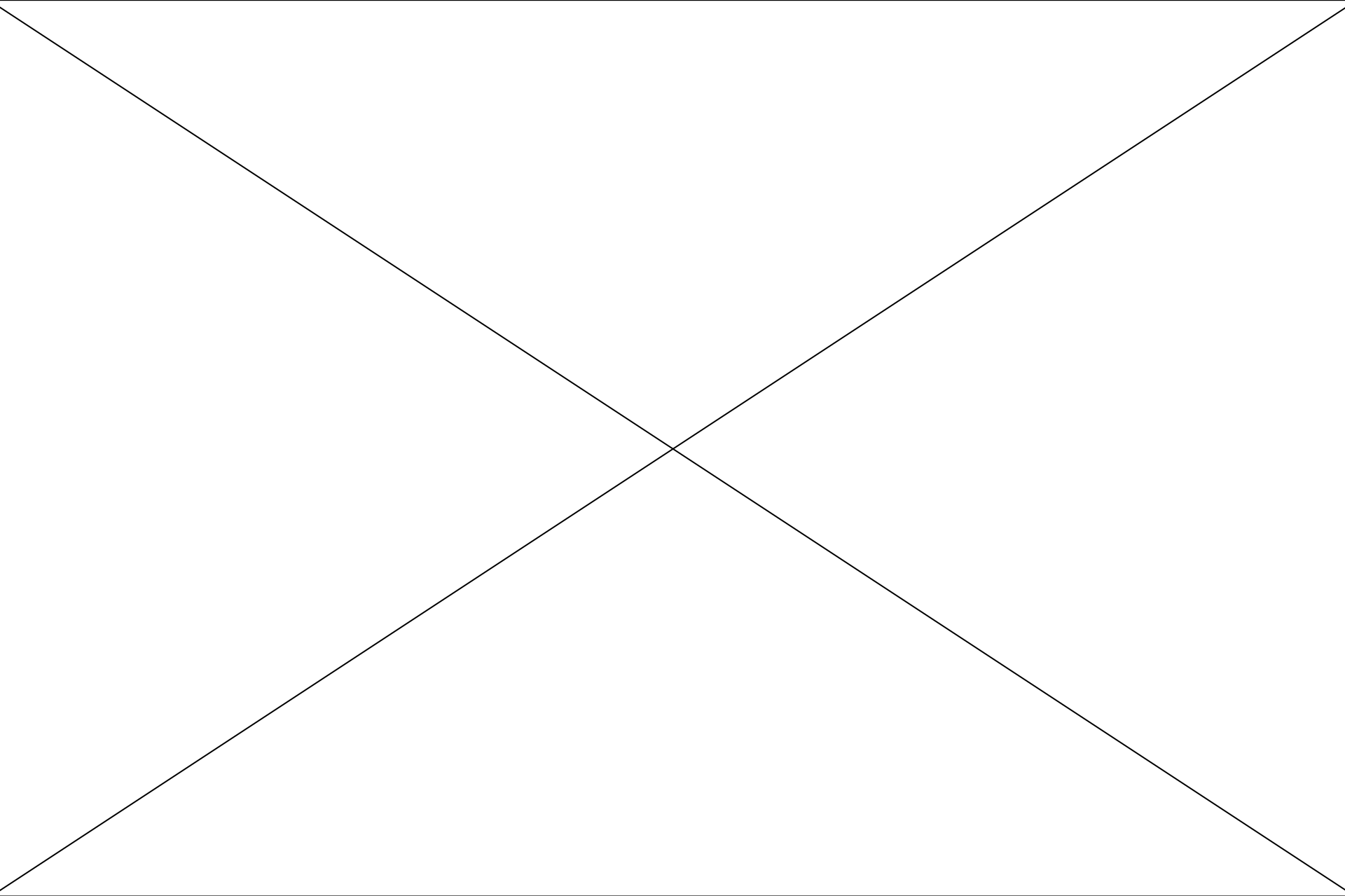
Short-Term Projects:

- Connectivity analysis for people and for wildlife
- Design guidelines
- Land Use Code changes
- Citizen Science Program
- Demonstration Projects
 - Living wall
 - “Habitat Hero” gardens
 - Pilot projects on both public & private lands

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION

Long-Term Outcomes:

- Restoration of existing sites
- Limited land acquisition to address gaps in connectivity
- Partnerships with public, private and institutional property owners
- Progress toward city-wide biodiversity goal
- Increased neighborhood engagement



WHAT WORKED WELL?

External Factors:

- Political will, interest from City leadership
- Alignment with community values

Project Management:

- Monthly meetings with project sponsors
- Interdepartmental team
- Partnership with CSU researchers & students
- Effective community engagement to build support
- An easily articulated goal: “10-minute walk to nature”

WHAT WORKED WELL?

Program funding approved by voters:

- “Building on Basics” sales tax for major city projects
- 80% community approval of funding for this and other projects
- Allocates \$3 million for Nature in the City over the next 10 years
- Ensures momentum and early wins for the program

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES

Internal barriers:

- Building support across multiple City departments (Planning, Natural Areas, Parks, Stormwater, etc.)
- Creating a new type of interdisciplinary program

Strategic plan development:

- What is “nature?”
- How to define and evaluate “connectivity?”

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES

Implementation:

- Managing high expectations – both internally and from the public
- Program managed through two separate departments
- Establishing a process and criteria for prioritizing projects
- Mapping biodiversity and merging with the 10-minute walk data

NEXT STEPS – 2016 GOALS

- Show quick wins through pilot projects
- Land Use Code updates & design guidelines
- Integration with Climate Action Plan and other planning efforts
- Continue honing 10-minute walk and wildlife connectivity analyses
- Citizen science data collection of bird and butterfly populations in the City

QUESTIONS?

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THANK YOU!

To learn more: www.fcgov.com/natureinthecity

Photo: Ava Diamond