



LARIMER COUNTY OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, September 22, 2011, 5:00 - 8:00 p.m., Loveland Municipal Building, 500 E. 3rd 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	Peter Kast	At-large
Patricia Brennan	At-large	Mary Banken	At-large
Nancy Wallace	Planning Commission	Trudy Haines	At-Large
Suzan Fritchel	At-large		

Staff Present:

Kerri Rollins	Open Lands Program Manager	Gary Buffington	Director
Charlie Johnson	Land Agent	Travis Rollins	Open Lands Operations Manager
Zac Wiebe	Natural Resource Technician	Zach Cook	Ranger
Rob Novak	Education Coordinator	Charlie Gindler	Natural Resource Specialist
		Sue Burke	Executive Assistant

Absent:

John Ericson	Town of Estes Park	Don Griffith	At-large
Hugh McKean	City of Loveland	Gerry Horak	City of Fort Collins
Jeff Hindman	Town of Berthoud		

Peter called the meeting to order at 5:21 pm.

REGULAR MEETING

- Approval of the meeting minutes for June 23, 2011.
- Nancy had a change about clarifying the Belvoir Open space transmission lines. **Steve motioned to approve the minutes with changes, Suzan seconded and the motion was approved unanimously.**
- Review Agenda and enclosures

PUBLIC COMMENT: Items not on the agenda.

INFORMATION:

- Zach Cook is the new Ranger II on our open spaces after competing with 45 others for the position, congrats to Zach! Travis introduced Zach, who is a great worker, a medic, and very customer service oriented. Zach was a platoon medic in Afghanistan, was a seasonal ranger for four and a half years, loves working on the open spaces and rents the house on Red Mountain Open Space. He graduated from CSU in 2006 and is excited to take this step in his career.
- Larimer County Board Reception – you are invited! Hosted by the county Commissioners on 9/26 4:30-6pm at the Courthouse Offices Hearing Room. RSVP by 9/21 to dtokarz@larimer.org
- Larimer County, City of Fort Collins and the Nature Conservancy submitted a letter with comments regarding the Windy Hollow wind project proposal in Wyoming just northwest of Red Mountain Open Space. One public comment just making sure we knew about the project and its proximity to the open space. Kerri will attend the Laramie foothills advisory meeting where it will be discussed
- Meegan had a baby girl, Riley West! Congrats to Meegan and her family!!



LARIMER COUNTY OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

- Ag lease process received 16 applications and six interviews were conducted for the three properties being leased. Nancy & Steve from OLAB, George Reed from the Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB), and Jeffrey, Travis, Charlie and Dan from DNR staff made up the review panel. The leases were updated to five years. Eldon Ackerman was awarded the Red Mountain Open Space (RMOS) lease, Eagle's Nest Open Space (ENOS) went to Jeff and Jenny Weiler, and Lynn Downy got the North property. Travis thanked the subcommittee for all their work on the rigorous process. Nancy commented that it was a difficult decision because the proposals were very different but all very good. Peter asked how they were different. Nancy gave an example that one would have lived on site like a ranch while another would have had just animals. There were also different time frames, different ways to move livestock, and different animals. The dollars per unit prices were also dramatically different. RMOS was more difficult than the others. Kerri asked if it was helpful to have George Reed from AAB. Nancy answered yes.
- Regional Open Space Boards meeting – proposed for November 9th, discuss desired topics. Kerri reminded the Board of the meeting last year. There have been requests to have another meeting that's more "sharing". Kerri met with Mark Sears from Ft. Collins and Brian Hayes from Loveland and they decided to ask their respective boards what they would like to see out of the process. Kerri solicited ideas from OLAB. Nancy asked about the goal, would they be joint goals that the boards would work together on? Kerri answered that the RFP has goals for the study but wanted feedback about the process for achieving them. Trudy likes the goal of networking and working with each other vs. just a presentation, it will help build rapport. Kerri mentioned that one suggestion is to see a brief presentation from every group, then break into small groups for further discussion. Kerri also had an idea to meet once a year in November, this timing could be helpful. Steve wondered if it would replace the regularly scheduled November OLAB meeting. Kerri answered yes that since it has to be moved anyway for Thanksgiving, it would be a good time. Nancy thinks it's a good idea to continue meeting occasionally to share ideas, especially with the impending tax issue. Peter likes the idea to talk about how the grant project goes forward but wondered about meeting in January. He's worried about doing the exercise before the grant awards are announced. Trudy sees a benefit in meeting anyway. Kerri is hoping to get some ideas from this meeting about the process if the project is funded. Mary asked what would happen if the grant isn't funded? Kerri mentioned that could be a good discussion anyway. Trudy commented that the Land Conservation Board talked about having each organization present their accomplishments and challenges, 5-6 minutes apiece to get an overview, then break into smaller groups with representatives from each agency, then spend the rest of the times discussing lessons and challenges. The Board will get to know people so everyone will have a relationship if we do end up working on the tax together. Suzan wondered if the initial meetings were to start a foundation for the effort to work on the tax together. Kerri answered possibly and mentioned that, as volunteers, the Board can do more than DNR staff. There are also some more immediate goals to work on. Peter suggested starting with the regional study. Then staff could come up with a recommendation so OLAB doesn't start from nothing. He likes the idea of having small groups. Trudy mentioned the Land Conservation Board again and that they really want to understand what everyone is doing, top accomplishments and successes, and then talk about why in smaller groups. Peter is concerned that the smaller communities will not have much to say. Trudy answered that they may not choose to present but they could benefit from hearing other presentations. Kerri clarified that the total time would be 30-45 minutes. Mary suggested having multiple scenarios to choose from. Kerri mentioned that the meeting will be in Loveland. Peter asked when the library will be finished? No one knows, maybe next year. Peter is nervous about the presentations from the smaller communities and suggested making presentations optional and limiting them to 5-6 minutes. Mary suggested focusing on the challenges. Peter suggested including "where do you see your program in 5 years?" as a question.



LARIMER COUNTY OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

- Zac will be participating in the Telementor Program with a Fort Collins student doing wildlife research at Sylvan Dale Ranch. Zac explained the project that will install a wildlife “guzzler” and motion-sensor cameras for the students to learn about wildlife population dynamics.
- The Plug In To Nature public survey for parents launched August 19th. Anyone can go to www.larimer.org/plugintonature to take the survey. It will wrap up in early October. Kerri encouraged the board to participate
- The Northern Colorado Birding Fair (NCBF) will take place on September 24th. There are several fun-filled birding trips, including one to our new 3 Bell Conservation Easement. This is the 7th annual NCBF and it’s gotten more sponsorship dollars than any fair, including grants from Fort Fund, Otter Cares, and KRFC. With this increased revenue, the fair is able to bring in a naturalist, Doc Wild, to present and MC the event. The theme this year is “birding in your backyard” and 1000-1200 attendees are expected. Peter wondered where attendees park. Travis answered that there is a plan in place, after 7 years he has a good system. The bottom lot will be filled first, then one side of the road, then the trail. Rob encouraged the Board to attend.
- Colorado Open Space Alliance Conference highlights from those who attended. It was a huge success. Mary agreed and commented that it was well organized. It was relevant for her because she’s a board member and a land trust employee. There are people on the COSA Steering Committee that ensure that board members are attracted and speaking on behalf of board members. She commented that three days is a long time as a volunteer board member and suggested having a board member day. Mary attended sessions about volunteering, the role of board members by Christian Meyer, a GOCO board member. There was also another TPL session about Greenprinting. John Fielder gave a great presentation. Kerri mentioned that John Fielder has been contracted to do a book on County open spaces to commemorate the 20th anniversary of GOCO. Mary mentioned that the Board should be proud of DNR staff, they are highly respected and work very hard. Kerri mentioned that she presented to Garfield county commissioners and other elected officials. Hosted by the Sonoran Institute, who is trying to pass an open space sales tax in Garfield County, Larimer, Jefferson, Routt and Eagle Counties were asked to do a presentation on the structure of their programs, tax structures, and the pros and cons of each. She enjoyed giving the presentation because she learned a lot about other county’s programs. The presentations will be on the Sonoran Institute website. There were probably 20-30 people in attendance. Terry Grosz was hosted by the rangers, a Federal Wildlife Marshall, who pointed out the great wildlife habitat that programs like DNR manages. He has authored 8 books about his career, one of which won an award. A movie was made of it and was also shown at the conference. Gary mentioned the great field trips, his specifically, by Aspen Valley Land Trust on the Porter Ranch. Zach C. commented that it was a great networking opportunity with the rangers. Zac W. commented that he, Rob, CJ and Jeffrey all presented a session. Mary mentioned the awards, then Kerri explained our winning of the Starburst award for the River Bluffs Open Space development project which will be presented to the commissioners in early October.
- 10 applications were submitted for the Small Grants for Community Partnering program for approximately \$18k. The committee met this afternoon to discuss, sites visits will take place on the 28th and a recommendation will happen after another meeting.
- The eagle nest at 3 Bell which blew out of the tree this summer has been replaced with the help of PV REA and raptor biologist Jerry Craig. Travis commented that thankfully no eaglets were injured.
- A Conservation Excellence grant for completion of the Regional Study and Master Plan was submitted on 8/10 to Great Outdoors Colorado. Letters of commitment were received from all cities and towns in the County. Thanks to Zac & Meegan for their help!



LARIMER COUNTY OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

- Staff attended a community meeting hosted by GOCO for their River Corridor Initiative. The cycle will have \$18 million, and concept papers are being requested. DNR has learned that many people will be applying. A concept paper will be submitted by Oct. 14, then the GOCO board will meet in December and decide who to ask for full applications.
- Natural Resources submitted a GOCO grant on behalf of the Thompson School District for Big Thompson Elementary School of Nature and Science Playscape and Community Recreation Project.
- Board and staff appreciation picnic drew 95 people, but only 10 Board members. Thanks to Mary and Peter for attending. Kerri solicited feedback about changing the event to attract more board members. Steve had a conflict but would have come. Trudy wondered if it would be better in the fall. Nancy thinks there's nothing wrong with having a staff appreciation and inviting the boards. Trudy thinks that one event a year is plenty. Nancy suggested doing them on an open space, perhaps a newer one. Mary commented that she wouldn't have come down from Estes Park twice and if the board meeting was cancelled she wouldn't have come, Patricia concurred.
- Report from the Open Lands Operations Manager
 - Attended regular Agricultural Advisory Board and Habitat Partnership Program meetings
 - Free Firewood Program will begin in October at Horsetooth Mountain
 - Hosted 'Forty in the Fort' endurance mountain bike race at Horsetooth Mountain and Lory State Park, 150 participants
 - Pre-hunt meeting for Red Mountain hunters is September 24th
 - DNR will host the Blue Sky marathon on October 2nd. Travis commented that he met someone from Carbondale who was planning on attending

Patrol-

- Led a field trip at Eagle's Nest for the Livermore Women's' Club 115th anniversary. It included the Liverash family, from which the town is half named.
- Ranger Gibson led three interpretive programs – one outdoor survival class and two backcountry cooking classes. They were well attended. Suzan asked how DNR gets the word out about programs. Rob answered that there is a monthly events flyer that the public can subscribe to and a press release is sent out every month. The campground programs are also marketed to the campgrounds
- There has been a slight restructure and Travis now has a maintenance crew leader and access to heavy equipment.

Maintenance-

- Crew finished correcting drainage issues at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space trailhead
- Crew currently is working at Eagle's Nest Open Space on interior roads
- Next, crew will be working on the Soderberg rental house at Horsetooth Mountain.
- In partnership with Lory State Park, finished installing boundary signs at Horsetooth Mountain to clarify where hunting is allowed.
- 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
- Natural Resource Events for October. See website <http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources>

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

- Report on 2010 Small Grants for Community Partnering – brief slide show
They have all been closed out successfully.



LARIMER COUNTY OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

- River Bluffs Open Space (RBOS) Playscape Draft Plan Review – Rob

Rob made it clear that he's not looking for any decisions from the board but guidance instead, he wants to get a lot of public input. From the Board he wants to know what should be allowed. There is a spectrum from completely wild to more developed and this project will likely be somewhere in the middle. He explained some of the "built" options such as slides or water features. Once DNR defines what can be allowed, then the public will have a chance to comment. The current plan is more of a menu. DNR will lay out the options, refine the project and then get public comment. One of the results from the Plug In To Nature (PIN) study is that one major obstacle is fear and that this area will hopefully squelch any fears. DNR will likely put in for a GOCO grant, it'll cost approximately \$25k, requiring only \$2500 from DNR. Some donated time from Belt Collins, a landscape architecture firm, has also been acquired. Peter wants to look at it in a bigger context, does DNR envision doing a series of these. Rob thinks so, possibly including them in the "developed" areas near trailheads. They should also be near major urban centers or even in the parks. Peter suggested having models of different ends of the spectrum, then consider the public perception and proceed from there. Kerri also suggested having a draft of options to present to the public. Peter wants to stay away from a playground. Rob wondered if that was in terms of materials or "rides". Peter doesn't want to have a lot of plastic. Suzan asked if there were any nearby that Rob has seen. There is one at Gateway Natural Area that has sand, big trees, logs, a small wall, and stumps. They've also built frames as starts to forts and kids can finish them with natural materials. The North Fork of the Poudre River runs through Gateway and they have gotten lots of unsolicited comments in support of keeping it away from the river. DNR has the same challenge at RBOS. There is another one at the High Plains Environmental Center in Loveland. It's completely natural and its size is 72 by 100 feet with lots of areas to play around. The topography could be altered, different plantings that kids could eat, etc. Nancy thinks sand would be a wonderful addition to a space like this. Rivendale School is trying to change to natural materials and the kids play in it a lot. She also thinks DNR shouldn't waste time focusing on the 0-2 age range. Peter doesn't want to give up on the river access; there could be a water feature that incorporates the river. Rob mentioned water rights issues and Peter clarified that as long as it goes back into the river, it shouldn't be a problem. Rob mentioned that there is also a nearby water tap that could be used. Peter was thinking about some type of water engineering options, dams, etc. Rob mentioned that it should be suitable to the site and perhaps irrigation could be incorporated. Gary wondered if river water would be dangerous. Travis explained that potable water would be safe and then explained that the topography is another reason to use domestic water. Rob commented that one of the major regrets of the Gateway area was the exclusion of water. Travis mentioned the struggle of resource protection vs. recreation and public access. This project could help strike a balance and loosen the regulations. Nancy wondered how much additional cost is associated with maintenance and that those costs should be considered, especially concerning water use. Rob answered that this will be considered during the public process. Kerri added that there could be an adopt-a-trail type group to help with maintenance. Rob also suggested using volunteers to maintain plantings. Mary is supportive of using volunteers. Mary is continually reminded of McDonald's playgrounds and how filthy they are, any time there is a public space there will be these kinds of issues and required maintenance. Mary didn't notice any information about dogs in the plan and doesn't want to see it become a dog park. Nancy wondered about adult access and if the area should have benches. She also thinks there needs to be adult supervision. Trudy asked if there was data available about the pros and cons of different parts of the spectrum. Rob answered that it's a pretty new idea and we have a good idea of the spectrum but not data about pros and cons. Trudy mentioned that there is a lot of area to work with. Rob agreed and stated that there could be different areas along the spectrum. Trudy commented that it is a great concept. Gary mentioned that in the future, DNR might assist schools in planning their own playscapes. Kerri commented that DNR is already contributing to that effort with Big Thompson elementary who has designed a playscape. Gary commented that there are other science and nature schools in Ft. Collins and there could be an opportunity to partner with them. Kerri thinks it's an investment and the districts will never do it themselves. Nancy thinks it's a great pilot to see what can be done with limited money. Kerri commented that



LARIMER COUNTY OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

one of the challenges at Big Thompson elementary is getting rid of the existing playground infrastructure. The community is very behind it but there will still be some traditional playground equipment. Trudy agrees that this is a good investment; the RBOS project will get kids out there. Rob mentioned that DNR will be able to attract in-kind donations if the public process is done well. Rob clarified that, in terms of the spectrum, the Board is supportive of avoiding the traditional playground model and using natural materials. The likely process will be a grant application, public process, a draft for public review, then build it with volunteers. Peter clarified that the completion goal is the fall of 2012.

- Update on Plug in to Nature Project – Rob

Rob reminded the board about the new project name and showed the website. Approximately 25 representatives have been assembled as the advisory group. They have been very active, helped develop the survey, and will meet on October 11 to review the survey results. Also, over 500 pieces of literature have been reviewed. At this point, “connection to nature” is somewhat understudied. In the literature review, the safety component is huge. The research in the past has been focus on programs but not simply letting kids play outside. Unstructured play is receiving more attention now. DNR was looking for 400 responses that ideally match the population demographics in the county. As of Tuesday, there were 415 responses and now the data can be analyzed. It is pretty close to matching the demographics but needs to be improved in Estes Park and unincorporated Larimer County. The survey has reached underserved groups well also. Technology gets a lot of attention in the rhetoric about this although there is no research to support that technology is the problem. Instead, research has shown that technology has become an alternative to going outside rather than the cause of staying indoors. The consultants have been great to work with so far. Now, the public engagement will continue with six November meetings and ten focus groups. The inventories of facilities and programs have also been completed. The final summation should be done in December with a final report in February. Kerri added that they have been directed to update GOCO at the December meeting in order to guide next steps. Trudy wondered how many surveys he’d like. Rob answered that 600-800 is more ideal but it’ll probably end up around 500. Peter clarified that PTA’s have been contacted. Rob confirmed and mentioned the efforts that have taken place in schools. Nancy asked if Wellington has been involved. Rob answered no but there might be a public meeting there. Mary suggested getting in touch with Estes Valley Investment in Childhood Success in Estes Park.

FINANCIAL REPORT:

- Update: Natural Resources Capital Development and Acquisition Summary 2010 – 2012 – no changes

Kerri commented that there isn’t an updated report because Lori is in the midst of compiling end-of-year reports that will hopefully be available next month. There are some requests coming up, one for the Poudre River trail project and possibly for Hermit Park Open Space campground improvements.

DIRECTOR’S REPORT: Items not on the agenda

Gary updated the board on the disposal of Big Thompson parcels. Charlie added that there are 160 total parcels, DNR will dispose 60 or so and have sold, transferred or traded 25 so far. They are very small and are usually sold to adjacent landowners. Gary mentioned that selling a parcel can be very complicated due to many interested parties. The model has been to keep river access for the public and sell the rest to adjacent landowners. There are currently four parks that have a higher level of amenities and good fishing access. Charlie mentioned that a different set of circumstances presents itself with each parcel. The goal is to get them back in public ownership and provide access. Steve wondered how DNR acquired them. Charlie answered that they came into our ownership after being condemned from the Big Thompson flood of 1976. Gary commented that there are also many encumbrances, wells, gazebos, etc. They’re often sold to people who have been using them for 30 years already. Charlie commented that the public thinks this is a good thing as long as public access



LARIMER COUNTY OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

is retained. Gary mentioned the cost is approximately \$30k a year for maintenance, mostly from the general fund. Charlie mentioned that there are a few that might be buildable but in the past the Board has chosen to not build. There is one of them that should be considered because it could generate some income. Gary wants to be careful about increasing maintenance costs. Charlie commented that another aspect is to resurvey some of the properties. Engineering is working on it when they have time. This couldn't happen if DNR had to pay a private surveyor. Steve wondered if the parcels are up for bid. Charlie answered that they are first offered to adjacent and historical landowners, then they can go to bid, it's only happened once. Peter asked if anyone has argued adverse possession. Charlie answered yes but you can't adversely own property with the government. Charlie has enjoyed the process due to the amount of people he's worked with. There have been good relationships created for the most part.

OL budget, Gary commented on the Open Lands budget and that the program is healthy. He doesn't expect any furloughs or layoffs even though there isn't a lot of money. Sales tax has increased a little this year and it'll hopefully continue.

Performance measures for Open Lands - see handout. DNR will have this number to report every year. It's a way to measure success and accountability that government should have. Nancy suggested adding questions about management. How many acres does DNR manage? How many Open Spaces have management plans? How many acres have public access? Kerri responded that it's a challenge because of the amount of land under conservation easement (CE). Trudy thinks that if any part of a property is open then the acreage is "open". DNR has more fee simple land than CE with Red Mountain Open Space. Trudy reiterated that if any is open, it's all open. Kerri commented that she went to a session at the COSA conference and learned that Pitkin County has been doing public tours to inaccessible areas of the property so they lower their impact but still allow access. They haven't had one instance of trespass. Steve mentioned keeping that in mind as the election approaches. Trudy also likes the tour idea. Rob mentioned another idea about having "Open Space days" to remind the public of all the work that's been done. Kerri mentioned having a "hook", possibly a Naturalist led hike. Mary mentioned another COSA presentation by the Trust for Public Land that mentioned that property values adjacent to open lands are affected by the management.

Kerri mentioned information about the jail tax - see handout. The jail tax proposal is consolidating the court and justice center. Gary mentioned that it'll be a reduction in overall tax. Trudy wondered why? So it will pass. Trudy thinks that's somewhat odd. Steve has seen the presentation and thinks it makes sense; a decrease will sell to the public. Don't forget that the state has passed an open space tax cap exemption. Charlie asked if it was true that the county will be cut by 20%. Gary answered yes but not till 2014, DNR will lose \$250k. Another thing to consider is that DNR is waiting in line and if this tax passes, work could start on the Open Space tax extension.

Kerri passed around the updates from Hermit Park Open Space – see handout.

Nancy moved that the Board move to Executive Session, Suzan seconded, the motion passed unanimously.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: (24-6-402(4)(a) C.R.S. Purchase, acquisition, lease, transfer or sale of any real or personal property interest.

Next regular meeting: Thursday, October 27, 2011; Loveland Council Chambers, 500 E 3rd St., Loveland