



MAJESTIC VIEW

NATURE CENTER



2022 Strategic Recommendations



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Executive Summary

The City of Arvada's Majestic View Nature Center (MVNC), part of the Vibrant Communities and Neighborhoods (VNC) worksystem, has provided the Environmental Education line of business since 2001. MVNC's purpose has been to lead the City's efforts to offer superior services relating to environmental education, conservation, and community engagement with our natural environment.

MVNC and Community Park has served 300,000 people between 2001-2021 and in a 2019 community survey, 28% of Arvada residents reported they had visited the Nature Center. With over 80 acres of valuable natural resources– including 2 non-recreational lakes, heavily vegetated pockets of cover for wildlife resting areas, accessible paved and soft trails, outdoor classrooms, a certified habitat demonstration garden and interpretive signage encouraging environmental stewardship. MVNC is the environmental education hub of Arvada.

With the increase in Arvada's population, and the increased demand for Majestic View's services, the MVNC is envisioned as a guiding team to improve and expand the City's environmental services. This should include participation with the Arvada Parks Advisory Committee in the implementation of the Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan and the Majestic View Nature Center Master Plan and in collaboration with other VCN teams, Utilities, and Public Works to provide environmental services for all Arvada residents and promote stewardship of Arvada's natural areas.





Strategic Recommendations

Background

The original Majestic View Community Park Masterplan was completed in 1998, before all the properties that currently make up the footprint of Majestic View Park were purchased. Therefore, the masterplan did not take into consideration all of the existing properties-namely the previous Hansen property. Despite this, over 20+ years, many of the objectives in the original plan have been accomplished, such as the transition of the Harder residence into a Nature Center and environmental programs being offered to schools and the Arvada community. However, few recommendations remain to be accomplished from the original master plan that are still feasible due to the state of the remaining properties, current City-wide strategic goals, and/or available funding.

With no previous approved budget request for a master plan update, the purpose of this document is to provide strategic direction for next steps with recommendations for MVNC until a complete updated master plan can be implemented. These recommendations are based on previously outlined goals, visions, objectives, and recommendations from the 1998 Majestic View masterplan; the 2016 Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan; and other historic documents. With limited staff capacity and no additional funding, this document's purpose is to realign MVNC's goals with the City of Arvada's City Council Strategic Results and to create a clear vision for the Nature Center moving forward with environmental educational offerings. These recommendations are adaptable to future changes and feedback. Community engagement for public feedback, environmental assessments and budgeting have not yet been conducted for the entirety of this document or the recommendations therein.

Vision For City of Arvada's Majestic View Nature Center

The Nature Center's mission is to inspire environmental learning and interpretive connections with our community. This is the result of a Nature Center "Dreaming Big and Delivering" with a focus on environmental education, stewardship and community building.

Objectives relating to Environmental Education

- Provide a community hub where visitors can gather to connect and learn about Arvada's natural features, history and ecosystems.
- Offer formal and informal educational programs for Arvada area schools, focused primarily on elementary-aged children but adaptable for older ages and a variety of abilities.
- Offer formal and informal educational programs designed to appeal to other community members, including families, educators, naturalists, and the general public.
- Fulfill the Nature Center's mission (to inspire environmental learning and interpretive connections) by offering informal means of learning, including interpretive programs and self-led opportunities that occur along the City's trail network through wildlife and natural areas.
- Provide residents with information on the benefits of sustainable landscapes through demonstration gardens, backyard wildlife programs, interpretive signage, and engagement with the City's sustainable practices.
- Partner with other environmental organizations to lower barriers for children to get outdoors and connect with nature, including grants for lower-income schools, free programs on water education, and program swaps.





Objectives relating to Conservation

- Continually develop and manage the City's natural areas, such as the Majestic View Park, with a focus on the stewardship of a balanced ecosystem, with native flora & fauna, and interpretive opportunities across the City's landscape.
- Emphasize the Majestic View Nature Center vision that focuses on the preservation of habitat with high conservational and educational value for opportunities to engage the Arvada community with its rich natural heritage.
- Collaborate with the Parks team to develop, integrate and maintain resource management plans for all City-owned open space properties that define appropriate public use and ecosystem management strategies. This would incorporate the low-mow strategies, milkweed initiatives, and controlled burn engagement plans.
- Develop and maintain native grass prairie arboretums, an area of native prairie species and desirable naturalized species adaptable to the dry climate of prairie environments. Provide interactive and educational activity points with signage or natural play prompts near high-visibility areas.
- Preserve and interpret core wildlife areas with multi-organizational projects and programs.



Objectives relating to Community

- Provide places that accommodate community activities without significant impacts on the City's natural resources.
- Manage Majestic View Community Park, and other protected natural areas, as places that welcome visitors inclusively, from throughout the region, to walk, picnic, observe wildlife, create memorable connections, and enjoy the beauty of Arvada's natural areas.
- Encourage community members who have a passion or interest in Arvada's environmental landscape to engage, volunteer, or simply connect with other like-minded participants.

Majestic View Nature Center Goals

1 - 3 years

1. Begin providing summer camp programs to create more enriching educational opportunities and to support financial sustainability.
2. Begin an environmental assessment and capitalize on grants for restoring habitat areas of highest concern in Majestic View Park.
3. Collaborate and integrate Nature Center services into other VCN & City services, such as providing educational materials for Open Space, Forestry, Festivals, or Stormwater.
4. Begin Leave No Trace integration into programs and practices.



3 - 5 years

1. Complete Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standard (ABASS) soft trails outlined in the 1998 master plan to support better access within the park for programs and visitors.
2. Provide established summer camps that offer the Arvada community inquiry-based curriculum and opportunities for impactful projects that could have real-world impacts, such as a habitat restoration or conservation research project.
3. Strive for Leave No Trace Gold Standard Site accreditation.



LEAVE NO TRACE
GOLD
STANDARD SITE



4. Complete demolition of the two remaining house properties to create space for educational opportunities (Fox & Hansen).
5. Replace back wooden deck before it becomes a safety hazard/wood rot beyond repair.

6 - 10 years

1. Lead weekly programs and environmental projects in other parks and natural areas of high conservation concern.
2. Expand the Nature Center to provide larger functions for programs, public community or City events. Being able to host larger community events could support our financial sustainability.
3. Have a large enough staff/volunteer base to offer a wider range of accessible and inclusive educational opportunities, from translated programs to culturally inclusive exhibit concepts.
4. Support the Arvada Parks Department in establishing other environmental education hubs within Arvada's open spaces, such as creating outdoor classrooms, trailheads, natural play areas or interpretive signage at areas like Leyden Creek Nature Preserve or Van Bibber Open Space. This would provide awareness of the amazing ecosystems present in Arvada and help protect them through educating sustainable use of Arvada's open spaces. This would support VCN maintenance efforts and protect Arvada's valuable resources, such as nesting bald eagles or wildlife corridors.

DEI & Accessibility

The City of Arvada's DEI statement is as follows:

We recognize that diversity, equity and inclusion are inextricably linked to our ability to achieve our organizational goals, to be an employer of choice and to deliver our mission of “delivering superior services to enhance the lives of everyone in our community.”

MVNC would like to adapt the City of Arvada's DEI statement to include a promise to improve our specific services. Recommended below is the adapted statement:

We recognize that diversity, equity and inclusion of all staff, volunteers, partners and community members are inextricably linked to our ability to achieve our organizational goals and to deliver our mission. As such, we strive to incorporate feedback and all community needs to the best of our ability in every future program and project.

Proposed draft land acknowledgement to be displayed at Majestic View Nature Center and verbally acknowledged at large events after consultation with regional indigenous groups:

For centuries, Indigenous peoples lived and traveled across the land now known as Arvada. The Tsétséhéstaestse (Cheyenne), the Hinono'eiteen (Arapaho), Nuche (Ute), and Oceti Sakowin (Lakota) nations have and continue to care for the land that many of our site-based programs utilize to inspire environmental learning and create meaningful interpretive connections. With that understanding, we acknowledge:

- We offer our respect to the Indigenous Peoples both past, present, and future, their Elders and Knowledge Keepers, who have cultivated such care for this land that has connected many generations across time.
- We acknowledge the injustices that separated these Indigenous Peoples from this land and recognize our responsibility to continue learning from and steward the ecosystems of Arvada.
- We honor the indigenous cultural perspectives and traditions that helped shape, and continue to be a part of, the community and physical landscape of Arvada to where it is today.



Site Recommendations

Majestic View Park Zones

Oberon and Hayes Lakes

Both lakes are ideal wildlife resting areas for resident and migratory birds, as well as other flora and fauna. MVNC has visual data demonstrating that the aquatic and surrounding wetland habitat is used by a range of wildlife including bobcat, weasels, deer, and coyotes.

Oberon lake is north of the Nature Center and Hayes lake is the lake to the south west of the park. Hayes lake is bigger than Oberon and has fewer invasive weeds, however it sits completely surrounded by unfenced backyards where nutrient runoff causes yearly algae blooms. Hayes also has a natural spring that reduces the impact of drought, whereas Oberon is ditch and stormwater fed, so Oberon water level significantly drops in winter.

It is recommended to improve the sustainability of both lakes by taking measures to restore natural areas in the park (see below). It is also recommended solar aerators be installed to help cycle the nutrients which are approximately \$10,000 each, three would be needed for Hayes and two for Oberon. These would be accompanied by stormwater quality signage.



Core Wildlife Area

The shrubland along Majestic View Park wetlands are areas of the park's highest biodiversity, as most wetlands are across the State. These habitat areas support the greatest number of species and are where the majority of the game trails through the park provide safe wildlife corridors for migrating and resident wildlife. The core wildlife area is partially marked as a wildlife resting area and public visitors are discouraged from entering the core wildlife areas. Better marking around the core area and along game trails to discourage off leash dogs, kids, or other visitors from disturbing wildlife, as well as removing fencing barriers throughout the core wildlife areas from before the park properties were purchased by the City would improve the mobility and quality of wildlife through the core areas as well as reduce human/wildlife encounters along trails, reducing risk of wildlife conflicts.

Prairie Arboretum

The native grass field in the center of the park is an established experiential example of Colorado prairie grasses. Seeing the health of undisturbed native grasses compared to mowed native grasses creates an interpretive opportunity to connect our community with Arvada's historical prairie landscape and the prospects of our changing climate. It is recommended to preserve the prairie grasses, mow as little as possible, and create interpretive and interactive opportunities along the trails through the prairie arboretum. This would include improving the paved interpretive trail as well as graveling the social trail along the windchime art installation.



This recommended mowing schedule is aligned with the City's **Maintenance Standards for Parks.**

Nature Center Garden

The Nature Center facility resides in the previous Harder family residence, and built around the South side of the Nature Center is 25,000 square feet of certified wildlife habitat demonstration garden. This garden is a living exhibit that provides interpretive opportunities on topics from invasive plants, pollinators, sensory gardens, water conservation and quality (rain gardens), and even restorative backyard practices. Continuing to work within this living exhibit, maintain it, restore areas that have not thrived or have invasive plants, and create interpretive self-led and interactive activities is recommended to keep the garden relevant and demonstrative of current innovative garden practices.



Leased Land (CSA & Pasture)

The park currently hosts two leased properties: 1) the horse pastures leased to an Arvada rancher that grazes horses/cows and maintains the fencing and fields; and 2) a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) organization that operates the historical Kennedy farm. The CSA should remain as a produce-focused farm, with limited livestock (e.g. chickens, bee hives, etc). These organizational partnerships are not currently collaborative, but future collaboration is recommended to create interpretive opportunities that support both the leased usage and the Nature Center's programs. If no interpretive collaborations can be established, then it is recommended to revisit the lease agreements and leaseholders.

Restored Natural Areas

Restoring natural areas in the park is recommended in the wetland, aquatic, and riparian/shrubland habitats, ensuring that invasive species impacts are limited and native flora and fauna thrive. Therefore, the below projects are recommended for the next 10 years to take lasting care of our ecosystem and sustainably prepare it for our changing climate.

- **Shoreline Mitigation** is recommended to remove areas where cattails have filled in water inlets, limiting the water supply to the lakes or along historically riparian habitats. Cattails will continue to fill in and eventually take over the lakes, which will mean losing all aquatic species and species that rely on aquatic habitats. Restoring shoreline ensures that wildlife that needs open shores to reproduce, rest, and feed are able to remain in the park, which is vital for many of the Nature Center programs to be able to observe, study, and connect with while learning about this type of ecosystem.
- **Invasive species removal** is recommended to remove invasive species, both plants and animals. There are observed invasive turtles, which out-compete native turtles and can disrupt the food chain in the aquatic ecosystem. There are also obvious invasive plants, such as Russian Olive and Teasel, which pull water resources away from the aquatic and wetland ecosystems. These invasive plants also do not provide the same quality of habitat for native Arvada wildlife.
- **Aerators are recommended**, as mentioned above, to help cycle the nutrients to prevent algae blooms and improve water quality for wildlife as the lake water levels are much lower than they historically have been. This would help reduce the amount of staff and money needed for monthly water treatments during the summer.



- **Ecological Study** is recommended to have a professional third-party assessment of the overall health of the landscape. Having this assessment would ensure that we can educate the community on Arvada's wildlife and ecosystems, but also determine the most efficient and sustainable way to maintain biodiversity. Oberon Lake recieved a donated aquatic study from a Colorado Parks and Wildlife ecologist several years ago, but they are no longer able to offer those services so a third party contractor is recommended.
- **Dredging Oberon Lake** is recommended as the water depth has decreased and without cattail management, will likely continue to decrease over time. As water depth decreases, water temperatures rise in the summer and freeze points go deeper in the winter–this makes it harder for species to survive extreme temperatures. Without dredging, Oberon will likely transition into a marsh and will impact programming and Nature Center functions, wildlife migration patterns, and would remove the visual attractant for many park visitors.
- **Prescribed Burns** are recommended as a preferred method of removing invasive plants as it helps cycle nutrients back into the soil, and is more feasible with the Nature Center's limited staffing and funds. Scheduling prescribed burns along the riparian habitats/ditches would help sustain our water resources and support of financial sustainability, as well as provide educational opportunities around native grasses, fire and invasive species. Burns would be in collaboration with Open Space and Arvada Fire Protection District.

Wildlife Management Guidelines

Most of these guidelines are from the 1998 Master plan or early 2000s business plans and are still applicable. These impact conservation and habitat restoration projects the Nature Center may lead or collaborate on, in addition to programming and other interpretive projects.



Habitat

- Arvada will strive to maintain, create, and manage habitat to support the broadest sustainable wildlife population.
- Arvada will explore conservation partnerships with private landowners to insure the conservation and management of wildlife habitat.

Native Species

- Arvada will continue its efforts to preserve, protect, and enhance wildlife species that are at risk of becoming threatened or endangered.
- Arvada will continue its efforts to prioritize, develop, and implement recovery plans for species that are listed as threatened or endangered.

Invasive/Exotic Wildlife and Disease Management

- Arvada will prevent and control invasive or exotic pathogens that impact wildlife and may be harmful to native species and ecosystems.



Wildlife relocation and reintroduction

- Arvada will evaluate wildlife relocation processes and other appropriate methods used for the purpose of species conservation.

Wildlife Viewing Opportunities

- Provide wildlife viewing opportunities while protecting and conserving wildlife and wildlife habitat, without negatively impacting other legitimate wildlife uses.
- Increase public awareness of wildlife viewing ethics: teach the public how to respect wildlife, including their need for undisturbed space and the importance of natural forage.
- Through Majestic View Nature Center's school-based programs, increase the number of Arvada students who learn about wildlife management, wildlife issues, and how human actions affect wildlife, wildlife habitat, and wildlife conservation.



Wildlife Information

- Inform Arvada residents who are interested in opportunities for wildlife related issues through diverse media
- Inform the public about ways to reduce conflicts with wildlife while sharing the same environment and increase knowledge, appreciation, and the respect for wildlife when animals are seen in a community.
- Arvada will inform and educate the public about wildlife biology, natural systems, ecology, and wildlife management.

Public Involvement

- Policy decisions

Law Enforcement

- Manage wildlife regulations
- Wildlife encounters/conflicts

Recommendation

Collaboration with a professional specialized consulting firm to develop and implement a comprehensive, multi-species Arvada wildlife management plan is proposed. This would become part of the Arvada Parks, Trails & Open Space Master Plan and the City's Comprehensive Plan. This would help the Nature Center and Animal Management provide accurate information and direction for the rescue and rehabilitation for a variety of wildlife, as well as guide trail/park closure decisions to support protected species during breeding or migration.

Trail Plan

Existing Trails

There are several existing trails in the park, including the Interpretive Trail, Cattail Trail, Oberon Trail, Prairie Social Trail, and Kennedy Trail. These trails can be briefly described as:

Interpretive trail

This trail is a paved trail that adhered to ADA standards at the time it was built. Along the trail are several educational signs about the history of the park and various ecosystems.



Cattail Trail (Loop)

This loop is a soft gravel trail that loops around the west pasture, with gorgeous unobstructed views of the mountains. Cattail trail also looks down the hill along the cattail/wetland corridor that used to be the riparian overflow channel from Oberon Lake to Hayes Lake. This trail also branches off towards the West, bridges over the cattails and exits the park into the neighborhood on the North West side of the park.

Oberon Trail

This short, soft, out-and-back trail that slopes down to Oberon Lake; it does not loop around the lake. This trail has sitting stones and a brick seating area on the outlook, but no benches. There is one sign at the trailhead and one sign in the lake that indicates private property/do not cross ice or wade. However, due to shoreline compaction caused by visitors not staying on trails, it is recommended to add more visible signage to warn visitors to not cross the ice or walk along the shoreline. Shoreline compaction can cause issues for wildlife hibernating in the muddy shoreline, as they can become trapped and buried.



Prairie Social Trail

This human-made shortcut through the prairie arboretum is also the main driving pathway for park maintenance vehicles, which increases the wear and erosion on this dirt trail. This dirt trail, which is also the location of the Landmark Art Exhibit wind chime installation, can become excessively muddy in the spring and fall. This trail is popular with many walkers and has low impact on wildlife. *It is recommended this trail be graveled and leveled to reduce further erosion and to increase safety and accessibility for visitors walking along the art installation.*

Kennedy/Mountain View Trail

This trail is the short paved trail that follows the pasture fencing from the demonstration garden to the Kennedy property and “Nature Explore” space. This trail is unmarked/un-named, but is distinguished by the unobstructed panoramic view of the mountains and West Arvada. It also has several sitting benches and a few small shrubs, none large enough to provide shade. Overall, this trail currently has no interpretive activities. This is the trail that all participants for our Nature Playdates must walk to get to the Kennedy property and dead ends at the outdoor classroom. As most neighbors don’t utilize this trail, preferring to walk along the driveway, any encouragement for visitors to not walk in the road will improve safety and reduce car/walker conflicts. It is recommended to provide interactive and interpretive opportunities along the trail to encourage walkers to view from the trail, such as interactive signage or engage self-led activities such as follow the concrete footprints/hopscotch.

Future Trails

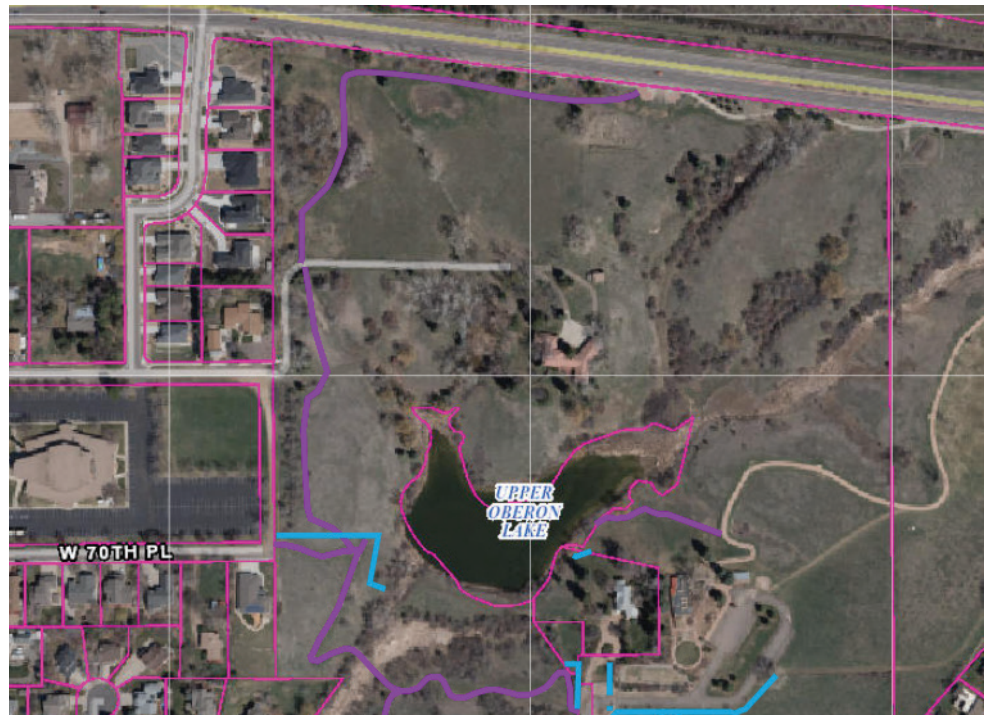
Hayes Trail Outlook

The 1998 Masterplan proposed that Hayes lake eventually be made publicly accessible via a trail outlook for programs and visitors. Currently, Hayes lake is only accessible to staff along an easement from 68th Avenue, meaning more visitors are unaware of this natural resource. Being hidden also has created a sense of ownership for the residences that back up immediately to the lake, causing issues when they want to clear the view or do their own aquatic maintenance.

The proposed new trail would connect the Cattail Trail loop to an overlook on the Northside of Hayes lake, which would improve staff access for maintenance as well as provide public access for programs and visitors. This trail segment would cost at least \$20,000 as of 2021 to clear, grade, and gravel/build an outlook deck for an accessible trail to the lake edge. With increased costs of disposal fees, materials, and labor this cost will continue to increase.

Fox Trail Connection

The 1998 Masterplan proposed a trail loop around the lake, connecting the Cattail Trail Loop through the Fox property to where 72nd Avenue would be, along the canal and connecting to the East parking lot and Interpretive Trail. Now with 72nd Avenue being built, this trail is recommended to be completed for the segment between the Cattail Trail Loop to the sidewalk along 72nd. This would almost complete a loop within the park boundaries and provide better programming access to the Northwest portion of the park.



Vehicular Access

The Nature Center has heard hundreds of times, over many years, that the park is the “hidden gem of Arvada” from visitors, neighbors, presenters, and even City staff. This description is used because it is difficult to find but once it is found it makes a meaningful impact to people’s emotional and physical wellbeing.

Part of the difficulty to find the Nature Center is due to confusion between the “Majestic View Park” parking lot and the “Majestic View Nature Center” parking lot, especially when 72nd signage doesn’t direct to the Nature Center separate from the park. Many families and elderly visitors state that the ½ mile walk along the Interpretive Trail makes it difficult to get from their car to the Nature Center. The difficulty people have finding the Nature Center parking lot is due to the lack of signage and/or small, unclear signage when driving along main thoroughfares (72nd Avenue, Carr Street, 66th Avenue, and Wadsworth).

This not only lowers customer satisfaction with rentals, programs, and bus drivers but it decreases the general awareness of the Nature Center in the community for walk-ins or new residents. Since there is only one route that accommodates all vehicles, like school or adult care buses, having clear directions is vital to being able to provide our services. If buses attempt to come from the west over 66th, they high center on the railroad tracks. The only bus/school accessible connecting road is from Carr Street on the East side of the park to 68th Avenue through the neighborhood to Garrison.

Recommendation

It is recommended that updated and/or additional signage with current City and Nature Center logos and language be placed along the main thoroughfares around the Nature Center. This is consistent with signage precedent for other City facilities, such as the golf courses, Arvada Center, and City Hall. This also would involve Colorado Department of Transportation to place signage on Wadsworth and 68th Ave, the most common intersection access for Nature Center participants and visitors.



Properties (Hansen, Fox, Kennedy, Harder/MVNC)

Harder/MVNC Property Recommendation

Purpose

The Nature Center is the environmental educational hub for the Arvada community, with impact and opportunities across the City. MVNC should not only be an example of environmental stewardship and sustainability, but an experiential learning opportunity for all ages. The programs and interpretive opportunities should bring together the innovation and the passion of Nature Center staff and volunteers to provide quality, destination-worthy services.

In addition to inspiring future stewards of our natural landscape, MVNC's educational programming supports several other City requirements for stormwater permits, communications support with forestry and open space, and festivals/events. Being able to assist in educating residents to make them aware of park maintenance decisions in a fun, memorable way will have a larger, positive impact than just broadcasted information. Stormwater education is also required in several areas, from outreaches to booths to programs to exhibits. Not providing these services could impact heavy fines on the City and/or deteriorate public sentiment during park maintenance projects.

The 2016 parks, trails & open space master plan recommended expanding MVNC programs and interpretive opportunities into a wider reach to encourage spontaneous everyday interactions with environmental education across Arvada's many miles of trails and throughout Arvada's natural areas.

Expansion of the Facility

The Nature Center is located in a building that was originally built as a home in the 1940s and has since been remodeled (the Harder property). This has led to visibility issues with visitors stating they didn't know the Nature Center was a public Nature Center as it still looked residential, as well as accessibility barriers with the heavy, narrow doors, restrooms, and parking lot. In 2021, we were able to add signage to our building front with our name and logo and in 2022 a glass, commercial door was installed to visually open the tight entryway and invite visitors inside.

However, large wheelchairs and strollers still struggle to enter the facility, making it hard for them to participate in programs or enjoy the exhibits. Having a front entryway that opens up access and adheres to current ADA code would create an inclusive, welcoming experience to visitors as they participate in the Nature Center's services.

Another challenge with providing programs in one of the oldest City facilities housing employees is the general lack of space. There are no "staff-only" secured-access areas, meaning staff must eat and be accessible to the public during lunch breaks, while working on projects, processing payments, or during meetings. On top of the lack of "staff-only" space is the lack of space for large programs. The largest classroom fits no more than 20 participants, and with most Jeffco area schools hosting classes with around 30 students, providing our services to schools and the public is becoming increasingly difficult to do. For safety, security and to support financial sustainability it is recommended that the Nature Center facility expands to accommodate a larger footprint that would incorporate a classroom large enough

to fit 40-50 people without taking away any of the current office and shared spaces. This would also elevate visitors' learning experiences by allowing space for more immersive exhibits and alternative/modular seating options.

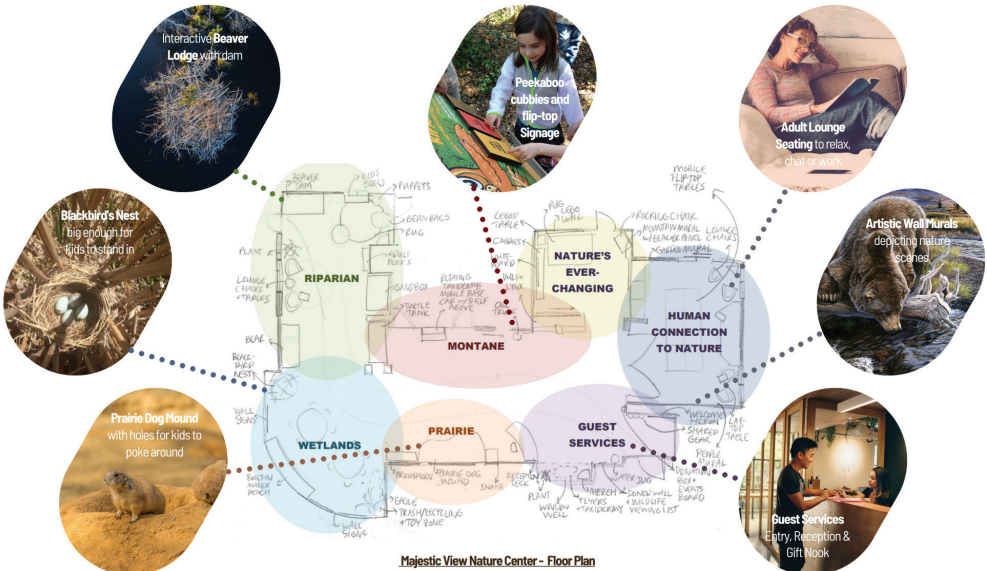
A facility expansion would also allow for the Nature Center to provide full-day camps to an industry average number of campers weekly (typically camps accommodate 30 students per camp). Being able to offer full-day summer camps to a full roster of campers would drastically increase the revenue opportunity of offering camps at the Nature Center. Instead of camp sessions with 20 students maximum, the Nature Center could offer multiple camp sessions or larger camp sessions up to 30. This would make summer camps a more sustainable revenue source for the Nature Center and allow for us to create impactful and memorable relationships with Arvada students. Having a classroom expansion would also support the Nature Center's other interpretive opportunities with larger rental groups, public events, hosting industry training and workshops, and volunteer activities (most of which are revenue generating activities).

Display Concept Ideas

The existing displays and exhibits have become outdated and deteriorate the visitors' experience with stale information and static design. Many of these were donated and cannot be updated/fixed broken components, such as electrical/wiring components or computer programs. This discourages return visitors and does not deliver on a superior experience when compared to neighboring environmental facilities.

With the environmental education field universally moving toward an inquiry-based and interactive interpretive style for signage, programs and exhibits, the current displays will need to be updated and rotated more frequently with themes and activities based on industry-wide interpretive standards. It is recommended to update exhibits to incorporate a cohesive visitor experience that is immersive and memorable, with a goal to update at least 2 exhibits per year to be able to reshape the visitors experience within the next five years. Exhibits typically cost between \$2,000-\$6,000 per display.

The recommendation is to create an overarching story that visitors can travel through as they move through the Nature Center. Starting on the mountain/montane ecosystem, visitors can travel through our watershed as it travels down through our riparian rivers where there are beaver dams and aquatic turtles, through our wetland bend and come back through the prairie. Our classrooms are recommended to become more educational as they illustrate how nature is always changing and how humans around the world are connected with nature.



Kennedy Property Recommendation - Nature Play

The Kennedy Property has two components, one is the multi-year leased farm to a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) organization and the other component of the property is the historical site where the Kennedy house, garage, barn and gardens are/were built. This historical site was modified to become an outdoor exploration space when the original house structure was removed—now the location of one of the Nature Center's most popular programs: Nature Playdates.

Nature play is an unstructured activity that encourages all ages to develop their imagination, curiosity and understanding of their surrounding world within a natural landscape. This could include activities such as creating leaf piles, climbing logs, building forts, catching bugs, etc. However, while the house was demolished, this site still has many remnants from the original structure such as old irrigation pipes and wire fencing which increases risks for injury during nature play. In addition these pipes and wires are overgrown in bushes and shrubs, making them more hazardous for children that explore the area. This outdoor exploration space is also shared with the CSA who utilize the garage and barn for farm storage, the Nature Center reserves the workshop classroom as not a part of the lease agreement.

It is recommended that this space be revitalized for a more interpretive and safer nature play space by adding more natural play features, such as large stumps and wood cookies, and removing exposed debris and overgrown weeds from the space. This would elevate the Nature Center's Nature Playdate programs to the same customer expectation level as other Nature Play areas found at similar Nature Centers, such as Bluff Lake or Bear Creek. This would help ensure the Nature Center is able to host high quality nature play as well as provide a destination draw for families.

Hansen Property Recommendation - Outdoor Classroom

The Hansen House, immediately adjacent to the Nature Center, was not included in the 1998 master plan because the property was not yet acquired by that time. But it was added to the park before the 2001 opening of the Nature Center and historical documents suggest the building be a avian rescue/rehabilitation facility. This house is a two story house that historically has been rented to a parks maintenance worker to maintain the house. The house, originally built in 1920, has been renovated over the last century with many expansions and changes that make the structure no longer original to its historical significance but still requiring ongoing maintenance.

However, since 2019 no one has rented/maintained the house and when the pandemic occurred it was utilized as a quarantine house for frontline workers. Later in the pandemic, the house was partially renovated to accommodate storage equipment for VCN golf and hospitality teams and became a training facility for various PD teams. These changes have created significant challenges between higher electricity usage now being charged to the Nature Center's account (which is not accounted for in the existing budget) to having Police Department (PD) trainees and K9s shouting in the wildlife resting areas/adjacent to public programming—lowering the Nature Center's customer satisfaction feedback during programs. For example, toddlers have left a program early due to training activities that involved yelling "don't shoot" with loud barking or visitors have left as the parking lot was full with PD vehicles.

With no original purpose planned for this property in the 1998 masterplan, and with the increasing need for a larger classroom space for field trips and programs, it is recommended that this building be removed to become a sheltered classroom. There are many examples of classroom structures for Nature Centers, such as the Carson Nature Center's classroom. This would support the mission of the Nature Center services while eliminating the challenges of maintaining a building or dealing with teams unfamiliar with working within the needs of the wildlife resting areas. An additional classroom would also increase visibility to the Nature Center for visitors that get confused as to which "house" is the Nature Center as well as ensuring that the lake can be utilized for programs even during low-water seasons.

A sheltered, accessible classroom would allow camps and programs to have this as a weather-sustainable space in case of rain, snow, or high heat/sunburn risk and would increase program capacity. In addition, it would also ensure the Nature Center is able to utilize Oberon Lake, even if water levels continue to decrease and recede from the east side of the Lake—the side currently viewed/most utilized. With a view and a large enough room to comfortably seat more than 20 individuals would also allow the Nature Center to book weddings, celebration of life, and other revenue generating events when the classroom is not in use. Currently not many wedding requests confirm a booking as there are limited restrooms, no public accessible water if the water cooler runs out for the day, and dim lighting. This Hansen classroom recommendation would support MVNC financial sustainability and mission, and could also be utilized by the community. Without this outdoor classroom, the Nature Center may need to decrease service levels and will have limited revenue growth. If the classroom is built, the additional revenue would likely pay for itself in 5-10 years.

Fox Property Recommendation– Activated Space

The Fox property includes a large portion of our wildlife resting area, which makes it an ideal spot for conservation projects and wildlife viewing during guided programs. The Northwest portion of the park is currently not publicly accessible as there is no trail connecting the sidewalk along 72nd and the Cattail Trail. However, this also means that staff access is limited for easily monitoring this area of the park and limits Nature Center's opportunities for programs.

The Fox house, vacant since 2016, has been approved to be demolished and budget was approved for 2022 after the house began to fall apart (gas leak, ceiling collapse, wildlife living inside, etc). Once the house has been removed, it is recommended that this area of the park remain natural as a restored wildlife area but with better programmatic trails. The original 1998 master plan outlines a trail planned around the west corner of the park, but the original plan for the Fox house to become an event center is no longer feasible. So we recommend completing the trail loop and preserving that portion of the park for wildlife conservation, interpretive programs, and passive recreation.

Signage Plan

The purpose of MVNC is to provide educational opportunities, including asynchronous and self-guided activities in addition to programming. This supports the 2016 Parks and Trails Master Plan for the City of Arvada, so the below signage is recommended to be implemented in the next 10 years.



Majestic View Park

Garden/Nature Center Area

- ☐ Garden Zone Signs – replace/maintain
- ☐ Sensory tour walkthrough/things to do (journal, touch, smell, listen, etc)-connect with audio tour option

Nature Explore-Kennedy Property

- ☐ Kennedy History-where did the exotic rocks come from/small farmsteads
- ☐ NaturePlay – definitions & safety rules, things to do (climb this hill like an ant, stack these sticks to make a nest, etc).

Front Gate-MVNC

- ☐ Geology (types of rocks)-rock cycle and Colorado's mountains
- ☐ Solar Panels-how they generate electricity and cover over 90% of the Nature Center's electricity usage

Prairie Trail

- ☐ Leasing of Land to Ranchers-why are there horses/cows in the park? What happened to the buffalo?
- ☐ Native American/ancient and current connections & perspectives with land-Land Acknowledgment

Mountain Trail

- ☐ Panoramic view of the mountains/how our mountains formed over time

Oberon Lake Overlook

- ☐ History of Lake Oberon (Oberon township's water source 1870's)
- ☐ Cattail Succession/Ecosystems over time
- ☐ Additional signage - no wading/no walking on ice/shoreline avoidance

Hayes Lake Overlook

- ☐ Stormwater Quality-Runoff and algae (nutrient pollution prevention) with addition of aerators
- ☐ Wetland Migrations-how wildlife rely on wetlands

Existing Interpretive Trail Signs

- ☐ 3 signs - Reimagine to be more interactive and update information

Wildlife Resting Area

- ☐ Game Trails-this is not a trail for humans-protect from erosion and avoid wildlife conflicts

Other City Trails

Open Space

- ☐ The life cycle of fire-prescribed burns
- ☐ Our Native Prairie-low mow and what it means (lift the layers-what are all the benefits from unmowed grasses)

Parks

- ☐ Benefits of trees and how we're connected (physiological connection with trees and cultural connections)
- ☐ Natural landscaping-parks in a changing climate/benefits to native plants

Interactive Ideas

- Changeable (Plexiglas cover)
- Moveable/seasonal (game trails, self-guided activities)
- Lower to the Ground/accessible
- Slide over or Flap up for more information
- Tactile/Auditory activities
- "Combination Lock" type/turntable for clues
- "Interpretive boxes"-locked chests for informal trail interpretation for volunteers and park rangers

Programming Recommendations

Summer Camps

Nature Centers and other Denver-Metro Area Environmental Facilities offer kids summer camps to create impactful and memorable learning opportunities with youth. These camps provide a child care service to families outside of school seasons, but also provides environmental educators with the opportunity to fully engage with youth and share their passion for nature and learning. Having a full day to explore an environmental topic is more likely to have an impact or create a behavioral change than a 40 minute program, helping to inspire continuing environmental learning and stewardship.

It is recommended that the Nature Center become licensed to host camps in order to provide this service. Doing so would position the Nature Center on a competitive programming level with other facilities, would ensure the Nature Center meets customer expectations for a youth-focused facility, and provide Aravda with the only nature camp within City limits. Camps are also typically a revenue source that would also increase financial sustainability for MVNC.

Public, Private, and School Programs

The Nature Center has provided monthly public programs for all ages, even throughout the pandemic. These programs remain flexible and adapt to community feedback, interest, and available staffing/volunteers. The quality of public programs should be held to a high interpretive standard to drive word-of-mouth recommendations and introduce many visitors to the world of environmental education.

Many public programs generate leads for our private group and school programs as well. These programs are developed to support elementary Colorado state science standards while entertaining our non-captive audiences. To ensure the quality of the content is supportive to teachers and group leaders' needs, these programs are often customized to ensure the best experience possible. In order to have the knowledge and skills to do this, our staff needs to be trained in interpretive sciences and leading non-captive audiences. It is recommended that all staff be certified interpretive guides through the National Association of Interpretation, and interpretive training be provided to all teaching volunteers to ensure consistently high-quality programs.

Volunteer Management

In the 2016 parks master plan, 50% of survey results thought parks should focus on encouraging volunteerism & stewardship. With the decrease in volunteers over the pandemic years, there is an increasingly high need for a more robust, coordinated volunteer program that would entice and retain new volunteers. A volunteer program would provide a consistent onboarding process, a rewarding experience, and encourage higher volunteer retention. This would also ensure more systemic training of volunteers, which would improve the Nature Center's consistency in quality of service. This is true for any City team that utilizes volunteers, so it is recommended that a full-time VCN volunteer coordinator position be approved. Currently Nature Center staff does not have time to effectively provide excellent volunteer management without decreasing levels of service in other areas.

Accreditation and Conservation

With the Nature Center achieving 2 decades of environmental education, it is time to strive towards an industry recognized accreditation. One such accreditation is to be a Leave No Trace Gold Standard Site. Gold Standard Site designation is the highest level of recognition by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics for parks and protected areas, an organization recognized nationwide for their mission to protect wildlife and natural spaces by focusing on community education and stewardship.

This standard supports the Nature Center's existing programming, including stormwater quality education and how Arvada students can minimize their impacts to nonpoint-source pollution. It also aligns with the Nature Center's objectives for wildlife and open space conservation through educating our community on ways to minimize their impacts on Arvada's landscape. This will become increasingly vital as the Arvada population and park usage continues to grow. Currently, there are currently only 3 other sites (State Parks) in Colorado that have achieved this standard. Requirements for this accreditation includes staff training, signage, ongoing history of Leave No Trace principles and ethics integrated into programming and management practices. The principles are described below:

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel & camp on durable surfaces
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimize campfire impacts
- Respect wildlife
- Be considerate of other visitors

Safety & Customer Experience

With the acknowledgement of possible threats to City facilities, public spaces, and child gatherings public safety guidance has changed dramatically since the 1998 master plan. The layout of the Majestic View Nature Center is no longer comparable to other similar facilities for staff or public safety in the event of a safety emergency.

In addition to safety concerns the Nature Center building, originally built in the 1940s, renovated in the 1980s, and repurposed in the late 1990s, has many antiquated features that are becoming increasingly difficult to support. The building does not have air conditioning, and although it does have swamp cooling, the current layout does not effectively cool the air so inside temperatures reach over 80 degrees in the summer. This causes visitor, staff and volunteer discomfort and affects the customer satisfaction during programs. With no public water source available until a water cooler was installed in 2021 (previously the staff/kitchen sink was the only drinking source), high heat indoors creates concern for programs that involve movement with 30+ children in one room.

Also, there are no secure access, "staff-only" barrier points once the building is open to the public for the day. The front door is often open during the day to encourage visitors to enter the building as many struggle with the handle or holding it open while pushing strollers/wheelchairs. The front door is also only 24 inches from the main office, which has no secure access point. While staff are working in the building, the main office (which houses the Nature Center's money box, staff and volunteer protected personal information, PCI, and other internal/historical documents) is accessible to all visitors and as visitors enter, many people

intuitively turn first to their right—walking into the main office. Closing the door not only makes it difficult to maintain an open-door workplace culture but also impossible to monitor the rest of the building and greet visitors. Without greeting and monitoring visitors, there could be a risk of exhibit damages, abuse of our animal ambassadors, stolen retail items, or general poor customer experiences. The only other staff spaces other than the main office are a desk in the main exhibit hall and a shared workspace through the public kitchen that is also not secured from public access when there is limited staff. While the building is open for public hours, there are no secured access barriers to staff workstations or sensitive information.

The City provides 2 panic buttons, but there is no way to test them to ensure they work (during the last test that was attempted in 2021 dispatch said they could no longer test panic buttons and that we would have to obtain a third party security service). Also, the front greeter desk does not have a panic button unless one of the office workstations moves theirs, so there are not enough panic buttons for all workspaces. This puts increased pressure and anxiety on Nature Center staff/volunteers, especially in high tension interactions around visitor requirements (e.g. masking, keeping dogs on leash, etc.).

Going forward, with an expansion in mind for the Nature Center classroom, it is recommended that the Nature Center redesign the layout to accommodate for improved security and traffic flow.

Memorials

The Majestic View park is a memorable community hub for many Arvada residents. The Park currently hosts 7 memorial sitting rocks, 9 memorial trees with in-ground stone markers, and over 12 memorial benches along trails and in the park fields. With no additional memorial sites available for rocks, trees, or benches without negatively impacting Arvada park maintenance service levels, alternative memorial donation options are recommended to capture and honor the human connections Arvada residents and visitors have with the park. Majestic View Nature Center is authorized to accept donations and grants to support its mission and would be able to process payments for a memorial brick wall/pathway or memorial tree/sculpture. Having a concentrated option for many donations in one place would allow for more memorial donations to continue for many years to come. A sculpture in the garden would also be removed from park maintenance areas of concerns on other memorial items, and a donation wall inside the Nature Center would help increase visibility for donations and sponsors who help improve exhibits or contribute to Nature Center projects.



Funding Recommendations

As City funding for Majestic View Nature Center is limited, additional funding sources are likely required to accomplish most of the above recommendations and future projects. Below are some suggested funding sources below that can also help the Nature Center increase financial sustainability and increase service levels.

SCFD

The Scientific and Cultural Facilities District and Majestic View currently have an established relationship as an eligible scientific educational organization. SCFD funds most of the elementary-aged school programs as well as some of the recurring popular programs, such as the monthly Nature Playdates or Kids Art Club. SCFD funding requests are limited to 24% of the estimated annual budget. If the Nature Center's budget is cut, the request amount limit is lowered when applying for the yearly SCFD grant. SCFD will only cover educational program costs and directly related operating or administrative costs.



JOE/JOSF

Jefferson Outdoors Foundation/Jeffco Open Space Foundation currently funds 100% of program fees for low-income schools throughout Jefferson County to encourage kids to get outdoors and learn about nature. JOF allows Majestic View Nature Center to provide more accessible programming to schools that would otherwise not be able to afford busing and programs fees, which is useful for schools that travel from outside of Arvada.

Going forward, growing the JOF/MVNC relationship is recommended so JOF can help process individual donors and corporate sponsors for exhibit updates or conservation projects. This would ease time on Nature Center staff for handing out tax deduction letters and allow for more fundraising efforts.

JCOS

Jefferson County Open Space worked with the City of Arvada to initially purchase some of the properties that make up Majestic View Park. JCOS also listed several grant opportunities for completing trails and other park and open space amenities that might be utilized for trails and open space projects throughout the City.

Individual Donations/Corporate Sponsors

While MVNC is authorized to accept gifts and grants, it has not been promoted or pursued as a substantial funding source in past communications or programs. This has meant that no process has been established to systematically develop donor relationships with individuals or with community organizations, such as service clubs or faith based organizations. Individual donations for in-kind services or monetary donations can increase service levels and allow for community involvement on sponsored projects, such as a litter clean up or exhibit update.

Kids Camps

Kids camps are a unique and in-depth educational experience. Arvadan parents would be able to access educational child care during the day and MVNC would have the opportunity to create memorable interpretive connections with Arvada's youth. These week-long camp programs inspire future environmental stewards as well as provide the community with a camp alternative to more active sports. We would be the first environmental/nature camp in Arvada.

Typically, summer camp pricing can range from \$200 to \$500 per child, per week. Most camps accommodate between 20-30, for up to 10 weeks in the summer. Even with additional staffing requirements and costs, this would potentially create significant additional revenue each summer. However, the current layout of the Majestic View Nature Center would not be able to accommodate a full (30 student) level of service without a facility expansion and/or a covered outdoor classroom near the Nature Center, along with additional staffing.

Majestic View Nature Center also partners with Jeffco Outdoors Foundation and Stormwater Team to provide scholarships for residents that are unable to afford camps. These sponsored registrations are awarded based on scholarship applications.

Summer Camp Specific Cost/Benefit Analysis						
QUANTITATIVE COSTS						
Non-Recurring Costs	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	TOTAL
Camp bins & cubbys/remodel	\$1,500.00	\$100				\$1,600.00
Camp radios	\$200.00					\$200.00
Project organizational/support costs	\$800.00	\$300				\$1,100.00
Total Non-Recurring Costs	\$2,500.00					\$2,500.00
RECURRING COSTS						
Hardware/Software (including cc process fees)	\$900	\$2,200	\$2,200	\$5,800	\$5,800	\$16,900.00
Additional cleaning/maintenance	\$672	\$672	\$672	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$5,016.00
Camp Program supplies	\$500	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$5,500.00
Camp Shirts (1 shirt per child/week)	\$850	\$3,150	\$3,150	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$23,150.00
Staffing (camp instructor-only costs)	\$3,000	\$20,400	\$20,400	\$60,500	\$60,500	\$164,800.00
Seasonal (camp weeks only)	\$4,800	\$9,600	\$9,600	\$9,600	\$9,600	\$43,200.00
Camp Liscences/renewals	\$300	\$200	\$200	\$200	\$200	\$1,100.00
Training Seasonal Instructors/Volunteers	\$150	\$150	\$150	\$150	\$150	\$750.00
Total Recurring Costs	\$11,172.00	\$37,372.00	\$37,372.00	\$87,250.00	\$87,250.00	\$260,416.00
TOTAL COSTS	\$13,672.00	\$37,772.00	\$37,772.00	\$87,250.00	\$87,250.00	\$263,316.00
QUANTITATIVE BENEFITS						
Revenues	\$150 1/2day	\$350 full	\$350 full	\$350 full	\$350 full	
Camp Tuition	\$7,200	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$187,500	\$187,500	\$522,200.00
Camp add on after/late care (estimated)	(staffing not available)	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$7,000.00
Extra Shirt purchases (estimated)	\$48	\$200	\$200	\$450	\$450	\$1,348.00
SCFD Grant Contribution (If awarded)	was not able to ask for 22	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$60,000
Total Revenues	\$7,248.00	\$81,200.00	\$81,200.00	\$210,450.00	\$210,450.00	\$590,548.00
NET INCOME/LOSS	\$(6,424.00)	\$43,428.00	\$43,428.00	\$123,200.00	\$123,200.00	\$327,232.00



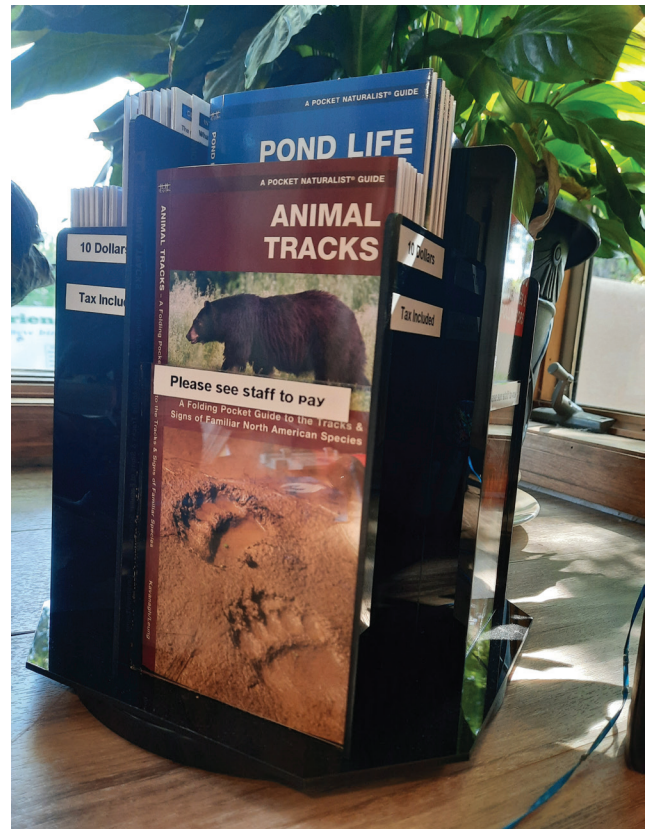
Estimated costs and potential revenue are outlined below taking into consideration class size limitations for the first few years until additional classroom space is created. Other assumptions are as follows:

- Year 1: 4 weeks, 1/2 day, \$150/wk, 12 kids
- Year 2 & 3: 10 weeks, full day, \$350, 20 kids
- Year 4 & 5 (If Hansen outdoor classroom is built and additional 30 kids can be accommodated per week): 10 weeks, 2 camp sessions, full day, \$375, 50 kids total
- Assume no more than 10% each week utilize extra shirt and care add ons; late or early care \$15/day, extra camp shirt \$10

Gift Shop/Nature Center Souvenirs

As recommended in several historical documents, the Nature Center has developed a retail nook in 2021 to provide educational resources and improve visitors' experience while creating an additional minimal revenue stream. The Nature Center is currently approved for sales tax purposes and has begun offering animal ID guides to visitors, nature books, hats, binoculars, nature kits for kids, water bottles and postcards.

However, there currently is no credit card processing system at the Nature Center. Until there is a credit card processing system, collecting large amounts of card payments is not feasible. Promoting a gift shop is not recommended until a secure, digital credit card progressing terminal/point of sale (POS) system is installed.



Miscellaneous, State and Federal Grants

Partnering with non-profit organizations, and State or Federal Agencies to provide additional funding. In the past, limited Nature Center staff time has limited the number of grant applications and reports that can be completed. With additional seasonal staffing and volunteer coordination, it is recommended that the Nature Center strive to apply for additional grants, such as the *Get Outdoor Colorado RESTORE Colorado Program (GOCO)*, *National Fish and Wildlife Federation Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program*, or the *Combined Noxious Weed Management (NWF) and U.S. Forest Service State & Private Forestry (SPF) Grant*. This could increase grant revenue for the Nature Center up to \$100,000.



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