

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES

Tuesday, April 14, 2015, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.,

Lake Estes Room 333, Larimer County Courthouse Office Building, 200 West Oak, 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.

Please call Deb at 619-4567 if you are unable to attend this meeting. Votes require a quorum. Thanks!

PRESENT:

Parks Advisory Board members:

Steve Ambrose
Mark DeGregorio
John Gaffney
Frank Gillespie
David Hattis
Rob Harris
Ron Kainer
Chris Klaas
Stephanie Van Dyken

Absent:

Russ Fruits
John Tipton
Deborah Shulman

Staff:

Gary Buffington
Mark Caughlan
Dan Rieves
Judy Rodriguez
Zac Wiebe

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm. The minutes of the last meeting were approved. Charlie Johnson photographed the Board for the 2014 Annual Report.

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.
- Green CE closed in late February, protecting an additional 677 acres in the Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains corridor – Larimer County contributed \$75,000 to the conservation easement.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

- The Meininger TE closed March 18, and Poudre River Trail construction is still scheduled for completion in June!
- The Grant Access easement at Lions Park Open Space closed March 3rd. The restoration project planned for the banks of the Poudre River has started and will carry on after Spring runoff.
- The COSA Conference will be in Snow Mass September 14-16. OLAB members are encouraged to sign up.

PRESENTATIONS: None

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Big Thompson Conservation and Recreation Assessment – Zac Wiebe

- Zac presented the conservation and recreation assessment currently underway regarding the Big Thompson corridor. After several meetings with a technical advisory committee and with the public, the plan is now being drafted into chapters.
- Chapters include: 1. Significant recreation/conservation area; 2. Parcels with limited public use value (no facilities but open, e.g., for fishing); 3. Parcels with no public use value (leave natural); 4. Divestment properties (properties that could be disposed. Each chapter will contain descriptions of the County's current properties that fit that chapter definition.
- The plan will also describe what we'll do with properties we inherit. There are 10 property owners have signed up for FEMA buyout since they can't rebuild. Nine in Big Thompson canyon and one in Drake. Still waiting for final approval.
- We do work with Ft Collins and Loveland, but they are pulling back, so we'll probably be expected to take on more. Expect to have the final plan by June. CDOT's final plans are expected later this year.
- The information Zac presented can be found on the County website. The maps may be viewed here as well as draft plan, which will be posted soon: <http://www.larimer.org/bigthompsonplan/BT-Maps.pdf>

Board and staff comments:

David Hattis: Are the conservation easements noted on the maps shown on public lands? [Yes.]

Rob Harris: Is private land marked on maps? [No, unless they have an easement.]

Frank Gillespie: Is the yellow triangle on the Narrows Park map county land? [Yes, but is not accessible to the public. At one time the Board had approved to sell it to a neighbor, but that never happened.]

Mark DeGregorio: The Forks/Drake area is seeing residents encroaching on land (e.g., RV park). Who is allowing this? Who needs to follow up on what is happening on the land? [The County needs to look at this issue soon.]

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

Mark DeGregorio: Do we know the diversity of people who attended the public meetings? [Although the BTRC meetings attracted landowners in the area, the County's meetings had a variety of recreation/community groups and people interested in a healthy eco river system including people from Wellington and Windsor.]

Mark DeGregorio: Would the US Forest Service take back random parcels connected to forests? [Doubt it, but we can approach them when this plan is finished and we know what parcels we have and how they fit into the plan.]

MarkDeGregorio: There seem to be 3 processes working through the corridor: CDOT, FEMA, and county/city planning. Is everyone talking to each other on the BTRC? [Yes, it should be noted that FEMA dollars can't be used on Federal land.]

Stephanie van Dyken - Public comment showed bicycling - is that road or mountain? [People want to ride up the canyon and have connectivity to other areas. Biking trails would be difficult to ride and maintain. A detached trail isn't feasible. Replacement roads will have a 6 foot paved shoulder bikers could use. CDOT will be unable to add a separate bike trail or extra space to existing roads due to site constraints and cost.]

Frank Gillespie: Interpretation on the comments list, what does that mean? [More informational/directional vs. interactive/interpretational.]

2014 Camping Statistics – Dan Rieves

- Dan reviewed camping statistics for both weekend/weekday visits, and seasonal. We have great baseline information but can't always compare apples to apples over the years due to changes in reservation company, site increase, changes to sites.
- 2014 was a banner year for visits with campgrounds, probably due to full reservoir early and remained high all summer. We were up 19% with 14% increase in reservations, and total nights reserved and revenue was up 17%. We expect numbers in 2015 to be even higher.
- At near full capacity during the Memorial Day - Labor Day season (109 days) on weekends and higher on weekdays than in the past. Indications are that 2015 will be the same or even better.
- Popularity is causing difficulty in the way we staff for the season. We are also not seeing as many quality candidates for seasonal employment as we have in the past. Campground hosts in other areas are getting stipends. DNR will most likely increase seasonal pay (current \$8-10/hr) for this upcoming season.
- DNR doesn't have a lot of room to grow for camping. As we explore adding to the campgrounds, we also need to consider raising our rates at some point as they have been pretty stable for awhile. Need to explore all possible options including: broad brush increase at all sites; charging more for sites with exceptional views; and, differential pricing (charging more as the check-in date approaches). Increasing fees will have a political impact; we will need to be careful on how we approach any increase.
- Would also like to see more options with Active Network (reservation system). For example, giving a camper the option to show what's available this weekend at all our campgrounds. Talking to Active Network about connecting us to other community events (e.g., when someone uses Active Network to register to run the Horsetooth Half Marathon, they get a link to our campgrounds they might want to use while in the area).

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

Board and staff comments:

Rob Harris: Do we know out of state vs. resident? [Yes, 89% are from Colorado .]

David Hattis: Can we look at occupancy by site? [Yes.]

Mark DeGregorio: Will we add more cabins? [We are at a good place with cabins and don't have plans to add cabins. When the time comes to replace, we'll need to review needs.]

_____: What percent of our park generated revenue is from permits? [Of the total \$3 million in 2014 park-generated revenues, \$1.4 million (47%) came from day and annual permits; and \$1.25 million (41%) came from camping.]

David Hattis: Didn't we previously discuss out of state marketing? [Yes, that effort was to promote East Portal and Mary's Lake. We do get mentions in blogs and magazine and could encourage Active Network to make DNR parks the Park of the Week.]

David Hattis: Need to consider RV owners vs. other campers who can/can't afford increase.

Dan: We'll also need to look at all the other campgrounds – what do they charge? How do we fit in?

Chris Klaas: Does Active Network charge for their services? Can campers cancel their reservation? [Active Network charges the camper for each reservation (\$8.50). County does not pay them directly. Campers can cancel reservations with their reservation fee refunded, but there is a cancellation fee.]

Natural Resources Financials – Gary Buffington reviewed the presentation that he'll be giving to County commissioners in a few weeks.

Board and Staff Comments:

Mark DeGregorio: With the tax extension, will we need to bond out in the future? [Bonds are in the plan, but not sure where we'll be in the next 25 years.]

David Hattis: What does the bond debt service cover? [Loan we took out when matching funds were needed. Current debt will be paid back in 2018.]

Rob Harris: Are the sales tax figures just Larimer County? [Yes.]

Chris Klaas: Isn't the new tax extension split 50/50 with other entities? [Yes.]

Gary: Bureau of Reclamation was suppose to be a 50/50 agreement; but this is never guaranteed for capital improvements. It is more like 65/35. Bureau money is allocated by Congress, and only so much trickles down to our region.

Chris Klaas: Is there an expiration date on our management agreement with Reclamation? [Yes, our current MOU was effective 7/10/97, for 25 years, renewable for an additional 25 years.]

Chris – Do we hold a reserve in the budget? Does that include Tabor? [The County requires a 10% reserve for all property tax revenues, which includes Tabor. This applies only to the Weed District in our department,

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

because our other programs are not funded by property taxes. However, we do carry a large fund balance in all of our funds, which may be applied to operating deficits or to capital improvement projects, etc.]

ACTION ITEMS: None

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

Horsetooth District:

It's like summer already – last weekend had few campsites not filled at Horsetooth Reservoir. We are short-staffed because we don't staff for full campgrounds at this time. We have had a couple of motorcycle accidents and a girl thrown from a horse in the area, so the season is starting to be busy. We are also training seasonal employees.

New Horsetooth Visitor Center and office – Public comments due tomorrow (4/15). Have had several positive comments. Engineers and architects are working on details, and we should get budget soon.

Carter Lake District:

Our current challenge is to finish walk in sites at Pinewood by end of April; camp hosts are coming in; getting water turned on; lawnmowers out, buoys on reservoir.

The Admin Office has had technology nightmares (admin staff moved temporarily to Loveland) plus restoration to the building from water damage – it's been challenging working out of the office. Carter Lake Marina's slips are built and boats are starting to show up.

Worth mentioning that it has been difficult to get people hired as seasonal workers and campground hosts. Applicant pool has been tough. We are looking at increasing seasonal wages. Most of our rank and file parks positions pay under \$10 per hour. We are not competitive, and want our positions to be highly coveted.

We recently hired a new ranger for Horsetooth, who is currently in training. We also plan to fill several new positions: a Restoration Conservation Specialist; a part-time graphic artist; and a supervisor for the Outreach, Education & Volunteer programs.

David Hattis: Can seasonal employees be paid overtime? [Yes, we know there will be overtime, especially on heavy weekends, and on holiday weekends - Memorial Day, July 4, and Labor Day.]

David Hattis: Is the ANS program stable? [Yes, it is for now. If the state quits paying for the inspections and we had to cover the costs of that program, boating on the reservoir would be drastically be different.]

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Rodriguez

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

APPROVED:

Rob Harris, Vice-Chair

Next regular meeting: May 12, 2015, Boyd Lake Room, Larimer County Courthouse Office Building, 200 W. Oak Street, Ft. Collins, CO.

Public can view agenda and minutes at http://www.larimer.org/boards/minutes/parks_advisory_board.cfm