

Preserve the Greenbelt Environmental Education Project Description

About IES

IES is a small Denver-based non-profit organization that engages stakeholders to deliver technically sound solutions to complex environmental and health problems – without unwanted side effects. IES was founded in 2004 to apply an innovative approach to environmental problem solving that emphasizes asking difficult questions, reaching out to all potentially affected stakeholders to invite involvement in project design and oversight, and commitment to sound science.

The IES Tree Project works to improve the environment of Colorado’s urban areas through proper tree selection, management and outreach. Through strategic environmental education and improvement, we affect positive change in community health and local economies while engaging and inspiring the communities we work in. Through this engagement and education, we create lasting impressions on the individuals we work with.

About the Greenbelt

The Wheat Ridge Greenbelt is a jewel in our urban landscape and provides many outdoor recreational opportunities. The Greenbelt is an important piece of a healthy and active Wheat Ridge. The 20-mile Clear Creek Trail runs through the Greenbelt and is used by joggers, hikers, walker, picnickers, and cyclists from Wheat Ridge and many surrounding communities. The Greenbelt is also a popular spot for bird watching and kayaking. It is part of the City of Wheat Ridge Parks and Recreation system, and is owned and maintained by the City.

The Wheat Ridge Greenbelt faces multiple environmental challenges. Tree loss from the 2009 hailstorm and low tree survival rates in previous restoration efforts threaten the riparian health of the Greenbelt. Soil erosion results from fewer trees, which decreases streamside habitat including that for the threatened Ute ladies’-tresses orchid, a rare earthstar fungus subspecies, and important communities of plains cottonwood. In addition, soil erosion can affect water quality downstream. The Greenbelt is also experiencing threats from residential encroachment, historic grazing, haying, mining, amendments to creek banks, and adverse weather events. Channelizing and ineffective mitigation efforts to the creek banks in many areas have altered the natural hydrology of the creek system.

About Preserve the Greenbelt

In collaboration with the City of Wheat Ridge, IES is working with two schools located near the Greenbelt in Wheat Ridge to help protect this important natural resource. IES received a grant from Xcel Energy in 2013 to implement the Preserve the Greenbelt Elementary Education Project with the City of Wheat Ridge, Kullerstrand Elementary, and Mountain Phoenix Community School. IES is designing a unique education curriculum to engage the young users of the Greenbelt in a tactile way. We will engage the students with the natural world immediately surrounding them. This method of teaching instills growth in awareness,

knowledge, attitude, and skills and fosters participation with their community and its valuable resources.

The Wheat Ridge Preserve the Greenbelt Elementary Education Program will build on IES's Revive the Greenbelt! Project (2012-2013) to protect, preserve, and improve priceless natural resources by educating and engaging students and their families. In early 2013, IES implemented a new sustainable volunteer tree stewardship program to care for new trees and shrubs. This stewardship program will expand in 2014, and build further on the school program. The new program will go beyond classroom instruction by taking students out into the Greenbelt for hands-on experience with planting and maintain trees in the Greenbelt. With this project, we will help to restore two areas of the Greenbelt while teaching elementary students and their families about the importance of the Greenbelt and how to properly care for this important resource.

Goal of the Preserve the Greenbelt Elementary Education Project

The goal of the Wheat Ridge Preserve the Greenbelt Elementary Education Program is to develop a sustainable volunteer program that will maintain newly planted trees in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, increase the rate of tree survival, and engage students and their families in protecting the environmental and community benefits of the Greenbelt.

Objectives

- Restore and revitalize two areas along the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
- Improve air and water quality of the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
- Develop an education plan which will engage local elementary school students in their local community and environment
- Teach elementary students how to properly plant and maintain trees
- Plan and host a planting event with community schools
- Educate students on the benefits of the Greenbelt and Urban Forestry
- Conduct an environmental analysis of the planting site
- Design a strategic landscape plan
- Implement the Tree Stewards program in new areas along the Greenbelt
- Document the project to ensure that it is able to be replicated

Michael Haney, Research Associate, mhaney@I4ES.org

Carol Lyons, Executive Director, carol@i4es.org

IES