

Larimer County Open Lands 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: September 27, 2018

Time: 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Location: City Council Chambers, Civic Center Municipal Building, 500 E. 3rd St., Loveland, CO

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

Members		Staff		Guests
Carl Sorrentino	x	Gary Buffington	x	Several members of Loveland OL Commission
David Marvin		Meegan Flenniken	x	Brian Hayes (City of Loveland)
Gerry Horak		Lori Smith	x	
Jason Brothers	x	Charlie Johnson	x	
Paul Alaback		Thanh Matthews	x	
K-Lynn Cameron	x	Chris Fleming	x	
Marilyn Hilgenberg		Steve Gibson	x	
Nancy Wallace	x	Jenn Almstead	x	
Peter Kelly	x	*Thomas Donnelly		
Sherri Valentine	x	Emmy Ellison (minutes)	x	
Suzan Fritchel	x	Amy Gilboy	x	
Ken Zornes		Zac Wiebe	x	
		Linda Hoffman	x	

x = present

*commissioner

1. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS – 5:07pm
 - a. Introduction of Amy Gilboy, the new Restoration & Stewardship Specialist working under Zac Wiebe.
2. PUBLIC COMMENT

- a. Unrelated to Fee Study – none

3. AGENDA REVIEW

- a. Fee Presentation being moved up to next item.
- b. Time for public comments related to Fee Study will be allowed after the presentation.
- c. Fee Study action item being changed to a discussion item tonight.
- d. Add update of LESA document by Jason Brothers.

4. FEE STUDY PRESENTATION BY HARVEY ECONOMICS

- a. Financial Analysis Fee Study – Open Space and Parks fee increases in 2019 including fee establishment at Devil’s Backbone. Presentation by Susan Walker and Jessica Harvey from Harvey Economics.
 - i. Working with LCDNR since early July, focus on user fees (entrance permits and camping) in context with operating/capital expenses for recommendation on fee levels.
 - ii. Will discuss revenue requirements (amount of revenue required to cover Parks and Open Lands operating costs), simple fee increases for entrance permits and camping, fees at Devil’s Backbone Open Space at the south/Loveland trailhead, and weekend/holiday camping fees.
 - iii. Current fee locations are Horsetooth Reservoir, Carter Lake, Flatiron Reservoir, Pinewood Reservoir, Blue Sky Trailhead at Devil’s Backbone Open Space, Horsetooth Mountain, Hermit Park and Ramsay-Shockey. There are also many open spaces in LC that are free. Fees in 2008 compared with 2018 have changed very little, no increase in daily pass, only changes are slight increase in camping fees and annual pass.
 - iv. Permit and camping trends: permits sold have almost doubled (94% change) and the camping nights skyrocketed (177% change) since 2008. Impacts of increased visitation are: parking lots and camping spaces are more frequently at capacity and harder to access, even extending into the off-season, more personnel time required to manage both facilities and visitors. More visitors also means more revenue.
 - v. Separated financials between Parks and Open Spaces, looking in future at projections of both revenue and operating expenses. Parks: 2017 operating expenses were \$400k more than revenue, historically revenues in parks cover 85-90% of operating expenses. In the future, revenue growth will slow as capacity is reached and operating expenses will increase, widening the gap between revenues and costs. By 2020, the operating expenses will be 30% greater than fee revenues, so a 30% increase in camping and permit fees is proposed, making the daily permit \$9. Camping fee proposed costs range on average from \$3 to \$10 increase (more for camper cabins). Open Spaces: limited number of open spaces where fee is charged, camping at Hermit only, operating expenses are somewhat different but situation is similar in that the gap between revenue and expenses will widen over time and a smaller amount is covered by fees in open spaces (25%). Proposing fee increase to \$9 for daily

permit like in the parks, would generate \$430k in 2019 and cover 36% of operating costs. Benefits are that it is easy for the visitor to understand, would simplify the fee structure, costs and time required to maintain are similar at parks and open spaces (especially high visitation sites). Camping at Hermit costs would increase on average \$3 to \$10 (like reservoir parks, camper cabins would increase more).

- vi. Annual permit proposed fee increases include \$20 increase for LC resident vehicle and \$30 increase for nonresident vehicle. All will increase except the senior vehicle permit and the disabled vehicle permit. Annual permit sales make up 5% of total permit sales and daily permits make up 95%. Revenue from annual permits is \$794k (36.5%) and from daily permits is \$1.384 million (63.5%).
- vii. Devil's Backbone – high visitation area, 2014 southern trailhead was 68k people, projections are 100k in 2019 (conservative). 50k cars going through the parking lot in a year. Increasing visitation means increased management needs, similar to open spaces that do charge fees like Horsetooth Mountain and Hermit Park.
- viii. Chris Fleming – been watching the capacity at DBB over the years, doubled the parking lot and it is still full. Once physical capacity levels out, operating costs double because at-capacity requirements include having a ranger in the parking lot managing needs (visitors park in roads, neighborhoods and on Highway 34, increased vandalism, etc.), also need another ranger on trails to manage increased user conflicts on trails. Trail was originally 18 inches wide, now is 6-8 feet wide in some places, resource impact is large. There are increased Search & Rescue and other costly medical and emergency calls.
- ix. Northern side of DBB, fee charged at Blue Sky trailhead coming from Fort Collins, no fee in Loveland, inequality. Focus is on need for intensive management. Using increased rate of \$9 for daily permit and projected 2019 visitation, estimated revenue for 2019 is about \$500k. Estimate of operating costs for that location is over \$500k. Instituting fees would not completely cover costs but would be close. Want to offer a high quality experience to user.
- x. Holiday/weekend pricing options – differential pricing. Holidays and weekends are much bigger revenue generators than weekdays. Don't like to send folks away but are currently turning visitors away when capacity is reached. Differential pricing is common in recreation and entertainment industries and is discussed in the Master Plan. Camping peak season used to be Memorial Day to Labor Day, now is mid-April to mid-October. 2017 season had 159 total days, 6 holidays and 49 weekend days. Weighted weekend day revenues assume that 50% of visitation occurring on the weekends and also assume 50% fee increase on holidays and 30% fee increase for weekend days. The 50% and 30% numbers can be easily adjusted. Camping revenue for the 2017 season was over \$1.4 million, the additional revenue generated is \$161K, weighted is \$243K.

- xi. Other revenue ideas for future discussion are included in final report, considered fees charged at other places across state, looked at low income opportunities.
- xii. Proactive approach, comparison of projected expenses and projected revenues in future, application of steady annual or periodic fee increases.
- xiii. K-Lynn asked if the consultants looked at the capacity of the parking area at DBB when projecting capacity and whether or not the projection could occur. It was noted that the consultants analysis predicts that it could occur but within a lengthened season. Chris and Steve both commented on the increasing capacity at both DBB and Horsetooth (about 50% increase in last 5 years) and the increasing needs because of it. K-Lynn mentioned that the size of the parking lot is often tied to the capacity of the open space, will need more open spaces to keep up with increasing use and needs.
- xiv. K-Lynn commented that the annual pass numbers may increase at DBB as regular users will more likely buy the annual pass.
- xv. Meegan noted that 30% of the Horsetooth Mountain visitors are from out of county based on current visitor study. Chris mentioned that more international visitors are at DBB.
- xvi. Nancy asked if the consultants looked at length of stay for possible 2-hour limits on parking or the like. It was noted that it was not looked at and it is not a common practice and would be expensive to manage.
- xvii. Pete mentioned people and time counters in retail world, asked if there was anything that could substantiate that. Chris said that there was no data on average stay length but based on her experience, most stay about 2 hours, parking lot turns over in 2-3 hours typically. It was noted that there would be privacy issues with obtaining that type of data.
- xviii. Jason asked regarding the percent of operating expenses covered by fees, is there a target for the percentage change over time and is there consideration for other revenue sources. It was noted with the 30% on the parks side, 100% of operating costs would be covered by user fees through 2020. Capital costs are not included so other revenue sources that currently make up the difference could be directed elsewhere. Excluding state parks, other organizations that were called for comps said they relied on general funds and taxes but all said that if they didn't have the general funds or taxes, they'd have to rely on fees. Also asked about differential pricing and its prevalence in public vs private realms. It was noted that it is becoming more prevalent, states are doing fee studies and are most comparable to Larimer County, State of Colorado is looking at differential pricing currently. Weekend differential pricing is common in public sector. Demand curve suggests that the supply is not meeting the demand as folks are being turned away, market can bear more based on demand, will be more elastic, visitors may appreciate the differential pricing.

- xix. K-Lynn asked the same question as Jason but for open lands. It was noted that open lands has different funding sources so the target percentage for operating costs is not specific in relation to fee revenue.
- xx. Brian Hayes asked two questions, one was how the Loveland citizens/stakeholders will be incorporated into the fee study discussion and the second was how the free parking lots at Coyote Ridge and Prairie Ridge (planned) will be looked at. It was noted that Gary was invited by Marilyn to attend the next Loveland OLAC meeting on October 10th. The consultants did not look at Loveland's free parking lots in their study. Brian also asked if people will gravitate to Loveland's free parking lots and if so, will fees have to be considered for those lots in the future. It was noted that when LC areas are at capacity, so are partners' areas. HT Mountain has charged a fee for years and there has not been a noticeable increase in visitation at nearby Bobcat Natural Area due to fee at HT Mountain.
- xxi. Sherri asked Chris how important pets are in dictating what properties get visited. It was noted that while pet owners include their pets regularly, places like Coyote Ridge (no dogs allowed) are at capacity regularly.
- xxii. Brian asked where the 10% increase in operating cost figure comes from. It was noted that it is an average that has been seen, includes inflation and increased visitation.
- xxiii. Suzan asked if non-Larimer County users' data was included in the study. It was noted that it was considered, however ease of implementation was an important factor and managing the acquisition of the type of documentation needed would be prohibitive. Also noted was the current difference in resident and non-resident annual permits.
- xxiv. Sherri asked about the needs of the low-income visitors. It was noted that the opportunities available to low-income visitors are the free entrance walk-in/bike-in locations, the multiple LCDNR parks and open space locations, discounted senior/disabled entrance permits, educational partnerships, and other LC low-income visitor opportunities. Access for kids is important. Disabled veterans have free access. Prices for senior/disabled permits will not increase in 2019.
- xxv. Suzan commented that if the differential pricing happens on weekends/holidays, low-income folks are most affected as it's their only time off. It was noted that the differential pricing only pertains to camping, not to daily passes. It is an important issue to consider.
- xxvi. Carl asked what the next step in the process is. It was noted that an action item is planned for the next OLAB meeting, Parks Advisory Board will discuss in October, 2 work sessions with BOCC in October/November, public hearing in December for adoption or adjustment to recommendation. Nancy and K-Lynn suggested an open house for the public for increased transparency.
- xxvii. Brian commented that the City of Loveland would support an open house. LC will look at scheduling an open house.

xxviii. PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Elizabeth Kayl – Parks and Recreation Director for City of Loveland for last 4 years. Topic of great interest for Loveland’s Open Lands and Trails commission and residents, want to engage in dialog on this topic. Should have comprehensive view of impact to residents and visitors. Keep social equity in mind while weighing options. Several Loveland Open Lands board members here to comment. Thank you for opportunity for further discussion.
2. Ross Livingston – chair of Open Lands Advisory Commission (OLAC). Hoping for meaningful dialog, goal is to engage people of all ages in recreational activities. Fee structure at DBB will discourage residents from using, outcome is unacceptable to Loveland’s OLAC. Recently extended the open space sales tax, Loveland will receive \$270K less of that funding in 2019, disturbed by possible fee structure. Budget docs show that LC is covering management costs, fee structure is unnecessary, detrimental to quality of life in Loveland. Regarding the presentation, what can we do to reduce operating expenses? Issues with differential pricing strategy, shouldn’t compare natural area to movie theater, would create problems and backlash.
3. Gail Bernhardt – OLAC Commission member & DBB user, within cycling distance from home, has annual permit. Ross’ opinions are not representative of all on commission. DBB risking getting loved to death. LC supporting other citizens but they don’t pay for maintenance. How to address needs at Coyote Ridge and Prairie Ridge parking spaces if fee at DBB, don’t want to push the problem elsewhere. Capital expenditures for open lands will be limited by availability, how that aspect overlaps with operational costs as those funds shift to operational over time. Not all open spaces can be accessible to all people because the resources get loved to death. Worth great discussion and opposing viewpoints, open and honest.
4. Unknown citizen – echo Gail’s comments, put more emphasis on increasing non-resident fees.

5. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF LAST MEETING MINUTES

- a. Carl Sorrentino motions to approve, Nance Wallace 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 Open Lands Advisory Board minutes, go to <http://larimer.org/subscriptions.cfm>, enter your email, click ‘Subscribe,’ and then check the ‘Open Lands Advisory Board’ box.



- c. Colin Waters (CO Lottery) presented the Starburst Award to LCDNR and Fort Collins for the Horsetooth Foothills Conservation Project at the staff/volunteer picnic – Meegan
- 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 – Meegan
 - i. Invitations will be coming for this meeting to be held last week in October. Sherri and Meegan working on stakeholder committee, looking at policy opportunities and how to address those, good time to be involved. County boards and outside groups will be invited. Encouraging folks to show up.

7. ACTION ITEMS

- a. Board recommendation on staff recommended regulation changes effective 2019 – Steve & Chris
 - i. A1 – camping outside of designated area, not problem on reservoirs but is a problem at Hermit, used to be 10 feet.
 - ii. A6 – reducing capacity at Hermit due to smaller spaces.
 - iii. A11 – smoking/cooking in cabin at Hermit, allows cook stove and propane lights.
 - iv. F10 – updated language to include drones, allowed only with permission for special events.
 - v. A4 (repeated in F13) – projected music being limited.
 - vi. F14 – E-bikes classified, no e-bikes on any natural surface trail, no Class III's on hard surface trails.
 - vii. I6 – food storage language updates, use of provided bear-proof lockers or keep in vehicle.
 - viii. Nancy inquired about leading sentence before each of the regulations.
 - ix. L1 – new alcohol law in 2019, how to best regulate. Will allow consumption in campsite and on vessel (excluding operator). Boat rangers observe before approaching to monitor change of operators. Nancy suggested omitting what IS allowed since it is not written that way in other regs. Model taken from California, good practice.
 - x. W30 – inclusion of flyboards in outlawed regulations as they are dangerous.
 - xi. X2 – launching boats outside of designated hours and from unapproved boat ramps. Due to newer Bureau of Reclamation requirements regarding ANS.
 - xii. Resident definition
 - xiii. Fine increases – raising all fines, not for revenue generation but as deterrent. Maximum fines are \$300, only using max with ANS fines. Sherri asked if they will actually work as deterrents, feels they should be doubled at least to discourage illegal activity. Summons requires court appearance in front of judge which can equal much higher fines, have option on each regulation to summons but typically only summons for higher level offense. Fines are within industry standards.
 - xiv. Nancy moves to recommend to BOCC with modification of proposed regulations in this packet, Sherri seconds, motion passed unanimously.

8. UPDATES & REPORTS

- a. Open Space District Reports – Steve/Chris
 - i. Steve – Red Mountain cattle were confiscated, held for 2 days before owner picked back up, owner sold 400 of them, only keeping 15. Staff assisted with grand opening at Long View Trail.
 - ii. Chris – peak season at Hermit, finished construction on trailheads, still have little things like signs, etc., grand opening will be next spring, will have soft openings for 2 trailheads. Maintenance staff has been working hard to keep up, getting long term projects completed. Starting to pour concrete for bear boxes in rest of campgrounds and cabins. Zero negative encounters with bears this year but lots of sightings. Volunteers from all over nation working on rebuilding Hermit’s Cabin, worked with HistoriCorps, Shane did great job. Viestenz-Smith opening tomorrow, really beautiful, management contract with Loveland, LC does day-to-day operations.
- b. Amy Gilboy was hired as the Restoration & Stewardship Specialist – Meegan
- c. Update on Education Coordinator and Land Agent positions – Meegan
 - i. Hired Angela Borland as the Education Coordinator, starts October 25th. Land Agent position closed, selected 6 for interviews 1st week in October
- d. Update on Director position – advertised 2 weeks ago, will accept applications until October 14th, Todd working on selecting committee, asking for 2 members from OLAB and PAB each. K-Lynn volunteered, Sherri suggested Pete, Pete said Dave Marvin volunteered remotely, Pete volunteered. Pete said Todd implied desire for consistency and asked how we should handle 3 volunteers. Meegan suggested that one way to handle would be to go with those who volunteered and are here in person.

9. DISCUSSION ITEMS

- a. Jason Brothers gives update on (Land Evaluation and Site Assessment) LESA document. Jason sits on Ag Advisory board, they recommended an update to the LESA doc as it needs to reflect more modern values of what a high value farmland acquisition is. Current version emphasizes larger properties, seeing more activity recently with smaller, CSA type operators. Update water rights, water sharing opportunities. Seeking input on interest level for participation from LC staff and OLAB.
- b. Meegan noted that Travis Rollins has been working on that with Jason and George Wallace. LC staff would like to see it, then bring draft to OLAB. K-Lynn supports involvement.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

- a. October meeting will be held to keep up with the Fee Study plans. K-Lynn suggested that the open house occur before the October 25th OLAB meeting in order to have feedback to discuss. Loveland open house only, advertise in Loveland and Fort Collins. Precedent on fees for high use open spaces, getting a system for that. Nancy stated that pushback on fee increases is unlikely but is more likely for DBB fee implementation,

need to be able to have public discussions. K-Lynn stated need for percentage of operating costs goal at high use areas, also asked about north vs. south entrance use. It was noted that there are more trails on the south end. Comparison of parking use south vs. north is 100 vehicles at DBB and 25 at Blue Sky.

- b. Pete will likely be gone for the October 25th meeting.
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- 11. NEXT MEETING SCHEDULED: October 25, 2018 at the Loveland Campus, 200 Peridot Avenue, Loveland, CO 80537, Big Thompson River Room.

 - 12. 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. Nancy moves to enter Executive Session at 7:41 p.m., Suzan seconds, motion passed unanimously.

 - 13. ADJOURN – 8:26 p.m.