



OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD (OLAB)

MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, August 22, 2013
5:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Loveland Council Chambers, 500 E. Third St., Loveland

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.

Members Present

Carl Sorrentino - At-large
Nancy Wallace - Planning Commission
Trudy Haines - At-large
Suzan Fritchel - At-large
Gerry Horak - City of Fort Collins
Hugh McKean - City of Loveland
Steve Vessey - At-large
Mary Banken - At-large
Paul Alaback - Town of Berthoud

Staff Present

Charlie Johnson, Land Agent
Kerri Rollins, Open Lands Program Manager
Jeffrey Boring, Natural Resources Specialist
Sandy Werkmeister, Dept Specialist
Travis Rollins, Natural Resource Mgr Visitor Services
Steve Gibson, County Ranger
Gary Buffington, Director of Natural Resources

Members Absent

John Phipps - Town of Estes Park
Ladonna Lee - At-large
Peter Kast - At-large

REGULAR MEETING

- Motion by Suzan Fritzel(?) and second by Mary Banken(?) to approve the minutes of June 27, 2013. Motion passed unanimously.
- There were no changes to the agenda, but Kerri did alert the board to plan for a long Executive Session.

PUBLIC COMMENT: No public in attendance.

INFORMATION:

- Regarding the Our Lands, Our Future (OLOF) final report and subsequent master plan update, Kerri recapped that the advisory committee and core team partners of the cities and towns have reviewed the final report and executive summary, and there was some detailed comment and subsequent revisions. Logan Simpson Design (LSD) is in the final throws of finalizing the document and we expect to have it in the next few weeks. As soon as we have it, it will be shared with the board.
- One part of the OLOF study was a financial analysis to create a tool to help predict our future financial needs as we continue to acquire land. We want to have money for long term management as well as future acquisitions. Kerri asked for volunteers to create a small working group to work on ideas and scenarios that will support and finance this program into the future. Meetings would probably start in September, through the end of the year, every couple weeks for 1-2 hours during business hours. Ladonna Lee, Peter Kast, Steve Vessey and Nancy Wallace volunteered to serve as this group.
- Volunteers are needed for the Small Grants for Community Partnering subcommittee. Trudy Haines described what a nice chance it is to reach out to the community and raise awareness about the Open Lands Program. Serving on the committee takes a couple of meetings, plus about 1½ days in the field. Carl Sorrentino, Suzan Fritchel and Paul Alaback volunteered.

- NoCo Nature Festival (formerly Northern Colorado Birding Fair) will be held on September 21 at Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space. It has been expanded in scope, reflected in the name change, a new website and Facebook page. Partners are bringing on new vendors and sponsors to fit with the new scope of the event. There will be more/new presentations, including Wolf, Snake Conservatory, and Nature Educators.
 - Jeffrey reported that on Saturday, August 24, there will be a volunteer project at Three Bells Conservation Easement to remove Russian olive trees. We have 18 volunteers signed up, up from 12 last year.
 - Kerri reported that Heather Young has been investigating “citizen science” projects such as Project Noah and Project Budburst. **Project Budburst** is focused on plants, and gets citizens involved in documenting when plants are budding, flowering and going to seed. We can request all or specific species, and once information is uploaded, scientists from around the world can use the data and share information. **Project Noah** allows citizens to post photos taken of wildlife, along with the location, and then ask experts questions about the animal, behavior, etc. Ideas about how to best use these two projects are being generated and reviewed, with input from volunteer naturalists.
 - Paul Alaback mentioned that he is one of the senior scientists that helped organize the Budburst Program. He has lots of ways to connect her up with additional resources and educational materials.
 - Ducks Unlimited is applying for a GOCO grant to conserve about 1.5 miles of Big Thompson River corridor east of I25. We are partnering with them by contributing \$5000 toward the two conservation easements, contingent on whether they receive the grant.
 - Kerri made a call out to the board to try and attend the grand opening of Loveland’s River’s Edge Open Space.
 - Report from the Open Lands Operations Manager - See enclosure
 - Travis mentioned an item not on his report, that up at Red Mountain we are having continuing issues with our neighbors who have bison, who prefer to graze on Red Mountain Open Space because the land is kept in better condition than that of Table Mountain. He went into some detail about Colorado range and fencing requirements and allowances.
 - The turnaround and closure gates at Horsetooth Mountain are done (more on this later in the meeting.)
 - Hiring two seasonal Park Aide positions to assist with capacity issues at trailheads (more on this later in the meeting.)
- 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 September. See website <http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources>

ACTION:

Final Review: Poudre River Trail Easement (Swets) – On an overhead map, Charlie outlined the details of a quarter mile trail easement on the Swets Property. This is a very important connection for the Poudre River Trail because there is no other option to get through this commercial area. The value was high (\$18,000) because it is a commercial property area. Kerri added that this is the first acquisition for the \$5.1 million GOCO grant we were awarded last year. The board held some discussion and speculation about the area and the future, which Charlie addressed.

Motion by Steve Vessey that OLAB approves sending a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners to purchase the quarter mile trail easement from Bill Swets, to serve as a connector for the Poudre River Trail, as presented today. Carl Sorrentino seconded and motion carried unanimously.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Duck Lake /Regional Trail update – Jeffrey Boring

- Jeffrey Boring, Resource Specialist, shared an overview about the Colorado Front Range Trail--a decade long project of connecting Mexico to Wyoming by trail--with the Board. Next Jeffrey showed the board approximately 2.2 miles, all easement or ROW secured with one trail underpass (already built) and some existing trail (formerly known as Duck Lake Trail) that could all come together to become a connection route between Loveland and Fort Collins and a major connector for the Colorado Front Range Trail. All of this is in the Carpenter Road area of northern Loveland city limits. Kerri provided some context to the board, explaining that Jeffrey is planning to apply for a grant later this year, and is introducing the topic to the Board so it will be a familiar topic when he comes back with a full proposal.

- It is major connection that would create 50 miles of connected trails between Fort Collins and Loveland. It would be a 10' wide concrete.
- The demand for trail connectors, to further trails, is huge. On average, everyone is on the trails in Fort Collins twice per year.
- Three at-grade crossings (no underpass or overpass required.)
- Preliminary Costs: Based on urban/mixed use trail averages of about ½ million per mile, this should be about 1.1 million dollar project. Potentially we have three partners:
 - Loveland: \$252,000 (based on the construction of their section and any acquisition that is required.)
 - Fort Collins: \$15,000
 - State of Colorado (grant): \$350,000
 - Larimer County: \$487,000

Steve Vessey asked where the money comes from to maintain said trail. Jeffrey responded that when so many jurisdictions come to together to tie in trails, it makes sense to write cooperative agreements between entities. For example, in this case it would make sense to have an agreement with Fort Collins to extend their maintenance to this portion of the trail. Any funding that we would extend would come from our long term management fund. Steve further voiced concern that we be cautious to not get to a place in 10 years that we cannot maintain all the trails we have put in. Nancy reminded the board that this issue has to be considered when it comes to passing the next tax. Divisions of money will need to change to include higher maintenance as the amount of open lands increase.

- Jeffrey will be holding public meetings and will come back to the Board with a budget request to act as a match for the grant application, which is due the first of November. The funds would be awarded in 2014, and the trail built in 2015.
 - The board generally expressed support of this trail project.

Open Spaces Capacity Updates

Travis Rollins and Steve Gibson presented the plans for addressing capacity issues at Horsetooth Mountain Park and Devils Backbone Open Spaces.

Horsetooth Mountain Trailhead –

1. Adding a turnaround prior to the gate house with fixed gates to allow visitors to exit the parking lot, providing a ‘one in one’ out scenario when the trailhead is at capacity, (with someone communicating the status of the lot via radio.) This will also allow full closures during muddy conditions, fire, etc.
2. Moving automated pay station to upper kiosk- this helps relieve the bottleneck at the entrance to the trailhead and sets up finding a parking space *before* paying.
3. Additional ‘no parking’ signs along County Road 38E.
4. Making signs easier to understand by installing ‘upper and lower lot’ trailhead signs (which are actually for Horsetooth and Soderberg) along CR38E to help disperse use at parking areas.
5. Installing a webcam at trailhead. Add additional cameras at other open space trailheads in the future if pilot project is successful.

Reorganize Blue Sky Trailhead-

6. Expand parking lot onto the turf area at the south end of the lot. This decreases current maintenance (mowing and watering) and expands the parking by approximately 20 spaces.

Soderberg Trailhead-

7. Add connector trail from Swan Johnson Trail to Stout Trail, to access the falls or Horsetooth Rock from a different trailhead. Meegan Flenniken will have more details about this at the next meeting.
8. Add secondary lot to the north of existing lot.

Devil’s Backbone Trailhead-

9. Add an ‘express’ multi-use (including horses & mtn bikes) trail from trailhead that would allow visitors to gain access to Hunter, Laughing Horse and Blue Sky trails without having to use the crowded Wild Loop.
10. Eventually the existing Wild Loop Trail would be foot traffic only.
11. Add secondary lot either along Hidden Valley Drive or on Hidden Valley property.

Staffing-

12. Convert one seasonal ranger position into a full time position.
13. Add two seasonal (1400 hour) park aids to assist with traffic flow and visitor contacts at trailheads. When trailheads are not at capacity, these positions would assist with regular operations and maintenance. One will be assigned to Devils Backbone and one to Horsetooth Mountain.

Kerri added that there is a budget request regarding some of these items which we will address after the presentations.

Restoration Systems: River Bluffs Restoration mitigation project proposal

Jeffrey Boring reported that we have been approached by two firms to consider using River Bluffs Open Space as a mitigation bank. Both firms will present an introduction of the concept to us.

To start, Jeffrey educated the board about the condition of the Poudre River at River Bluffs. He showed aerial shots, where one can see the old flow of the Poudre, now an oxbow. There are 15' levees, 12-15' banks that are failing, dense non-native trees and one homogeneous channel that is no good for fish. Poudre River Report Card, at River Bluffs receives an overall grade: D. The type of mitigation project under consideration is bigger than tree removal. It is moving river banks and allowing a river to have a little room to spread out and flood naturally.

Jeffrey introduced Tara Disy Allden & Raymond Holz from Restoration Systems and Grant Gurnee & Jon Dauzvardis from ECOS. Tara introduced mediation banking and Restoration System's role. Grant discussed actual mediation concept plans, which take 7-10 years after the start. The presentation is available electronically or in print by contacting Sandy at 619-4592.

Gerry Horak asked for clarification on what the relationship is between Larimer County, ECOS and Restoration Systems, LLC and the response was that there is not a relationship yet. We are exploring their [ECOS and Restoration Systems, LLC] ideas for restoration on the portion of the Poudre River at River Bluffs Open Space, and sharing that information with OLAB.

The board received the information presented mostly positively, and began generating ideas for involving the public in the monitoring process, educating over the years and showing lots of before/after. There was also much discussion about past and present river restoration methods.

FINANCIAL REPORT /ACTION:

The board received an updated Natural Resources Capital Development and Acquisition Summary 2012-2014, with a \$12,600 line item added for work to address the over-capacity issues at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.

- Motion by Steve Vessey to approve the one-time expenditure and amendment to the budget of \$12,600 for capacity improvements made at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space. Second by Mary Banken and Suzan Fritchel. Motion carried unanimously.
- Specific trail changes and requests will follow in the future. Staffing additions and other implementation recommendations will come out of Long Term Management (LTM) and are estimated at about \$50,000 per year.

Some OLAB members were reminded that the board heard a presentation on over-capacity issues in May of this year, when staffs were tasked by Gary Buffington to have an action plan in 1-3 months.

BOARD COMMENT: No additional comments.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: Per (24-6-402(4)(a) C.R.S. Purchase, acquisition, lease, transfer or sale of any real or personal property interest, motion by Steve Vessey that we move into Executive Session. Second by Trudy Haines. Motion carried unanimously.