

# LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

## MINUTES

Tuesday, October 8, 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:***

Mark DeGregorio  
Ron Kainer  
Chris Klaas  
Rob Harris  
Frank Gillespie  
Steve Ambrose  
Linda Knowlton  
John Tipton  
John Gaffney  
Stephanie Sigler

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

Russ Fruits  
David Hattis  
Forrest Orswell

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

Gary Buffington  
Mark Caughlan  
Chris Fleming  
Dan Rieves  
Deb Wykoff

#### **Public: None**

The October 8, 2013, meeting of the Parks Advisory Board was called to order at 5:35 p.m. Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

#### **BOARD MEMBER REPORTS – None**

#### **GENERAL INFORMATION:**

- 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

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### PRESENTATIONS:

*Flood Damage Property Update* – Chris Fleming, Blue Mountain District Manager and Dan Rieves, Visitor Services Manager

Dan and Chris presented photos of damage to Big Thompson Canyon and our areas which sustained flood damage. Dan, Chris and Gary Buffington toured the Estes properties on 9/26/13.

- If damage was typical rain damage, we do not consider it flood damage.
- Hermit Park Open Space received the most severe damage, mainly to roads.
- The entrance area at Hermit Park is being used as a staging area for road repair materials and equipment for US 36 and other Estes area roads.
- Some evacuees with campers were placed at Mary's Lake campground, which had minimal damage.
- The road to East Portal campground was destroyed; and newly installed infrastructure, as well as the water treatment system, were damaged or lost.
- Pinewood Reservoir had some damage.
- Forks Park in Big Thompson Canyon will be used as a debris collection field for the Drake area.
- At Sleepy Hollow Park in Big Thompson Canyon, the entrance road and parking lot look like riverbed, but amazingly, the vault toilet survived unscathed, with a couple inches of mud on the floor. The toilet paper was still dry!
- Glade Park is full of trash and debris, which must be removed even if we decide not to redevelop it.
- Funding for repairs may come from several sources:
  - County insurance coverage for business interruption losses, and destruction of buildings and other permanent facilities.
  - FEMA reimbursement for damage to roads, trails, and other infrastructure.
  - Repair of popular trails will commence immediately, funded by the department.
  - Hermit Park is on hold, while we re-assess the situation up there.
- County Engineering has assisted us on many improvement projects in the past, but they have been and will continue to be unavailable due to fire and flood-related work. We can contract some of that work out, but it will be very difficult to find contractors available to do the work.

### Board and staff comments:

Linda Knowlton: Who makes the decision about whether to return the river to its original channel?

Mark Caughlan: Believes it is the Army Corp of Engineers which decides what to do with the river. We have had to get a Federal 404 permit from the Corp for work which will affect stream flows.

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Dan Rieves: We're not sure, but we know it's not us. And God doesn't need a 404 permit – he's got a Genesis 1:1 permit to rearrange anything He wants!

Mark DeGregorio: 37 years ago, there was a reason we were supposed to hold those Big Thompson properties in perpetuity – it was the 500 year flood. Now we've had a 1000 year flood. People get a false sense of security after time passes. The bottom line is there are properties in that canyon which should never be built on again. Will the County allow people to rebuild in those areas?

Dan Rieves: This is an opportunity to open up public access to Forest Service roads like Pole Hill Road. These historic roads are very important to emergency services to gain access to remote areas. I don't care where you build your house – I just want a way to get you out in an emergency. It's very frustrating to know the roads are there, but have no access to use them.

Gary Buffington: Walt Graul wants to meet with Gary, Dan and the Commissioners to talk about the fishery in the Canyon. There is much more property involved in this flood than in 1976, and the same questions will arise. They will be looking at us again, and the issue of funding to maintain the properties into the future must be addressed this time.

Mark DeGregorio: The fishery isn't going to be a big priority when they have a road to get in.

Frank Gillespie: Were any of our buildings damaged?

Chris Fleming: The buildings held up pretty well. Most of the damage was to the roads and trails.

### **DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

#### *Department Public Comment Process – Dan Rieves, Visitor Services Manager*

- Public comments can include anything from letters, texts, people waving you down in the campgrounds, you name it. We receive 5 or 6 comments a month on the County website for Visitor Services.
- First we document who, what, when. Then comments are sorted by topic and/or district and routed accordingly. The key is getting it into the right person's hands quickly. Dan hands off inquiries to the appropriate manager to respond.
- On a location-based complaint, it is the responsibility of the manager of that location to respond and /or oversee the response.
- On over-arching policies of the department, Dan will respond directly – or if it requires an investigation by a specialist, he refers it appropriately. For example, all camping reservation system issues are handled by Shannon Barnes.
- On the first day of a district manager's week, you see the light on the phone blinking, and your job is to get back to those callers and try to resolve their complaints as fast as possible.
- We have a “no wrong numbers” policy – no matter what they call about, we try to get them to the right place, even with another agency.
- Response method matches the manner of communication – a phone call, an email, a letter. Serious problems may be addressed by a white paper on a formal policy issue.
- Dan may serve as the point person on issues which are generating a lot of public comment, like the 45 minute free parking issue on the east side of Horsetooth – he wrote twelve response letters, but fielded many, many calls and emails.
- Gary Buffington: It gives us a chance to respond, when citizens watch us and ask questions. We're glad to tell our story, and use these inquiries as opportunities to do that.

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- Complaints about staff or volunteers are handled with care.
  - We capture the complainant's position in writing. If they won't do this, through an email or witness statement, then we will address more informally.
  - There is a check list supervisors can use to ensure all bases are covered.
  - The complaint goes to the district manager (unless it is about that person.)
  - Depending on the nature of the complaint, it may be informally handled and documented.
  - Formal investigations are initiated for allegations of criminal, illegal or inappropriate behavior.
  - Human Resources may be involved, as well as the Sheriff's office, if law enforcement actions are involved.
  - Gary is the record-keeper for all these situations. Documentation may also go into the employee's personnel file.
- The human interaction tends to defuse the situation – when people can talk to a real person, they feel less frustrated.
- We have a refund/request form; and we have a Citizen Complaint Report. We tend to err on the side of the customer if there is a sound basis for the complaint. We have a flowchart of the procedure to decide whether to give a refund.

### Board and staff comments:

Linda Knowlton: If someone sees something on a weekend, what will happen? Linda was told by someone about something they saw on a Sunday morning. It was an incident on the Blue Sky Trail which appeared to be a trespass by vehicles.

Dan Rieves: Based on the location described, that was probably on private property. If they call on a weekend, they may not reach someone, although during the season, the main office is staffed on weekends. But most staff are working on the weekends, so there is ample opportunity to find someone. If it's during the off-season, and no one is around, then we ask people to be good witnesses and record their observations.

Mark DeGregorio: How do you get policy statements and guidelines to front line staff, who may encounter such issues? Front line staff want to be helpful; they feel compelled to provide an answer, which may be incorrect.

Dan Rieves: We communicate information by email to managers and supervisors, and then supervisors share with staff during weekly meetings. We also use a pass-on book to share information between shifts. We emphasize that messaging is important, and employees cannot inject their own interpretations.

Twitter feed was started about a year ago. Any field staff can tweet an item of information at any time – on the weekend, e.g., when parking lots are full, or there's a line. Rob Novak monitors all comments. We've been investing time and energy in trying to build our following to make this a more effective method of communication.

Gary Buffington: It's going to be important for the next sales tax renewal to keep ourselves, our story, our customer service, in front of the public. We need to use every opportunity to tell our own story in a positive way.

**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

### Blue Mountain District:

- The Pro Cycle Bicycle Challenge was a success.
- All three Estes properties were closed by the flood over a month early, which will have a big impact on revenue for the year.
- All employees were safe, although a few lost homes or other property in the flood.
- Two rangers are completing their FTO training.
- NCWCD is drawing down Carter Lake to do repairs at the outlet.
- Horsetooth and Carter did not get filled during the flood, because they are part of a water distribution system, with specific regulatory controls.
- Chris was on a sailboat on Carter recently, and loved it. Next season we plan to increase opportunities for our field staff to do more ride-alongs with sailors, to learn what that experience is like.
- The Pinewood project is in limbo at the moment with the flood and the government shutdown.

### Horsetooth District:

- Very little flood damage at our facilities. \$80,000 was recently spent at Lions Park on river bank mitigation work, which held up well. Only some steps down to the river were lost.
- Camping has been pretty good – nearly full on nice weekends.
- Horsetooth Ache rowing competition had over 100 competitors this year.
- Lots of weddings in our parks this year.
- Entrance to South Bay road project has been delayed until next fall, due to flood projects.
- East side revenue has zoomed this year, from \$68,000 last year to over \$100,000 this year. Elimination of the 45 min. free parking was a factor, as are the new swim beach facilities, and the automated pay stations.
- The auto pay stations (11 total) improve compliance from 75% to 99%. We got only one email complaint about not being able to pay with check or cash.

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Our Sr. Accountant, Lori Smith, has produced monthly projections for 2013. This is the best recreation year ever. The forecast for permit sales this year is \$1.3 million, almost \$200,000 over 2012. Camping is forecast to increase \$147,000. So if these projections prove accurate, revenues will be up over \$300,000. It's due to good weather, good water, good customer service, and an enthusiastic public that come from all over the state to be outdoors here.

### Board comment:

Steve Ambrose: It's also the very professional staff we have out there. He was with the Forest Service for many years, and our staff compares very favorably.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

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Respectfully submitted,

Debra Wykoff

APPROVED:

Rob Harris, Vice-Chair

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*Next regular meeting: November 12, 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](http://www.larimer.org/parks)

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