
City of Aurora

Aurora Plains Conservation Center

Aurora, CO



A conservation center's cultural and ecological legacies inspire its vision as a place for native habitat restoration, community engagement, and research.

SERVICES

Climate Adaptation
Ecological Restoration
Water Strategies

In 2019, the City of Aurora developed a master plan to guide future development and management of the Plains Conservation Center, an outdoor education facility and state-designated natural area with a mission to preserve Colorado's prairies, educate visitors about Colorado's native ecosystems, and inspire conservation. The 1,100-acre site, which also explores Cheyenne, Arapaho, and homesteading culture from the late 1800s, supports native shortgrass prairie with abundant wildlife including pronghorn, bald eagles, and rattlesnakes. The initial phase of development recommended in the plan included the design and construction of an educational prairie trail and design of a wetland "classroom."

As the ecological consultant on an interdisciplinary project team led by Mundus Bishop Design, Biohabitats identified prairie restoration opportunities, evaluated wetland hydrology, designed half a dozen prairie plant community themes and their resident species, and developed strategies to integrate ecological and cultural elements into the trail, wetland, and restoration designs. This involved conducting field reconnaissance with Center staff and stakeholders, participating in a community forum, and developing final design and bid documents for the Prairie Meander trail and Wetlands Laboratory.

Among recommended strategies integrated in the trail and wetland design were prairie themes (shrubs and succulents, pollinator support, very low-growing grasses, and swales) to be used as educational features along the one-mile Prairie Meander trail. Indigenous uses of plants will also be highlighted. Biohabitats also recommended demonstrations of natural disturbance such as grazing and fire for long-term management and visitor appreciation.