



# OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD (OLAB)

## Meeting Minutes

**Thursday, July 24, 2014**

5:00- 8:00 PM

Courthouse Offices Building • Lake Estes Room on the 3rd floor • 200 W Oak, Fort Collins

*The mission of the Larimer County Open Lands Program is to preserve and protect significant open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, and develop parks and trails for present and future generations. These open lands provide opportunities for leisure, human renewal and protection of our natural and cultural resources.*

<b>Members Present</b>	
Carl Sorrentino	At-large
Ladonna Lee	At-large
Mary Banken	At-large
Peter Kast	At-large
Trudy Haines	At-large
Nancy Wallace	Planning Commission
Paul Alaback	Town of Berthoud

<b>Staff Present</b>
Gary Buffington, Natural Resources Director
Charlie Johnson, Senior Land Agent
Alex Castina, Land Agent
Meegan Flenniken, Resource Program Manager
Sandy Werkmeister, Department Specialist
Zac Wiebe, Fund Dev & Spec Proj Spec
Chris Fleming, Visitor Services Manager

<b>Members Absent</b>	
Suzan Fritchel	At-large
Steve Vessey	At-Large
Gerry Horak	City of Fort Collins
Hugh McKean	City of Loveland
Ward Nelson	Town of Estes Park

1. CALL TO ORDER - Meeting was called to order by Peter Kast.
2. PUBLIC COMMENT - None
3. AGENDA REVIEW - No changes
4. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF LAST MEETING MINUTES
  - Motion by Mary Banken and second by Paul Alaback to approve the minutes from the June 26, 2014 meeting as submitted in this month's packet. Motion carried unanimously.
  - Motion by Trudy Haines and second by Carl Sorrentino to approve the minutes from the July 16, 2014 meeting as submitted in this month's packet. Motion carried unanimously.
5. INFORMATION & ANNOUNCEMENTS
  - a. Staff will present the Board recommendation for the future of the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax to the Board of County Commissioners for potential adoption and ballot referral on July 29 between 9 and 9:30 a.m. Gary Buffington invited the Board to attend. We will send you more details as we receive them.
  - b. Zac reported that as part of the master plan update, we are working more closely with the Ag Advisory Board and planning to do a joint tour to the Boulder County Open Lands Program on September 24 to visit some of their ag properties. They would like as many Board members as possible. It will probably take the better part of the day. Send an email to Zac at [zwiebe@larimer.org](mailto:zwiebe@larimer.org) if you are interested in going. Zac also introduced Zach Thode (Thode), a member of the Ag Advisory Board, and invited him to the table for the master plan update section of the meeting. Thode added that they plan for the tour to include a couple of non-facilitated stops at farms too, to obtain their perspectives. Trudy, Paul, Ladonna and Nancy indicated interest at this time.
  - c. Planning for annual Departmental attendance at the New West Fest (Fort Collins) & Corn Roast Festival (Loveland) is underway. They are the weekends of August 16 and 22, respectively.

- d. Gary reported that the Roberts Ranch tire removal partnership project has removed 16,000 tires. Zach Thode (Thode), who manages Roberts Ranch, added that other than a bit of restoration work/reseeding, this first removal completes Phase 1. On August 14 the State is coming back out to start looking at Phase 2, which is removing the tires from the gullies. The entire project is funded by the State of Colorado, other than some in-kind staffing. Tetrattech Engineering will design the mitigation plan.
- e. Every few years Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) updates their strategic plan by collecting feedback from around the state. One of these meetings is in Fort Collins on August 13. Please plan on attending to give your feedback on future priorities for GOCO funding. The Board discussed several of their priorities, such as river restoration, or access to people who can make recommendations for them. Trudy and Peter thought the Board should have input prepared for GOCO.
- f. A neighborhood meeting regarding the Devil’s Backbone Open Space management plan update took place with the Hidden Valley neighborhood, where we received very positive feedback on our ideas for the parking lot and trails. A public meeting is planned for July 30 6-7:30 p.m. at the Natural Resources Department administrative offices at 1800 S CR 31, Loveland. There were two press releases and notices were sent to all neighbors within ½ mile of the trail.  
Trudy mentioned that we should always speak of it as Larimer County Devil’s Backbone Open Space, to keep it clear as to who manages it.
- g. Meegan reported that we hosted a bioblitz at Chimney Hollow Open Space on July 12. It was a joint effort in the department with Jeffrey working on it from a resource perspective and Heather from a communication perspective. A mix of scientists, volunteers and members of the public attended. Many known species were documented, as well as some new fungus and diatoms (algae.) Paul Alaback elaborated on the education piece and how great he thought the idea to have the public, especially children, interacting with the scientists. He suggested that the Natural Resources Administration Offices building probably wasn’t the best area for attracting people so it will be fun to watch it evolve by rotating the location.
- h. Meegan reported that we applied for a Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) river restoration grant for repairs to the west bank of the Poudre River at Lion's Open Space for approximately \$47,000 and the City of Greeley applied for a CWCB grant for repairs to the east bank of the river. We hope to hear on the grant by the end of August. Gary added that Greeley just received their permit approved by the Corp of Engineers for their pipeline to go through that area, which will force more restoration. The board will probably hear from the neighbors when all this begins to move forward.
- i. Report from the Open Space Operations Manager–included in packet–no comments
- j. Sales Tax Report from prior month–included in packet–no comments

6. DISCUSSION & UPDATES

- a. Open Lands Program Master Plan update and review.  
Zac Wiebe presented the same material (included in the meeting packet) used at the recent public forums the last couple months, to the Board. People want us to keep doing what we are doing, which we will, but we are also reviewing some of the new things that people are suggesting. Supporting emerging farmers was a big theme, and we are meeting with the Ag Advisory Board to discuss how we can do this with the added benefit of cultivating a better relationship between the two boards, and potentially with other boards that deal with land in Larimer County, such as the Environmental Advisory Board, Parks Board and the Rural Land Use Board.

Discussion regarding agriculture:

- Paul commented that the two ag goals listed in the presentation are very different. Zach Thode (Thode) said the second goal on the master plan is intended as a local food shed security. There is a handful of community supported agricultural (CSA) people in the County that are emerging as entrepreneurs in the agricultural environment but struggling to have the capital to get themselves going, with water and land (close to populations for a CSA to work) being too expensive. The goal is intended more as an umbrella goal for open lands, agriculture and local food security. It is a community based idea more than revenue beneficial. Whether this need should be addressed by

cities or the County might depend on the size of the land. A city is more likely to support a small acreage/CSA type approach whereas the County might explore leasing back larger, more productive, acreages to the young emerging farmer. There might be some options to obtain the larger productive properties by making some easement agreements with the water. The Ag Board is interested in helping with these types of efforts. Nationwide the average age of farmers is 62, which is a problem. The Ag Board would like to get that average down to 45-50. Ladonna asked how they would address the challenge of choosing whom to help. True competition will happen and it will become risky and hard to award the lease to the young and inexperienced. Thode responded that the County historically has had a very open and competitive process with their leases and that wouldn't go away. He said there are a few ideas in discussion, with the logistics and details still pretty far down the road. He said Ladonna's point was very well taken. Peter suggested an incubator program (2-4 years) for young farmers as a trial period.

- Following discussion, Zac Wiebe checked in with the Board as to whether they still support the over-arching goal to support emerging farmers and ranchers. Trudy likes the idea of continuing with more conservation easements on productive farmland and leasing back. She feels the small CSA makes the most sense close-in to the cities, but other than opportunistic properties, obtaining such property may need to come with some funding beyond open space dollars. Land with the features needed for a CSA is not necessarily the core mission of the open lands program in the City of Fort Collins. Paul Alaback said that all these ideas can also meet the broad goal of the program of retaining the heritage of this County, which is productive agriculture land. Zac Wiebe added that water is the item that prohibits us from purchasing such land. Mary suggested engaging Legacy Land Trust for their experience with water and their reach into Weld County. Thode agreed that these types of big purchases would have to be a partnership of many. At this point we are getting it on the master plan so everyone can see that it is a supported goal of the cities and the County.

Other new items that rose to the top were back country camping and off leash dog areas. A newly formed group in Fort Collins say that dog parks are not the experience they are looking for. They want large acreage, off leash trail type opportunities. At this time the cities nor County offer this. The only place someone can do this is forest service land, to which the groups response is "that's too far." Trudy said she sees this as a conflict with our mission of protecting wildlife and habitat. Zac confirmed that we have relayed our process for acquisition to them, which doesn't include buying land for specific groups. If we have land where that use seems appropriate, then we might consider doing so. Trudy also weighed in on backcountry camping, which she thinks we should consider carefully for Red Mountain. It is such an expensive venture that is already available elsewhere. Later she added that she does not like the idea of camping at Red Mtn because once allowed, it changes the experience because of paraphernalia left behind and the additional ranger presence. Zac responded that it is allowed in the management plan and Meegan added that they are evaluating where a couple of sites could be allowed (no pad, no fire grate, no table) and out of view of trails.

Zac displayed the maps that highlight the new Conservation Priority Areas Analysis of the cities, towns and Larimer County. Many areas repeat between agencies. Something we heard from focus groups was to not target areas to *one* priority, such as agriculture, but rather develop a set of criteria that includes high agricultural values.

Next Zac went over the Regional Trail Analysis, again showing the priorities of the cities and towns as well. The board discussed several of the trails and the possible connections that can occur into the future. Note: The trail proposed for Hwy 36 is a larger statewide initiative to connect federal protected areas, but there has been limited funding for the venture. Since the flood, CPW and GOCO have thrown some money in and it has been put on a 24-month fast track. Gary is attending meetings on the subject, and along with Boulder, presenting ideas that could lessen the cost of acquiring and building the trail and suggesting alternatives for the long term management of the trail.

One of our focus areas is the restoration of rivers and streams. Due to the prohibitive cost of water, instream flows is difficult for us to address and may not be our role. We will contribute to it when appropriate. Paul suggested that tying it in with grassland restoration could help us be involved.

After thanking the Board for their input, Zac said the next step will be a first draft for their review. He also thanked Zach Thode again for coming. Thode added that if there is interest, all or one board member is welcome to attend the Ag Board. The ag board has discussed having a liaison between the boards, even if not as an active member. Peter suggested receiving the Ag minutes in the OLAB meeting packet and Thode agreed that seemed reasonable and we will look into making that helpful.

b. Hermit Park Open Space Financial Report and Master Plan

Gary reminded the board that when our Accountant Lori Smith presented her annual long term management spreadsheet some months back, there were some questions about the expense of Hermit Park. Meegan and Chris went through a presentation on Hermit Park (included in the meeting packet) reviewing background information about the acquisition, required upgrades (when converting from private to public), the revenue piece that offsets some of the expenses, goals of the 2007 master plan and completed capital projects 2007-2013. Gary discussed revenues, operating expenses and indirect costs such as the mechanic, volunteer & education programs and administrative/payroll costs. In 2013, Hermit Park revenue only covered about 40% of the total cost to operate. In this business, most parks are subsidized to keep visitor cost down. The acquisition of Hermit Park never prevented us from making another purchase. It has seen a couple of rough years with the fires and flood but once back on track the cost to run may go down.

- Carl asked about whether there might be a free day again in the future, such as we did in 2013, to which Chris said yes, once we are past all the flood repairs.

c. Small Grants for Community Partnering

Zac presented a final report/photo presentation of the Small Grants for Community Partnering projects from 2013. He also sought committee members for this year's cycle, and everyone agreed to the same team serving as the committee as last year (Carl, Paul & Suzan.)

d. Other

Zac added another quick item regarding the master plan, which is that we will be updating all of our policies and procedures, so expect to review those in the next couple of months.

7. ACTION ITEMS – none

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION: (24-6-402(4)(a) C.R.S. Nancy Wallace moved that the Board move into Executive Session to discuss the purchase, acquisition, lease, transfer or sale of any real or personal property interest. Second by Mary Banken. Motion carried unanimously.

9. ADJOURN

10. NEXT MEETING: Thursday, August 28, 2014