

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES

Tuesday, February 10, 2015, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.,
Boyd Lake Room, Larimer County Courthouse Office Building
200 W. Oak Street, Fort 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:

Mark DeGregorio
Russ Fruits
Frank Gillespie
David Hattis
Rob Harris
Chris Klaas
Deborah Shulman
Steve Ambrose
John Gaffney
Stephanie
John Tipton

Absent:

Ron Kainer

Staff:

Gary Buffington
Mark Caughlan
Pam Mayhew
Dan Rieves
Deb Wykoff
Heather Young
Steve Johnson, Commissioner

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm. The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

GENERAL INFORMATION: (10 min.)

- 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.
- The North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization awarded Larimer County, Loveland and Fort Collins a \$450,000 Transportation Alternatives Program grant to complete the Front Range Trail, Loveland to Fort Collins segment. A Colorado State trails grant has also been submitted for this effort.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

This is the trail on Carpenter Road. We are planning construction to start in 2016.

- The GOCO Concept Paper for the Long View Corridor trail submitted by Larimer County, Loveland and City of Fort Collins was approved and we've been asked to submit a full application, due March 4. A Colorado Department of Transportation grant was also submitted for this effort. Nine projects were asked to submit an application. We will ask for \$1 million.
- Construction of the Poudre River Trail, Harmony to Timnath segment, was advertised on Friday, January 9. The project will be awarded in late January and built this spring. One of our important pieces was the acquisition of the Swets property. That part of the project is underway for bidding.
- The 7-acre Devil's Backbone Keyhole property closed December 3, 2014. The parcel has already been incorporated in to the updated management plan.
- The department's annual State of the Resource Report for 2014 will also be posted on our website soon.
- We are cooperating with CSU on the introduction of genetically pure bison from Yellowstone, 12 cow-calf pairs. 80 acres of Red Mountain will be fenced to add to Soapstone range. There will be a full presentation about the program at the next Advisory Board meeting. Brucellosis-free embryos will be implanted into the host mothers. The Great American Bison will be designated the national mammal.
- The City of Fort Collins is also introducing the black-footed ferret at Soapstone.
- Open Lands Manager, Kerri Rollins, was part of an interview panel for the next Loveland Parks & Rec Director. There were 7 candidates and Elizabeth Anderson will start on February 17. Anderson is currently the Operations Manager for the Parks and Recreation department in Sacramento, Calif.
- The Devils' Backbone and Blue Sky Trail ended 2014 with over 106,000 visitors! Camera counters will be moved to Red Mountain Open Space for 2015.
- Stephanie Van Dyken has volunteered to represent PAB on the committee to select the 2015 Artist of the Year. Diane Roeder, a Sr. Accounting Technician with our department, and herself an accomplished local artist, will head up the committee this year.
- The Red Feather Lakes Library is seeking Larimer County sponsorship for a GOCO mini-grant request to redevelop the parking area into a nature-based community use area. They will ask for \$45,000, toward a total need of \$60,000. We are planning to sponsor them, and may award them several thousand dollars through our Small Grants Program, since we have invested very few sales tax dollars so far in the Red Feather area.
- The Big Thompson Conservation and Recreation Plan is underway and the first public meeting is planned for February 12 in Loveland. This is a partnership endeavor with City of Loveland and GOCO. We submitted a request for federal money to purchase around 10 properties in the canyon. The values being offered are post-flood. We have hired a consultant to assist with this process.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

- Rob Novak, our Community Relations Specialist, has left the County to be the Director of Communications for CSU's Natural Resources Department. The position has been re-advertised after a thorough recruiting effort failed to generate a successful candidate.

5:55 PRESENTATIONS:

Wildflower Guide Volunteer Project – Heather Young, Education Coordinator

- Heather introduced volunteer, Jane Thompson, who was part of the group of 6 volunteers who donated over 10,000 hours to work on the project. All the illustrations were also done by a volunteer.
- Jane explained that she and another team member realized that most flower guides do not include many of the flowers commonly seen in the foothills in this area. Paul Alaback, a retired professor from the University of Montana, in collaboration with others, produced the copy. Linda Bilsing edited. Photographer, Janet Sitas, took many of the photos; Lisa Matthews did the drawings. Jenna McAleer also worked on the project. The project had several partner agencies which provided both financial and technical support.
- The Guides will be sold through our campground reservation system. Our goal is for it to be a self-sustaining project, with funding for future printings provided by sales of the guide. The initial printing was 1000 copies.
- We hope this guide will be used in educational settings, and that users will graduate from this guide to more technical guides.
- Jane's parting thought: If we could get this online, there could be a link on the County website. The group hopes to find funding for that next.
- County Manager Linda Hoffmann wrote a letter of recognition of this work; and this Board commended the project team for the quality of The Foothills Plant and Flower Guide!

2014 End of Year Presentation for the Education & Volunteer Programs – Heather Young, Education Coordinator, and Pam Mayhew, Volunteer Coordinator

- See attached presentation for an overview of these two programs.
- Board member Chris Klaas is a Boat Ranger Assistant at Carter Lake.
- Our objective is to manage the volunteers we have effectively, rather than just growing the program to an unmanageable size.
- 2014 Volunteer Program statistics:
 - Increase in volunteer service hours, (2014 hours' recorded to date - 23,478) (2013 - 18,138)
 - Increase in the number of projects' (2014-30 projects) (2013-20 projects)
 - Increase in the number of engaged volunteers' (2014-320 volunteers) (2013-210 volunteers)
 - Restoration of the annual Volunteer Recognition Event with 160 attendees
- 2014 achievements of the Education Program include production of :

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

- The Foothills Plant and Flower Guide
 - Junior Ranger Guide
 - Education Section of the Devils Backbone Management Plan
 - National Get Outdoors Day – 1650 participants
 - Chimney Hollow Bioblitz – 300 species surveyed, 75 volunteers
 - NoCo Nature Festival – 800+ people (replaced the NoCo Birding Fair)
- Total outreach impact for Education Program:
 - 178 events for 7226 members of the public
 - Decrease in number of programs, but 22% increase in' participants/program and 13% increase in total number of participants.
 - Campground hosts are starting to be paid for their service; we may have to re-assess our program, as we lose qualified and experienced people.

Board and staff comments:

Mark Degregorio gave a shout-out to Heather for her assistance on the RMNP workshops!

David Hattis: Is there a mechanism to get feedback from our volunteers?

Pam: The response to our new events is a good indication. We do survey our campground program presenters.

Heather: We rely more heavily on personal contact with our volunteers instead of surveys.

Dan: It's difficult because there are so many levels of interaction with volunteers – various tools and communication methods.

Russ Fruits: Is there any plan by the Commissioners to expand the demographic criteria for participation in the Sr. Tax Work off program?

Commissioner Johnson: Doesn't know.

Pam: Participants in the Sr. Tax Work-off Program typically don't have enough hours to make it worth the time to train them.

Frank Gillespie: What about TEN?

Heather: Teaching Environment Naturally – it's a week-long training. It's still going on – it's a state program. They use Devils Backbone for nature hikes. You can teach environmental education through any topic; hopefully it's expanding.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Short Term Concession Policy/Procedure – Dan Rieves

- What was broken with the procedure was the fee mechanism for a small proprietor conducting some kind of business, like canoe or kayak rentals, etc. on our properties. For years we had only a few – scuba instruction, etc. But now this is ballooning – e.g., there are 15-20 paddleboard concessions.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

- The fee structure was arbitrary: 5-8% of gross revenues. (These are not the club or long term concession licenses.) These are one year agreements. There is a lot of work to get one vendor signed up, with insurance requirements, negotiations, etc. At the end of the year, many of these generate \$50 or less. This has not been cost effective for the department.
- We will now assess a \$500 concession fee up front. This is 5% of gross up to \$10,000. Anything above \$10,000, 5% kicks in. We can also use the Special Event process to capture one-time uses like a scuba certification dive.
- The process will be streamlined; vendors will be provided with a license certificate and they are required to carry their insurance certificate with them as well.
- Issue: How to decide which vendors to choose, and how to balance competing needs. Licenses may be limited to specific locations. We have done a poor job of partnering with our concessionaires. We plan to change this in the future. Our short term concessions should appear on our website and camping reservation system.

Board and staff comments:

David Hattis: When do you make that call to limit the number of vendors – e.g., 3-4 instead of 10? Are the department's costs covered by the fees?

Dan: On a returning vendor, costs are covered. On a new vendor, we probably don't break even.

Gary: You don't get to be 96% self-sufficient by being poor business managers. We are very focused on establishing a sound business basis.

Dan: He would rather see existing vendors add more services, instead of adding more vendors. If it becomes too competitive, we'll have to open it up to a bidding process and select a limited number. We try to take care of our vendors. Vendors must adhere to a set schedule – be there when they say they will. Food vendors have not been successful.

Dan: We had our pavilion rental fees too high, and rentals dropped. We reduced the fees, and now pavilion rentals are higher.

John Gaffney: How many \$500 licenses do we expect to sell this year?

Dan: Probably around 10.

Horsetooth building plans – Gary Buffington

- In the past 8 years, we have spent around \$10 million on visitor improvements. In the final two years of the Parks Master Plan, we will focus on staff buildings at Horsetooth.
- The staff building will be the new “front door” to Horsetooth Reservoir – something it has lacked all these years.
- We are in the second round of designs for the Horsetooth office building. Next we plan to do a new shop. The total cost for both will probably be around \$3 million.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

- The offices will be located in a 5000 square foot building; it will have 2 levels, with walled offices, open work stations, lots of storage, and a public interface area. It will be located on the knoll overlooking the reservoir at S. Bay.
- The public process will start in the spring.
- The new Park Master Plan process will begin in 2016.

Board and staff comments:

Steve Johnson: The Commissioners were so impressed with Mark Caughlan, who gave a formal presentation to the Commissioners early today – he cares so deeply about Horsetooth, and is really in tune with what would work for the site. His dedication and love for Horsetooth deeply impressed Steve. He thinks we are so fortunate to have such quality staff, and knows the public will benefit from Mark's efforts for many years to come.

Gary: Mark is the project manager; Horsetooth is his life and love.

Dan: Mark is good at building stuff!

David Hattis: Is the Bureau contributing any funding toward it?

Gary: We won't know until later in the year. They will be cooperating on a display about the Colorado – Big Thompson water project.

Frank Gillespie: What will the building be called? It's being put on a prime spot – will the public criticize us for putting a building on it?

Gary: It won't be a huge interpretive education center – it's the front door for a recreation area. A front door is so important to the public, to set the tone. We are replacing 3 tent sites currently on the site. We wrestled with the option of a public facility – wedding venue, etc. But the costs are so extraordinary to operate such a public venue, we can't justify it without a guaranteed income stream. Parking would be an issue – not enough flat ground.

Fleet Management Plan – Gary Buffington

- We are now part of the County Fleet Management Plan. We have 110 pieces of equipment, managed with our own mechanic, who now works for the Fleet Department. The budget projections indicate that we may save up to \$35,000 this year. Replacement costs will be spread over the life of the equipment.

Board and staff comments:

David Hattis: Expectations?

Gary: It costs us \$300k a year to manage Fleet. We will be assessing whether the County plan is cost-effective; if not, the agreement can be revisited annually.

Dan: Loss of autonomy is a concern – will the mechanic be available when we need him? Will we be able to choose the equipment we need? We won't be able to defer replacement until an item of equipment really needs to be replaced and/or we can afford to do so!

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

Estes Campgrounds – Five Year Report – Gary Buffington

- For the previous 20 years, the Estes Valley Recreation and Park District had concessionaires managing their campgrounds. We assumed management responsibility for five years. Gary presented the 5-year financial summary. The department netted \$25,400. This was disappointing, to say the least. However, on the plus side, the Estes operation absorbed \$366,000 in allocated costs for things like administration, mechanic services, volunteer and education services, etc.

Board and staff comments:

Frank Gillespie: What did you learn?

Gary: For 20 years, the concessionaires weren't required to adhere to the 14 day rule for camping. The Bureau of Reclamation refused to allow us to do the same. That significantly reduced revenues. The partnership wasn't as great as we thought it would be. RV parks are not our forte.

David Hattis: How is it going this year for the District?

Dan: There were serious utility and infrastructure issues when we took it over. We provided the bridge for them to take over management themselves. The last year was a great year – higher revenues, most of the problems were fixed. We spent the last six months working with their new campground manager. A lot of the “high wire act” and brain damage was done – but we didn't get to enjoy the fruits of our labor. We helped Estes stay on the same reservation system. The Sheriff is not thrilled, because they relied on our staff to manage the campgrounds; and now they must respond to issues that arise.

Mark DeGregorio: Did we get any money from the BOR for ADA improvements?

Dan: Those funds went to the Rec District, not to us. There were a lot of emergency repairs. It was one thing after another.

Mark: The reason he was so opposed to this and voted against it was that he toured the campgrounds with an engineer who told him about all the issues – the engineer said it was a black hole waiting to happen.

Dan: What should have happened was that the campgrounds should have been closed until all the facilities were brought up to standard. But this was not considered politically or financially palatable. The District could not forego the \$20,000 per year from their budget which the campground revenues represented.

David: \$25,000 isn't much to speak of, but what the Department did with those properties is a long term benefit to the community. It demonstrates again the professionalism and quality the Department provides on every project it undertakes.

Steve Johnson: Are we in a position to offer them advice?

Gary: Chris Fleming is located up there at Hermit Park.

David: Is Reclamation going to hold them to the 14 day camping limit? If not, it changes the nature of the use of that property.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

Gary: It represents \$100,000 in additional revenue. We will certainly expect Reclamation to hold them to the same standard.

Chris Klaas: Is the paid campground manager still there with the District? It's going to be tough for a smaller agency to handle an operation like that.

Gary: Yes, but Chris Fleming says one person will not be able to run the whole operation. We had a store manager, park rangers, maintenance staff, etc. We had a seasonal staff as well.

Dan: It will be 20 hours a week just to operate the store.

STANDING AGENDA ITEMS:

Park District updates and Parks Master Plan Implementation Progress report – Dan Rieves, Carter Lake District Manager

- Pinewood renovation project is done. We are now building the walk-in tent sites on Windy Pines. We're also doing the playscape and amphitheatre with in-house crews.
- The Admin Offices flooded in January.
- The offices at the ROC have been subdivided to provide two closed door offices.
- Water levels at both Reservoirs are outstanding, and will be good through mid to late July, as far as we know now.
- 2014 was the perfect recreation weather: Snow in the mountains, full reservoirs, good weather on the weekends. We saw camping increase on Thursdays.
- For 2015, early reservations are up as much as 38%! Weekend and holiday campsites are already almost booked up.
- We are recruiting summer help. Paul Treakle, the consummate restroom custodian and all-round handyman at Horsetooth, is not returning this summer. He will leave huge shoes to fill.
- This year will be an operational year – no big projects pending. We're just getting ready for summer!

Board and staff comments:

- David Hattis: Will there be a grand opening for Pinewood?
- Dan: We'll do a soft opening, and wait for the green to sprout on all the dirt we moved. Probably in May or June.
- David: Have we made any headway with BOR and Northern Water on fluctuating water levels?
- Dan: There are too many complexities for them to make high water levels for recreation a priority. Without buying a lot of water, there is no way to control that.
- Gary: We meet with them monthly. That's the biggest influence we have – staying in touch with them.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

- Dan: We're part of the conversation, so at least we know in advance what's coming. But people still think Gary has the dial in his office, and personally controls water levels in the reservoirs!
- Steve Ambrose: Are you going to do the "show me" trip for the Board this spring?
- Dan: We'll schedule it .

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Thanked Deb for bird-dogging the Visitor Center flooding repair issues. The projected cost is over \$92,000. The backflow preventer system failed when a surge of water pressure came down the hill at 1 am. Pea gravel stuck in the valve, and water flooded the building. The alarm went off at 1 am; both our staff and the fire department responded. Repairs will take another 4-6 weeks.
- Annual park permits were distributed to all board members present.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Wykoff

APPROVED:

Russell Fruits, Chair

*Next regular meeting: March 10, Boyd Lake Room,
Courthouse Office Building, 200 W. Oak Street, Ft.
Collins, CO*

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