

PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

2018 DNR FEE PROPOSAL

The following comments were received by Larimer County's Department of Natural Resources from the public via email, phone message, phone call and social media (specifically, the Department's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/LCNaturalResources/>). All comments listed below were provided to appointed members of the Open Lands and Parks Advisory Boards and considered in their decision making process. All email and social media comments are reproduced as originally written and are unedited. The phone calls and voicemails have been summarized.

Email comments:

Citizen #1, email #1:

Please keep Devils Back bone free and open to the public. There are few non-fee areas where dogs are allowed. Bobcat, Coyote and sometimes Lonhaggler are no dogs, Carter, Boyd and Horsetooth are fee areas. Why dont you post and enforce off leash dog fines to help with the \$ situation, \$200 first offence, \$500 second. Thank You,

Citizen #1, email #2:

Please keep Devils Backbone free and open to the public. I am limited where I can walk my dog already. Bobcat & Coyote Ridge dont allow dogs and Lonhaggler does sometimes. Carter, Boyd & Horsetooth are all pay areas! I walk daily and cant afford to pay for it. Thank you,

Citizen #2:

I've been following the discussion around implementing a fee at Devil's Backbone. I'm from Greeley and frequent Devil's Backbone and Horsetooth Mountain Open Space. I will not be able to make it to an open house to chime in, but I had an idea that probably has come up, but thought I'd share.

I saw there was some concerns from Larimer County residents about implementing a fee on a property that they have already paid for. I recalled a run I took a couple years ago in Boulder and coming into the South Mesa Trailhead where the signage read "All park visitors whose motor vehicles are not registered in Boulder County must possess either a daily or annual permit to park." It looks like they have this rule at several areas in Boulder County. It may open another can of worms for Rangers to be able to enforce



such a rule, and it may not raise the money you're needing to, but that may answer the concerns of residents in this case. Coming from Weld County, I could see that being fair. I would probably purchase the annual pass I've been eyeing for a while.

That was just rolling around in my head for the past couple weeks. Thanks for your time.

Citizen #3:

No one should be charged fee to hike or park for an hour or two to hike. How about charging horse double, their riders never clean up after themselves. And they think they own the trails. Bikers too.. the impact on trails from horses and bikes are many times that of feet. Glad I don't live near your county. How about asking the 1% that got the tax break. I am a retiree, just over the income for tax break but paying 1/3 of my AGI for health insurance.

Citizen #4:

We weren't able to get to the open house on the proposed fees for Devils' Backbone but here are a few thoughts:

We pay our portion of the dedicated sales tax and the annual pass fee and are glad to do it. The Open Spaces and Trails in this area are a major reason for living here and we use them a lot. Thanks to the foresight of voters these amenities are available. Thanks to you all and the County Commission, these amenities are available and generally in good shape. We appreciate that too.

On Fees:

Most of the many times we've used Devil's Backbone, there has been no ranger on site, there has been no trail work underway and there has been little evidence of other "maintenance" activity. (The lone recent exception is the extension of the parking lot, which was nicely done.) Before imposing any new fees, how about presenting a line item budget to the public detailing the presumptive \$562,000 annual cost of maintaining Devil's Backbone. Then we would all have a good idea of what would cost \$562,000 annually.

For that matter, how about a public presentation of the sources and uses and balances of funds raised through the sales tax extension we recently approved? And a line item budget for those funds showing in detail the amounts used for acquisition and the amounts used for maintenance of existing amenities and facilities? How about a formal projection of revenues through the life of the extension and a projection of costs by function and location over the time period? The sales tax must raise millions annually. Where does that money go ? Before you impose additional fees, a public accounting seems appropriate.

Have you considered a system like that used by USFS, through which a modest daily fee is collected via a lock box? Have you considered what a \$2.00 fee raised voluntarily or on an honor system might raise? (We would pay it at least part of the time, even though we pay the annual.)

We frequently see older people, families with small children, and K-12 school groups using Devil's Backbone. We would hate to see a fee structure that would even slightly curtail the use of the area by these groups. Devil's Backbone is the single most accessible semi-wild open space available to these users.

Most importantly; A \$9.00 daily fee will likely ensure that only those with money will continue to use Devil's Backbone. It will change from a public amenity to a largely "exclusive" one, used mainly by the affluent as a private amenity. But – it was acquired using public funds, self-imposed by a strong majority of all voters. Accelerating its conversion to a largely private amenity is probably not very good public policy.

Charging new fees without an accounting of the sales tax funds and without presenting the details of the presumptive \$562,000 annual cost, and without projection of the likely change in user patterns seems a formula for public aggravation and resentment.

Citizen #5:

My 92 year old dad, 84 year old mom, my sister, my brother and I all go to Devils Backbone routinely. We have seen a significant increase in trail users. As a result, we fully support the plan to raise fees, however, I have a suggestion. Going from none to \$9 is a big mistake. Better first make a strong case for and establish the fee at a low entry price (\$3-\$4), and then gradually increase over time. Many people will stop going altogether, and many will be upset for a \$9 fee.
Make it painless, earn trust! Thanks for listening~

Citizen #6:

I am not able to attend either of the open house meetings to discuss the proposed trail fee increases for Larimer County Open Spaces and wanted to submit my input as a citizen who frequently uses them.

First, I wanted to thank you and the department for hosting these open houses and soliciting public feedback. I also deeply appreciate the work your team does to help maintain the trails and keep the open spaces clean and pristine.

As for the proposed fee increases, I would hope that the department would be transparent in communicating to the community how exactly the fee increases will lead to either a) more trails and open spaces to decrease or manage congestion and b) better management of the current open spaces. The department should also determine how

communities of a lower socioeconomic strata would be impacted by these fee increases before putting them into effect. From what I observe, congestions occurs around the reservoir, reservoir campground, and the Horsetooth Falls trailhead. If fee increases can't be avoided, it doesn't seem appropriate to raise costs on all the spaces, but only the congested ones. While For instance, Soderberg, Blue Sky, and Devil's Backbone are not yet congested and are used more so by local community members than tourists. Comparable open spaces in both Denver and Boulder, which face far bigger congestion issues, are either free or only charge \$5/day or \$25 for an annual permit (in the case of Boulder county and Flagstaff Mountain). I would think that a better solution would be the following:

1) Leverage the robust non-profit community to help build more trails, increase trail connectivity and hence relieve parking congestion, and provide trail maintenance. Among the many non-profits doing such work are Wildlands Restoration Volunteers and Overland Mountain Bike Club. They have large networks of local volunteers who would be more than willing to put in the work to increase trail infrastructure rather than be pushed out by fee increases, which do little to solve the problem.

2) Create more access trails or bike lanes to the open spaces to encourage citizens to safely commute by bike and further relieve congestion.

Thank you for your time!

Citizen #7:

I was unable to attend last night's open house regarding the proposed fee increases. But I'd still like to voice my thoughts on the matter as follows:

Increased congestion at parking lots and on our trails is a growing concern. I feel the best way to address this is by improving trail connectivity.

We need a smarter, better connected soft-surface trail network that's designed to keep pace with the demands of a growing population and provide access opportunities to all citizens.

A soft-surface trail network that ties into our existing multi-use paths will cut down on congestion at trailheads by encouraging more users to ride, rather than drive, to their favorite trails.

Expanding our trail systems with new loops for all ability levels and creating more access points will cut down on congestion by dispersing users and providing more places to recreate.

Alongside trail connectivity, Larimer County can further tap into a robust non-profit community (such as Overland Mountain Bike Club, Wildlands Restoration Volunteers and Colorado Addicted Trailbuilders) who in turn can utilize their networks of volunteers to help manage, maintain and expand these spaces without making access more expensive.

I personally am involved in trail building activity at Bobcat Ridge, including another build day this Saturday. Thank you,

Citizen #8:

If fees are further increased you are limiting many folks to experience our local outdoors & get exercise. Get the money elsewhere or get it from nonresidents. Its difficult to justify paying \$9 to use a trail for 45 min- 1 hr. This is not fair, we pay local taxes yet we should be able to enjoy our local trails and not break the bank. It costs gas money to reach these areas

Citizen #9:

My name is ---, and I'm a resident of Fort Collins. I'd like to express my position against the devils backbone fee. I'd also like to express that I would like to see more thought given to soft surface trails to connect our current trail systems.

Further, my wife and I moved to Fort Collins for the urban cycling accommodations. We were shocked to find out how little soft surface trails we have within a reasonable riding distance. I live in old town and can see Lory State Park and Horsetooth from my house. However, I have to get in my car and drive me my bike to ride the trails. I would like to see more soft surface trails giving us access to these without having to ride on the pavement with distracted drivers.

Let's face it, people are moving here for cycling. We need to get ahead of the curve and have trail options ready so we can minimize trail user conflicts when the population grows even more.

Here are some points in favor of more trails:

1. Cyclists give back to the local trail systems by volunteering on public land, protecting the environment and preserving open space
2. Youth cycling is seeing a rapid growth in popularity, thus helping kids learn about healthy lifestyles and outdoor stewardship
3. A better connected trail system would provide access to surrounding open lands without the need to drive, thus helping reduce traffic congestion, strain on trailhead parking areas, air pollution and negative automobile-bicycle interactions

4. Increased soft-surface trail opportunities will help disperse users, improve access for regional residents and visitors, and reduce strain on the current trail system
5. Well-designed trails will encourage trail users to stay on trail and lessen impacts to our natural resources
6. Mountain bike tourism has proven to greatly increase the economic vitality of communities with a high-quality multi-use trail network designed to accommodate all ability-levels by boosting retail, restaurant, hotel, gas and grocery store sales

Thanks for your consideration,

Citizen #10:

I am a mountain biker, runner and hiker living in the Fort Collins area. I understand there is a meeting tonight to discuss some proposed fee increases for trails. My perception as a user of the trails in our area for the past 20 years is that we need to add trails rather than add fees. The number of people in the area and thereby the number of trail users have significantly increased over time, and we need to increase trails to keep up with the demand. I have worked with Overland and Team BOB over the years on trail work, and am happy to continue that work as well as recruit new people to help with trail work. With population increases likely to continue, we need to expand trails to provide continued high quality trails in the area. Thanks and regards,

Citizen #11:

Fee hikes really suck!

It already costs too much to get into Horsetooth. I pay taxes for open space.

I already cant afford to hike at Horsetooth, AND I live in Larimer County.

I cant go hike in my own Open Space AND now youre going to raise the fee?!

What the hell is open space for? It not the residents of the County where it exists.

You need to do a better job managing the money you got.

Stop actively managing certain sections of open space, and let it be damn open space.

Fire a ranger or two.

There isnt even enough parking at Horsetooth, and now you want more damn money!

Maybe we need a new director?

<https://www.outsideonline.com/2361271/user-fees-wont-save-public-lands-wyoming>

Citizen #12:

I would like to propose that we inflict a heavy fine on anyone that proposes to raise or introduce fees on public lands. Tax payers are already being taken advantage of enough.

To add insult to injury by charging them for something that is already theirs?? Only a ignorant half wit would be ok with such an idea

Thanks for your time

P.S. maybe could just start with firing them if they work for the county

Citizen #13:

As a Loveland resident, outdoor enthusiast, trail runner, and mother to future outdoor enthusiasts, I am writing to you to strongly advocate against instating a recreation use fee for Larimer County Open Spaces. I am aware of the reasons behind instating a fee- mitigating traffic congestion being one reason. But, I can't tell you how important it is that we continue to leave Open Spaces free and truly open for people. If the goal is to manage congestion, then I suggest a proposal to expand trails and create new trails for people to spread out. Though I happily pay annual fees for county, state and national land use (I love to support these natural areas) I think it is incredibly important to keep these Open Spaces free for so many reasons- one being that I like to think there are perks for living and working close to these areas! Additionally, there are too many people that may not be able to afford these fees, and I do not think income disparity should prevent populations of people from enjoying these lands. There have to be places in Larimer County for anyone to go and enjoy the outdoors- where we are all equal. Thank you for your time. Very Sincerely,

Citizen #14:

As a Volunteer Naturalist Assistant with Larimer County Natural Resources, I am concerned that charging a fee at Devil's Backbone will affect attendance at some of our programs.

The Tiny Trekkers program attracts several young families with 2-3 young children. For these attendees to pay a fee to park could dissuade many from attending.

Additionally, the cost of living steadily climbs in our beautiful area. I think many families will be unable to recreate in this local gem, which would be a loss to our community. As we all know, it is more important than ever for children to get out, learn about and enjoy nature. Thank You,

Citizen #15:

I am distressed that you are trying to impose a high fee for use of Devil's Backbone. It is a treasure of Loveland, to be sure. But many of our families will not be able to afford the fee. It has been shown how important these outdoor activities are to the upcoming generations. Please don't impose an onerous fee! Let's find money in the budget to help support this beautiful icon for the enjoyment of all. Sincerely,

Citizen #16:

I will not be able to attend tonight's public input meeting on the proposed Open Space fee increases. Thank you for accepting this note as my input.

Larimer County is fortunate to have beautiful spaces worthy of preservation for the public. We're equally fortunate to have voters that have made the financial commitment to support that activity through the Open Space funding programs. Over the years, a substantial amount of money has flowed from public pockets into lands preserved for the public.

I'm concerned that despite this significant and ongoing investment, more fees and higher amounts are considered necessary for program operations. As it is, current fees already discourage families seeking a quick picnic or anyone taking the kids and grandparents on a outdoor stroll. These are not activities anyone should want to inhibit, or worse yet, treat as revenue opportunities.

I'm one of the fortunate residents who has the time to visit and appreciate Larimer County public lands. I'm fortunate to spend hundreds of miles running, biking, and hiking county trails every year. Quite simply, Larimer Co areas are already managed to a higher standard than other jurisdictions. Greater access fees will erode overall support for the programs.

There are substantial open space tracts that are not now and likely never will be accessible to the public. At least some of these have significant ongoing expenses. Funding such expenses by imposing additional (and raising existing) fees on areas open to the public is misleading and jeopardizes support for the entire program.

If current funding mechanisms unnecessarily limit the ability to fund operations, then come to taxpayers with proposals to modify the allocation of existing funds. Instituting more and higher fees puts the affected resources out of range of many citizens, and undermines public backing from even outdoor fanatics like me.

Thank you for the chance to weigh in. Feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss further.

Social media comments:

Gathered Dec. 18, 2018

Commenter #1: It's definitely going to be a big hit for Druids & Dragons Con 2019 but it sounds like this is what you need to keep the parks in great condition for years to come like you have been, it's a cost we're willing to pay.

Commenter #2: If y'all are going to create more bathrooms like the one at Carter Lake with those funds, then by all means, charge me a bit more.

Gathered Nov. 21, 2018

Commenter #3: How about for hikers since they get to use the park in all conditions.

Commenter #4: No fees for Devil's Backbone.

Commenter #5: I can't make it, but I'm not going to pay to hike the Backbone. What a joke that is!

Gathered Oct. 23, 2018

Commenter #6: Got the meeting notice too late. Obvious but true, this fee increase will likely keep many young families and poorer citizens from enjoying day use and camping. Guess we just turn everything over to the wealthy transplant mentality?

Gathered Oct. 22, 2018

Commenter #7: Changes = increases? Correct?
Why has there been no mention of the shifts forthcoming with the renewal of the sales tax with addl funds being made available for management of open space areas? The ratio of acquisition dollars to management is shifting soon as I understood things in the election to renew funding of these areas.

Commenter #8: I'm actually surprised that there isn't a fee at the Devil's Backbone yet. I was the first ranger to patrol the area when the first segment was constructed. When I first started working for the county the fee was only \$3. I'm glad to see that the Open Space Initiative is still going. Great use of tax dollars. Please keep it going :D It sucks that there is a proposed fee increase but like everything else it costs more to manage these parks

Commenter #9: I understand the need to increase revenue to maintain the parks and spaces, but \$95 seems a bit much for access to just the Larimer County Park system. Heck, the America The Beautiful National Parks pass is only \$80/year....

Commenter #10: Please don't charge for Devil's. I see many families out there that I don't think would go there if there was a fee!

Commenter #11: Lot of maintenance is dog droppings, not litter. I propose an additional fee for dogs.

Commenter #12: If a fee is implemented for the Devil's Backbone Trailhead, would our current Larimer County Parks pass be expanded to cover that? And how about increasing the fee (more than the proposed \$20) for non-resident pass and leaving resident pass fees alone?

Commenter #13: I might be able to consider fee increases if it weren't for the fact that the maintenance in campgrounds has deteriorated so horribly over the past few seasons. I don't feel we are paying for what we expected any longer. Maintenance at individual campsites is severely lacking. Every site we've had this year has been littered with trash upon arrival, huge dog poop, (burning fecal diaper in fire pit left by host who saw it & passed by), fishing line and hooks all over ground, trash and cigarette butts, to name a few. Once Horsetooth's Visitor Center went up, cleaned campsites went out the window. The camp hosts used to be much more helpful and kind. Now they behave as though you're interfering with their time when approached with concerns. We originally trekked to Ft Collins from Aurora area to camp based on the cleanliness, upkeep and perception of safety with rangers seen in the campgrounds. We were happy to pay for activities in the area, given that we were proud to be a part of Larimer County and all the great ecological support they provided with respect to Natural Resources and preservation. However, over the past few year, specifically the last 2 years, paying higher prices than most campgrounds in Colorado, IF you can get a site in Larimer County at all, has been insulting given the poor care of the campgrounds. Due to family health risks, we cannot camp at altitudes higher than 6500 feet, which greatly limits our options. Of particular concern, the restrooms (ESPECIALLY the larger shower houses) have been unclean, broken down condition since spring. The people who are paid to try to maintain and clean the restrooms do a good job, with what they have to work with. Most of the hand dryers don't function, (if they're still on the wall at all). The soap dispensers sat broken on the counters in the bathrooms, the vent on the wall out of the bath was completely off, and most often at least one stall was always out of order. Although we did stop in at Visitor Center, as well as report to rangers, all they did was shrug and say "Yes, we know, we've been reporting it and nothing is getting done." Add to all this the ridiculous practice of allowing 2 bus sized RV's to park on one site alone, (in many of the campsites blocking many other campers from being able to park, let alone set up in their reserved spots), which translates to far more than 8 people on a site at a time - it's become an overcrowded unpleasant experience, which has been disappointing. Not to mention the rangers not enforcing rules for some visitors, and

over-enforcing fined rules for others. I saw an elderly lady literally crying outside the Visitor Center who had been given a parking ticket after earlier in weekend asking a Ranger to help with obnoxious rude loud neighbors. The equity in providing rule regulation is not there. Maybe it would be helpful for the people at the gatehouses of the campgrounds to hand out a flyer as you go through the gate on general campground etiquette/common sense reminders of expectations) would be helpful in some of these issues. People constantly walk through and over other peoples reserved sites - literally - right through the picnic table areas no less than a foot from dwellings. Thank you for the opportunity to enjoy the natural resources, I hope it continues in a productive and happy manner for everyone involved.

Commenter #14: I'd pay to have one, bike only day every other week. 😊

Commenter #15: There should never be any fee for any citizen to enter any public lands. Period. They belong to the people, not to the government to make money off of. It's discriminatory and we need a constitutional amendment to prohibit any such fees.

Voicemail/phone call comments, summarized:

Voicemail #1: Caller stated that he supports the DBB fee for the following reasons: when people pay for something, they treat it with respect; caller uses DBB frequently and often sees people disobeying rules so with increased revenue, the patrol/enforcement could be increased.

Voicemail #2: Caller stated that Larimer County should definitely charge a fee. She has been using DBB for years and many people disrespect the resource by going off trail, etc. Need money to support it. Last year, DBB was closed a great deal because of misuse. Caller suggested that users buy the park pass and suggested free options in the area. 100K people is too many. Caller and spouse both support the proposed DBB fee.

Voicemail #3: Caller is a Loveland resident and frequent user of DBB. She stated that DBB should remain a free space and does not want a fee at that location.

Note:

These comments have been attached to the meeting notes when each board weighed their decision to recommend or not recommend the fee package as presented at that time. Board recommendations were an important part of the overall fee schedule decision to be made by the Board of County Commissioners.