

# Growing Up Boulder Final Report

Summary of Findings, August 21, 2015



## Young People's Contributions to the North TSA

Growing Up Boulder (GUB) is a child- and youth-friendly city initiative established in 2009 as a formal partnership between the City of Boulder, Boulder Valley School District, and University of Colorado's Program in Environmental Design. In 2015, GUB began working with Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) to engage children and youth in the North Trail Study Area (North TSA) planning process. Participants include children from the Boulder Journey School, a preschool in north Boulder that uses Wonderland Lake for educational purposes; 5 OSMP Junior Ranger crews; and approximately 20 families at a weekend Family Day. All engagement activities have been held at the Wonderland Lake trailhead facilities but have also emphasized all areas of the North TSA. This report summarizes all outreach activities and outcomes.

In total we estimate the following participants:

- Approximately 10 children (ages 4-5) from Boulder Journey School
- Approximately 25 children (ages 3-17) (20 families) at the Family Day planning tables
- Approximately 56 visitors to the Family Day interpretive station
- Approximately 60 Junior Rangers (ages 14-18) and 10 Crew Leaders from OSMP's Junior Ranger program

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## Summary of Young People's Ideas

### Children and Families

- More opportunities for interaction with water
- Enhanced lake access, with sand play, boardwalks and clear trail access
- Protecting and increasing wildlife, especially insects
- More trees for shelter and shade
- More rocks for climbing

In the future, I would like More trees and wild life  
in the North TSA because There's more to see.

Draw your vision here:

First Name: Quinn Spaff Age: 8

### Junior Rangers

- Improved access to information, both trail details and interpretive, that can be taken along on hiking trails (either mobile app or paper)
- Signage changes (fewer overall, positive tone, educational)
- Attention to social trails (prevention and evaluation)
- A wide range of perspectives about dogs in open space (from no dogs, to stricter limits, to more relaxed policies)
- Wonderland Lake access (trails and water)
- Additional trails for hiking and biking (single track, moderate difficulty)
- Provision of drinking water sources at popular trailheads
- Overall maintenance (trails, non-native invasive plants)

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Young People's Contributions to the North TSA



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## The Power of Engaging Children and Youth

Recognizing the need for collaboration with communities, participatory planning with children and youth emerged in the 1970s with UNESCO's Growing Up in Cities project. Growing Up Boulder applies UNESCO's participatory approaches with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child's principles that all children have a right to be heard and influence decision-making in their communities. GUB recognizes that children and adolescents are one of many groups in modern cities whose voices are often not heard, yet they are valuable members of our society who can offer new perspectives and insights to the development of their communities. Studies have shown that children are more flexible and creative in their thinking than adults. They are less restricted by the way "things should be" and by their past experiences, and they offer new ways of approaching problems.

By involving young people in planning the North Trail Study Area, OSMP is facilitating the next generation's commitment to conservation and potentially identifying less explored strategies that would otherwise not be part of an engagement process.



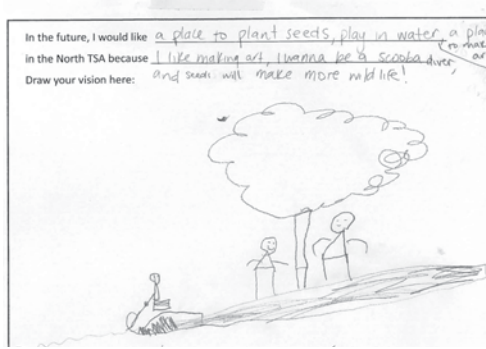
Photographs by Tori Derr (Top) and Phillip Yates, Open Space and Mountain Parks (Bottom)

## Family Day

The Family Day was held on July 11, 2015 and offered indoor stations for children and families to share their views. The stations included a “draw your vision” station, a “keep, change or add” mapping area, and a graphic facilitation station. Interpretation staff from OSMP also set up a station at the Wonderland Lake trailhead to engage children in learning about special natural features of the North TSA. The Boulder Family Nature Club set up a special scavenger hunt and hike around Wonderland Lake to bring families from Boulder Journey School and other club members to the event.

## Draw Your Vision

This station provided drawing sheets with the prompt, “I would like to see \_\_\_\_\_ in the North TSA because \_\_\_\_\_.” Children and families drew ideas for the North TSA and open space in general and filled in their responses. A total of 18 children (ages 3-17) and 2 adults (ages 20 and 40) completed this vision exercise. Primary ideas are summarized on page 1 of this report or are excerpted below. Additional images are presented in the Children’s Access to Nature Section (page 6).



## Family Day Quotes and Images

*"Keep water access: We float boats!"*

*"Algae is fascinating!"*

*"A boardwalk with viewing hole so I can watch the fish and ducks without scaring them."*

*"More trails along creeks."*

*"I love finding things like butterflies!"*

*"I like seeing prairie dogs. Protect the prairie dogs!"*

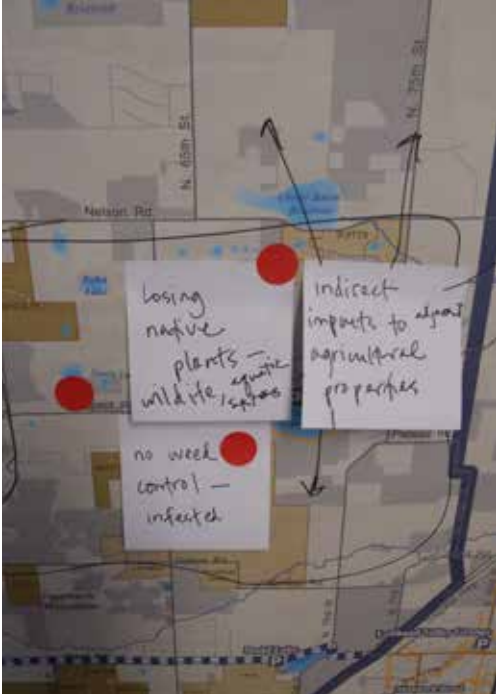


Drawings from Family Day participants; Photographs courtesy of Phillip Yates, City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks; Graphic Illustration courtesy of Deryn Wagner, City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks

## Keep, Change, Add

The “keep, change, add” station provided maps of the North TSA with color-coded dots that indicated things visitors would like to keep (green dots), change (red dots), or add (blue dots) to the area. Many comments came from parents or other adult visitors, but some also came from children and families together. The majority of comments were placed on the Wonderland Lake/Four Mile Creek/Foothills map and are summarized below:

- Improved water access at Wonderland Lake (6 respondents)
- A wooden pier into Wonderland Lake (2 respondents)
- Provide increased weed control at Wonderland Lake and Nelson Road areas (2 respondents)
- Protect native plants and animals at Wonderland Lake and in the entire North TSA (2 respondents)
- Bathrooms and drinking water at Wonderland Lake (1 respondent)
- Fix bridge and maintain a wading area for water play at Four Mile Creek (1 respondent)
- Create a single track mountain bike trail east of Hogback Ridge (1 respondent)
- Require dogs on leash or no dogs in Foothills area (1 respondent)



## Boulder Journey School

GUB partners with many schools and youth-serving organizations to accomplish its work. For many years, Boulder Journey School has been an active partner to engage young children. Based in the philosophy of Reggio Emilia, BJS honors children’s own modes of expression, instills a “pedagogy of listening,” and promotes children’s right to active citizenship. Teachers listen deeply to children’s ideas and find intersections between young children’s interests and GUB’s participatory processes. Over the course of much of the 2014-2015 academic year, preschool students at Boulder Journey School explored insects as a major theme of study. In the classroom, students researched insects and explored their outdoor playgrounds, finding praying mantises, butterflies, and spiders. They took a field trip to Coot Lake (with City of Boulder’s Parks and Recreation staff) to think about how recreation might impact invertebrate habitat and to explore ideas for nature play. Prior to the field trip, they researched insect body parts and designed costumes so as not to scare the bugs. Teachers projected human-sized insects so that young children could experience the difference in scale between small insects and much larger humans. And in July of 2015, they visited Wonderland Lake to look for insects and learn from OSMP interpretive staff. Returning back to the classroom, two of the children developed a “Bug Care Book,” illustrating safe ways to find and hold bugs. BJS students demonstrated a consistent empathy and care toward insects and a desire to learn more about them through direct interaction and exploration.

## Boulder Journey School Quotes and Images

*“We want to protect the bugs.”*

*“And live with them!”*

- 2 BJS students sharing what they want to see at Wonderland Lake



Top Row: Courtesy Boulder Journey School: Praying Mantis by Boden; Photo by BJS; Spotted Orb by Sutton  
Bottom Row: Photo left by Tina Briggs, City of Boulder Parks and Recreation; Grasshopper by Ashi; Photo right by Tori Derr

### **“How to Hold a Grasshopper,” by Mary [Excerpt from the Bug Care Book]**

*“It’s really long, so that is good. It can breathe. Holding it so gently not squeezing. But you can’t do that with ladybugs because their wings would get bent.”*

## Boulder Journey School's Recommendations

- Students liked seeing dragonflies and moth cocoons
- Students want to protect insects and other invertebrates and consider ways to protect their habitat and homes
- Children would like to play with the bugs more, or live with them
- Children would like more interaction and tactile experiences with small scale nature, including bugs, fish, and plants
- Teachers recommended more pictures on signs so they are easier for young children to understand
- Teachers requested clearer and easier crossing from the RTD bus stop across Broadway to the Wonderland lake trailhead. It is hard to navigate with school groups, and they have gotten lost trying to find the underpass.
- GUB and OSMP facilitators noticed during the interpretive walk to Wonderland Lake that the trail was not wide enough to accommodate children's frequent stops for snacks, water, and observations. Pullouts with shade may help young children make the journey to the lake.

## Children's Desire for Nature Access

*"People are always telling us to get out and enjoy nature, but then we can't do anything with it but walk."*

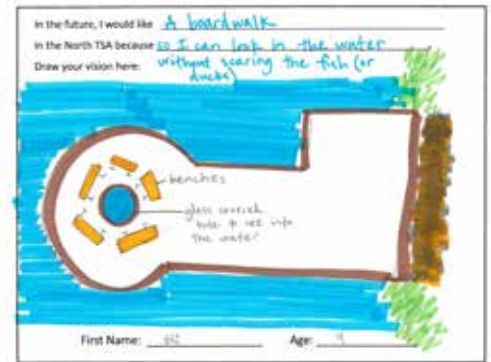
- 9 year old participant

Over the past 6 years, Growing Up Boulder has consistently found that children and youth of all ages want diverse experiences with nature. In the North TSA process, this emerged from both the Boulder Journey School and Family Day outreach and aligns with the City's recent Nature Play Symposium goals. As the images in this report illustrate, children want access to nature at fairly small scales and have a fairly well developed appreciation and empathy for animals. This is well represented by the comment that:

*"I would like a boardwalk [with viewing hole], so I can look at the fish and ducks without scaring them."*

Children want access to nature so that they can view wildlife, play with sand, touch the water, get their feet wet, peer into the shallows for tadpoles, and generally experience Rachel Carson's *sense of wonder* that is critical in developing care for, knowledge about, and long term interest in nature.

Wonderland Lake was an ideal scale for many children. At the Family Day, one 4 year old said "In the Future I would like to ride my bike because I can't walk all the way around [the lake]. I get tired." Places in the North TSA such as Wonderland Lake or water play at Four Mile Creek, emerged as ideal locations to support children's access to *and interaction with nature*.



## Open Space and Mountain Parks' Junior Rangers

Growing Up Boulder typically uses engagement strategies that allow young people to demonstrate their expertise, develop increased competence, and find synergies that can be shared. For this process, GUB identified the OSMP Junior Ranger group as an ideal group of youth to work with because they already were familiar with Open Space and would have the time available to engage in meaningful processes. We set up an in depth and follow up strategy to work with 5 crews.

For in depth engagement, we worked with 2 crews (one in June and one in July) for 5 hours. We introduced the planning process, used photovoice to identify aspects of open space that work well or need attention, developed an ideal vision through graphic facilitation, and synthesized ideas into final recommendations. Each crew member then established their top priorities by "voting" on the recommendations using 3 sticky dots per person.

For the follow up crews (2 in June and 1 in July), we shared the outcomes from in depth engagement and provided Junior Rangers the opportunity to respond to their peers ideas as well as to develop their own recommendations. Each crew member again chose their top three priorities.



### PhotoVoice

GUB uses photovoice as a method in which young people take pictures with colored frames to represent aspects of the physical (and sometimes social) environment that they like (green frames) or don't like (red frames). We used this method with 2 Junior Ranger crews, one each in June and July. Crew members walked the site for about 40 minutes, recorded why they took the photographs they did, and shared their photographs with each other through a facilitated discussion. Photovoice discussions led to many recommendations for OSMP.



*"Diverse habitat on trails is good and makes hiking more interesting."*



*"Social trails are bad because they disrupt natural wildlife and vegetation and cause erosion."*



## Junior Rangers' Photovoice: Elements they like in open space



From left: Positive messaging of signs; Bike racks at trail heads; Biking and fishing



From left: Ability to see wildlife (also birds, wildflowers); diverse vegetation and wildflowers (although too many invasives and non-natives); Attractive, positive, educational signs



From left: Winding trails with shade; Responsible dog owners and happy dogs; Recreational use of trails



From left: Wide-open unobstructed views; Ducks and wildlife make hiking experiences more interesting; Nature inspires creativity

## Junior Rangers' Photovoice: Elements they do **not** like in open space



From left: Negative visual impact of bright colors in Wildland Urban Interface (WUI); Trail damage and need for maintenance; Fishing litter, irresponsible user



From left: Too many and sometimes obtrusive signs on trailhead; Negative interaction with inconsiderate biker; Fencing not effective - people are using fenced area



From left: Crowded trail area resulting in social trails; Invasive species; Spillway either needs to be better restricted or made safe for visitor access



From left: Off-leash policies (see Points of Tension); Overgrown and unmaintained trail areas; Lack of maintenance (why fence?)

## Junior Rangers' Recommendations

The most prevalent recommendations were for the provision of a detailed map or smart phone application, trail maintenance, improvements in signage, access to water, and addressing social trails (see charts below). Many recommendations were influenced in some way by a desire to preserve nature and to decrease the negative impacts of social trails.

- Make it easier to access information at trailheads, using an app, paper brochure, and/or signage
- Maintain wide-open unobstructed views so that we can appreciate the beauty. Especially in Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas, pay attention to viewsheds, designs, and consider vegetative screening
- Increase maintenance overall, especially trail maintenance to prevent erosion and reduce social trails, and reduction of non-native, invasive species
- Decrease the number of signs. Make signs unobtrusive, attractive, and positive in their messaging
- Address social trails to reduce erosion and protect native plants
- Improve the beach/water access at Wonderland Lake. It is not currently clear where the trails are. People walk in areas they are not supposed to. People want better access and there are conflicts among types of users.
- Provide drinking water sources at popular trailheads (Wonderland Lake, Chautauqua, Boulder Valley Ranch)
- Increase bike trails (no single track in the north) and increase hiking trails (to reduce crowding)

## Access to Information at Trailheads

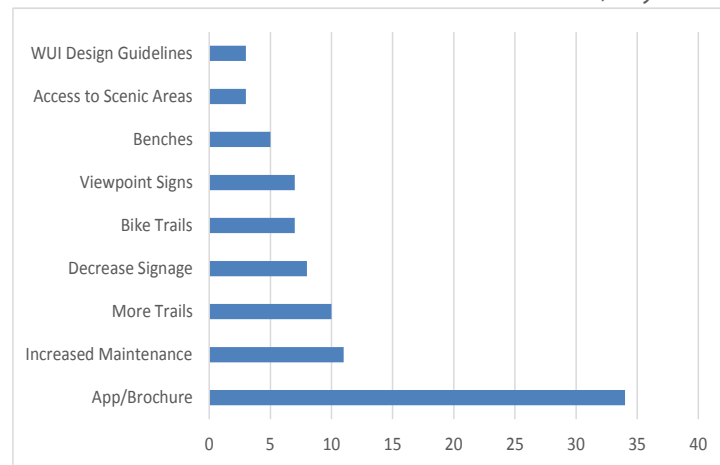
One of the most popular ideas (which received the top number of priority votes at 26-33 votes) was for a comprehensive map, similar to a ski resort map, that could be made available at trailheads. Junior Rangers were very enthusiastic about this idea. The Junior Rangers felt that it would be useful along the trail, as most people can't hold the static map image posted at the trailhead as they hike. The map would include the following types of information:

- Trail distances, connections and difficulty levels (using an easy to understand color coding system) and elevation
- Unique natural history features, and interpretive details at viewing points
- General safety information, including identification of poison ivy
- "Sleuthing" activities for younger hikers

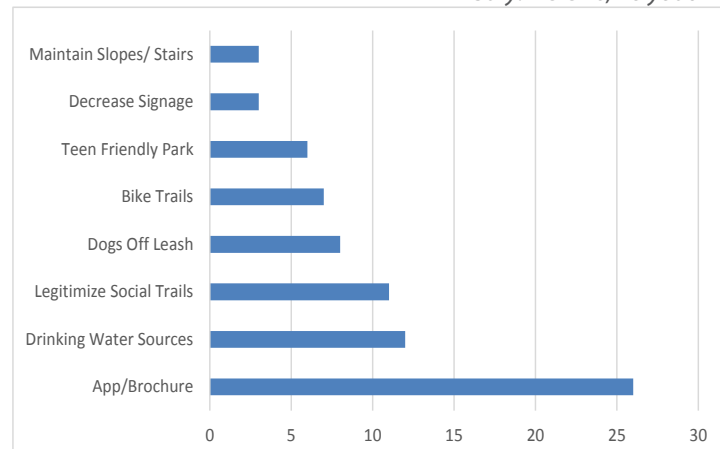
Junior Rangers were divided fairly evenly on whether the map should be in a paper form or a digital application. Some felt that people spend too much time with technology and nature should provide an escape from it. Some felt that it would be easy to download and would provide opportunities to access a wider range of information than a paper map. Some also thought the app could save paper and reduce costs.

*Which 3 Recommendations Do You Prioritize?*  
Number of Responses from In Depth and Follow Up Processes for Priority Recommendations

*June: 3 crews, 42 youth*



*July: 2 crews, 28 youth*



## Ideal Vision

Junior Rangers participated in a visioning exercise to share their ideal open space experience. Most did not choose part of the North TSA for this experience, but the process led to rich discussion about issues that are relevant for the study area and also raised some points of disagreement among Rangers.



Left illustration: Remote hiking experiences with wildlife, biking with friends, experiencing the seasons, picnicking with family, hammocking with friends, fishing at a lake, high mountain lakes, ziplining from peak to valley with a golden eagle. (Illustration by Deryn Wagner, Open Space and Mountain Parks).

Right Illustration: Laying in the grass in the shade, sunrise hike to the top of Flagstaff, hiking through lots of trees with an opening to a lake, hiking through a tunnel of trees, listening to music from Chautauqua with in a hammock with wildlife all around, cross country running to the Reservoir, great paths and hikes to great views, biking and hiking through the quiet. (Illustration by Simon Bialobroda, Bialobroda Architecture).

## Points of Tension: Off-Leash Dogs

Junior Rangers expressed a wide range of viewpoints about dogs and open space. This emerged in the photovoice activity and again in the visioning activity. The range of viewpoints included:

- There should be no dogs on open space land because they are too damaging to vegetation and wildlife
- There should be more enforcement of existing Voice and Sight policies, with “policing” of people who are not following the existing dog policies
- The existing Voice and Sight policies are “a joke” and need to be revised to be effective
- The existing Voice and Sight policies are effective and do not need to be changed
- There should be more flexible off-leash policies, with those demonstrating a dog who follows commands being allowed greater freedom and more access to off-leash open space than current policies allow
- There needs to be more education about the impacts of dogs on wildlife so that people understand why the policies are in place.

## Wonderland Lake Access

Both families and Junior Rangers said they would like to see the Wonderland Lake Access evaluated and redone. Families and children want access to the water. Junior Rangers thought the trails and fencing were not working for current users (based on signs of off-trail use, conflicting uses in a small trail and beach, and overuse of fencing). Most individuals expressed a desire for better access but also protection of sensitive shoreline.

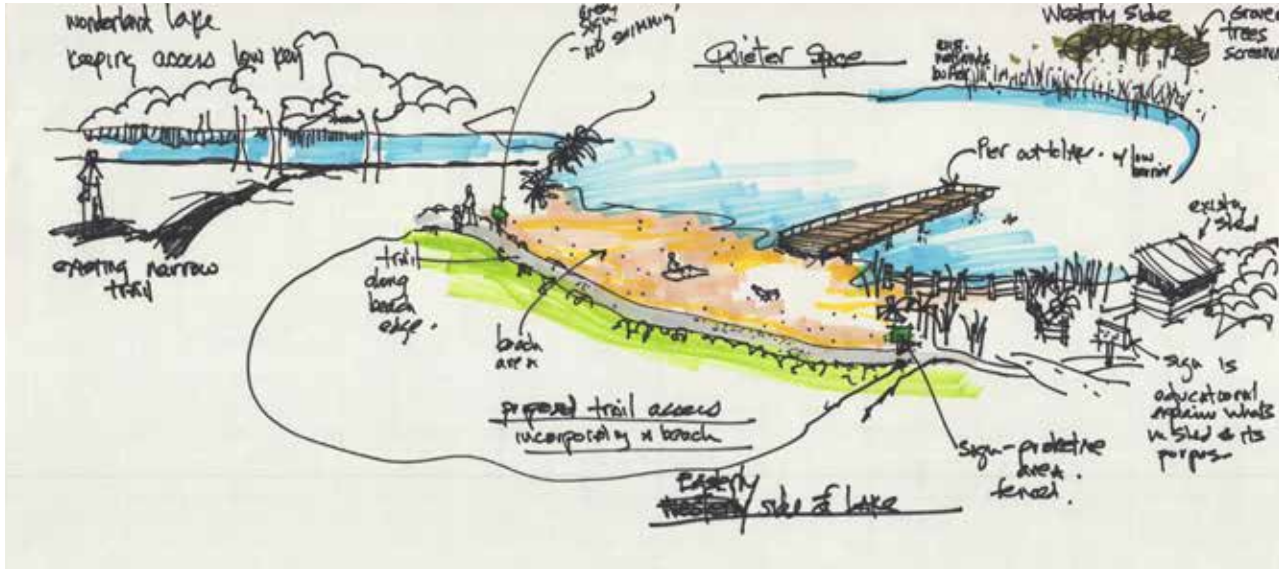


Illustration by Simon Bialobroda  
Bialobroda Architecture

In July, Junior Rangers worked with Simon Bialobroda to think about what a redesign of the beach access at Wonderland Lake would look like. While most Rangers agreed about pushing the trail away from the beach to create a more clear distinction of uses, there was less agreement about a pier, or an additional access point. Junior Rangers could not agree on who should be using or accessing the lake from these points. The issues identified were that people want access (such as the children at the Family Day), but that because of the way the trail runs through the site, there is often conflict between users, with runners and walkers coming through with dogs, while others are trying to sit and enjoy the view, and others want to explore. A clearer access and better delineated visitor experience would help address these concerns.

## Points of Tension: Recreational Experiences

As seen in the "Ideal Vision" exercise, Junior Rangers do not all have the same vision for what an ideal recreation experience would be, and many identified multiple types of experiences, from solitary and quiet to more active and social. At several points in time, Junior Rangers discussed conflicts that emerge from too many users. They experienced this on the trail at Wonderland Lake and photographed both bikers and runners who were not respectful in sharing the space. Some felt that more trails might help relieve some of the high use areas. Others wanted to be allowed greater freedom and more access to off-leash open space than current policies allow. They also talked about wanting some trails just for mountain biking because there are few single track areas that allow for a moderately challenging bike experience, especially in the North TSA. When Junior Rangers voted on their priorities, about 7% prioritized a separate bike trail.

Junior Rangers also discussed wanting to see more wildlife, as part of their recreational experiences. Tensions over the carrying capacity of trails emerged at the Family Day, with many ages saying they wished they could see more wildlife and some expressing concerns for the impacts of recreation on wildlife.

## Points of Tension: Response to Social Trails

Prevention of social trails was a major concern for nearly all of the Junior Ranger crews. They suggested that there should be increased management of original trails keeping them free of vegetation and overgrowth so that people do not create new social trails. Others suggested that if a social trail is widely used, OSMP should evaluate why people are using the trail. They thought that if it leads to a view point or some other feature that people want to go to, the city should consider incorporating the social trail into their system and maintaining it. They thought this would prevent further erosion and damage. This group thought that “maybe the city should listen to the people,” who are voting with their feet. Some further thought that it did not make sense for Junior Rangers and other OSMP staff to spend as much time as they do repairing damage from social trails. They suggested creating natural barriers to social trails, providing more education at trailheads about why they are damaging, and hiring professionals rather than Junior Rangers for some of the trails that have significant damage.



*“Maybe the city should listen to the people” who are voting with their feet when they create social trails.*  
- Junior Ranger

## Themes that Cross Sectors: Design Guidelines in the Wildland Urban Interface



*“It is important to keep the landscape around trails natural.”*  
- Junior Ranger

*“There is a need for responsible stewardship [and better design guidelines] in the WUI.”*

- Junior Ranger



The Wildland Urban Interface arose as an issue a few times with Junior Rangers, with some having quite strong concerns for how development was occurring and the aesthetic coherence between brightly colored homes and natural spaces. Many suggested that new trails should be placed farther from development and closer to scenic features, and that trails in neighborhoods should have trees planted as visual screens from roads and development to ameliorate both noise and visual pollution. Some Junior Rangers also felt that design guidelines should be developed so that homes adjacent to open space do not use bright colors and are more harmonious with nature. Some Junior Rangers offered a differing view saying, “I don’t go to Wonderland Lake to get away from it all. I go there to experience Boulder.”

## Themes that Cross Sectors: Transportation to and Parking at Trailheads



All groups - Boulder Journey School, Family Day visitors, and Junior Rangers - discussed the challenges of getting to Wonderland Lake via RTD bus. Both the BJS teacher and families from the east side of Broadway said that they found it hard to find the underpass, that there is no clear access point, and there is no crosswalk of any kind across Broadway. Both bus stops feel unsafe because they are too close to the road and there is not enough space for a class to wait. BJS students are frequent visitors to Wonderland Lake via the bus, and they struggle with access every time.

*"It's really hard to cross Broadway with a class of preschoolers."*

- Boulder Journey School teacher

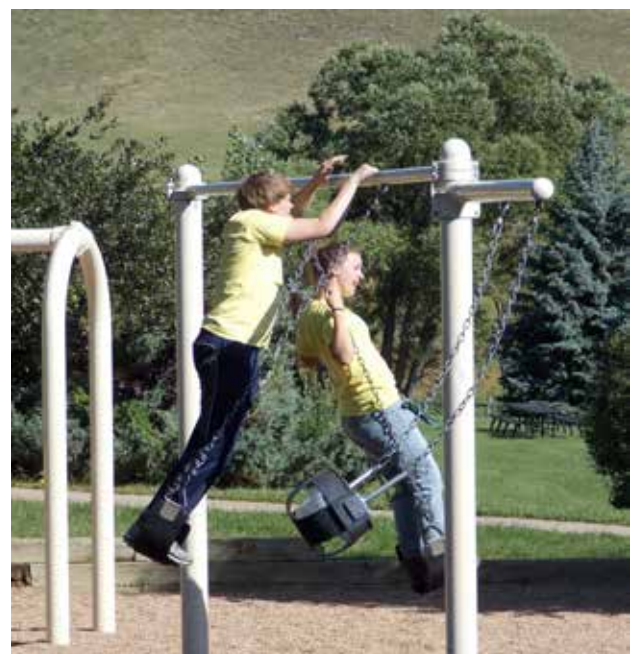
Additionally, Junior Rangers requested more ways to access trailheads. They cited numerous trailheads where there is insufficient parking and yet very few Junior Rangers knew how to access most trails via bus. They want to see more regular, visible bus routes to trailheads to promote alternative transportation. They also said there were not enough bike racks at trailheads for safe storage.

## Themes that Cross Sectors: Parks for Teens

The playground near Wonderland Lake (managed by City of Boulder Parks and Recreation) became a point of discussion for one of the crews during the photovoice activity. They played on the equipment designated for ages 2-5 and spoke about how there are no playgrounds designed for them. "Foothills is better, but there aren't really parks for teens." Many Junior Rangers in this crew felt that they were not welcome in city parks, that mothers do not accept them in existing playgrounds, and that they would love a place to play and hangout. The follow up crew also liked this idea and showed interest not only in using such a park but also in helping design it.

*"We want parks for teens, too. . . I am so tired of moms yelling at me."*

- Junior Ranger



## Reflections on the Process

We asked Junior Rangers to reflect on what they liked or would change about the process they participated in. In general, Junior Rangers liked the photovoice process, having their visions drawn out by graphic illustrators, and the opportunity to be heard. In the Junior Ranger newsletter, Crew 2 (pictured below) wrote:

*"We felt honored that they came to us and gave us a chance to participate in the decision making process at such a young age. It was nice to have a day to think and reflect on our times in OSMP, and have fun with the crew, while you knew you were contributing to something real.*

*We learned how much time, detail, and effort goes into the planning process and took an active role discussing our recommendations for the North TSA...*

*Tori and Deryn were incredibly responsive to our new ideas and we felt like our voices were being heard. We could teach them about new things that they hadn't considered before, like hammocking. . ."*

Like most GUB outreach, this process identified partners who held interest in the planning topic, fostered multiple modes of creative expression, and provided a structure for engagement that met partner needs, timelines and interests. Over many years, GUB has found these to be critical components of its outreach with children and youth. In reflecting on our own process, we wish we could have provided more time with Junior Rangers to educate crew members about special features, issues and ecological concerns specific to the North TSA. Crew members expressed concern for conservation and preservation of open space, but there was not always enough time for in-depth dialogue or to build expertise and refine recommendations based on deepened knowledge.

Similarly, at the Family Day, we wish we would have placed the interpretation tables and the mapping and drawing activities together, so that educational activities could support visions and recommendations more directly. This is an important part of GUB's process: recognizing the expertise in all our residents, helping to deepen their knowledge, and then providing opportunities to make and discuss recommendations.

Finally, GUB typically partners with schools or youth-serving organizations to bring perspectives from some of Boulder's least heard children and youth, such as from lower income or Latino families. Because of the timing of engagement in this process, we did not have the means to accomplish this. Future engagement might find ways to partner with existing OSMP work that targets this population as well.



Photograph by Tori Derr



## As Strong as our Partners



*"[We like] Halice because she is such great leadership for OSMP."*

- Junior Ranger

This work would not be possible without the many partners that comprise Growing Up Boulder. For this engagement project, Deryn Wagner and Halice Rupp from Open Space and Mountain Parks provided essential leadership. From Boulder Journey School, Vicki Oleson, Erin Smarr, and Mary Strauss facilitated not only a year of thoughtful engagement about how and why nature is important to young children, but also brought a team of families to the Family Day workshop via the Boulder Family Nature Club. Junior Rangers Desmond Manthy and Graham Stevenson; OSMP staff Lynne Sullivan and Jayne Basford; and Open Space Board of Trustees Member Frances Hartogh all helped make the Family Day a success. Simon Bialobroda provided his artistic talent for the July Junior Ranger workshop. In the GUB house, Erica Fine and Corey Lunden provided support at the front and tail ends of the project, respectively. Finally, we appreciate the leadership of Tracy Winfree, which will allow GUB to continue to partner with OSMP to bring young people's voices to open space planning.

- Tori Derr

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Photograph by Tori Derr