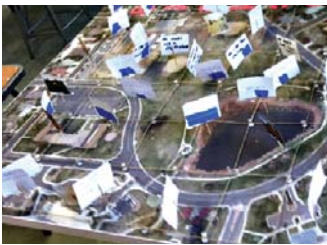


Burke Park—Make a Difference Class

Boulder, Colorado



Recognizing the need for children to have early, positive outdoor experiences right in their own neighborhoods, the City of Boulder Parks and Recreation Department initiated an effort to improve a public park that would inspire nature and adventure play and provide new gathering spaces for outdoor living and learning. For the site, they chose Admiral Arleigh Burke Park, a six-acre park featuring a popular lake and a location adjacent to Horizons Montessori K–8, a charter school founded on principles of environmental responsibility.

Rather than simply design for children, the City chose to design with children. To help envision the new park, the City pulled together a unique partnership of Horizons students, the Keep it Clean Partnership (a community group focused on improving stormwater management), the City’s Watershed Outreach office, Biohabitats, and the University of Colorado’s Growing Up Boulder, an initiative which fosters youth involvement in planning and decision making.

Children take an active role in transforming a city park into an engaging and biodiverse place for people of all ages to experience nature.

As part of Horizons’ four-week service learning program called Make-A-Difference, Biohabitats and other partnership members engaged 4th–8th graders in a series of activities to re-envision their park. During the first week, students explored the site, learned about its geology and hydrology, and created photo grids to document features and opportunities. The second week was a ‘bio-blitz,’ where students identified plants and wildlife and tested the lake’s water quality. During the final weeks, students learned about the design process, participated in charettes, built models of play and learning areas, and held a community workshop with more than 40 neighbors, including those from a nearby senior community. The students shared their findings and their suggestions for the park, and the workshop resulted in an exciting, multi-generational exchange of ideas.

The result was a design that emphasized four key themes: a playground area dubbed “river of sand and rock” by the children, which emphasizes nature and adventure play; an outdoor learning area where visitors can study habitat around Thunderbird Lake; active living areas that promote exercise, health and wellness for all ages; and community gathering space for picnicking and gardening.

In addition to enlivening an outdoor nature play park, the collaborative, community approach to planning forged new relationships, provided unique educational opportunities for University and Horizons students, and fostered the ecological restoration and adaptive management of Thunderbird Lake.

SERVICES

- Inventory & Assessments
- Planning
- Public Outreach

*conservation planning
ecological restoration
regenerative design*



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