Cassie Kaslon
Managing Principal
Valerian

Stacey Stickler
Associate Principal
Valerian
Presentation Outline

A. Why Nature Play Design Guidelines?
B. Nature Play Design Guidelines Overview
C. Case Studies
D. Conclusion & Questions
FIRST CREEK PARK

Globeville Landing Park

39th Ave Greenway

ST. CHARLES PARK

CITY PARK

WESTWOOD PARK

JOHNSON HABITAT PARK

GRANT FRONTIER PARK

PASQUINEL’S LANDING

CHERRY CREEK VALLEY ECOLOGICAL PARK
NATURE PLAY
IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT
DESIGN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

PREPARED FOR:
What’s in the Guidelines

- Nature Play Benefits
- Site Selection
- Public Engagement
- Inclusion in Nature Play
- Design Development
- Construction Document Guidelines
- Project Construction Period
- Post Occupancy
- Case Studies

- Over 70 pages of riveting information!
Why Nature Play Matters

Recent findings from GOCO indicate that 80% of Denver Public School students have never been to the Rocky Mountains.

Denver Office of Children’s Affairs estimates that 54% of Denver’s children live in families at or below poverty level.

Benefits include:
- Environmental Stewardship
- Socio Economic
- Developmental/Health
- Economic
Nature Play Benefits

Environmental Stewardship

• Early exposure to nature by children is one of the most powerful experiences to influence their desire to work, play and protect natural areas as adults

• Natural play areas adjacent to waterways, rivers or creeks provide an amenity that engages with a natural water source that can stimulate creative and environmental awareness
Nature Play Benefits

Socio-Economic

- Equity measures include equal access to high quality, well designed, nature rich parks within walking distance of the communities they serve.

- Underserved communities have much to gain from contact with nature and tend to receive lower quality, less nature rich greenspace and lack access to transportation to Denver Mountain Parks, National or State parks.
Nature Play Benefits

Developmental/Health

• Research has shown that spending time outdoors in natural areas can improve children’s social skills, attention spans and academic performance, and reduce bullying.

• Nature play includes gross motor, fine motor, proprioceptive and vestibular movement along with sensory rich dramatic, creative and cognitive engagement.

• Studies indicate that direct contact with soil improves the health and diversity of gut flora, which is linked mental health and autoimmune disorders.
Nature Play Benefits

Economic

• Trees and boulders that are primary materials can be accessed from within Forestry or internal city resources such as road or Urban Drainage projects.

• Funding can be shared by multiple entities through partnerships with organizations that typically connect children and communities to nature.
What Makes a Good Site

- Proximity to waterways/floodplains
- Existing mature vegetation
  - Shade trees – preserved and utilized
  - If removed, vegetation can be repurposed into seating and climbing features
- Weed management strategies
What Makes a Good Site

• Existing landforms – hills and slopes should be preserved or developed
  • Embankment slides, caves, or climbing areas
• Accessible to multi-modal systems
• Proximity to regional trails
Public Engagement
NATURE PLAY PUBLIC MEETING PROCESS

DETERMINE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS WITH PROJECT MANAGER AND THE PLANNING DIRECTOR

DEVELOP SCOPE INCLUDING ACTIVITIES, ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRODUCTS

PRESENT DATA

DETERMINE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS WITH PROJECT MANAGER AND THE PLANNING DIRECTOR

NATURE PLAY: REQUIRES ADDITIONAL EDUCATION OUTREACH AND COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO ACT AS PROJECT ADVOCATES

DEVELOP SCOPE INCLUDING ACTIVITIES, ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRODUCTS

SCHEDULE DATE AND LOCATION (ON SITE IF POSSIBLE)

ACTIVE ENGAGE AND NOTIFY STAKEHOLDERS USE KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO INCREASE INVOLVEMENT

DECISION REACHED
Community Involvement

Conduct the meeting outdoors at the site
Create interest nodes for individuals to express their thoughts freely
Community Involvement

Gather community input through creative measures. Include hands on and collaborative activities: asset mapping, community commitment boards, sandbox charettes.
Youth Leadership

Establish a group of youth that will serve as the voice of the community
Hidden Elements of Play
Enhance the Existing

View the site from the eyes of the future user... children

Connect the element of fun into the existing site features

- Landforms
- Vegetation
- Waterways
Use The Trail System
Use Landforms
Use Vegetation
Don’t Forget the Shade
Include All 5 Senses
Repurposing Material
Floodplain Interface
Connecting with Water

- Do you want to encourage contact with water?
Connecting with Water

- Do you want to encourage contact with water?
- Is it clean?
Connecting with Water

- Do you want to encourage contact with water?
  - Is it clean?
  - Is it stable?
Connecting with Water

- Do you want to encourage contact with water?
  - Is it clean?
  - Is it stable?
  - Do you really want to do this?
What You Won’t See in a Floodplain

- Large Play Structures
- Play Features That Require Fall Zones and Safety Surfacing
What You Won’t See in a Floodplain

- Large Play Structures
- Play Features That Require Fall Zones and Safety Surfacing
But You May See This!

• Water
• Boulders
• Logs
• Plants
• Animals
• Dirt!
Connecting with Water
Connecting with Water
Resilience and Maintenance
Making it Last

- Work with maintenance staff to develop a maintenance plan
- Develop a planting plan to withstand heavy use appropriate to the site
- Follow through after construction and make necessary changes
- Educate users on how to use the space
Change Will Happen

Human Caused

Nature Caused
How to Deal With Change?

1. Know and expect change to happen

2. Identify what changes you can be okay with

3. Let change happen – the users will know, better than we will, how to use nature for play
What Can and Can’t Change

Things that CAN’T change
- Safety
- Volume of the floodplain
- Locations of structures that cross waterways

Things that CAN change
- Vegetation (within reason)
- Alignments of secondary/tertiary trails
- Locations and appearance of nature play areas
Educate Others

- Engage the community in the discussion of the area

- Use signage to educate users on how the area may change over time – and that’s OK
More than A Fad
First Creek Park

Project Size: 6 acres
Year Completed: Summer 2019
Location: Denver, Green Valley Ranch
Budget: $1.3 Million
First Creek Park

Ownership:

DENVER PARKS & RECREATION

MHFD
MILE HIGH FLOOD DISTRICT

Construction Team:

NARANJO CIVIL CONSTRUCTORS

Nature’s INSTRUMENTS

Design Team:

VALERIAN
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | PLANNING | IRRIGATION

JACOBS

GREAT ecology
ENVIRONMENT + DESIGN

bienenstock
natural playgrounds

5 SMOOTH STONES
RESTORATION PLLC

CORVUS
Environmental Consulting LLC

Habitat Management
Environmental & Natural Resource Services
First Creek Park: Existing Conditions
First Creek Park: Community Engagement
First Creek Park: Master Plan

- Preserve existing trees
- Provide access to the creek
- Activities for wide range of ages
- Flowers!
First Creek Park
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First Creek Park
First Creek Park
First Creek Park

Welcome to First Creek Exploration Play Zone

First Creek is a natural stream, water levels change with weather and season.
First Creek Park
First Creek Park
First Creek Park
First Creek Park
First Creek Park
First Creek Park
Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park

- Project Size: 75 acres
- Year Completed: Fall 2013
- Location: Arapahoe County, Colorado
- Budget: $3.6 Million

Creekside Quest Children’s Garden

- Project Size: 1 acre
- Year Completed: Spring 2015
- Budget: $100,000
Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park

Ownership:

ARAPAHOE COUNTY OPEN SPACES

Design Team:

VALERIAN
MULLER ENGINEERING COMPANY
ERQ

Partners:

MHFD MILE HIGH FLOOD DISTRICT

Southeast Metro Stormwater Authority
Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority
Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners

Construction Team:

eci SITE CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT
NARANJO CIVIL CONSTRUCTORS
Western States Reclamation, Inc.
Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park
Existing Conditions
Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park
Existing Conditions
Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park
Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park
Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park
Creekside Quest Children’s Garden
Creekside Quest Children’s Garden
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Creekside Quest Children’s Garden
Creekside Quest Children’s Garden

SLEEPING
BUFFALO HERD
Come visit us at our Expo Booth!

Please visit the following for additional resources:

www.valerianllc.com
https://udfcd.org/
https://www.denvergov.org
www.thegreenwayfoundation.org
www.goco.org
www.naturalplaygrounds.ca