

Larimer County Parks Advisory Board

The mission of Larimer County Department of Natural Resources 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.

MINUTES

Scheduled times are subject to change.

Date: October 9, 2018

Time: 5:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Location: Natural Resources Administrative Offices (AO), 1800 S. County Road 31, Loveland, CO 80537

Contact: Please contact Emmy at ellisoea@co.larimer.co.us or 970-619-4462 if you are unable to attend.

Members		Staff		Guests
Brian Rasch	x	Ken Brink	x	Several members of the public
Chris Klaas		Gary Buffington	x	Susan Walker (HE)
Deborah Shulman		Dan Rieves	x	Jessica Harvey (HE)
Kathy Maher	x	Mark Caughlan	x	Jake Hoffman (BOR)
Mark De Gregorio	x	*Stephen Johnson		
Michael Robinson		Emmy Ellison (minutes)	x	
Robert Harris	x			
Russell Fruits	x			
Stephanie Hansen	x			
Steve Ambrose	x			

x = present

*commissioner

1. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS – 5:32 p.m.
2. PUBLIC COMMENT
 - a. Tracy Ayala spoke on behalf of Paddle Board @ The Comedy Overlook regarding their adherence to required codes/policies for operating a home occupation business near Satanka Cove, requesting to not be referred to as 'illegal.'
3. AGENDA REVIEW

4. DISCUSSION ITEMS

- a. Financial Analysis / Fee Study – Open Space and Parks fee increases have been proposed for 2019 including fee establishment at Devil’s Backbone. Susan Walker and Jessica Harvey from Harvey Economics (HE) presented a PowerPoint on the Financial Analysis Fee Study.
 - i. Working with LCDNR to conduct a financial analysis fee study to evaluate current user fees, analyze fee revenue in context of operating/capital expenses and present recommendations. Focus is on user fees – entrance permit sales and camping nights, primarily. Main discussion topics include revenue requirements, simple fee increases (entrance permits and camping fees), fees at Devil’s Backbone Open Space (DBB) – Loveland/South Trailhead, and weekend/holiday fees for camping. 3 possible approaches for revenue generation: simple fee increase, fees at DBB, and weekend/holiday fee increases for camping. Current fee locations are Horsetooth Reservoir, Carter Lake, Flatiron Reservoir, Pinewood Reservoir, Blue Sky Trailhead at DBB, Horsetooth Mountain, Hermit Park, and Ramsay-Shockey.
 - ii. Daily entrance permit fees have not changed in 10 years for parks (20 years for open space properties), annual permits have increased by \$10 in 10 years, and camping has increased in a couple of places by \$3-10. Many non-fee locations exist in Larimer County. Permit and Camping trends show a large increase in historic permit sales and camping nights. Continued growth in visitation is expected but at slower rates as capacity at popular locations is reached (parking spaces, campsites). Revenues and operating costs are separated for Parks and for Open Spaces. **Parks** – projections for fee revenues increasing but at slower rate due to capacity limits, operating expenses increase consistently, gap between two widens increasingly. In 2020, the expenses are projected to be 30% greater than the revenues. A 30% increase in entrance permits and a 30% increase in camping fees would close the gap for the next couple of years but is not long term solution. With that proposal, 100% of operating expenses would be covered, the 30% permit increase would be \$9 daily permit and \$3-10 daily camping increase (excluding cabins which are more). **Open Spaces** – difference here is there is only one camping area and fewer locations charge entrance fees so fee revenue is much smaller and covers only 25% of operating expenses. Sales tax largely covers the remaining 75%. Proposed increases are similar to Parks, \$9 entrance permit, \$3-10 camping fee increases (excluding cabins which are more). Would generate \$430K in 2019 moving the operating expenses covered to 36%. Annual permits increase by 30% also, senior and disabled passes will not change for either Parks or Open Spaces. Annual permits are small portion of sales but are bigger portion of revenue (36+%), but daily permits are bulk of sales and revenue overall.
 - iii. DBB fees – 2014 visitation counts show just under 68K visitors and 34K vehicles. 2019 projection show approximately 200K visitors. Intensive management is



required, similar to HT and Hermit (both charge fees), Loveland parking lot doubled in 2015 and continues to regularly reach capacity, and capacity periods require additional staffing. Access from Fort Collins (north side) currently requires a fee (Blue Sky), access from Loveland is currently free. Coyote Ridge access in Fort Collins is also free but doesn't allow dogs. Blue Sky visitation in 2014 was 25K visitors. Proposed fee revenue at DBB in 2019 using proposed fee increases shows a total of \$510K in revenue, proposed operating expenses are \$562, revenue generated there would stay there for maintenance and improvements. Numbers closely compare with Horsetooth Mountain Open Space. Price sensitivity discussed, people will still keep coming, supply and demand. Don't know what % of people who go to DBB already have the annual pass. There are other free places in LC.

- iv. Mark De Gregorio noted that fees exist for both revenue generation and management tool for resource degradation. Parking lots control visitation, how to manage that in the future. Don't want to price people out. On crowded days, visitation shifting already. Bigger picture with LC and Loveland acquisitions, need to consider use of the whole area. In favor of fees.
- v. Round Mountain and Viestenz-Smith in canyon are open now. Discussion of pressure points – it was noted that Coyote Ridge and Bobcat are current overflow areas. Management expects dispersal, not reduced visitation.
- vi. Kathy asked about mountain bikes and equestrian opportunities elsewhere. It was noted that there are other locations with those opportunities.
- vii. Differential pricing, common in recreation and tourism industry. Holidays and weekends tend to be busier, already turning people away during those times. Extended peak season is mid-April to mid-October. 2017 had 159 total days, 6 holidays and 49 weekend days. Assumption on slide is that 50% of visitation occurs on the weekends, also assume 50% fee increase on holidays and 30% fee increase on weekend days (the 50 and 30%'s can be modified).
- viii. Stephanie Hansen asked about resident vs. non-resident campers on the weekends. It was noted that it's about 75% to 25% non to resident for camping, will hit the non-residents harder. Price sensitivity data shows that the farther visitors come from, the less the fee matters.
- ix. Additional proposed camping fee revenues could generate \$160K to \$245K per year.
- x. Rob Harris asked about differential pricing for entrance permits. It was noted that cost of implementation is considered and for camping, the existing reservation system allows for ease of implementation, permits do not have that ability.
- xi. Working on being proactive in the future, suggestion to do evaluation annually with fee decisions every 3 years, careful projection of future revenues and costs is required. Would reduce need for large percentage increases going forward.

- xii. 3 proposed recommendations from HE are Simple fee increases (\$1.4 M additional revenue per year), Weekend/Holiday camping fees (\$200K additional revenue per year), and Fees at DBB (\$500K additional revenue per year).
- xiii. Comp analysis, state parks are most comparable (enterprise zone like LCDNR) but most other agencies receive general fund tax support. LCDNR does not have general fund as revenue source. Many places rely heavily on fees. \$9 is similar to fees at state parks. Average threshold on annual permits is that it takes 10 visits to make it worthwhile. May work to increase number of annual passes sold in the future. Rob Harris suggested that the annual pass fees stay the same to entice folks to purchase. Mark De Gregorio mentioned utilizing fee free days in order to give lower income folks opportunities.
- xiv. Low Income Opportunities – currently offered in LC are multiple free LCDNR parks and open spaces, free entrance for walk-in/bike-in, discounted senior/disabled entrance permits, education opportunities, and other LC low income visitors. Gary agreed to look into low income pass options used by other agencies.
- xv. Steve Ambrose asked if LC has considered graduating or staggering the proposed increased fees. It was noted that it is worth discussing the strategies of implementing incrementally, but no analysis was done.
- xvi. Public comments:
 - 1. Scott James – Loveland resident and DBB user, belongs to trail building group. Opinion that most locals will get the annual passes if fees are implemented and \$95 is expensive. Can get federal passes for less than that. Understand need for revenue and resource management, requesting that LC be cost conscious about it.
 - 2. Judy Balice – long time area resident, coming from perspective of birder, hiker, skier, sailboat racer, bicyclist. Been devastated by the canyon closure, Bobcat has fee, DBB is busy, trying to find alternative to flat, hard concrete. Not many places to go with a dog. Disagree with 2 persons per car estimate, believe it's one person most often. Birders won't pay \$9, get there early, carpool and gone by 10am. Need more places like Bobcat and DBB. Many birders can't afford \$9 and \$95 seems steep. Paying the annual fee is fine but the cost should be less than \$95. Steve Ambrose noted that the older birders Judy mentioned would be eligible for the \$45 senior pass.
 - 3. Jim Frankum – suggest if \$9 pass is implemented, keep the annual pass the same or lower for better public reception, likely will have huge increase in annual pass sales. Liked Reporter-Herald editorial about buying less land and using more money for maintenance. Thanked board members.

5. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF LAST MEETING MINUTES

This meeting will be recorded and archived according to law. Votes require a quorum.

Public can view agenda and minutes at:

http://legacy.larimer.org/boards/minutes/parks_advisory_board.cfm



- a. Rob moves to approve, Stephanie seconds, motion passed unanimously.

6. INFORMATION & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a. Natural Resource events for this month: See <http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources>.
- b. To sign up for Parks Advisory Board minutes, go to <http://larimer.org/subscriptions.cfm>, enter your email, click 'Subscribe,' and then check the 'Parks Advisory Board' box.
- c. The department is wrapping up its open spaces passport program this year. The deadline to submit a completed passport is Dec. 1. We're ending the program because we've seen a steady decline in returned passports since the program launched in 2016 and we want to go out on a high note by encouraging people to finish their passport this year. More info is available at www.larimer.org/passport.
- d. Save the Date! During the week of October 29th, there will be a Boards & Commissions Summit on the policy/strategy elements of the Larimer County Comprehensive Plan. Invitations will be sent prior to the date – Gary

7. UPDATES & REPORTS

- a. Park District updates and reports – Dan/Mark
 - i. Mark – HT full on weekends, fishing still good. ANS program going strong, staffing problematic due to low position pay, will be open to mid-December. Satanka shut down, Inlet Bay closes Nov. 1st, rangers pulling boats out of water. Glen pulls boats out and winterizes before dry storage. Water drawing down, still working on outlet structure at Soldier Canyon dam, 5388 elevation for divers. Rotary Park still seeing vandalism but lowered due to ranger presence and locked gates. Large Boy Scout group (350) coming in to South Bay to remove 1" cottonwood and elm stems, will also put rocks back. Working with Weeds department also for herbicide application after cutting. Had 2 drownings in LC in last 2 weeks. Working on fall projects, some CIP, working with BOR, replaced ramps at South Bay, cabins, archery range and parking soon. Winterizing park, training.
 - ii. Dan – Getting water turned off before freezing, camp hosts and most of seasonal rangers are gone, leveling campsites out. Water levels at Carter are typical for season based on 5-10 year average. Small fire, motorcycle crashes, had CPR/AED save at Flatiron. Working with BOR and Northern to get egress points for afterhours boating extractions, will accomplish that by spring, goal is locked gate with spike strips at each reservoir, education effort in spring for awareness.
- b. Regulations update – Ken
 - i. Cabin tour – DM's and Ken did a capital project tour for insight into camper cabins and archery range projects. Looked at and stayed in cabins from basic to luxury, tried to be visitors. Learned a lot, will develop a camper cabin model, board participation is welcome as a group is put together for discussion.

- ii. Regulations update – presented slide show on Regs update to BOCC, had great comments/adjustment suggestions from PAB. Regs are sole enforcement tool for seasonal rangers. Lengthy process, BOCC was happy and didn't have changes. Next stop is County Attorney's office for legal review then BOCC for final approval. Jan. 1st implementation is goal, should have new brochures printed in mid-December. Mark De Gregorio asked about larger fines for fires during fire bans and unattended fires due to serious consequences. It was noted that campgrounds are intended to be safe but rangers have the option to summons someone into court if deemed appropriate. Serious calls are managed by full-time people. Also limited in maximum fine amounts.

8. ACTION ITEMS

9. U.S. BUREAU OF RECLAMATION UPDATE

- a. RMP final version was announced 3 weeks ago, will issue a FONSI. About 1 week away from 30-day cooling off period.
- b. Russell inquired about construction on dam and if impacts are expected for recreation. It was noted that the Soldier Canyon dam project will require low water levels for divers, anticipating similar levels as this year. Water schedulers at BOR would have more specific information.
- c. Mark said the Grand Lake Clarity project has had a successful year.

10. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

- a. Stephanie mentioned that she was part of the 2018 artist selection committee and recently attended a workshop that the artist, Amelia Furman, gave at the Horsetooth Area Information Center that was well attended and fun.

11. DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Gary Buffington

- a. Public engagement calendar update: Gary attending OLAC on the 9th; joint meeting with OLAC, LC staff, members of OLAB and PAB on the 18th; 2 Open Houses (one Loveland in October, one Ft. Collins in November); hoping for Action Item at November PAB and OLAB meetings; November Admin Matters meeting; final hearing in December. Fee changes may be effective Jan. 1st but if not, 2019 passes will not have price on them.
- b. Short discussion of low income pass options.

12. NEXT MEETING SCHEDULED: 11/13/2018 at Horsetooth Area Information Center (HAIC), 4200 W. County Road 38E, Fort Collins, CO 80526

13. EXECUTIVE SESSION: Pursuant to C.R.S. (24-6-402(4)(a)) for discussion pertaining to the purchase, acquisition, lease, transfer or sale of any real, personal or other property interest.

14. ADJOURN – 7:36 p.m.