

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES

Tuesday, June 9, 2015, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.,

Bison Room, Natural Resources Administrative Offices, 1800 S. County Road 31, Loveland

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:

Frank Gillespie
Steve Ambrose
Ron Kainer
Deborah Shulman
Chris Klaas
Rob Harris
John Tipton
Mark DeGregorio
Russ Fruits

Staff:

Gary Buffington
Mark Caughlan
Dan Rieves
Deb Wykoff
Zac Wiebe
Steve Johnson, Commissioner

ABSENT:

John Gaffney
David Hattis
Stephanie Van Dyken

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

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.
- The [2014 Natural Resources Annual Report](#) is complete.
- The Community Relations Specialist position has been filled. Teddy Parker-Renga will start on June 1; and will be at a future meeting for introductions.
- Staff attended the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Partners in the Outdoors conference.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

- Boulder County is offering farm and water tours on June 13 and 23 (as well as in July and August) for \$20, includes lunch. For more info and registration go to <http://www.bouldercounty.org/os/events/pages/agtours.aspx>
- The Board of County Commissioners recommended the [Open Lands Master Plan](#) to the Planning Commission, who approved it on Wednesday, May 20, 2015. We will have printed copies soon.
- A new [revised DRAFT Big Thompson Canyon Conservation & Recreation Plan](#) has been posted to the website for public review. All feedback and comments are due by end of May. A survey is also available on the website for additional information.
- [Get Outdoors Day](#) is June 13, at Ft. Collins City Park – please make an effort to attend this wonderful family event led by Larimer County! Larimer County is the lead again this year and Heather and Pam are doing a great job! (Heather Young is our Education Coordinator; Pam Mayhew is our Volunteer Coordinator.)
- Rick Andersen, the Loveland Open Lands Manager, has resigned his position. Loveland is looking at restructuring before hiring again, and Marilyn Hilgenberg has been appointed as interim.
- SB206, the Colorado Coalition of Land Trust bill to reform the conservation easement tax credit passed 59-4 on May 6. The bill now heads to the Governor’s desk for signature.
- Natural Resources reached an agreement with the Planning Department to monitor 8 conservation easements that were accepted by the Rural Land Use Program in past years. This brings us in to compliance with state certification requirements.

PRESENTATIONS:

Smoke-free Trails Regulation – Jan Moraczewski, Larimer County Health & Environment

- Tobacco-Free Larimer County is a county-wide initiative to engage youth, and encourage people to quit smoking, by working with and through community organizations.
- In Larimer County, our smoking rate is 15%, but smoking-related illness is still the number one cause of death!
- E-cigarettes are the newest thing, and a source of concern, because the health effects are unknown.
- The City of Ft. Collins is a leader in the state in smoking prevention, with a 9% smoking rate. They have recently added parks and city property, downtown areas, and events like New West Fest to their no-smoking policy.
- Because many of our park and open space areas are contiguous to Ft. Collins areas, the question has arisen in regard to county parks and open space areas, and the possibility of a smoke-free trail policy.
- Is it a problem?
 - A survey of Ft. Collins showed 78-79% support for smoke-free areas
 - Larimer County survey showed 73% support from 2450 responses
 - 66 counties, nation-wide, have smoke-free trail policies (of a total of over 3000 counties) Several of these counties were in California – beach areas; but also in Wisconsin and other states.
 - No other Colorado counties have such a policy.
 - Tobacco litter, fire danger, youth exposure, and second-hand smoke are problems which may arise.
 - When youth use tobacco, they often congregate in park areas. When kids see other kids congregating and smoking, they think everybody does it, whereas it’s actually a very small percentage.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

- Secondhand smoke can be a risk where people congregate outside under a roof, depending on wind and other factors.
- How would such a policy be implemented?
 - Through education, signage, and enforcement
 - In natural areas, parks and open spaces, rangers may contact and educate visitors
 - Enforcement would be used only as a last resort
- How does the Board feel about this idea? Suggestions for additions, changes, ideas, concerns, questions, etc.?

Board and staff comments:

Deborah Shulman: Supports the testimony about cigarette butts – she lives near Lory State Park, and sees a lot of butts on the trails, etc. She thinks there are a lot health benefits to a smoke-free policy. People don't look at cigarette butts as litter.

Jan: People who smoke have rituals which include disposing of the butts in various ways, other than putting them in a trash receptacle.

Frank Gillespie: Cigarette butts take a couple of years to decompose, and add up! How many more rangers would it take to enforce this on our properties?

Dan: At every level of fire restrictions, smoking is identified as a prohibited action. We post detailed informational signs for fire bans.

Ron Kainer: The people who use our trails are running, exercising; he thinks they would support a smoke-free policy. In his neighborhood at Horsetooth, there are butts all over the ground.

John Tipton: It's a nice concept, and he likes the idea; but wonders how it could be enforced. Education seems like the most effective way to implement the policy.

Jan: There are different strategies, which may be implemented progressively, as the situation demands. If the public sees someone doing something they don't like, and there is a sign or regulation prohibiting it, they are more likely to confront someone about it.

Chris Klass: What is the current County regulation on littering?

Dan: We enforce at several levels – more stringent for large quantities. We have several related regulations, but nothing that specifically addresses smoking.

Jan: It would be up to the County to determine how and where to post signs. Jan suggests a catchy slogan like "Smoke-Free in L.C." They do not expect us to increase staffing to enforce it. If there were higher costs involved, the Commissioners would have to be advised of that.

Rob Harris: Would this have to be approved by the Commissioners? [Yes – as part of our park regulations.]

Jan: All she's talking about is trails, but this could be expanded to include boating, camping, etc., parking areas, campgrounds, etc.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

Steve Ambrose: What if people walked 10 ft. off the trail – then would it be permitted? The approval rate in the surveys is about the same as the percentage of non-smokers. Do we get complaints about this?

Dan: Only in the context of high fire danger – then people become very hostile toward smokers in our areas. If this were a more common conversation, we probably would have addressed it.

Deborah Shulman: If the definition isn't very clear, we may increase the risk of people going off-trail and smoking in grassy or dry areas.

Rob Harris: How is Ft. Collins defining it?

John Tipton: Does this include e-cigs? Those seem to meet most of the concerns – odor, fire risk, litter. Perhaps we should be actively encouraging their use!

Mark DeGregorio: In practicality, you don't see many people walking on trails, or riding bikes or horses while smoking cigarettes. He just doesn't see it at Rocky Mountain National Park.

Jan: Just as in a building, we set a standard, even if only 1 person would actually smoke indoors.

Mark Caughlan: The actual incidence of use is very low in our areas. No other counties in Colorado have such a regulation.

Gary: How is Ft. Collins promoting it, and what is the cost?

Jan: Her department may have some funds available.

Gary: What does the board feel about smoking in campgrounds?

Steve Ambrose: In campgrounds or on boat ramps, the smoking issue is much more serious than on trails.

Rob Harris: There is nothing worse than camping next to a bunch of smokers from whom you can't escape.

Mark DeGregorio: Campfires put out much more second-hand smoke than cigarettes; but there is nothing more annoying than smelling somebody's cigarette smoke blowing your way. And what about people in boats?

Dan: If you have a regulation that is property-wide, it will apply to every place in the park or open space. Is that an excessive infringement on personal freedom? What would employees who smoke do if we had a blanket prohibition throughout our areas?

Russ: Should we do some research before we make a decision? Wait and see what feedback the OLAB has, since most of the trails are on the open spaces? See how Ft. Collins handles it?

Gary: Perhaps we should treat Ft. Collins as a demonstration project, and see how it works out for them. Boulder County and Jefferson County are the two largest counties in the state – what are they doing about it? He wants to talk to the other entities involved before sending a recommendation to the Commissioners.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Big Thompson Conservation and Recreation Assessment: Update on Final Draft Plan – Zac Wiebe

- We partnered with Loveland to create this plan, from Loveland to the upper reaches of the river, including the north fork of the Big Thompson.
- Zac displayed the time line – they are just finishing up, slightly behind schedule. Since the last time Zac presented to this board, there have been several public meetings by CDOT, in which we made ourselves available for public feedback.
- Fishing access is by far the #1 priority of the public, and restrooms are #2. Hunting and camping and wildlife viewing were the lowest priorities.
- Themes expressed in public comment:
 - Restoring previous recreation sites
 - Improving fishing access and parking
 - Providing bike lanes
 - Restoring and protecting a healthy river ecosystem
- Action plan: Each agency has defined responsibilities for specific areas.
- Next steps: Incorporate feedback; obtain County Commissioners and Loveland City Council adoption; seek grant funding, investigate potential acquisitions, and finally begin restoration.

Board and staff comments:

Mark DeGregorio: Very surprised that wildlife viewing is so low – with the longhorn sheep in the canyon, he would expect that to rank higher – he'd like to see pull-off areas for interpretation. He attended one of the meetings. There were some interesting comments to CDOT. He sees 3 legs to the stool: Where does the road go; where does the river go; where does recreation go? It concerns him that the planning commission was not involved. He sees increasing encroachments and people just doing things in the canyon, and wonders where the code-enforcers are and who is minding the store? He has seen photos of RV parks right back where they were before. Will FEMA money pay for acquisition?

Zac: The FEMA money was for mitigating future hazards. Other funding is now available is for some purposes, but no other funds are available for recreation. There's definitely a little bit of a "wild west" environment in the canyon right now.

Russ Fruits: Now it's no longer a Parks Advisory Board issue; it's an Open Lands Advisory Board issue. The board which has dealt with these issues for a number of years and is most familiar with it, is now out of the picture. Are we just creating the same problems all over again? There's a strong sense of deja vu! What are we going to do with all these small isolated properties? How are we going to manage these properties effectively?

Mark DeGregorio: The difference this time is the opportunity to plan in advance.

Zac: We aren't getting saddled with properties we don't want. The properties have been classified:

Category 1: Develop for recreation

Category 2: Retain for public access, but don't provide facilities

Category 3: No public access, but will be retained for river health and wildlife habitat

Category 4: Identified for divestment

Gary: The reason the Canyon properties were moved to Open Lands was because of the funding available. These properties are open space in character, and there is no other funding available to maintain them.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

Chris Klaas: Has the county done any public education on this?

Gary: In the next 3 months, we'll see more details on which agency will be doing what, and more public information generated. If people were asked back in the 1800's what they wanted, they would have said faster horses! Our job as government is to help invent the automobile – the next best thing, not the last best thing. There will be 6 ft. paved shoulders all the way up the canyon, where possible. It is not yet clear how those are intended to be used – won't work for bikes if the gravel isn't kept cleaned off.

Zac: The public supports restrooms, but it's the canyon residents who especially want restrooms provided so people don't use their private property instead.

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

- It has been a challenging year for recreation so far.
- The weather is the #1 concern – as fantastic as it was last year, it's been equally awful this year.
- On Saturday, one parking lot was empty, except for employees' vehicles.
- The camping has stayed consistent – all sites sell, no matter what the weather on weekends.
- Weather and water levels have the biggest impact on day use. We have full reservoirs, but cold, wet weather. Memorial Day weekend was dead.
- Several areas were intermittently closed due to flooding. The little creek at Flatiron was flowing 10 inches over the road – had to close all the sites on the east side of the creek.
- Pinewood project: All the reseeded areas experienced little mud slides; some sites were too muddy to open. Walsh Construction just finished up last Friday. The asphalt in the camp host site didn't cure, and we had to move their rig.
- We normally mow a few times when the weather is wet – but now the grass grows faster than we can cut it. We can't keep up.
- May of 2015 was the wettest month ever on the globe. It was the wettest May in Colorado in 124 years.
- Our camp hosts are doing great – super adaptable, great attitudes that the rain hasn't dampened.
- We need nice weather on the weekends to turn things around on revenues. We aren't giving refunds unless people are displaced due to the weather.
- The Carter Lake Open was last weekend. There were good racing conditions, and a pretty good turnout; a well-run event.
- We lost part of the Foothills Trail due to erosion and wave action, along the shoreline.
- At the S. Bay swim beach, some of the riprap settled, and must be reinforced.
- Found 3 breaks in the water line at Inlet Bay.
- At Horsetooth, the campgrounds are 80% full even on weekdays; and the Sunrise day use area parking lot is full.
- We'll have high water levels through the year, which will help us in September.
- Catch a Special Thrill event was again successful. There were 32 kids this year; it was the 18th year at Horsetooth.
- Graffiti problems at Rotary Park continue. Smoking marijuana and graffiti seem to go hand in hand. We have increased patrols, and got some press focused on it.

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

- Duncan’s Ridge is a popular climbing area. We are working with the Climbing Coalition to improve those trails and routes. The Northern Colorado Climbing Coalition (N.C.C.C.) wants to adopt the area.

Board and staff comments:

Ron Kainer: Asked about graffiti he has observed in a specific area - Mark is aware of it, but it’s been too wet to get to it.

Chris Klaas: What is the status of the Horsetooth building project? Mark expects to start construction in December – we are neck-deep in the planning process right now.]

DIRECTOR’S REPORT

One new board member has been selected, but not yet confirmed by the County Commissioners. The new member will probably join us for the July meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Wykoff

APPROVED:

Russ Fruits, Chair

***Next regular meeting: July 14, 2015, Bison Room,
Natural Resources Administrative Offices, 1800 S.
County Road 31, Loveland, CO***

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