

MINUTES
OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS BOARD
REGULAR SESSION
August 19, 2021
Zoom Video Conference

OSTB Present:

Graeme Means Dist. 1	Howie Mallory Dist. 2	Amy Barrow Dist. 3	Michael Kinsley Dist. 4, Chair	Wayne Ives Dist. 5
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Staff Present: Gary Tennenbaum, Jessie Young, Liza Mitchell, Janet Urquhart, Paul Holsinger, Kim Arensdorf, Dale Will, Richard Neiley

Others Present: Andy Worline, Brandon Hawksley, Mick Pritchard, Brian Long, Patrick Rawley

Media: Jason Auslander, Aspen Times

Michael Kinsley called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Howie Mallory moved for the OSTB to approve as amended the 06/01/2021 OSTB & BOCC Joint Meeting for Regular & Executive Session Minutes. Graeme Means seconded. Motion passed (5-0).

Sky Mountain Park Management Plan Update

Gary Tennenbaum applauded the efforts by Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, the City of Aspen, Aspen Valley Land Trust, and the Town of Snowmass for the acquisition and preservation of Sky Mountain Park. Tennenbaum commended the partners, 500 volunteers, as well as large private donations that contributed to the development of the Park. In 2012 the first Sky Mountain Park Management Plan established goals for wildlife protection, habitat improvement and trail development. The park is closed to the public annually from Dec. 1 to May 15 to protect wildlife, and most trails do not allow dogs. Tennenbaum stated that OST works with the Town of Snowmass to create seamless boundaries for enforcement.

Howie Mallory asked about OST's interface with adjacent properties. Tennenbaum stated that OST has had a good working relationship with adjacent property owners, coordinating on noxious weed mitigation and habitat improvement projects.

Carly Klein stated that the updated Sky Mountain Park Management Plan focuses on efforts for natural resources, recreation, outreach and education, monitoring and stewardship, maintenance, and agriculture.

Liza Mitchell provided achievements with regards to natural resources, monitoring and stewardship.

- A seasonal closure to all recreational use has been established from December 1 – May 15 to improve habitat.
- 105 acres of overly mature Gambel oak were mechanically treated to mimic natural fire disturbance.
- Elk hunt has effectively prevented a refuge effect and associated overbrowsing of vegetation within the park.
- A geomorphological assessment on lower Brush Creek indicated little evidence of degraded channel form or sediment dynamics negatively impacting the watershed health, functional riparian communities or infrastructure.
- Noxious weeds, while present, are being controlled.
- Plans were prepared and implementation is underway to restore two old agricultural ponds to native riparian habitat, and the adjacent former agricultural pasture back to native grass and shrublands.
- Avian monitoring and mammal survey.
- Targeted studies of aspen stands were completed.

Klein provided notable updates to recreation, outreach and maintenance within the Park, which include:

- Skyline Ridge Trail realignment
- Airline Trail
- Cozyline Trail
- Cozy Pony Loop Trail
- Butterline links Arline Trail to Buttermilk
- Deadline Trail
- Seven Star Trail
- New wayfinding and regulatory signage has been installed throughout the Park.
- All fencing over knee height has been removed to mitigate danger to wildlife.
- Numerous trail maintenance and improvement projects have been undertaken.

Klein explained that following the Board review, the Management Plan will be reviewed by the Town of Snowmass and City of Aspen, then will be released for another round of public comment.

Klein reviewed the Park conditions, property access and parking. She noted that more than half of users are accessing the Park by means other than vehicle. Existing parking areas providing access to the Park include Buttermilk Ski Area, the Brush Creek Park-and- Ride (Intercept Lot) and Town Park.

Mallory asked about details for the wildlife habitat, specifically with the Elk and Deer. Graeme Means suggested a wildlife corridor and biodiversity map. Mitchell stated that biodiversity information and maps do exist in the detailed wildlife reports. She noted that this information can be summarized and added to the quick facts on the Management Plan.

Mitchell noted that Sky Mountain Park is a very large and non-fragmented area with diverse native vegetation habitat types. OST works with Aspen Global Change Institute who operates and maintains two soil moisture monitoring stations. Brush creek is the main hydrologic feature for Sky Mountain Park, which has been improving water quality due to no major inputs from human infrastructure and natural functioning river functions, she said.

Mitchell commented that the wetland fen on the Upper North Mesa is considered at risk of further degradation due to the invasion of broadleaf cattails, and therefore an action item to be addressed with the updated Plan.

Mitchell provided mapping of vegetation types at Sky Mountain Park. She noted that this baseline information can be utilized to track vegetation over time.

Mitchell explained that since the 2012 Management Plan, OST has continued to study and monitor the wildlife species and habitat that occur at Sky Mountain Park. She noted that the indicator species are selected for targeted monitoring because their welfare is an indicator of the habitat. Mitchell applauded the public for compliance with the dog policies and seasonal closures in place to support wildlife habitat.

Using Viewline Trail counter data as a basis for recreation use, Klein stated that the year Covid-19 hit the recreation use increase by approx. 50%. She specified that 91% of the survey responses indicated that mountain biking is the predominate recreational use. Other uses include equestrian, hiking and trail running. Klein noted that there has been great compliance with rules and regulations for the Park.

Klein commented that historically, agriculture was the main economic driver in the Brush Creek Valley. Mallory asked if Cozy Point South agriculture is primarily used for hay, or if there is potential for food production. Tennenbaum stated that OST shares irrigation with Cozy Point Ranch, and Elk populations are heavy in that area, therefore fencing is a concern. The way it is managed today accomplishes the goals for wildlife, he said.

Klein stated that the 2012 Management Plan permitted a potential for commercial and special uses evolving over time. Portions of the Park have been used for some trail based events, and no commercial events are permitted using single track, she said.

Klein commented on the significant response to the public outreach. The Sky Mountain Park story map had over 1,300 views and the survey received over 600 comments. 47% of the responses commented on consideration of directional trails. Park character and expectations, and beauty and protection of views ranked highest for the attributes survey respondent indicated were most important.

Mallory asked about typical user conflicts. Klein explained that speed on downhill riding, specifically Deadline Trail was identified as a conflict. The Management Plan will address signage for user safety and trail etiquette, she said.

Klein commented that the rules and regulations at the Park specify no motorized use on trails, including e-bikes and one-wheels. Means asked about public comments regarding motorized use. Klein explained that within the public survey responses ebikes showed 5% of people in support and 9% against. Tennenbaum stated that our entire system needs to be looked at with regards to ebikes and it cannot be considered for just one OST property that is single track. Additionally, the trail systems connect with many different jurisdictions and connectivity needs to be considered with regards to the policies, he said.

Wayne Ives recommended rewording the rules section to state that “Park rules include general regulations of use and commercial/special-use policies that seek to protect natural biodiversity first while allowing and managing recreation uses”.

Klein stated that the Plan proposes to change the commercial use policy by limiting it to two commercial events per year, selected by the Town of Snowmass. Amy Barrow asked about the history of events at the Park. Klein stated that Ragnar and the Snowmass 50 have been the main events in the past. Means suggested limiting the number of participants for the events.

Mitchell noted the changes for natural resource management, monitoring and stewardship actions:

- Passively maintain geomorphological integrity of Brush Creek in conjunction with beaver activity.
- Explore opportunities to increase or establish a buffer between trails and sensitive aquatic resources.
- Enhance old pasturelands with native sagebrush plant communities.
- Continue mechanical treatment of mature Gambel oak to improve wildlife habitat.
- Assess forest health across the Park and local landscape to identify priorities for future forest-health improvement projects.
- Control noxious weeds.
- Continue the elk hunting program/lottery at Sky Mountain Park with a modification to allow hunting from trails.
- Explore water-quality testing data and needs along Brush Creek.
- Monitor aspen forest health and consider options to promote regeneration in declining aspen stands as needed.
- Maintain and improve collaboration with area natural resource managers and private landowners.

Mallory asked about the budget implications with regards to management of the Park. Mitchell explained that staff would need to look at a 10 year timeframe for natural resource management, maintenance and recreation.

Klein highlighted the recreation management, education and outreach management actions:

- Construct an uphill route as close as possible to the existing Airline Trail to provide separation from downhill mountain bike traffic.
- Install airport observation area and interpretive display.
- Formally designate Deadline Trail as a downhill-only mountain bike trail and install signage/update OST maps.

- Implement Park closure from dusk to dawn.
- Monitor the potential to provide a singletrack connection between Ditchline Trail and Cozyline Trail.
- Implement a trail safety and etiquette campaign.
- Provide interpretive signage to communicate restoration and habitat improvement projects.
- Coordinate public education opportunities such as birding hikes and other natural resource tours with RFC, ACES or similar groups.
- Encourage use of the Park among under-represented user groups and members of the community.

Any Worline, City of Aspen OST, applauded the partnership with PCOST, and Sky Mountain Park being a great asset to the community.

Brian Long, City of Aspen OST, thanked OST for work on the Management Plan.

Mike Pritchard, Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association, commented on being grateful for all of the work on the Park and the Management Plan. The trail system has been very beneficial and sustainable for the biking community, which increases to the health and wellbeing for the public. He noted support of adding a parallel climbing trail to Airline Trail.

Brandon Hawksley, Director Town of Snowmass Parks and Recreation, commented that the Town has started working on some of the action items, working with Rocky Mountain Youth Corps.

Means commented that the Park is a huge success. In terms of connectivity, the Park is part of a solution for traffic issues, and a map would be beneficial to identify connections to the Park from Aspen and down valley, he said.

Barrow applauded the natural resource and biodiversity education that enhances the recreational experience.

Mallory applauded staff on the wildlife habitat efforts. He suggested a potential hiking only trail alignment so those who do not bike can enjoy the Park. Additionally, he recommended setting perimeters for carrying capacity due to significant increase in recreation.

Kinsley proposed an initial valley-wide conversation with what the future holds for mountain biking, noting the danger of overuse as well as dog use. He noted that the management of Sky Mountain Park shows that mountain biking and preservation of the environment can co-exist in one area.

Board action below.

Land Use Referral - 24963 Frying Pan Road

Paul Holsinger stated that the applicant, the Dearhamer family, have filed an application to conserve a 167 acre property up the Fryingpan River through the CD-PUD provisions in the land use code. The land is eligible for 2-3 TDRs through this application. Holsinger explained that the property possesses valuable open space, scenic, and ecological benefits including nearly a half-mile of Fryingpan River frontage and a portion of Lime Creek before its confluence with the Fryingpan River. Conservation of the property would protect connectivity from the White River National Forest to the Fryingpan River for wildlife. Additionally staff is working to acquire a fishing easement along Lime Creek, he said.

Patrick Rawley, the Dearhamer's representative, stated that he is working with Community Development on the referral, and a property notice went out to adjacent property owners and the Upper Fryingpan Caucus.

Means asked for additional details regarding the public access on the property. Holsinger explained that the best opportunity for public access is at Lime Creek. Currently there is public access on the road though the property, he said.

Means asked about the development potential without the TDRs. Rawley stated that single family residences could potentially be developed on the property.

Mallory asked about the development plans for the applicant. Rawley stated that the applicant does not have plans to do any development above the home site.

Board action below.

BOARD AND STAFF COMMENTS

Barrow complemented the fencing around the Brush Creek Sagebrush Test Plots.

Mallory asked about the status of the Redstone to McClure trail NEPA process. Tennenbaum stated that the Forest Services is still working on the final review, however are getting closer to releasing the draft.

Kinsley asked about adaptive management with regards to ebikes issues on the Rio Grande Trail. Mallory stated that the City of Aspen will be discussing speed limits with regards to biking, and correlating with other jurisdictions. Tennenbaum explained that staff is continuing to work on education campaigns to inform the public on safety rules and regulations for ebikes.

Mallory asked about the planned outcome for the Aspen Chamber Resort Association destination marketing survey. Jessie Young stated that ACRA is currently conducting community canvassing, then will organize a management plan to address tourism impacts.

Mallory asked about the agriculture lease process update. Holsinger stated that the draft recommendations will be included at the next joint meeting on September 7.

BOARD ACTION

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Sky Mountain Park Management Plan Update

Wayne Ives motioned to release the Sky Mountain Park Draft Management Plan for public comment. Graeme Means seconded. Motion passed (5-0).

Land Use Referral

Howie Mallory moved to recommend OST staff comments for the 24963 Frying Pan Road land use referral. Wayne Ives seconded. Motion passed (5-0).

ADJOURN

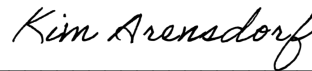
The OSTB meeting of August 19, 2021 adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Approved:



Michael Kinsley, Chair
Pitkin County Open Space & Trails Board

Attest:



Kimberly Arensdorf
Pitkin County Open Space & Trails
Administrative Specialist