

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES

Tuesday, March 11, 2014, 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

Ron Kainer

Chris Klaas

Linda Knowlton

Forrest Orswell

Stephanie Sigler

John Tipton

Absent:

Russ Fruits

Staff:

Gary Buffington

Mark Caughlan

Chris Fleming

Steve Johnson, Commissioner

Dan Rieves

Deb Wykoff

Public: None

The March 11, 2014, meeting of the Parks Advisory Board was called to order at 5:31 p.m. Minutes of the last meeting were approved

BOARD MEMBER REPORTS:

Mark DeGregorio reported that he attended the last meeting of the Open Lands Advisory Board. There was a lively discussion of the sales tax issue.

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PUBLIC COMMENT: None

GENERAL INFORMATION:

- The Larimer County Fishing Expo was held on March 8 & 9 at The Ranch. Attendance was 3200 over 2 days. Dan Rieves explained that when the Expo first started, it was somewhat controversial because Chad LaChance gave specific tips on how to fish for walleye at Horsetooth. This is what makes it a popular event.
- The Poudre River Restoration Project at Lions Open Space will resume this spring. The site suffered moderate damage during the September 2013 flood and two sections of bank will be laid back and revegetated to reduce erosion. The trailhead will be closed during bank repairs.
- The Devil's Backbone Open Space Management Plan will be updated in 2014. The planning process has begun.
- 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

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Big Thompson Properties – FEMA Flood Damage Project Worksheets overview, funding options and alternate projects – Dan Rieves, Visitor Services Manager, Chris Fleming, Blue Mountain District Manager, Gary Buffington, Natural Resources Director:

- Dan explained how the FEMA process works. Site specific tours were conducted by FEMA of all affected properties. A Project Worksheet (PW) was written for each property, which includes a cost estimate to restore the property to pre-flood condition.
- Forks Park was initially estimated at \$1.8 million by FEMA. The current number proposed by FEMA is \$318,000, based on the estimated fill required. FEMA reduced the fill from 10 ft. to 3 ft., based on flood plain limitations on replacing fill.
- The County's consultant believes the correct amount of fill is between those two numbers and should total approximately \$1 million.
- FEMA applies different rules to small projects (\$67,500 or under) and large projects (over that amount). Forks Park is considered a large project.
- On a large project, if actual project cost comes in above the estimate, FEMA will pay the excess documented. If it comes in under the estimate, we are reimbursed only for the actual cost. All the funds authorized must be used at the location where originally located.
- The County may also choose to select an alternative project.
- There are two options for alternative projects:
 - A) Standard procedure: Must be elected by 10/7/14; 10% penalty deducted from original award.
 - B) Pilot process alternate process: Must be elected before the project is obligated; no 10% penalty.
 - In either case, we must submit a scope of work for one or more alternate projects.
 - If excess funds remain, those funds can be used on other projects, mitigation, safety equipment, etc.
- Issues with Forks Park:
 - No master plan for the future of the canyon.

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- CDOT has not yet decided where to locate the road or the river.
- It is unlikely that it would make sense to use the entire award at that location.
- FEMA has indicated they will allow us to appeal Glade Park and make it an alternate pilot project without paying the penalty.
- We propose to go for a pilot project alternative project.
- This does not in any way affect our commitment to provide recreation in the Big Thompson canyon. We are committed to being an effective partner in the Canyon.
- The alternative project we propose is the Pinewood project. The minimum County contribution on the Pinewood project will be \$250,000 up to \$453,000. The scope of work is already prepared and ready to submit to FEMA, because that project is scheduled for 2014.

Board & Staff Comments:

David Hattis: Is there a certain amount of restoration required, even if you do the alternative project? [No.] So we can just walk away and do nothing?

Dan Rieves: That is not our intention, but technically, yes we can.

Chris Klaas: Is there a deadline to use the money? [Yes. But extensions may be requested.]

Ron Kainer: Has CDOT given us any time frame? [No.]

Forrest Orswell: Are we required to use the funds for public access facilities?

Chris Klaas: Do we have usage numbers for Pinewood or Forks prior to the flood?

Dan Rieves: Forks visitation was minimal. Glade was much higher.

Mark DeGregorio: What happens to the Big T properties after the road and river restoration work is done?

Dan Rieves: We don't know yet. We are waiting for the Master Plan for the area to be completed.

Mark Caughlan: Trout fishing in the canyon has changed drastically below Drake, the fish numbers are gone. If we build a parking lot at Forks, it may not provide access to any kind of recreation.

Dan Rieves: It will take a long time for the ecosystem to be rebuilt. Our role and the role of our properties in accomplishing that are not yet clear. The Forks parcel may not even be there after the river and road are relocated. The best access may shift to Cedar Cove, which is now a wide, flat bench. Dan met with Walt Graul, of the Friends of the Big Thompson Canyon and the Loveland Fishing Club, and they are on board with this proposed plan.

Linda Knowlton: When is the actual deadline to make this decision?

Dan Rieves: In the next week or so, before FEMA authorizes the project.

Mark DeGregorio: Looking at public expectations, there is beginning to be some impatience among canyon residents. If we go forward with the alternative project, there will be management expectations that go with it.

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Dan Rieves: Recreation is a low priority compared to the road, the river, and other issues like public safety, private property homeowner and business restoration, etc. We cannot do anything at this point. Our top priority right now is Hermit Park, getting it open as quickly as possible.

Gary Buffington: Does any board member feel we should not do the alternative process pilot project?

John Tipton: Given all the circumstances, the alternative project seems like the prudent course of action.

Dan Rieves: The cost to restore Forks to pre-flood condition will go down. The footprint will not grow; it can only shrink. Much of the money was for the bridge; because the river moved, there is no need for a bridge, unless the river is moved back. The restroom cannot be relocated anywhere other than where it is right now, because that's the only spot out of the flood plain. The road is temporary, it will have to be rebuilt.

What this is not is a cash grab. These funds are allocated for these properties. But by moving it to another property, there is the opportunity to make the money go farther by matching BOR funds, getting GOCO funds, etc.

Chris Klaas: This sounds like a way to make improvements, and still have money available when the time comes. It doesn't make sense to rebuild the park until we know the outcome. We should use the money on another project; and not wait until the road work is done – that could be several years.

Linda Knowlton: People in the canyon will say, "You took the money for the canyon and you spent it on something else over there."

Rob Harris: How you word it, and how you set the expectations for the canyon is critical.

Dan Rieves: The canyon may be rebuilt with funds from many partners. It is not acceptable for us to just invoke our right to do the alternate project. We can do that, but that is not what we want to do. We have worked too hard in the canyon to undo some of the previous wrongs from the last flood, to walk away now. But we want the coalition to address the issue of who is best suited to manage recreation in the canyon.

Gary Buffington: The City of Loveland is also in the canyon with funds for Viestenz-Smith Park, etc.

David Hattis: If we use the funds for an alternate project, and then a plan for the canyon is ready, where will we get the funds for the canyon at that point?

Gary Buffington: Some open space tax dollars were being used to maintain the canyon parks before the flood. User fees might be necessary in the future.

Dan Rieves: If we could bank these funds for management or future restoration, we would. But we can't – we have to use the funds within the time limits allowed.

Frank Gillespie: Why is there more flexibility with this money than with the rebuilding of the road?

Dan Rieves: The funds must be used to restore to pre-flood condition, at the original site.

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Steve Ambrose: He has heard that unless CDOT uses the existing alignment for the road, they will have to go through a NEPA process to move it.

Dan Rieves: Many of the legal descriptions tie to the river; so it will be very difficult to determine property boundaries and road location.

Gary Buffington: There are a lot of possibilities for the canyon – a trail all the way up the canyon could be an option – but there is no way to know at this point where our properties will fit into that picture.

Dan Rieves: What we can't do is to use part of the funds at the original location and use the rest at another location. But we can use all of the funds on an alternate project or other allowable costs.

Stephanie Sigler: Can the alternate project be denied? It makes a lot of sense to say let's use the money we're being offered and not let it go to waste. But she shares the expressed concerns about the expectations of the public for the canyon.

Dan Rieves: Yes, if the scope of work does not meet FEMA criteria. Then we can go ahead with repairs at Forks.

Chris Klaas: Glade Park was a trailer park before the 1976 flood. Forks Park was private homes before 1976. Through the post-flood process, the County acquired the properties and created the parks. The majority of the people using those parks were not residents – they were visitors from elsewhere. It is important to remember the residents, but does it have to be the same location as before which is going to be washed away again? If Forks has potential to be flooded again, why put it back in the same place? He applauds the department for taking a better approach, cooperating with other agencies and looking at options.

Dan Rieves: Our commitment in the canyon is to provide good, safe, well-located recreational access – what everyone deserves are areas where people can recreate without impeding traffic or taking their lives into their hands.

Linda Knowlton: This is not an action item – does this have to go to the Commissioners?

Dan Rieves: It's an administrative item. Staff wants the support of the board to go forward. It's not worth it to risk all the relationships we've built in the canyon just to avoid the 10% penalty of doing the standard alternate project process.

Frank Gillespie: How much money did we put into Glade Park with the Fishing is Fun project?

Dan Rieves: That project did a little work at all four areas, including the Forks Park restroom. Most of that was the stream enhancement, approximately \$25,000 at Glade Park.

Gary Buffington: Glade was not an ideal park. It was handed to us with no funding.

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2013 Revenue Snap Shot – Dan Rieves, Visitor Services Manager:

- The automated pay stations project has been submitted for the County’s Innovation Award for 2014.
 - It took over 2 years to implement the project, system-wide. There were some issues to be addressed: connectivity issues, high volume, etc. Antennas had to be added, which improved connectivity.
 - In 2013, \$391,011 was collected out of the automated pay stations.
 - The top producer was the original unit at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space; South Bay came in second.
 - Over 60,000 permits were sold without any physical processing.
- 2013 total revenues exceeded 2012 by over \$468,000!
- The primary reason was weather – a gorgeous summer. We also had good water levels.
- Special events increased \$21,000 – a 315% increase.
- Park permits – up 22%
- Camping – up 12%
- Overall – up 19% over 2012, even though our Estes Park properties closed a month early.
- What happens to the extra money? The excess goes into the fund balance for future use.
- We are starting to see the fruits of our master plan improvements – like full-hook-up campsites that generate more revenue.
- Horsetooth has historically contributed to the financial health of the rest of the lakes; but the other locations are gradually pulling more of their weight.
- The loan owed to Solid Waste will be paid back over 3 years beginning this year.

Board & Staff Comments:

Linda Knowlton: Are you able to show that they are saving us money? Can you quantify that savings?

Dan Rieves: We cannot quantify it, but they are saving money. The hours the gate houses are open have been scaled back; the staff hours to stock, empty the pay stations and count the funds are eliminated. The total cost of the machines were recovered in the first year. Almost no complaints were received about the lack of cash option. One roll of paper produces 5000 permits; the old stations had to be restocked in bundles of 25 or 50. Besides that, they are making us money – compliance went from 58% to 90%. Self serve revenue increased dramatically.

Steve Ambrose: Has there been any vandalism?

Dan Rieves: No. If anyone disturbs them, the machine notifies us. They also alert us when the machine is low on paper, someone is running a bad card repeatedly, etc.

Gary Buffington: Next we want to work on a way to use the auto pay stations to sell annual permits or print a receipt to exchange for an annual.

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PRESENTATIONS: None

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 District:

- This is the 4th year of Ranger Excellence school.
- Planning for FEMA flood work in the canyon and at Hermit Park has consumed a lot of time.
- 3 fulltime rangers are all out in the spring. We are figuring out how to backfill that void.
- The maintenance supervisor at Hermit will be leaving in April.
- Springtime maintenance, hiring, training.
- ANS inspection program is getting ready to begin for the season.
- Carter Lake Sail Club is trying some new things: a safety day in partnership with our staff; expanding the Regatta.
- Bedbug infested cabins have been sold – there were over 70 bids.
- WE are working with the Bureau of Reclamation on some other ideas to replace the cabins – tipis at Flatiron. This is a big trend, nationwide.
- We are in the last year of the contract for the Estes Park campgrounds. There was damage to the water system at East Portal.
- AVI will be the contract manager on the road project at Hermit Park – no timeline yet, but hoping early summer. We are also doing a pavilion upgrade.
- The hang-up on the Pinewood project has been an Army Corp of Engineer requirement that we go through the 404 permit process to move fill from the lake bottom to the shore. To avoid that, we must reduce campsites at the shore location.

Board and staff comments:

David Hattis: Has anything happened on extending stays at the Estes campgrounds? Is there a borrow area for the road at Hermit? What's the occupancy rate at Pinewood?

Chris Fleming: Extended stay issue has not been addressed yet, pending contract negotiations. Our CE does not allow borrow at Hermit. Completion of the trail system all the way around the lake will also be a plus at Pinewood.

Dan Rieves: The occupancy rate is about 40% - we expect it to go up with nicer facilities. If we put in electrical, that will definitely improve revenues. It's very difficult to trench into the ground up there, so we're not sure it can be done economically. If it just improves the experience of visitors, it will be money well-spent.

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Gary Buffington: Pinewood has always been neglected – last on the list for improvements. It's time to get it done.

Linda Knowlton: Do the neighbors know about the electrical service?

Dan Rieves: Yes, they would prefer it because there would be no generator noise. There will also be other elements that benefit the neighbors related to the water system, etc. The road to Pinewood is a natural filter, preventing large motorhomes from going up there, and the sites won't be large enough to accommodate large rigs.

David Hattis: The article in the Coloradoan about enforcing the regulation requiring people to pick up after their dogs. Are we also doing that?

Chris Fleming and Mark Caughlan: Yes – we have always enforced our dog regulations. We also have barrels placed in the first quarter mile of the trail to make it easier for people to get rid of the waste.

Gary Buffington: In the same article, it said the City is hiring 3 more rangers.

Steve Ambrose: What about the additional enforcement responsibilities related to marijuana?

Dan Rieves: The statute reads that you cannot consume in a public place. All of our areas are public places. The question pertains to expectation of privacy inside tents and motorhomes. We don't raise the issue with campers unless other unsafe or illegal related activity is occurring. Almost all our contacts involve use in a public place and/or by a person under the age of 21. Possession is no longer an issue, unless you reach a threshold in quantity, which is beyond the amount most people would be carrying with them.

Linda Knowlton: If the folks in the tent next to you are imbibing, and you complain, will we enforce?

Dan Rieves: Case law is not clear on the reasonable expectation of privacy based on the enclosures – tent vs pop-up vs motorhome. To us, a small quantity is no different than a six-pack of beer. If you aren't causing problems, and minding your own business, we won't bother you.

Horsetooth District:

- Water levels look good so far. Snowpack is up over 100%. Reservoirs may be filled. The last year they were full was in 2006.
- Fishing Expo was again successful for the tenth year. Our seminar speakers do it for free, and the event is free to the public.
- We are trying to buy some sonar units for use to improve search capabilities on Horsetooth and Carter. The technology is much improved.
- Lions Park – the rehab done last year saved the park in the flood. Greeley water is responsible for the work being done.
- Three rangers are out on family leave with new babies.

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Board and staff comments:

David Hattis: Asked about the Russian Olive trees. Are they treated with herbicides to prevent regrowth? [Yes.] Do we have a vegetation management plan? [Yes, as part of the master plan.]

Mark Caughlan: We received a grant to remove the Russian Olives in our campgrounds. The next threat will be the Emerald Ash Borer.

Linda Knowlton: She has heard that the harsh winter in the Midwest significantly reduced the population of Emerald Ash Borer.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

- This is the last year of the Estes Park campground contract. We have done a lot of great things in the past five years, improved relationships with neighbors, and have not yet made a profit. We won't continue the contract if there is not an increased financial incentive. We need to have finalized this summer to have time to prepare for the next season. The current terms are not conducive to renewing for us. There are major infrastructure issues which have not been addressed despite repeated assurances by EVPRD.
- Board membership: Four members' terms are up. Linda Knowlton, Ron Kainer, John Tipton, and Rob Harris. This is the best Parks Board we've had ever. Gary expressed his appreciation to all, and encouraged them all to re-apply.
- Copies of the first-ever Community Report were distributed.

Board and staff comments:

Rob Harris: What does it mean to re-purpose Mary's Lake campground?

Dan Rieves: It means they would use the Real Estate for something other than a campground.

Linda Knowlton: How much does EVPRD receive?

Gary Buffington: They get 5% off the top.

Chris Fleming: The Estes campgrounds closed a month early, at the beginning of the primary season – autumn.

Gary Buffington: The private concessionaires sold sites for the whole season. The Bureau of Reclamation will not allow us to do that – we had to limit stays to 14 days max, which cost us probably at least \$100,000 in revenues.

Chris Klaas: What is the update on Pam Mayhew, Volunteer Coordinator?

Gary Buffington: Pam is doing well, and hopes to return to work part-time soon.

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Respectfully submitted,

Debra Wykoff

APPROVED:

Rob Harris, Vice-Chair

<i>Next regular meeting: April 8, 2014 Larimer County Natural Resources Administrative Office Building, 1800 South County Road 31, Loveland CO.</i>	Public can view agenda and minutes at www.larimer.org/parks
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