

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES

Tuesday, June 11, 2013, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.,

Natural Resources Administrative Offices, 1800 S. County Road 31, Loveland, 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:

Frank Cada

Mark DeGregorio

Frank Gillespie

Russ Fruits

Rob Harris

David Hattis

Ron Kainer

Linda Knowlton

Forrest Orswell

Absent:

Steve Ambrose

Steve Johnson, Commissioner

John Tipton

Staff:

Shannon Barnes

Gary Buffington

Mark Caughlan

Casey Cisneros

Zach Cook

Chris Fleming

Steve Gibson

Dan Rieves

Travis Rollins

Public: Nick Clark is a local resident and a heavy park user. He came to listen to the meeting.

The June 11, 2013, meeting of the Parks Advisory Board was called to order at 5:30 p.m. Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

BOARD MEMBER REPORTS – NONE

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PUBLIC COMMENT: NONE

GENERAL INFORMATION:

- COSA conference is in Crested Butte 9/9-9/11, registration will begin in June.
- GOCO and State Trails stakeholder meetings were held for future trail projects, we will be applying this year for Poudre River trail elements and Loveland/Fort Collins corridor trail.
- Colorado Lottery, in partnership with a Lighthawk helicopter, shot video of protected areas in Larimer County.
- Natural Resource Events for this month: See website <http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources>.
- 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
- Frank Cada is retiring from the board. Frank was one of the original Task Force members for the Parks Master Plan. He has been able to see most of the implementation of the Master Plan. He is very impressed with our staff. He is leaving the board believing the Parks are in good shape.
- Kris Klass attended the meeting. Kris is one of our new board members. His term will begin in July.

PRESENTATIONS:

Weed Management on Larimer County Parks and Open Lands – Casey Cisneros, Weed Control Technician II: See attached report

Casey explained how and why we manage weeds on our parks and open spaces. Casey and his crew manage weeds at 4 of our parks and 11 open spaces which adds up to nearly 33,000 acres and 79 miles of trail.

- Noxious weeds are identified as plants that are a threat to the ecology, economy or human health. They are also defined as invasive exotic species.
- Weeds are categorized and grouped as: Native, exotic grasses, shrubs, trees, forbs.
- Weeds are also grouped by different life cycles such as: Winter annuals, biannual, simple perennials, deep rooted perennial.
- Weeds colonize and disturb sites quickly.
- Weeds can alter the physical environment, damaging native eco-systems.
- Weed management protects the habitat and preserves biodiversity.
- Weed control stops further spread plus we want to stay compliant with the Noxious Weed Act.
- Weeds are the reason most restoration projects fail.
- Weed management goals include removing noxious weeds, establishing and maintaining desirable plant communities and protecting native eco-systems.
- Methods for controlling weeds include education, cooperation and collaboration.
- One of the easiest and most economical ways to manage weeds is through Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR).
- Different management practices include: Mowing, using a chipper, herbicide applications, cut stump treatments, grazing etc.
- Weed control methods include: Prescribed fire, shoveling, pulling, weed whacking and mowing.
- Resources and publications include Larimer County Weed District website, Department of Agriculture, CSU Extension, Weed Management Reference Guide etc.

Board and staff comments:

Rob Harris: Did the native grass come back on its own or did you have to seed?

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Casey Cisneros: Originally we thought it would have to be reseeded, but the native grass came back on its own. Most likely after the burn it invigorated the perennial grasses.

David Hattis: Would the herbicide be as effective if you didn't burn?

Casey Cisneros: No. The reason we burn is to clear the canopy off so the herbicide can get to the live plants underneath.

Rob Harris: What is taking the place of the Toadflax at Horsetooth?

Casey Cisneros: Native grasses and forbs.

Linda Knowlton: What do you think the effect from the fires has been? Has your workload increased?

Casey Cisneros: The only area we really noticed is at Horsetooth Reservoir on the west side where the Galena fire went through the valley. It invigorated a lot of the deep rooted perennial weeds. We are seeing more Leafy Spurge and Canada thistles.

Mark DeGregorio: Are you organizationally a sub-group of the County's Weeds program or are you separate?

Casey Cisneros: We are part of the Land Stewardship program. The program includes: Forestry, Weed District, Parks and Open Lands Weeds. We all work together, but I work solely on parks and open lands properties.

Gary Buffington: Casey is in Meegan Flenniken's program. Casey just received his Masters in natural resource stewardship with a focus in ecological restoration. The department was able to give him a little help with time and finances.

Trail-head Capacity at Larimer County Parks and Open Lands – Steve Gibson, Zach Cook, Travis Rollins, Open Space Manager – See attached report

Travis, Steve, and Zach explained the issues we are experiencing with over-capacity at our Open Spaces. The purpose of this presentation is to raise awareness and to stimulate ideas of possible solutions.

- Typically we hit capacity on Saturdays and Sundays, but we will hit capacity during the week as well.
- Horsetooth Mountain Open Space and the Devil's Backbone Open Space have the most capacity issues.
- Problem areas include: Overhill Drive, CR 38E, Thompson Heights, Shoreline Drive, Poudre Fire Authority Station 9, Skyline Drive, Hidden Valley Drive.
- Resource damage includes: Trail widening, wildlife habitat disturbances, and social trails.
- Current efforts to help with capacity issues include: Using volunteer ranger assistants to help assist with parking; using social media to let visitors know when we are at capacity; and redirecting visitors to other areas.
- Current efforts include communicating with other agencies to see how they are handling these issues.
- Long term solutions include: Utilizing advancing technology like the use of web cams, digital road signs, mobile applications; implementing a fee at the Devil's Backbone; and increasing the user fee at our other Open Spaces.

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Board and staff comments:

Frank Gillespie: You would have to have a dedicated employee updating the conditions or it will fall back to field staff and they might not have the cell coverage to do it.

Dan Rieves: The field staff is currently doing updates using Facebook and Twitter. I would put the mobile app, the road side signs and web cam under the umbrella of: When we have to turn visitors away because of over-capacity issues, we have done everything we could think of to communicate the message.

Frank Gillespie: Suggests using a shuttle like at Rocky Mountain National Park.

Dan Rieves: I would entertain a proposal by a concessionaire. I have spoken to numerous staff at Rocky Mountain National Park and they regret implementing the shuttle service.

Frank Gillespie: I think it is a possible solution that has to be explored.

Dan Rieves: Absolutely, and it is on the list.

Mark DeGregorio: I think the bigger issue is at some point there has to be a management decision on how much is enough. You will never be able to satisfy parking capacity. You can keep expanding and expanding. Where does the balance between protecting the resource balance with user visitation?

Dan Rieves: We believe we are still within that cushion. We can do some things with parking and trail routing. We are heading toward a hard cap where we just can't accommodate the influx of visitors during these peak times.

Mark DeGregorio: Would it be out of the question to give people a tee time or reservation?

Dan Rieves: That is actually the next step for our boating capacity issues. We are closer to doing that for boating than at the trailheads. It is done at other places.

Russ Fruits: That could work really well with an app. You could link it up to Facebook and Twitter to automatically send out updates.

Dan Rieves: Gary has instructed Travis and me to bring him a first draft of an action plan in August. We have some action steps we will be taking between now and the Fall.

Frank Gillespie: Why didn't we include the Forest Service trailheads up the Poudre and Big Thompson as another possible overflow place to send people when we are at capacity?

Dan Rieves: We do refer people to those areas. The problem is we can't call a phone number to talk to a live person to get real time information. Those areas are experiencing the same capacity issues we are.

Linda Knowlton: Some of the trails Frank mentioned are not reasonable alternatives for people.

Linda Knowlton: I rarely see a ranger on the trails. Rangers should not be in the parking lots. Maybe you could hire some lower paid employees to manage the parking lots.

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Dan Rieves: It would be a difficult job to staff. It's not a full time job.

Rob Harris: It comes down to supply and demand. If the trails are getting wider maybe they should be wider. Maybe hard-scape some trails.

Travis Rollins: We are doing that in some places. We are moving in that direction.

David Hattis: How many of our users want convenience vs. more of a back country experience? How many years ago was the carrying and capacity at our trail heads developed. Do we need to revisit that?

Dan Rieves: Absolutely. The original management plan for these properties didn't adequately address this. Not due to lack of foresight, but due to a lack of thinking that this would be the reality.

Linda Knowlton: Who controls the parking on CR 38E? Have they considered no parking signs?

Dan Rieves: Road and Bridge. We would get a lot of push back if we put up no parking signs. From an easy management stand point we would like to put up no parking signs. However, there are some good parking spots. Those spots will fill up first, and then there are some marginal spots.

ACTION ITEMS - None

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Paddle Boarding Rules – Dan Rieves, Visitor Services Manager

- Stand-up paddle boards are extremely popular.
- Regulations need to be consistent.
- We use the United States Coast Guard for regulatory guidance.
- When it comes to any type of boating enforcement, we try to be consistent with Colorado Parks and Wildlife.
- Paddle boards are considered vessels when they are beyond the narrow limits of the swim area.
- The rules for paddle boards are very similar to the rules of a canoe or kayak: Personal Flotation Device (PFD), sound producing device and a white light if operating after the designated sunset time.
- Enforcement in 2013 will be a point of education for the 1st contact.
- We have 3 or 4 short-term concessionaires that rent paddle boards at Horsetooth Reservoir.
- All of the concessionaires are abiding by the regulations.

Board and staff comments:

Linda Knowlton: Do the concessionaires tell people who are renting the paddle boards the regulations?

Dan Rieves: Our concessionaires are required per the agreement that they have with Larimer County to provide the PFD and whistle with the rental.

Forest Orswell: They are really hard to see from a boating stand point.

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Dan Rieves: They are very tough to see. I think we will start to see paddles in bright colors or bright colored rash guards. We try not to make a lot of additional regulations on top of what being done in the state. If it becomes a problem, we may make some adjustment to the regulations.

Annual Permit Update – Dan Rieves, Visitor Services Manager

A lot of changes have been made to the annual permits. One of the changes to the permit is transferability. Rob Harris' permit is the first permit brought to our attention that has stopped sticking. We exchanged his permit with a new one. We know a certain portion of people will abuse the transferability, but we believe most won't. We have sold about 80% of the number of annual permits from last year. We are about 20% behind from last year which we expected since they are valid for the entire year. Total annual permit revenue will tell us a lot. From a visitation stand point people are still coming whether they are buying the annual or a day pass. If more people are buying dailies vs annuals, it is actually a better exchange rate for the county. It's not a perfect system. There is a gray area with our marina and concession customers. Specifically, compliance with buying the annual with the boat endorsement. We will be able to see if this is a problem through the course of the summer. As we renew licenses we can address the issue.

Board and staff comments:

Rob Harris: Have we had any reports of theft because of the price being printed on the permits and is it necessary?

Dan Rieves: We are not aware of any permits being stolen. For auditing purposes we are required to have the price on the permit. The permits all look the same. A gate attendant could sell someone a combo permit and only charge them for a vehicle. I would encourage everyone to lock their vehicles when you are on our properties.

Rob Harris: Could we put the price on the back of the permit so when you peel off the back, the price comes off?

Dan Rieves: We can certainly look into it.

Gary Buffington: How are the automated pay stations doing?

Dan Rieves: They are working excellent. We had a little glitch getting one of them started up for the Spring. It turned out to be our fault. They have been very reliable. We thought we would have a big push back with the pay stations only accepting credit cards. We have had very few complaints.

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

Horsetooth:

- The CAST event was great. 26 disabled kids attended . This is the 15th year we have had this event.
- East side day use areas are extremely popular and busy.

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- Lots of special event requests: Weddings, triathlons, swims etc.
- Airstream is very popular. The airstream is reserved every weekend through August. The weekday reservations are picking up as well.
- Water levels are pretty decent. We are about 91% full.
- Sr. Ranger Jim Hawkins did a phenomenal job handling a situation with an intoxicated and suicidal suspect. His vehicle was damaged during the contact.

Blue Mountain:

- We were not successful getting the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant for the Pinewood project. After visiting with the GOCO staff, it turns out we almost got the funding. They encouraged us to resubmit in the Fall. We are hoping to do that project in the Spring of 2014.
- We are very busy with a lot of new rangers.
- Water issues at Hermit Park with springs coming up all over.
- Shower house at East Portal went down over Memorial Day weekend.
- Some water lines broke at Pinewood and North Pines campgrounds.
- The well collapsed at South Shore.
- Lots of medical calls involving bicycles and motorcycles.
- Ranger Vic Wilcox assisted a deputy with a suicidal party call. They were successful in saving the victim.

Board and staff comments:

Linda Knowlton: Who is renting the Airstream? Is it boaters or non-boaters?

Mark Caughlan: So far it has been non-boaters.

Dan Rieves: We were concerned about the price point for the Airstream. The overwhelming response from the public when the Airstream was at the courthouse, was we are well within our price point. We are very surprised with the amount of reservations. It is almost booked up beyond our comfort level.

Gary Buffington: On the capital investment side of the Airstream, we were told it is worth more than \$100,000. We invested \$46,000 into the Airstream.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

No board items to report. Gary asked for a round table discussion about what kind of agenda items the board would like to see for future meetings.

Board and staff comments:

Mark DeGregorio: I would like to see spreadsheets with costs etc.

Gary Buffington: Would you like to see more budget stuff maybe on a quarterly basis?

Frank Gillespie: We always ask for committee reports. Could we explore other things we could work on as a committee.

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Dan Rieves: There will be a couple committee opportunities coming up for the day use fees and capacity issues at the Open Spaces. Big Thompson properties will be coming back into the picture.

Linda Knowlton: Is there any pressure to get back to the Big Thompson properties?

Gary Buffington: Yes, there are some land and home owners that need some decisions.

Gary Buffington: There is someone contesting the fees for the Special Events. We are not sure where it will go. You might hear information on this topic again.

Dan Rieves: The main allegation is that the fees are too arbitrary.

Gary Buffington: I'm hearing you would like more budget information on revenue and expenditures. Maybe some information on capital construction.

David Hattis: Can you share any information about the shooting analysis that you're involved with?

Gary Buffington: We will be meeting this Friday again to talk more about it. We are trying to find safe places for a shooting range .

David Hattis: When is the study to be completed?

Gary Buffington: This Fall.

David Hattis: Any update with Roberts Ranch property?

Gary Buffington: Nothing on that. Mrs. Roberts has not decided what she wants to do with it. A lot of people still think Larimer County is the best option for her.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Barnes

APPROVED:

Russell Fruits, Chair

Next regular meeting: July 9, 2013, Larimer County Courthouse Office Building, Boyd Lake Room, 200 W. Oak Street, Ft. Collins, CO

Public can view agenda and minutes at www.larimer.org/parks

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