



## LARIMER COUNTY OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, February 24, 2011, 5:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m., Loveland Municipal Building, 500 E. 3<sup>rd</sup> St, Loveland, CO

*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.*

Present:

Steve Vessey	At-large	Suzan Fritchel	At-large
Mary Banken	At-large	Commissioner Tom Donnelly	
Nancy Wallace	Planning Commission		

Staff Present:

Gary Buffington	Director	Travis Rollins	Open Lands Operations Manager
Kerri Rollins	Open Lands Program Manager	Zac Wiebe	Natural Resource Technician
Charlie Johnson	Land Agent	Stephen Gibson	Open Lands Ranger
Charlie Gindler	Natural Resource Specialist		

Absent:

David Roy	City of Ft. Collins	Patricia Brennan	At-large
Trudy Haines	At-large	Don Griffith	At-large
John Ericson	Town of Estes Park	Jeff Hindman	Town of Berthoud
Peter Kast	At-large	Hugh McKean	City of Loveland

Nancy called the meeting to order at 5:15 pm.

**REGULAR MEETING**

- Approval of the meeting minutes for January 27, 2011.  
There was not a quorum, minutes could not be approved.
- Review Agenda and enclosures

**INFORMATION:**

- Environmental Education Pilot Project – consultant selection has begun, interviews will be mid-March

Tom asked about the process. Kerri explained that there were six applicants, a selection committee will score them and narrow them down to a short list of two to three. Then, interviews will take place and a selection will be made.

- Staff will attend the CCLT conference on March 7 & 8 at Denver University, as well as participate on March 9 to roll out the Center of Excellence project. The Center of Excellence is an idea funded by GOCO, Colorado Conservation Trust and Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts to raise the bar on the way we do conservation across the board. It will continue what the accreditation process has started.
- Kerri presented to the Our Lands, Our Future: The Colorado Landscapes Project hosted by Environment Colorado at New Belgium Brewery on February 15. Even though this event was rescheduled three times, there were still 100 people in attendance.
- The COSA conference will be September 19-21 at Hotel Colorado in Glenwood Springs, mark your calendars! Garfield County is attempting to pass an open space sales tax, Eagle County recently passed one but hasn't spent much yet. These factors contributed to the decision to hold the conference in Glenwood Springs. Board members are encouraged to attend.



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- To implement the Devil’s Backbone Cheatgrass Management Plan, a prescribed burn is scheduled for March or April (weather dependent) on the west side of the open space, near Mildred Lane. Approximately 50 grassland acres are planned for the burn.
- The Pleasant Valley Trail is getting a facelift. This 20+ year old asphalt trail near Bellevue is getting a much needed upgrade with new pavement, pedestrian bridge and wider trail width. Construction starts in late February and ends in April. Nancy asked if there is an update on widening the section of trail near Bellvue. Travis said construction has begun from the Poudre school area almost to Vern’s and will be widened from four feet to approximately eight feet.
- A work session regarding the Master plan update for the BOCC didn’t happen but has been rescheduled in March 21
- 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
- Report from the Open Lands Operations Manager – Travis
  - Open spaces are being used by the public and have been very busy.
  - Red Mountain OS re-opens March 1<sup>st</sup>. It has been closed for 3 months for winter range wildlife habitat.
  - There were 300+ hunting applications for nine permits, drawing will be held March 8<sup>th</sup>. The application are available through next week (Feb 28<sup>th</sup>). Steve asked if the permits are transferable, they are not. Tom asked if there are preference points. Travis mentioned that it has been a complex process that does not include preference points. Gary asked if there have been any repeat applicants from last year’s successful applicants. Travis answered yes.
  - There are various resource closures related to raptor nesting including the Keyhole at Devil’s Backbone Open Space (DBOS), River Bluffs river access, and Eagle’s Nest river access.
  - Cattail Flats trail at Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space is closed for bald eagle roosting areas and will re-open on March 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - Horsetooth Mountain Open Space (HTMOS): There has been some vandalism at the Blue Sky trail head, windows broken on the restroom. There was also a medical situation near Horsetooth Rock, a woman slipped and fell while hiking and broke her leg. Rangers assisted the rescue.
  - The Overland Mountain Bike Club, a nationally recognized group, has a proposed a cross country mountain bike race at HTMOS for July, it would be a 40 mile race using trails both on HTMOS and Lory State Park. The start/finish would be at Lory and approximately 150 participants are expected. There would be some trail closures during the race and the majority of participants would be from the Larimer County area. There will be a fee associated with it and it will generate revenue. Nancy suggested notice ahead of time because of the popularity with horseman. They will use signage and press releases. Nancy wondered if it would be hard on the trails. It’s a 20 mile loop that they would do twice. Steve wondered if they stay on the trail how do they pass. Travis answered that it will be a staggered start, bikers will race against time rather than each other. Kerri asked if the fee factors in trail maintenance. Travis explained that for each special event, there is funding factored in for maintenance, staff time, and resource damage. Gary asked how many special events DNR does in HTMOS. This is the only bike race and one other foot race. Nancy has no objections but wondered if it will be worth the effort. Travis’ message to Overland is that first impressions are huge to the staff. Steve G. mentioned that the race will take place in more backcountry



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areas. Suzan wondered if their fees include the day parking area. Travis answered that the bulk of the parking and awards ceremony will take place at Lory and that our trailheads are much more popular. Travis mentioned that it is still in negotiation and encouraged the board. Kerri mentioned the State Trails grant. Charlie mentioned the triathlon at Lory and that Overland is probably involved. Travis mentioned that PVH will sponsor as well as provide medical support on the day of the race.

- The Ranger Excellence School hosted by Larimer County will take place at the Ranch/Budweiser Event Center and is sponsored by COSA. It's a week long training conference for rangers/natural resource officers from around the state of Colorado and western region.

With all of the open space programs in the state, there is a need to share information. This year the Thomas McKee building will be used during the week of May 16<sup>th</sup>. Each day of the training will have multiple concurrent sessions that are very applicable to natural resource rangers. Gary commented that it speaks highly our ranger program that it hosts a program like this. Mary asked who will be doing the trainings. Travis answered that there are a variety of presenters including our Rangers, the Sheriff's office, people from Douglas County, the City of Aspen, lots of different folks. Nancy asked if the participants pay. Kerri answered that they do but the event is meant to be self sustaining. Gary asked what the cost is. Travis answered that the cost is \$125 for 5 days. The price includes a social dinner and a flight-for-life demonstration. Several trainings include certifications. Travis expects around 100 rangers.

- Jacob Wells, one of our full time rangers took a promotional opportunity to take a Lead Ranger position with City of Denver Parks, DNR will be re-hiring in the months to come. Tom asked how much it costs to train a new ranger. Travis answered that DNR typically hires 30 or so seasonal rangers, there is a strong pool and it depends on each person's qualifications to determine how much it costs to train them.
- Natural Resource Events for March. See website <http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources>

### FINANCIAL REPORT:

- Update: Natural Resources Capital Development and Acquisition Summary 2010 - 2012. – no updates  
There will be an update next month.

### DISCUSSION ITEMS:

- Open Lands Agricultural Leases, process review – Charlie Gindler  
Charlie presented a proposal for a new process to select agricultural (ag) lessees. As DNR acquired properties there were a number of factors used to choose lessees. See handout. Charlie gave a brief overview of each lease. See handout. He's been overseeing the grazing program for about 11 years. He explained the term "Animal Unit Month (AUM)". AUMs are used to determine forage, animals, and carrying capacity. An AUM is equivalent to a cow/calf pair. He explained that the lessees were determined through a long history; some are original owners, some are neighbors, etc. Tom asked how River Bluffs Open Space (RBOS) is looking with horses on it. Charlie answered that they graze in a time of year that doesn't have much of a negative effect. Steve asked how much DNR makes on RBOS. It's a flat fee of \$3000. Kerri asked about Long View Farm Open Space. Charlie answered that DNR pays the lessee to control the weeds. Kerri commented that DNR makes it a good deal because if he doesn't farm it, no one will. Gary asked what the total amount of revenue that DNR generates each year is. Charlie answered roughly \$20k.

Charlie introduced the new process for selecting lessees. See handout. It's a more competitive process, he is very happy with the current lessees but the new process is more equitable to give others a chance. Steve asked if this is a sealed bid process. Charlie said not exactly. Steve is concerned about the PR DNR could get if the process would be to take highest bid. Charlie answered that there will be many other factors considered related



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to resource management and stewardship, money only a small part of the criteria. Mary asked if revenue is expected to increase. Charlie doesn't expect that it will. He then explained how he came up with his figure of \$10.78 per AUM. He said, depending on the land, one could pay from \$2 to \$16 per AUM. He then came across the state board of land commissioners figure for AUM charges on state land and used their figure. Steve asked if it is cost effective to do this without an anticipated revenue increase. Charlie said that it's good for our image. Nancy mentioned that so far these leases have benefited only a few people and it's time to move toward a more equitable process. It might result in the same lessees but at least others had a shot. Travis reiterated that there is concern about negative PR because others don't have a chance. The main impetus was to introduce a competitive, fair public process. Charlie reiterated that he can't say enough good things about the current lessees but wants to make it fair. Steve wondered who would be on the selection panel. It will be a diverse panel of county staff and volunteers. Mary clarified that there will be a minimum bid. The ag contracts will have to be backed out of more slowly due to the existing use. Nancy mentioned that if wheat is the anticipated crop, it should be a split year process. The current contracts have an "out" for us and can be terminated at any time. Charlie asked for feedback. Steve cautioned him to be careful but it's a good process. Mary wondered if there are any expected future grazing leases on other properties. It's possible; some of them need minor infrastructure updates. A positive thing about this is that the management has been developed around the inherited lessees and this is an opportunity to start fresh with new management. Nancy commented that DNR might want to consider three year leases, five year leases are nice but three is the industry standard. Right now farmers are making money but in three years time, it could change. It may not benefit us but it could be fairer. Charlie commented that USFS leases and Ft. Collins leases are 10 years. Travis mentioned that DNR has spoken to the current tenants and they were willing to have five year leases. Steve asked if they are receptive to the new plan. Charlie answered that they aren't happy but understand, he hasn't heard a lot of negative feedback. They are disappointed but think it's fair. Charlie will consider the lease length during the process. Nancy isn't objecting to five years but thinks it should be considered. Tom recommended being cautionary and getting feedback from the entire board. Charlie mentioned that if it takes too long, he'll have to wait a year. The lessees need to know. Suzan mentioned a client with Boulder county ag leases. One has a 20 year lease that's re-negotiated every five.

- Horsetooth Mountain Open Space backcountry camping – Steve Gibson

See presentation. Nancy asked how many people would be allowed to use a site. Travis mentioned that they would use current campground restrictions, which allows 4-6 people for tent sites. There are no current backcountry regulations. Steve G. clarified that fires will not be allowed. Steve V. asked if there would be a reservation system. It will be first come first serve at first. Steve V. asked what happens if he pays for a permit then finds an occupied campsite. Travis answered that he feels that 95% of the campers could be accommodated with four sites but dispersed camping would be allowed if they are full. Allowing dispersed camping is critical so that no one is turned away. Mary asked if the fifth person would still have to pay. Yes. The current management plan allows for four sites. Steve V. clarified that a ranger would be monitoring the sites. Steve G. answered yes. Kerri asked if the sites are close enough to use the restrooms and, if not, how will campers use the bathroom. Travis answered that current literature is sufficient to educate campers. He then commented that the sites will be placed in areas that are accessible. Mary is concerned about allowing dispersed camping if the sites are full but, if not, it's not allowed. Travis reiterated that most campers would be accommodated with four sites and he didn't think dispersed camping would be very common. Gary commented that a possible solution could be to patrol and indicate through signage at the trailhead when the sites are full. Steve G. mentioned another method of having markers at the trailhead; they are considering lots of options. The current situation is unacceptable and causing resource damage. Nancy mentioned that there will be greater use once there are designated sites. Gary mentioned that the neighbors are watching this situation closely with the fire situation. Charlie G asked if they would be hardened sites or temporary, moveable ones. Travis said they would be hardened. Charlie G asked if compostable toilets would be considered. Travis commented that small steps will



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be taken; the main goals are to prevent resource damage and illegal activities. They will monitor it closely. Lory has a similar program with six sites and no fires. Mary asked if Lory has any data about capacity. Travis answered that in the summer it's full but other time of the year not. Travis' goal is to not turn anyone away. Gary commented that DNR could be headed for a reservation system. Nancy mentioned that the public will become accustomed to it and adjust as time goes by. Charlie G mentioned that the USFS has similar types of areas where dispersed camping is allowed but within a certain area.

- Natural Resources Recreation Map Project, Final Draft – Zac Wiebe

Zac presented the latest version of the recreation map. Overall, the Board had positive things to say. Mary suggested that open space closures and the Homestead Meadows trail profile be included.

- Heron Lakes Project Update - Kerri

The Heron Lakes grant is due tomorrow. The update is that the project will be phased due to feedback from GOCO. It is a small funding cycle with 17 applicants. Kerri displayed a map and explained the project. Phase I will protect the peninsula between McNeil and Welch reservoirs, about 40 acres. Phase II will include the recreation rights to McNeil Reservoir. It will also include the purchase of a additional acreage along Lonetree Reservoir. Suzan clarified that next fall will be a request to purchase the remaining acreage. DNR will have no management costs and will meet with Berthoud to discuss and advise on management and associated costs. Berthoud also plans to meet with Loveland. If DNR does do any management, it will be on a contract basis. Nancy asked what the possibility is to be funded for phase I but not phase II. Kerri has asked that question directly and GOCO's response is that they hardly ever see a phase II project not get funded. Kerri also mentioned that the planned Colorado Front Range trail goes through the property. Mary asked if there is any point of the process when the Board approves expenditures. Kerri answered that during last meeting the Board agreed to pursue a certain amount of money. The Board will have to vote on it before the grant award in June, after the appraisal and negotiations are completed. Nancy asked what was to stop the bank from foreclosing the rest of the property. Kerri answered that the bank is aware of the process and isn't likely to foreclose if grants are successful. Mary asked if the landowner has enough funding to build. Kerri answered not at the moment, it could be well in to the future. Nancy asked about bank subordination if this were an easement acquisition, and clarified that GOCO wouldn't contribute money if the loan is not subordinated. The contract might provide that the bank agrees that they subordinate their interest in the other portions. Kerri commented that the choice to phase a fee simple acquisition is ideal, and is based on the public access components of the project. Suzan asked about the recreation rights on McNeil Reservoir. They would allow for wakeless boating and fishing. Suzan clarified that Welch reservoir is a private lease and Lonetree is a state wildlife area leased by DOW.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Items not on the agenda**

See handout. The division is currently going through a process to improve excellence. It will get tight in 2012 and DNR wants to give the BOCC a clear idea of measured performance initiatives when making decisions. Gary will keep the Board posted.

**The meeting was adjourned at 7:28pm. There was no Executive Session.**

*Next regular meeting: Thursday, March 24, 2010; Loveland Council Chambers, 500 E 3<sup>rd</sup> St., Loveland*