

# LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

## MINUTES

Tuesday, July 9, 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  
Mark DeGregorio  
John Gaffney  
Frank Gillespie  
Rob Harris  
David Hattis  
Chris Klass  
Linda Knowlton  
Stephanie Sigler  
John Tipton

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

Russ Fruits  
Ron Kainer  
Forrest Orswell

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

Shannon Barnes  
Gary Buffington  
Mark Caughlan  
Chris Fleming  
Steve Johnson, Commissioner  
Dan Rieves  
Zac Wiebe

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

The July 9, 2013, meeting of the Parks Advisory Board was called to order at 5:30 p.m. Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

**INTRODUCTIONS:** New Parks Advisory Board members: John Gaffney, Chris Klaas, Stephanie Sigler

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John Gaffney: John has lived in Larimer County for 4.5 years. He works for Alberta Development Partners. He loves the parks system. His wife is a veterinarian and works in Longmont.

Chris Klaas: Chris has lived in Larimer County for 40 years. He is retired from the Loveland Fire Department. He wanted to get involved and give back so he started as a volunteer parking lot attendant at Horsetooth Reservoir last year. This year he is volunteering at Carter Lake on the boat docks and also assisting the boat ranger.

Stephanie Sigler: Stephanie was born and raised in Loveland. She went to CSU. After she graduated she lived in Texas for a stint. Her profession is landscape architecture. She has designed a lot of parks, trails and open space areas in Texas. Currently she is in Fort Collins and more involved in the planning side of things.

### **BOARD MEMBER REPORTS – NONE**

### **PUBLIC COMMENT: NONE**

### **GENERAL INFORMATION:**

- We will be electing our officers at the August meeting as well as taking our Parks Advisory Board picture.
- National Get Outdoors Day and Land Conservation Appreciation Day at Hermit Park were both great successes. Hermit Park saw approximately 200 participants, with many families attending. Thanks to the Estes Valley Land Trust for their partnership and participation!
- The Facebook contest through the Reporter-Herald increased our “likes” by 60%. We gave away a cabin stay at Hermit Park and an Airstream stay at Horsetooth Reservoir.
- 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
- Channel 7 wants to do a Mike Nelson story on the Airstream.

### **PRESENTATIONS:**

#### ***Our Lands-Our Future final report – Zac Wiebe, Fund Development & Special Projects Specialist***

Zac gave an update on the second follow-up survey results from Our Lands Our Future. The survey began through our need to update our 2001 Open Lands Master Plan. We partnered with each municipality in Larimer County and applied for a GOCO grant and were awarded \$75,000 to complete a regional study to look at conservation, stewardship and outdoor recreation preferences. The study began a year ago. See attached report.

- We looked into an economic benefits analysis: Property value, benefits of agriculture, recreational tourism etc.
- Property values in general can go up between 5% to 30% if the property backs up or is adjacent to an open space. Our study showed about a 5% increase in home value.
- According to the survey, there is a huge economic benefit for our parks and open spaces, especially for our Larimer county residents.
- We are losing agriculture land to development.
- The size of farms are getting smaller.

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- Conservation = High Quality of Life = Economic Development
- The second survey doubled a target of 300 responses.
- We reached underserved communities: Younger age groups 18 to 24, Hispanic populations etc.
- Community outreach events and tools: 4225 participants to date.
- 324 participants were invited from 2012 sample.
- 344 participants were from the 2013 open link.
- The second survey was sent out to the people who took the first survey. We also had a open link so anyone could fill it out.
- We received about 700 responses from the second survey. We had a little bit better response rate which was to be expected. The second survey was much shorter.
- The first survey didn't really dig into agriculture. We tried to do that with the second survey. Both surveys show agriculture wasn't as big a priority as it was in 2001.
- The survey asked what are some things that we don't offer that people would like to see. Designated backcountry campsites was at the top of the list.
- Shooting sports in general showed up as pretty low.
- Regarding the level of crowding, people in general didn't feel we were over crowded.
- The survey showed a general support for the extension of the existing ¼ cent sales tax.
- Financial model we use to predict the future: Revenues – Cost +/- Inflation = Predicted Outcome

### Board & Staff Comments:

Rob Harris: Are the Larimer County residents or non-residents counted once or are they counted every time they come through the parks?

Zac Wiebe: They are probably counted every time they come through.

Frank Gillespie: The first survey had a random selection of responders. Does the 4225 participants include both surveys?

Zac Wiebe: Yes

Linda Knowlton: So you could take the survey as many times as you want?

Zac Wiebe: That's true; you could. If someone chose to do that they would have to do it from a different computer and enter a different code.

Frank Gillespie: It's interesting to see that there is a similarity between the group that was randomly selected and the group overall.

Zac Wiebe: Often times active recreation groups are really good at getting the word out and flooding these types of surveys. We almost saw the opposite of that in some cases. We asked some questions about conservation vs. recreation and even the open link where you take your own survey choose conservation more than recreation. Not by a lot, but we were surprised by that.

Frank Gillespie: Does your consultant think the 4225 participants is a good response rate for a county this size?

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Zac Wiebe: The 4225 participants aren't respondents to the survey, those are people we have communicated with through all the means we have talked about. We had about a 13% response rate which is about what you can expect from this type of survey.

Linda Knowlton: What other comments did people write in and want to do?

Zac Wiebe: Community gardens, dogs off-leash areas, etc. There were some pretty funny comments.

Linda Knowlton: What about feedback to the public with the results from the survey?

Zac Wiebe: We will be giving a series of presentations to provide results.

Linda Knowlton: What are the other partners doing?

Zac Wiebe: Fort Collins and Loveland will be updating their Master Plans; Timnath will use the results to help decide how they will be spending their Open Space dollars.

Gary Buffington: Parks Advisory Board and the parks program is an important piece. For the last 18 years most of the sales tax has been used for the Open Spaces and rightfully so. In the next 6 years I would like to see the parks program piece be a little larger. Start thinking about what your recommendations might be looking into the future.

Frank Gillespie: I've heard the term renewal of the tax, but Zac mentioned maybe an increase in the tax. Has that been discussed?

Gary Buffington: Everything is on the table right now.

Linda Knowlton: So it wouldn't have to be an increase, it could just be a larger slice of the pie for parks.

Gary Buffington: We spent about 35 to 40 million dollars on the sales tax the last 18 years. The parks program has seen less than 2 million of that. The parks program does not have a long term sustainable funding source. That is a concern for the future.

Rob Harris: You say sustainable funding source other than user revenue because that is what supports most of the parks program?

Gary Buffington: Correct, user revenue, Lottery funds. We will be talking more about budgets and giving information starting next month so you can understand more of the specifics.

Gary Buffington: You will see a shift. It has been acquisition 70% and two pots of 15% for management and the other 15% could go either way. The first 10-15 years was focused on land acquisition of Open Space. The next 15 – 20 years will be about maintenance of those Open Space areas and parks. Now that we have acquired them, we have to maintain them. If the areas have public use, the maintenance costs are higher.

Linda Knowlton: In terms of funding, the overwhelming preference of the public from the first survey is for user fees as opposed to extending or increasing the sales tax. The public has a large appetite for user fees to fund public lands. User fees are only mentioned one time in the draft report. I think we are really missing the

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boat on an issue here, which is: We are not asking the public to do something they are not willing to do. They prefer it.

Gary Buffington: There is a user pay philosophy acceptance out there. We do have some push back when we increase fees. It's usually short-lived. Most people who use a lot of the Open Spaces think that the sales tax they pay takes care of acquisition and maintenance.

Zac Wiebe: That is something we will be looking at with our own individual Master Plan. We did hear that in the survey results and it provides us the opportunity to educate the public a little further. As we all know user fees alone aren't enough.

### **DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

#### *Capital Construction calendar for Parks Master Plan implementation – Dan Rieves, Visitor Services Manager*

Dan explained our implementation table from our Parks Master Plan and gave an update of our capital construction calendar. See attached report.

- The new paddling sports facility under Horsetooth Reservoir was not updated on the table. It was moved from Sunrise when we built the new swim beach. It is now a cooperative independent project between the Inlet Bay Marina and the Rowing Club.
- Some of these projects have been shelved such as the Archery Range north of the Horsetooth dam.
- The Airstream is not on the list. The Airstream is a project that came along and was not identified in the Master Plan.
- A good portion of the effort has been at Horsetooth Reservoir. When we built the new marina at Carter Lake our efforts moved to Horsetooth.
- We were able to do a lot of these projects quickly and cost effectively as a function of the economy. A lot of contractors need work.
- The big projects that remain in the queue:
- Re-doing the intersection of CR 38E and the entrance to the South Bay. That work will be done this Fall. It is being paid out of Parks reserve cash.
- Pinewood Reservoir is in the queue as well. We have postponed the project to the Spring and will be re-applying for the grant to help fund the project.
- South Shore utility assessment, particularly the issue with the water.
- Chimney Hollow additional trailhead and trail connecting from South Shore campground.
- Horsetooth maintenance facility and office is a priority as well.

#### Board & Staff Comments:

Mark Degregorio: Can you get funding from Road and Bridge?

Dan: No

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Gary Buffington: Making improvements is what people want and they visit more often. They don't mind paying. We are healthy financially.

Dan Rieves: The costs out-run the user fees. We do well with trying to use user fees for operational expenses. We use outside dollars for the capital construction projects. All the priority projects we have done have been projects that will in turn generate revenue. We are getting to the point now where we need to do some projects that will not generate revenue. We need to start taking care of our internal infrastructure as well.

Steve Ambrose: Can you talk about the Horsetooth forest heath (Pine beetle-kill removal). It shows the project was completed.

Mark Caughlan: There were 2 areas that we hit pretty hard. One area was above the swim beach; another is an area as you are coming up the switchbacks from Harmony road. The neighbors asked us to go in there as well, to protect their properties. We did both of those areas to be a good neighbor. Since this was Bureau of Reclamation land we went to the Bureau and ask for some help to control beetle-kill. The Bureau agreed to fund some projects and we would manage the projects and get the work done.

Steve Ambrose: Do you anticipate more beetle-kill projects?

Mark: Yes, it is an ongoing project.

Chris Fleming: We have done Pinewood, especially the Ramsey Shockey area, the west side of Carter Lake and a lot of work at Hermit Park.

Gary Buffington: I think the epidemic is waning, but it's still out there.

John Tipton: Our capital projects seem kind of out of line, with the results from Our Lands Our Future. Swim beaches and campgrounds weren't that high of a priority. Is there any thought to re-evaluate that?

Dan Rieves: We have already improved some of our swim beaches and campgrounds so I'm not surprised it wasn't high on the list.

Zac Wiebe: The study was intended to focus on those areas where the Open Space sales tax is spent. The survey didn't exclude Parks; it was more focused on our natural areas

Gary Buffington: Camping, RV-ing, WiFi, Paddle boarding are all hugely popular. I will be bringing you all a vision for the future with a campground involved in it. You will be able to go through an exercise about what we do there. It's right off I25. It will be a perfect spot for a campground. We will be taking this from the ground up and the Parks Advisory Board will have time to talk about this and help plan it out. You will be involved in that exercise and it will be fun.

David Hattis: The Bureau of Reclamation funding, is it comparable to other sites they have around the country?

Gary Buffington: It's suppose to be about 50/50 split. It's more of a 60/40 split with us being the 60. We probably average about 200,000 per year in the last 12 years. If they have dollars left at the end of the year we know we will get a call. They know that we can match the dollars and put it on the ground quickly.

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Dan Rieves: We get more because we can match it. You have to be able to match it.

Mark Caughlan: Since 1954 for 30 years we managed our areas on Bureau land, but we never got money for recreation to do improvements. Everything we built, we put in ourselves. Our director at the time, John McFarlane lobbied Congress to create Title 28 money for recreational money to be spent on Bureau properties. John flew to Washington DC, and met with the Senators and Congressmen to get it passed. The money has to be spent on Bureau properties for recreation.

### **ACTION ITEMS - None**

### **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

#### Blue Mountain:

- Two of our longer term seasonal park rangers have graduated from the Adams police academy and have started the FTO (Field Training Officer) program. The program usually takes 3 ½ months to complete.
- Water levels are good. All the boat ramps are still in the water.
- Extremely busy on July 4. There were no major incidents.
- Big wind storm about three weeks ago. Two sailboats were turned over. One sailboat sunk to the bottom. The person was able to recover the boat last week under 140 feet of water.
- We have been struggling with staffing issues in our ranger program this year.
- The Rangers are working with Heather Young in our Education department to develop a Junior Ranger program.
- Still no water at South Shore campground. We should have water by our next meeting in August.
- Campgrounds are full. Visitation is great at all of our areas.
- Fire Restrictions are in place, but you can still have fires in the permanent fire rings in the campgrounds.
- Getting ready for the Pro Challenge is taking a lot of time. As we get closer to the event it will take more time for our crews to prep for that.

#### Horsetooth:

- We had a cold wet Spring which threw our visitation off. The last month has changed all that.
- Every parking space we have at Horsetooth is filled on the weekends. We have added hundreds of parking spaces but every space we have at Horsetooth has been filled for the past 3 weeks on Saturdays and Sundays. The population has finally caught up with us.
- Our rangers have saved three people's lives in the last week.
- The Airstream is hugely popular. It is booked out all summer long with the exception of a few week days.
- Paddle boarding is extremely popular. We have four outside vendors that rent paddle boards. It is one of the fastest growing sports we've seen at the reservoir.
- We hosted a national wake surfing event. It was a very successful and popular event with 48 participants.
- Shower houses: We can't keep tokens in the machines because we are so busy.

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- Cliff diving is a huge issue. Two people have been air lifted out so far this year. A lot of injuries go unreported.
- Suicide rates are still high. We had another suicide attempt yesterday.

### Board & Staff Comments:

David Hattis: The employees we put through the academy are they permanent employees?

Chris Fleming: No, we didn't actually put them through the academy. They are seasonal employees and have to be sponsored by an agency. We sponsored them. If we hire a full time employee we will pay for them to go to the academy. Our seasonals pay their own way, but we sponsor them.

Gary Buffington: We have a mix of rangers seasonal and permanent. Some are fully trained but most aren't. We sponsor our seasonals if they want to go in that direction. We have paid for 2 of our full time rangers to go through the Academy in the last 10 years.

Rob Harris: July 4 was a record day, why was July 5 so slow?

Chris Fleming: A lot of people had to work on July 5. Relatively speaking we had a lot of people on the July 5, but July 4 was crazy.

David Hattis: How did the person recover the sail boat?

Chris Fleming: He had to hire a professional diving company due to the elevation of the lake and the depth of the water. They used giant air bags with line and were able to recover it.

Gary Buffington: What did we charge for the wakesurfing event?

Mark Caughlan: We closed off 75% of Satanka for the event. We charged \$5000 for the event. The ramp was still open for the general public with a lane of traffic. We only had a couple complaints.

Rob Harris: Do we have warning signs about cliff jumping?

Mark Caughlan: Yes

Rob Harris: At Lake Powell they have several videos with real people's experiences. Could we get a testimonial from the kid who got hurt?

Mark Caughlan: There is a picture posted at the marina. We could do something like that. That is a good idea.

David Hattis: Are there any locations around Horsetooth where cliff diving would be reasonably safe?

Dan Rieves: We have looked at that but with the way the water level fluctuates, it's not safe. Risk Management would have a problem with it as well.

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Gary Buffington: It is a tradition at Horsetooth. Cliff diving has been around forever.

David Hattis: I was really impressed with the coverage of the prop accident and how the rangers handled it.

Dan Rieves: We've learned when the reporters come to a report about the gory details, we tell them, "I can't give you the details, but I would love to take the opportunity to do a piece about boating safety." It works really well. We try to steer away from the bad side of it and use it as an reminder to the public.

Dan Rieves: I don't like the doom and gloom reports. It has been perfect weather for the reservoirs. 90 degrees is the magic number. The new generation is really hard to manage. We don't have to build a zip-line because they will build it. It is "buy a digital camera, start a Youtube site, and see how crazy you can get." It is very tough to manage.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT:**

- August 15<sup>th</sup> is the new Parks Advisory Board member orientation and tour.
- We will have some more budget information for our next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Barnes

APPROVED:

Russell Fruits, Chair

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*Next regular meeting: August 13, 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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