

Open Space and Natural Area Maintenance

Woodmen Hills Metropolitan District Parks, Open Space, and Natural Area maintenance divisions take great pride in maintaining both our irrigated and non-irrigated lands. Safety, aesthetics, and adherence to the Metropolitan Districts park maintenance standards are our top priority.

To maintain the health and aesthetics of the Metro Districts natural areas and trail corridors, the Parks and Recreation Department has adopted a sustainable landscape approach for open space and natural areas within the Metropolitan District, including its frisbee golf course, parks, waterways, and detention basins. This practice is similar to guidelines other municipalities and special districts have enacted. These guidelines are recognized as best practices in open space and natural area maintenance. Sustainable native landscaping considers environmental best practices, wildfire risk reduction, and resource efficiency.

Mowing Frequency and Schedule

Large Open Space and Natural Areas

- Only some of the Metropolitan Districts large open space and natural areas are mowed.
- Size, access, and feasibility determine if these areas are mowed, and how often.
- Large open spaces and natural areas that can be mowed are mowed approximately once annually.

Greenway Areas

- Greenway areas are frequently located between trails and private properties or between parks and other greenspace areas.
- Greenway areas are mowed once a year, in the late fall or early winter, around the first frost of the season.
- Mowing greenway areas around the first frost of the year helps native plants in those areas to seed.

Trails and Fence Lines

- Open Space areas bordered directly by private properties and along trails are mowed more frequently, between three to five times a year.
- The first mowing along trails and fence lines occurs in the late spring or early summer after the first big flush of growth when temperatures are consistent enough to support regular plant growth.
- Areas along fence lines or trails are mowed to approximately 5 to 8 inches in height and a minimum of 6 feet wide.
- The area that is mowed along fence lines is called a Courtesy Cut.
- The area that is mowed next to trails is called a Trail Cut.

Irrigated Landscapes

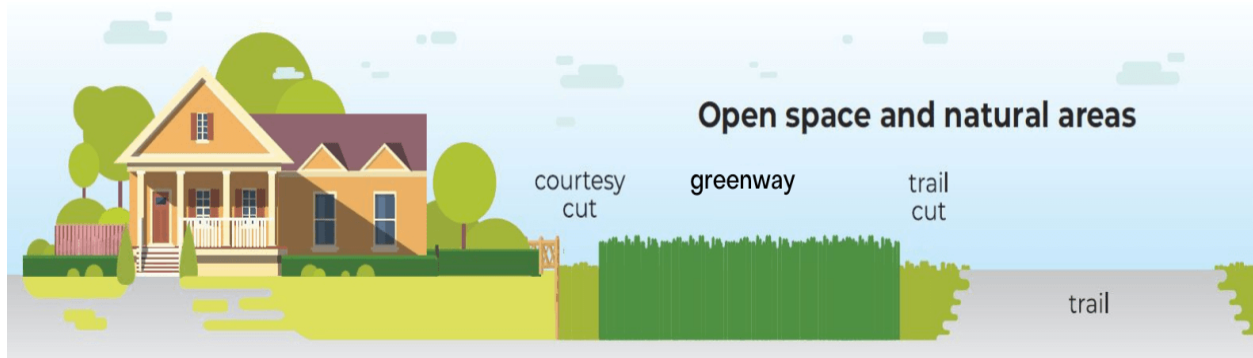
- Irrigated landscapes will be mowed and trimmed weekly between late spring and late fall, no later than the first frost. Typical cut height is between 3-5 inches.
- Examples include Meridian Ranch Boulevard, Monuments, Parks, and Recreation Centers.

Frisbee Golf Course

- The frisbee golf course located within Horseshoe Park implements the same sustainable native landscape approach.
- Native areas along fence and property lines will be mowed three to five times a year to a height of approximately 5 to 8 inches.
- The starting pad areas, the perimeter around the holes (cages), and the fairways will be mowed on a bi-weekly schedule beginning Memorial Day weekend and ending in the late fall, early winter, around the first frost of the season.
- All other native areas are mowed once a year, in the late fall or early winter, around the first frost of the season.

Waterways and Detention Basins

- Any vegetation in the waterways will be cleared once annually, this will typically need to be done with the use of a trimmer. Any debris will be cleared from the water way.
- The sides and drainage slope will not be mowed if it doesn't interfere with the water flow. This allows natural filtration for the waterways.
- Within 3 feet of the slope will not be mowed, this allows filtration for the waterway.
- Detention basin bottoms will be mowed once annually in the late fall or early winter, around the first frost.
- Detention basin inflows and outflows will be maintained throughout the year. This includes inspection and documentation within 48 hours of a major moisture event.



Sustainable Native Landscaping Benefits

- Native grasses can regenerate naturally by propagating their own seed.
- Native grasses support wildlife by providing food and cover.
- Many urban wildlife species, like coyotes or raccoons, are less likely to be pushed into neighborhoods as non-mowed native grasslands provide preferential food and shelter. This may reduce occurrences of human, pet, and wildlife conflicts.
- Native grasses help promote the return of other native plants and animals, including threatened and endangered species. This supports a balanced ecosystem by increasing biodiversity.
- Pollinators, such as native bumble bees, benefit from these policies which provide habitat and places for them to rest and have a meal. Colorado has 946 native bee species, some of which rely on undisturbed grasslands to nest.
- Healthy native grasslands filter pollutants from stormwater run-off.
- Local air quality is improved through reduced fuel emissions from mowers.
- When allowed to grow to a natural height, native grasses reduce non-native weed growth.
- There are reduced chemical impacts on our environment due to the elimination of fertilizer use and fewer weeds.
- Healthy, tall, non-dormant native grasses act as a "water reservoir" and provide a level of defense against stronger-intensity wildfire. A sustainable landscaping approach to open space maintenance does not increase fire risk.

Negative Impacts of Frequent and untimely mowing

- Mowing too frequently can result in high levels of insect mortality, including many native bee and pollinator species that local gardeners and agricultural groups rely on.
- Frequent mowing can disperse local wildlife into neighboring residential areas as they seek food and shelter.
- Untimely mowing can reduce native seed dispersal, which increases the likelihood of noxious and invasive weeds out-competing native plant species.

Myth or Facts

Myth: Tall grasses in drainage areas prevent water from flowing downstream.

Fact: These grasses do slow down water movement and that is a good thing. Slowing the movement of water reduces erosion and, thereby, sedimentation of streams, ponds, and rivers. Slowing the runoff allows the moisture to seep into the ground for the benefit of the vegetation and helps to recharge groundwater. This process also allows potential pollutants to be filtered out before the storm water reaches the stream, creek, river, or pond.

Myth: Tall grasses are a fire hazard. They need to be mowed to prevent a fire.

Fact: While these grasses, when dry, could be subject to wildland fire, mowing them does not remove the fuel load. Instead of being tall, they are concentrated on the ground which may result in a hotter fire. Fire Professionals, have stated, “Mowing the grasses alone won’t make a significant risk reduction, in that the fuel would still be there. It’s recommended that homeowners ensure that they maintain a “defensible space” between the fuel load in the field and their homes. This will most likely already be there if they have a bluegrass lawn or zero scape in that area.” If you are concerned about the potential for damage to your property, your best defense is to maintain your lawn. If there are trees or shrubs adjacent to the natural area and close to structures, you might consider removing them. It should also be noted that tall, non-dormant native grasses act as a “water reservoir” and provide a level of defense against a stronger-intensity wildfire.