

# LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

## MINUTES

Tuesday, March 12, 2013, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.,

Larimer County Courthouse Office Building, Boyd Lake Room, 200 W. Oak St., Ft. Collins, CO

*The mission of the Larimer County Parks and Open Lands Department 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.*

### **PRESENT:**

#### ***Parks Advisory Board members:***

Steve Ambrose

Frank Cada

Russ Fruits

Frank Gillespie

Rob Harris

David Hattis

Ron Kainer

Linda Knowlton

Forrest Orswell

John Tipton

#### ***Absent:***

Mark DeGregorio

#### ***Staff:***

Shannon Barnes

Gary Buffington

Mark Caughlan

Chris Fleming

Steve Johnson, Commissioner

Dan Rieves

Deb Wykoff

#### ***Public: None***

The March 12, 2013, meeting of the Parks Advisory Board was called to order at 5:34 p.m. Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

#### **BOARD MEMBER REPORTS –**

David Hattis was selected to participate in the Artist of the Year selection committee, which meets on Friday.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT: Items not on the agenda – None**

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## GENERAL INFORMATION:

- Natural Resource Events for this month: See website <http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources>. Some events have been cancelled due to muddy conditions.
- Energy By Design plan was adopted by the State Land Board in February. The full document will be available on our website soon at [www.larimer.org/openlands](http://www.larimer.org/openlands).
- The Pinewood grant has been submitted.
- The Fishing Expo was last weekend, with a good turnout despite the “blizzard.”
- Charlie Johnson has joined the board of Estes Valley Land Trust. Linda Knowlton asked what this means for our department. Gary Buffington responded that it is about relationship-building, and building rapport with other land agencies. It will not affect the time Charlie has available for our projects.
- *Our Lands-Our Future* public event was held on March 6, at the Backbone Grill in Loveland. The event was sponsored by Grimm Bros. Brewery to solicit public feedback on the second citizen survey and online mapping tool. We had a great turn-out at this event; about 100 people attended. The location injected a lot of new energy.
- To sign up for Parks Advisory Board minutes go to <http://larimer.org/subscriptions.cfm> put in your email and click ‘subscribe’, then check “Parks Advisory Board” box.
- Steve Ambrose asked about the effect of sequestration on our operations, e.g., funding from the Bureau of Reclamation. We have funds committed which are now tentative pending the results of that. Gary noted that impacts to the National Parks may push some business our way. Campground closures due to pine beetle kill have also pushed business our way.

## PRESENTATIONS

*Estes Park Campgrounds Annual Update – Chris Fleming, Blue Mountain District Manager (see attached.)*

- This presentation covered East Portal and Mary’s Lake campgrounds, not Hermit Park
- These campgrounds are on Reclamation property; Estes Valley Recreation and Park District is the manager/partner; we manage the campgrounds for Estes, now in the third year of our agreement.
- Revenues continue to lag behind expenses. In 2012, the operational loss was about \$39,000. Our losses have increased each year, as direct and allocated costs have increased. This was necessary because we went into it understaffed, and had to increase staffing to adequately provide services. This in turn increases allocated indirect costs.
- We’ve been spending the capital construction fund as we go to fix utilities, bring buildings up to code, upgrade facilities, etc. We thought these properties were a lot more turn-key than they turned out to be, and compliance standards for publicly maintained facilities are much higher than when the properties were privately managed.
- In 2012, we began paying the Estes Park “pillow tax”, which totaled \$6,736.
- There were two fires in the Estes area last summer; we definitely saw an effect from that.
- Chris presented a financial summary. There were pay showers in both shower houses, and revenue increased.

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- Dan explained that when we have a new cost center, some of our overhead (indirect costs) is allocated to the new cost center proportionately.
- Mary's Lake is about 50% reservations vs. walk-ins. Occupancy rates are equivalent to the reservoir campgrounds.
- Marketing funding was reduced from about \$7000 in 2011 to \$2500 in 2012, in an effort to more effectively and narrowly target the audience. Our survey shows that most people find us through the internet or through Reserve America campground reservations.
- A new filtration system and boiler were installed for the Mary's Lake pool, which significantly reduced maintenance time.
- The cost of the trash contract was reduced almost 50% for Mary's Lake.
- Campfire program attendance is higher at these areas than at the reservoirs.
- All the wooden picnic tables must be painted every year – volunteer hours made this possible.

### Board and staff comments:

Linda Knowlton: Did the closure of Bear Lake affect our visitation – discourage it?

Chris: No, it pushed some visitation to us.

David Hattis: Does Estes dictate the fees we can charge?

Dan: No. We have an agreement with the business community that we won't undercut the camping market; we also can't price ourselves out of the market by charging too much. But Estes Valley Parks & Recreation District doesn't tell us what to charge. The only fee change we've made since we took over was to combine the day fee with the camping fee for these campgrounds, because there is nothing else visitors can do at these locations.

Gary: For 20 years the private concessions did not follow the Federal rules on 14-day camping – they allowed people to stay all summer. Their revenue numbers were well over \$500,000. The concessionaires did nothing to improve the properties, and pocketed all the revenue.

Dan: We might want to turn part of it into a trailer park where people can stay all summer, so we can reach those revenue numbers.

David Hattis: Why is East Portal more popular?

Chris: East Portal is in the trees, and backs up to RMNP. Mary's Lake is more of a motorhome parking lot environment.

Dan: For the large RV's, there is a lot of competition in the area, with satellite hook-ups, wifi, etc., which we don't offer.

Frank Gillespie: We could advertise in the Trail Gazette, which is read by more visitors than any other – it's available for free.

Dan: Once the visitors are already in town, it's too late to reach them. We try to target people before they make their plans.

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David Hattis: Do we give these brochures to the USFS offices? They have a lot of people come through who are headed up to Estes – might be a good contact point.

Gary: We're in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of a 5 year contract. We're looking at what the future should be. Estes also has some new ideas about managing these areas. We'll be managing for 2013, but may be looking at getting out after that unless revenues turn the corner.

Frank Gillespie: Did Estes Valley Parks & Recreation know the magnitude of the problems that existed when we took it over?

Dan: It's impossible to say at this point. The new director of EVRPD is considering resuming management responsibility, or re-purposing these areas. The revenue they were getting from the private concessionaire was about \$10,000 higher per year than now; but we have done a lot to build good rapport with the community, and have significantly improved the facilities, which has been well worth it for them.

David Hattis: It's Reclamation property, but Estes manages?

Dan: Estes manages a whole group of BOR properties in the Estes area, including these areas, just as we manage the four reservoirs for the BOR.

### DISCUSSION ITEMS

*East Side of Horsetooth Parking Issues - Mark Caughlan, Horsetooth District Manager (see attached.)*

- There are several day-use areas on the east side.
- Annual visitation at these four areas exceeds that of Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.
- In 2002-03, we spent a lot of time and money on the east side improving facilities at these areas – parking, trails, restrooms, infrastructure, picnic sites, etc.
- In 2004, fees were re-instituted. 45 minute free parking areas on the east side of Horsetooth were opened in 2004, at the request of the Commissioners.
- Rotary is by far the busiest of the four day use areas. The term “bouldering” started at Rotary Park – the sport started here.
- These free parking areas are the source of many management issues. The 45-min. limit is ignored. The free area parking lot is full on weekends; the pay lot is empty. It's impossible to enforce and police how long people have been parked.
- There is a gate across the entrance that closes at night; but people can still enter through the exits, which are not gated.
- At Sunrise, people park in the free parking, and create social trails down the hill to the beach and day use areas. People are also crossing the road from the free parking on a blind corner.
- We propose to close the free lot at Sunrise.
- Skyline is a low-use area; we propose to make it a free area.
- Cliff diving is the biggest activity at Soldier Canyon Dam free parking area.
- We invested a lot in improving these areas – these free parking areas are counterproductive.
- Alternatives:
  1. Keep the 45 minute parking
  2. Close these areas
  3. Skyline Free
  4. Close Spring Canyon Dam
  5. Keep Spring Canyon open

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- Preferred option:
  1. Close all the 45 minute parking areas
  2. Eliminate the fee at Skyline Day Use Area, so use is free
  3. Close Spring Canyon Dam parking area

### Board & Staff Comments:

Linda Knowlton: Is cliff diving worse on the east side or west side?

Dan: Both.

John Tipton: What's the benefit of keeping Soldier Canyon Dam parking open? There is no trail access there.

Dan: There are people who just sunbathe and picnic here as well.

Frank Gillespie: What was the reason for the 45 minute free parking?

Dan: Years ago, the Division of Wildlife, which manages the fishing, pressured us to provide free parking for fisherman. At that time, there were no amenities on the east side – just dirt parking lots. But as we made improvements, and began doing more management in these areas, we needed to recoup our costs. The use also changed as facilities were improved. The Commissioners wanted to promote good public relations, and reduce parking tickets. But now, all the facilities that people are using are fee areas – and they're avoiding the fees by using the free parking. There is an inequity compared to people who do pay the \$7 to picnic.

Linda Knowlton: There are people who stop to take a photo and then leave. They're with their car. No problem. You don't need the 45 minute free parking spots to accommodate that legitimate use.

Dan: The ideal solution would be an entrance station at both ends of the east side road.

David Hattis: Would entrance stations be feasible? We're not collecting anything from road and mountain bikers using that road and trails.

Linda Knowlton: The Foothills Trail is a free Fort Collins trail – we can't charge for that.

Dan: It has not gained traction politically due to residents who use the road, and tourists who take the drive along the east side. It would be difficult to collect from some and not others.

John Tipton: Can we direct free parking to Reservoir Ridge?

Mark: People want to be at the reservoir.

Russ: Who are the biggest users of these areas?

Mark: People walking dogs, runners, people using the beach, people carpooling to South Bay.

Frank Cada: Can we require people to stay with their vehicles to park free?

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Mark: That would be impossible to enforce. All the free areas are right next to fee areas.

Russ Fruits: What is the penalty for parking over 45 minutes at these areas?

Mark: \$20

Linda Knowlton: Get rid of the 45 minute free areas. (General consensus in agreement expressed by the Board.)

Russ Fruits: What activities can you do in less than 45 minutes? (run, walk dog, etc.) What's the timeline to have something in place? Will it go to the Commissioners?

Gary: Yes.

Mark: We need to have a solution in place before the recreation season.

Dan: We're proposing to give Skyline to meet the free need.

David Hattis: How much public controversy will this generate? How much more efficient will staff be if the enforcement issue is eliminated?

Mark: We pay 2 seasonal park rangers for the east side – half their time is spent writing tickets and dealing with these issues. We wrote 50 tickets on the east side last weekend. We've set ourselves up for these problems by having the free parking areas.

Dan: The legitimate 45 minute user group is probably fairly small. There is an argument that it's a low-cost alternative. There will definitely be some push-back.

Forrest Orsewell: It's a great place to fish off Soldier Canyon when you can't get a boat in there.

Mark: There is other access to the same fishing areas.

Frank Cada: It's more of a PR problem with the tickets than having the areas closed.

Ron Kainer: How will these areas be closed?

Mark: Reseed them, post no parking signs. Road and Bridge will maintain these areas.

Chair Russ Fruits asked for any comments opposed. There were none. Commissioner Johnson recommended that the preferred option be implemented without Commissioner review. The Board supported this outcome. This is not an action item, so no formal vote was taken. Staff will act on Commissioner Johnson's and the Board's direction.

**ACTION ITEMS - None**

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### STANDING AGENDA ITEMS:

*Park District updates and Parks Master Plan Implementation Progress report* – Dan Rieves, Visitor Services Manager, Chris Fleming, Blue Mountain District Manager, and Mark Caughlan, Horsetooth District Manager

- Shannon sent out a revised calendar of meeting dates and locations. Note that some meetings will be at the DNR Administrative Offices.
- The tour of the Estes Park properties and the Big Thompson properties will be May 17, meeting at the DNR Administrative Offices that day, with lunch provided. Charlie Johnson will be on the tour to talk about the Big Thompson properties, including a couple that are in the queue for action in the next year.
- The GOCO application for the Pinewood project was delivered last Friday.
- We will also be submitting an application with Colorado Parks & Wildlife.
- Special Events are coming in for the year. The Pro Cycling Challenge will be going around Horsetooth Reservoir on August 24.
- Lake surfing event, Stroke and Stride on Wednesday nights, are examples of other planned Horsetooth events.
- The Fishing Expo had 2500 people, even with the “blizzard.”
- The Airstream trailer should be ready to use in May.
- Northern Water has projected a 60% quota for water. Snowpack is at about 65% of average. We need a cool, wet spring. Water restrictions start in Ft. Collins in April.
- Interviewing, hiring and training for the season are underway.
- Dan and Chris and Gary met with Carter Lake Marina for their annual meeting. They are adding electrical slips this year.
- Two rangers are going through the police academy; we’re planning for their field training through the season.

### DIRECTOR’S REPORT

- Responsible recreation shooting: Gary is representing Larimer County in a group which is examining this issue up and down the Front Range. Issues have arisen involving Forest Service properties in the urban interface, such as in Boulder County.

### Board & Staff Comments:

David Hattis: Shooting in the Pawnee National Grasslands in Weld County is also an issue.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Wykoff

APPROVED:

Russell Fruits, Chair

## LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

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*Next regular meeting: April 9, 2013, Larimer  
County Natural Resources Administrative Office  
Building, 1800 South County Road 31, Loveland  
CO.*

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Public can view agenda and minutes at  
[www.larimer.org/parks](http://www.larimer.org/parks)

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