

McMurry Natural Area Restoration

City of Fort Collins, Colorado



from top: McMurry Natural Area after restoration; Initial conditions

The City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program manages over 1,000 acres of open space along the Cache La Poudre River. As the on-call consultant for Riparian and Wetland Restoration, Biohabitats has been working with the City since 2008 to help the Natural Area Program protect its natural resources, enhance aquatic and riparian habitat, and improve wetland function along the river. As part of this effort, Biohabitats assessed all of the City's Natural Areas along the Poudre River and identified opportunities for ecological restoration.

Biodiversity and ecological function is restored to a landscape scarred by decades of gravel mining.

One top priority site was the McMurry Natural Area, located within the City's urban greenbelt, where decades of gravel mining scarred the landscape and left open water gravel pits with very little biological diversity and minimal ecological function. Working closely with the City, Biohabitats led a design-build effort to convert the gravel pits into an ecologically functioning landscape.

The restoration design focused on lowering elevated berms (artifacts of the mining operation), creating shallow wetlands, and revegetating the riparian area. A diverse assemblage of five vegetated zones were created including emergent wetland, wet meadow, willow, cottonwood, and

upland grasses. To facilitate public use and stewardship of the site, the design included a pedestrian trail and designated fishing areas. Grading and planting of Phase 1 was completed in June 2011. The City is currently expanding the restoration project to an adjacent gravel pit and implementing riverbank improvements including channel realignment and visitor amenities.

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