

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES

Tuesday, March 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
Ron Kainer
Chris Klaas
Deborah Shulman
Steve Ambrose
Stephanie Van Dyken
John Tipton

Absent:

John Gaffney

Staff:

Gary Buffington
Mark Caughlan
Dan Rieves
Deb Wykoff

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

GENERAL INFORMATION:

- a. Natural Resource Events for this month: See website <http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources>.
- b. 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.
- c. On Feb 12, we had our first public meeting for the Big Thompson Conservation and Recreation assessment. There will be an update later in the meeting.
- d. Heather Young and Kerri Rollins assisted with a tour of the Playscape project at Big Thompson Elementary for GOCO and a member of the National Children and Nature Network.

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- e. The County Manager approved the new Devil's Backbone Management Plan. The Plan was also recommended for approval by Fort Collins' Land Conservation and Stewardship Board and is awaiting signature by the Fort Collins City Manager.
- f. The Poudre River Forum was a success, with more than 200 people in attendance and a variety of perspectives on the future of water in Colorado were expressed. Hopefully cooperative projects can be developed, that benefit agriculture and the environment.
- g. Heather Young led a guided hike for CSU International Natural Resources students.
- h. [11th Annual Fishing Expo](#) was held on March 7 & 8 at the 1st National Bank Building at The Ranch. Our goal is to better connect our visitors to the shoulder seasons. Our reservoirs fluctuate 40-50 ft annually, which makes them challenging to fish. We try to teach people how to fish our reservoirs. There are speaker seminars every half hour to an hour; and there are vendors. We have the same speakers as at any Denver event. We had 3500 people over 2 days. It was well attended this year.
- i. The Poudre River Trail segment from the Gateway Trailhead in Timnath was awarded to NORAA Concrete Construction out of Brighton.
- j. Pam Mayhew & Ranger Zach Cook are working with Fort Collins on the 2015 Volunteer Ranger Assistant training, Campground host recruitment for 2015 almost complete.
- k. Get Outdoors Day will be on Saturday, June 13, this year.
- l. The partnership is moving forward to further the genetics of Yellowstone bison, the last large reservoir of genetically pure bison, by grazing bison on portions of Red Mountain Open Space and Soapstone Prairie Natural Area and then propagating calves with pure bison genes, to be placed in conservation herds around the U.S. The County Manager has signed the IGA between Larimer County, Fort Collins, CSU and the USDA and the project is already receiving significant press regionally and statewide! Dr. Jennifer Barfield is overseeing the project. Meegan Flenniken will be giving a presentation on the project at this meeting.

PRESENTATIONS:

Horsetooth Building Plans – Mark Caughlan, Horsetooth District Manager

- Gary and Mark met with the Commissioners last week. There will be a public open house on Thursday, March 12.
- These buildings are the last feasible projects included in the 2007 Parks Master Plan for Horsetooth.
- All the buildings at Horsetooth have the same look. The roofline, large pillars, textures of materials, etc., on the shower facilities and the group pavilion. The new building will follow suit. We tried to maintain a “residential look” that fits with the S. Bay neighborhood.
- The hinge point in S. Bay is between day use and camping: That’s where the new headquarters will be located.
- Horsetooth is the second busiest reservoir in Colorado, but has no front door. This building will serve that purpose.
- There will be 28 parking spaces in front of the building; and access to the large parking lot behind the building.
- There will be a display about the Colorado-Big Thompson Water District in the lobby of the visitor center area. There will also be interpretive displays about water levels, and environmental education topics. In addition to the indoor area, there are two outdoor interpretive kiosks.

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- The office area and the meeting room area are separated by the lobby. There will be a large meeting room which can be divided into two smaller areas. Both rooms will open onto a large deck overlooking the reservoir.
- There will be several staff offices, plus an open central area with cubicles for seasonal staff. An elevator to the lower level is required to meet ADA requirements.
- After the office building is completed, we will replace the maintenance building on the current location of the compound, but oriented differently for southern exposure. The maintenance building will incorporate office space, lockable storage, lockers, work and break rooms.
- Construction is tentatively scheduled to begin in November 2015, and the headquarters building will open in July 2016.

Board and staff comments:

David Hattis: Did we consider skylights? He appreciates the storage for tables and chairs. If this is a 20-30 year building, is it large enough for future staff?

Gary: We're planning on a future department headquarters which will take care of most future expansion. Horsetooth will primarily serve the Horsetooth area.

Mark: Depending on how much rock they find, we may be able to expand the lower level to gain usable space.

Dan: Horsetooth isn't going to get any bigger or busier than it is now. In the future, some staff will migrate out of this location to the department headquarters in the future, which frees up expansion space at Horsetooth.

Mark: The windows go all the way to the peak of the roofline – lots of light. Hence, no skylights.

Deborah: Is that enough parking?

Mark: Yes – during the season, people will go directly to their activity – camping or boating

Mark DeGregorio: Any thought about redesigning the entrance station to match at the same time, to capitalize on the economies of scale, since you'll have a construction crew on site anyway?

Mark: That's a great idea – but note that all our entrances look the same. The S. Bay entrance will be redone this fall, which is an opportunity to improve the entrance station as well.

Deborah: The headquarters building fits really nicely into the terrain, with the native rock. The attention being paid to how it looks from across the reservoir, and from the road, is very nice.

Chris Klaas: Does the public need a permit to access the visitor center?

Mark: Not if that is the only destination.

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DISCUSSION ITEMS:

2014 *Permit Revenues* – Dan Rieves, Carter District Manager

- Dan displayed a spreadsheet comparing permit sales by type and revenue. With the annual permit redesign last year, it is still somewhat ‘apples to oranges’ to compare revenues across years; so we will just look at 2013-14.
- There are factors we can predict and control, and others we cannot. In 2014, we enjoyed a “perfect storm of goodness!” Everything was good – the weather was great, no disasters, water levels, visitation.
- Iron rangers have been a very profitable investment. Self-serve revenues have jumped.
- The 6-mo. reservation window has also been very successful – all the weekends are sold far in advance, which pushes additional visitation to the weekdays. At Horsetooth, many weeks we were 80% full during the week.
- Because Carter Lake is more sailboat-based, with the marina and the sailclub, there is less additional weekend influx.
- With high water, we face some management challenges parking vehicles and trailers.
- Online sales are increasing, and we expect to collect more revenue earlier in the year, due to the 180 reservation window. We hope that will start to reduce pressure on the entrance stations.
- Our philosophy has been put the projects on the ground, and let the people see their money at work, and they will come. This has proved out. We’ve done all the projects for the customer first. Now we’re doing the projects for our staff. If we had done the visitor center at Horsetooth first, before we had full hook-ups, showers, a nice picnic pavilion, etc., the public impact would be very different. But the public has seen that we are good stewards of our resources, for their benefit.
- Day permit fees have not been increased for almost a decade.

Board and staff comments:

David Hattis: Does all the revenue generated at the reservoirs stay there?

Gary: Yes, but it is spent at any of the 4 reservoirs.

Dan: The revenues from Horsetooth help support Carter.

Mark DeGregorio: Are we planning to add any seasonal staff this summer? People are seeing a high level of service from facilities, and they need to see the same from the staff. Only two things matter: Clean restrooms, and for the person at the gate house to smile!

Dan: Our expectation is that we will make the best use of our current resources – scheduling , use of volunteers, etc. – before we add staff.

Deborah Shulman: What was the revenue impact of the High Park Fire?

Dan: We lost around \$50,000 in revenues. But with the fires, floods and ProChallenge, we have become used to dealing with crises.

Mark: What about long term reserves for rainy days?

Gary: We always maintain the required reserves; then we hold the excess for future projects as well as operating needs.

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David Hattis: Are we telling our story about how well we're doing financially?

Mark DeGregorio: If gas prices stay low, we may see people going back to Glendo Reservoir and Lake McConaughy on the weekends.

Dan: He doesn't think as many people will leave, as will come to the reservoirs and stay longer.

Deborah: Do a significant number of people come from out of state?

Mark: Over 50% are from the Denver Metro area. Not many from out of state.

2014 Violations Summary – Dan Rieves

- All rangers complete a daily duty log, and maintain monthly patrol summaries of all contacts, both public relations and law enforcement, by specific type of contact, action taken, and hours spent by type of patrol (boat, foot, bike, horse, training, outreach). This information tells us what our rangers are spending their time doing. At the end of the year, all this data is compiled by area.
- Top 5 law enforcement situations:
 - Campground issues
 - Fishing licenses
 - Restricted area
 - Boating violations
 - Traffic contacts
 - Alcohol related / dog related (Honorable Mention)
- 20% of all contacts are law enforcement contacts. 5% of law enforcement contacts are given a citation. 0.8% of law enforcement contacts are arrested.
- Rangers patrolled on foot or bike a distance equivalent to the distance from the earth to a satellite orbiting the earth!
- Total contacts: 39,555 by 25 rangers. Officer initiated contacts: 1152, much higher than dispatched calls.

Board and staff comments:

Chris Klaas: What's the day/night staffing? With Horsetooth, there is also a lot of time traveling the length of the reservoir.

Mark: 5 at night; 8 during the day.

Dan: At Horsetooth, there will be one at Inlet Bay, two at S. Bay, one on the east side, and two on the water.

Frank Gillespie: The stats show a couple of people who initiate a lot of contacts – why is that? Are they told to go out and generate revenue? It is not uncommon in bad economies, in small municipalities to emphasize revenue generation through ticket generation. We do not do that. The reason some rangers write more is their assigned location – Horsetooth rangers have more contacts. A night ranger will have low hours interpretive contacts and higher enforcement contacts. Different members of the team fulfill different needs effectively.

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Gary: He looks at the statistics every year, and looks for trends that need to be addressed.

Russ: The department doesn't generate much revenue from tickets.

David Hattis: Have we had a conversation about wearing video-cams?

Dan: Some of our rangers do wear them. The department purchased a couple. We have policies on how the recordings are to be stored – we can't cherry pick the results. We're waiting for the Sheriff to make the final decision, and go with that. Most officers working for us are pro-body camera, because of the documentation it provides – and knowing we're being recorded keeps us on our toes.

Laramie Foothills Bison Conservation Herd – Meegan Flenniken, Planning, Development & Land Stewardship Program Manager

- Larimer County has signed an IGA with Fort Collins and CSU. 80 acres of Red Mountain Open Space has been designated as bison pasture for a total of 800 acres with Soapstone, to be expanded to 1200 acres, with a maximum herd size of 24. The bison are owned by CSU and managed by USDA.
- Yellowstone Bison are the largest herd of genetically pure bison, which are also infected with brucellosis. A fertilized embryo from a bison with Yellowstone genetics will be genetically washed to remove brucellosis, then implanted in a non-Yellowstone female. Ova and semen or embryos are removed from dead Yellowstone bison; cleaned, tested, implanted in a hostess or frozen.
- Offspring are retested for brucellosis. No animals that test positive will be released at Red Mountain. Calves may be sold to private entities, or donated to the city/county. All funds from any sales would go back into the program. This is also an excellent opportunity for larger studies on ecosystem impacts and public education and engagement.

Board and staff comments:

Steve Ambrose: What's the definition of a pure bison? Are there impure bison in Yellowstone? Is the pure strain susceptible to the disease? How is it transferred?

Meegan: A pure bison has 100% Yellowstone ancestral genetics. All Yellowstone are pure. They are susceptible to brucellosis. That's why twice a year surveillance is important. It spreads through contact – saliva or droppings.

Mark DeGregorio: Are neighboring herds tested as well? Elk, cattle, etc? What about fence jumpers?

Meegan: Yes. Females in the herd are not allowed to be in estrus while on Red Mountain and Soapstone.

Big Thompson Conservation and Recreation Assessment – Meegan provided a quick update to set up a more in-depth discussion at the April meeting.

- In 1976, Larimer County assumed ownership of many parcels in the Big Thompson Canyon, many of which were also affected by the 2013 flood.
- 90 parcels have been declared substantially damaged by the 2013 flood.
- Larimer County, Loveland, USFS, and other entities which own property in the canyon are cooperating in a study to prioritize areas for conservation and recreation.

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- Criteria were developed for assessing properties, including feasible public access to the river, within the flood plain. 20 areas were identified.
- The first public meeting was on February 12. There is an online survey available: www.larimer.org/bigthompsonplan/ where the public and board members may provide feedback.
- Second public meeting with a draft plan will be in early May – want to narrow it down to 10-12 priority areas, and determine what will happen with all the parcels owned by Larimer County.
- Final plan may be adopted in late May or early June

Board and staff comments:

Mark DeGregorio: How does this relate to CDOT – where are they going to put the road? And what about other processes – like houses people want to rebuild – etc.? Is there a timeline for determination of the fate of private properties?

Meegan: It is a difficult cart/horse dilemma. The team wants to be ahead of it, and not wait too long; there were also grant opportunities they wanted to take advantage of. CDOT's final alignment is supposed to come out in September. Letters have been sent to all 90 parcel owners, but some are contesting, .

Russ Fruits: This board has spent a long time dealing with properties and owners. How transparent will this process be?

Meegan: Many fishing groups have participated in the public process. It is a good point how clear will the plan be about the parcels that don't qualify and what can be done with them.

STANDING AGENDA ITEMS:

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

- Pinewood Campground renovations are coming along well.
- Reservoirs open 4/1 for boating.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Wykoff

APPROVED:

Russell Fruits, Chair

Next regular meeting: April 14, Lake Estes Room, Room 333, Larimer County Courthouse Office Building

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