

LARIMER COUNTY OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD

The mission of Larimer County Department of Natural Resources is to establish, protect and manage significant regional parks and open lands providing quality outdoor recreational opportunities and stewardship of natural resource values. We are committed to fostering a sense of community and appreciation for the natural and agricultural heritage of Larimer County for present and future generations.

MINUTES

Date: April 22, 2021

Time: 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Location: Zoom Webinar

Contact: Please contact Sidney at smichl@larimer.org or 970-619-4462 if you are unable to attend

Members		Staff		Guests
Bob Hewson		Daylan Figgs	x	3 members of the public
David Marvin	x	Meegan Flenniken	x	
Gale Bernhardt	x	Zac Wiebe	x	
Jason Brothers		Charlie Johnson	x	
K-Lynn Cameron		Justin Core	x	
Linda Stanley	x	Steve Gibson	x	
Mark DeGregorio	x	Jenn Almstead	x	
Nancy Wallace	x	*Jody Shadduck-McNally	x	
Peter Kelly	x	Sidney Michl (minutes)	x	
Rick Brent				
Sherri Valentine	x			
Tom Shoemaker	x			

x = present

*commissioner

1. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS – 5:00 p.m.
 - a. Round of introductions for members of the public.
 - b. Commissioner Shadduck-McNally gave a brief update on American Rescue Plan dollars, high level review of boards and commissions, and NoCoPLACES 2050 partnership meetings.
2. PUBLIC COMMENT – none
3. AGENDA REVIEW
 - a. Added discussion for 2021 Quarter 1 Board Report.

4. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF LAST MEETING MINUTES

- a. Linda moved to approve the minutes from last meeting, Tom seconded, motion passed unanimously.

5. INFORMATION & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a. Natural Resources events for this month: larimer.org/naturalresources.
- b. To sign up for Open Lands Advisory Board updates, go to apps.larimer.org/subscriptions.cfm, enter your email, click "Subscribe," and check the "Open Lands Advisory Board" box.
- c. LCDNR hosted a variety of volunteer/education events associated with Earth Day/Earth Week including litter pick ups, trail maintenance, and others.
- d. Hired new Land Stewardship Technician position to conduct weed compliance efforts county-wide as well as provide oversight to vegetation management associated with grazing plans.

6. UPDATES & REPORTS

- a. 2021 Quarter 1 Board Report
 - i. Dave asked about the 17% decrease in revenue from Open Spaces annual permits in 2021. Lori commented the first quarter of 2020 saw a spike in sales due to COVID while this year may be more evened out to normal sales.
 - ii. Tom congratulated the department on leveraging \$16.1M in grant funding.
 - iii. Linda gave kudos to the trail realignments/wayfinding signs project at RMOS.

7. DISCUSSION ITEMS

- a. DBBOS Visitor Study – Jenn
 - i. The purpose of the Devil’s Backbone Visitor Use Study was to better understand visitation and determine feelings of crowdedness. The study also coincided with a 6-month e-bike study period. This research partnership with CSU allowed for a statistically valid study designed by unbiased, third party social science experts. 563 surveys were collected at the South and North (Blue Sky) trailheads.
 - ii. Study findings:
 1. The typical visitor was 44 years-old, self-identified as white (92%), visited in groups of 2 or more, and cited exercise as top reason for visiting (58%). Frequency of visits during COVID did not change based on gender, age, residency, or survey location. The Wild Loop Trail (50%), Keyhole Trail (41%), and Blue Sky Trail (31%) had highest reported use.
 - a. South Trailhead:
 - i. 51% male, 49% female
 - ii. 58% residents, 42% non-residents
 - iii. 60% hikers, 17% mountain bikers
 - b. North (Blue Sky) Trailhead:
 - i. 76% male, 24% female
 - ii. 82% residents, 18% non-residents
 - iii. 10% hikers, 77% mountain bikers

2. 50% of visitors expressed opposition to e-bikes on natural surface trails. Visitors in support (27%) cited greater accessibility for those needing assistance.
3. 99% of visitors rated their overall experience as “good” or “excellent.”
4. Carrying capacity results suggest some crowding, particularly during peak times. Ways to reduce crowding include the suggested one-way loop on the Wild Loop Trail to minimize crowds/prevent trail widening, additional signage on blind corners of the Blue Sky Trail, and trailhead education tables.
 - a. South Trailhead:
 - i. 50% of visitors felt crowded by other hikers
 - ii. 66% felt crowded, particularly on weekends
 - b. North (Blue Sky) Trailhead:
 - i. 37% of visitors felt crowded by other mountain bikers
- iii. Tom asked about the difference in the interpersonal conflict (witnessed) vs. social values conflict (perceived) ratings. The literature suggests a standard that no more than 25% of visitors should feel interpersonal conflict. Less than 18% of hikers and mountain bikers indicated having interpersonal conflicts with other hikers and mountain bikers, meeting this standard. However, mountain bikers at the Blue Sky Trailhead expressed more *perceived* problems with users, particularly with other mountain bikers riding unsafely (52%) and being discourteous (48%), resulting in greater social values conflict.
- iv. Gale asked if COVID may have affected results, particularly regarding conflict, and how the data will guide future management decisions. It was noted this is the first visitor study conducted at Devil’s Backbone Open Space so data cannot determine if 2020 was different, but it will serve as a baseline moving forward. Short-term solutions include suggested one-way trail loops, trailhead tables, direct messaging, encouraging the use of COTREX and “know before you go,” etc. Long-term planning and survey feedback will be considered in management plan updates.
- v. Linda mentioned the need to revisit user fees to manage crowding and management costs. Dave and Mark commented 42% of South Trailhead visitors were non-residents who do not pay the Help Preserve Open Space (HPOS) sales tax.
- vi. Sherri said she has never witnessed a biker yield to a hiker which might influence perceived conflict in high-use areas. She asked if lack of restrooms between the two trailheads might also influence gender discrepancies. Jenn said the majority of mountain bikers at Blue Sky were male, but she also observed many female trail runners.
- vii. Pete commented that the nature of the survey questions prompts visitors to respond from a point of conflict. Jenn clarified the survey asks a series of 3-4 questions about what users observed during their visit and if they perceived it

to be an issue on that particular day. Daylan noted surveys are a helpful way to understand visitor feelings at a given point in time.

- viii. Tom commented on the significance of the overwhelmingly positive satisfaction ratings.
- b. 2020/2021 Annual Department Financial Review – Lori
 - i. Daylan explained this budget presentation is the first of a series that will be provided over the next few months.
 - ii. 2020 department revenue was \$20,542,00 (2019 department revenue was \$17,898,000)
 - 1. Sales tax: 44%
 - 2. Permits and camping: 29%
 - 3. Intergovernmental (GOCO, Bureau, Lottery, and weed grants): 16%
 - 4. Charges for services (concessions, tickets, weed services, rentals and resale): 4%
 - 5. Property tax and specific ownership: 4%
 - 6. General Fund: 2%
 - 7. Interest and misc. revenue: 1%
 - iii. BOR-managed Reservoir Park Properties
 - 1. Overview of 2011-2020 revenue and expenses
 - 2. Capital improvement project (CIP) sources for 2011-2020 totaled \$10,547,000
 - a. Help Preserve Open Space Sales Tax: 30%
 - b. Park fee revenues: 26%
 - c. Conservation Trust (Lottery): 25%
 - d. Bureau of Reclamation: 11%
 - e. Other sources: 6%
 - f. Great Outdoors Colorado grant: 2%
 - 3. CIP projects for 2021-2025 (budget submittal \$16M)
 - a. Parking and access improvements
 - b. Sky View Campground
 - c. Horsetooth Camper Cabin Replacements
 - iv. Open Space Properties
 - 1. Overview of 2011-2020 revenue and expenses
 - 2. Extension of Help Preserve Open Space Sales Tax 2019-2043 projected at \$370M
 - a. Improvement, management, maintenance, and administration of open spaces, natural areas, wildlife habitats, parks and trails: 50%-65%
 - i. Management and maintenance of open spaces: 49%
 - ii. Improvement of open spaces: 13%
 - iii. Improvement of reservoir parks: 3%
 - b. Acquiring interest and protecting open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, parks and trails, and restoring and enhancing

native plant and animal communities and other habitat related restoration: 35%

- v. Land Stewardship
 - 1. Overview of 2011-2020 revenue and expenses
 - vi. Future growth and level of service per capita
 - 1. Larimer County population
 - a. 2020: 345,000 people
 - b. 2043: 495,000 people (150,000 projected)
 - 2. Acres conserved
 - a. 2020: 53,000 acres
 - b. 2043: 77,000 acres (24,000 added)
 - 3. Miles of trails
 - a. 2020: 98 miles
 - b. 2043: 142 miles (44 added)
 - 4. Trailhead parking spaces
 - a. 2020: 665 parking spaces
 - b. 2043: 965 parking spaces (300 added)
 - vii. Dave clarified that the ballot language outlines 35% of HPOS sales tax to be allotted to acquiring interest/protecting open space, 50% to maintenance, and 15% to flex. Sherri asked if it's possible for the 15% to be utilized for acquisition instead of maintenance. Lori affirmed the 25-year projections are subject to change over time but those splits are the ultimate outcome by the end of the tax. Daylan noted the challenges of conservation vs. recreation balance.
 - viii. Mark asked how Chimney Hollow Open Space and other capital improvement projects might affect budget/timelines in the next 5 years. Daylan said Chimney Hollow was included in the 25-year projections and the model will be adjusted annually for new projects. Meegan added the CIP includes several capital renewal projects, habitat improvement projects, Poudre River Trail construction, and funding for HTMOS management plan updates. DNR continues to look for opportunities to leverage funds. Dave asked if the projections assume the department will receive grant funding, Lori affirmed.
 - ix. Tom asked if the 2043 stats changed from last year's presentation, Lori said they are based on an economic study from 2018.
- c. Financial Sustainability – Daylan
- i. Daylan explained the gap between operating expenses (~\$15M in 2020) and revenues (~\$20.5M in 2020) funds both the CIP and land acquisitions. It requires trade-offs between management of current parks and open spaces and our capacity to grow. Fees are a critical component to delivering quality service while meeting demands of population growth and long-term maintenance.
 - ii. Keeping open space accessible is dependent on a revenue sharing agreement outlined by the HPOS sales tax.
 - 1. What we do today:
 - a. Bison pass low-income permit

- b. Small Grants for Community Partnering
 - c. Busing subsidy for title I schools
 - d. Sales tax share and trail connections with cities
2. New opportunities this year:
- a. Public engagement web forum and translation of key collaterals
 - b. “Space for Everyone” library loan program
- iii. Sherri gave kudos to the library program, Daylan said DNR’s Public Information Supervisor Korrie Johnston took the idea from State Parks. Commissioner Shadduck-McNally said she is looking for additional resources to support the program.
- iv. Dave commented it would be useful to know how municipalities spend their share of the sales tax. Daylan mentioned this is typically discussed at the regional boards meeting but it was delayed this year due to COVID.

8. ACTION ITEMS

- a. Arrowhead/Hilde Trail and Trailhead Easement Final Review
 - i. In exchange for vacating the 2001 trail easement and trailhead, the proposed trail easement and trailhead provide an improved access alignment to Red-tail Ridge Open Space. The proposal also grants a southern trail easement segment that would connect to the Boulder County line and Rabbit Mountain Open Space.
 - ii. Gale moved to recommend to the BOCC the approval of the alternative trail easement and trailhead in exchange for vacating the pre-existing 2001 trail easement and trailhead, Dave seconded, motion passed unanimously.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

- a. Charlie updated the Yeager property in Cedar Cove successfully closed last week.

10. NEXT MEETING SCHEDULED: May 27, 2021 via Zoom Webinar

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION: Pursuant to C.R.S. (24-6-402(4)(a)) for discussion pertaining to the purchase, acquisition, lease, transfer or sale of any real, personal or other property interest.

12. ADJOURN – 7:22 p.m.