

**MINUTES
OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS BOARD
RETREAT REGULAR SESSION
NOVEMBER 18, 2021**

The Gant – Conundrum Room; 610 S. West End St., Aspen

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, Dale Will, Paul Holsinger, Liza Mitchell, Carly Klein, Jessie Young, Janet Urquhart, Kim Arensdorf, Cindy Houben, Gerald Fielding, Richard Neiley, Ryan Quinn, Rich Norman

Pitkin BOCC: Patti Clapper, Greg Poschman, Francie Jacober

US Forest Service: Kevin Warner, Shelly Grail

Bureau of Land Management: Alan Czepinski

Colorado Parks and Wildlife: Matt Yamashita, Dani Newman

City of Aspen: Austin Weiss, Matt Kuhn

Town of Snowmass: Brandon Hawksley, Andy Worline

Town of Basalt: Catherine Christoff

Sheriff's Office: Alex Bruchetta

Independence Pass Foundation: Karin Teague

Aspen Ski Company: Peter Santini

Retreat Presenter: Dr. Chris Montz Professor, Recreation Ecology and Management (Utah State Recreation Ecology Lab)

Michael Kinsley called the retreat to order at 9:05 a.m.

What is Recreation Ecology? - Dr. Chris Monz Presentation

Dr. Chris Monz provided the framework of recreation ecology as it applies to multi-jurisdictional recreation management. Recreation ecology originated in the 1920's in Europe and the USA, and studies how recreation activities affect soil, vegetation, wildlife, water and air. Additionally, how human disturbances affect the visitor experience, and how knowledge informs sustainable management.

Recreation ecology theory (social and ecological), indicates that the initial recreation use in new areas results in the majority of impact. Visitors often judge the acceptability of conditions and this can affect their experience. Many situational variables influence these responses.

Dr. Monz presented the Nature Reserve of Orange County study sites as an example of small open space areas that are surrounded by urban development. These sites include 22 individual protected areas across various management jurisdictions, and are vital for conservation status and mandates. The study's approach creates an assessment of biophysical resource conditions, understanding human perceptions, use intensities and special distributions, park planning and management collaboration.

A questionnaire was provided at the study sites which reflected visitor motivations regarding recreation experience preferences:

- Solitude and escape
- Learning about and experiencing nature
- Spiritual renewal
- Challenge
- Outdoor exercise
- Safety
- Social experience

(37% “fitness orientation vs 63% “nature immersion” orientation)

The study evaluated social conditions by calculating People at one Time (PAOT) & trail width vs the rate of recreation impact and acceptability. GPS trackers were used to track overall use and visitor special use patterns including motivations, activity preferences, and landscape attributes. The data was used to create an integration of social and ecological-spatial overlap of use. It was found that there were nesting bird species of concern with recreation disturbances. Therefore the study suggests that some of the trails could be rerouted to lessen the disturbance, without hindering the visitor experience. Drone data was collected to analyze soil and vegetation disturbances over time. Erosion modeling, invasive species monitoring, and vegetation disturbances were also analyzed using motion photogrammetry.

The next steps: Trail management Efficacy Study (2021-2022):

- Social Science
 - Understand visitor norms and preferences for social and ecological conditions
- Visitor preferences for management actions
 - Ecological
 - Fragmentation analysis and connectivity
 - Additional drone work

Conclusions and implications:

- Experiencing nature and exercise are the primary motivations of visitors.
- Conflict and crowding are not reported by vast majority of visitors. However, visitors are more sensitive to high levels of crowding than ecological disturbance.
- Spatial distribution of visitors may conflict with conservation goals but can easily be modified.
- Advanced ecological monitoring methods can inform long-term sustainable trail design.
- Adaptive management strategies can now be assessed on these baseline conditions.

Conversation / Questions:

Should recreation management focus on sacrifice zones/already disturbed areas?

From an ecological standpoint, yes directing visitors to established places helps with reducing disturbances. Additionally, evaluating permit systems creates less issues and higher user satisfaction.

How does multi-jurisdictional recreation work with the data collected?

The data helps with utilizing planning workshops, and creating a larger conservation, as well as visitor use planning. Camping areas show proliferation of sites, specifically with soil and vegetation loss. Permits also help decrease ecological disturbances and restoration.

What is the methodology for carrying capacity?

Monitoring social and ecological conditions with acceptable conditions helps determine boundaries.

United States Forest Service (USFS) Aspen Sopris Ranger District – Shelley Grail and Kevin Warner

Due to the significant increase in recreation within the Aspen Sopris District the USFS recently established a reservation system at the Maroon Bells. This has helped fill in the gaps for days/times of the week that were not typically busy, therefore disbursing visitations. The Conundrum Hot Springs permit was put in place which has been a huge success by distributing visits throughout the summer. Additionally, the USFS is looking to establishing permit system for the 4 pass loop.

The USFS has had staffing and funding issues, as well as a drastic increase in day use. Pitkin County has offered solutions with providing funding for the Forest Protection Officer to assist with enforcement of lands. Additionally, the USFS has formed a stakeholder group to find solutions. It is recommended that state facilitator assist to determine issues.

Open Discussion – Defining the Issue

City of Aspen - Austin Weiss and Matt Kuhn

The City of Aspen expressed the importance of determining acceptable recreation use levels. Urban recreation trends are happening on already developed areas.

Town of Basalt - Catherine Christoff

The Town of Basalt is interested in partnerships and collaborative groups. There are benefits of wayfinding signage by improving connectivity and educating new users.

SkiCo - Peter Santini

Utilizing SkiCo resources to see where they can help with recreation management would be beneficial. Additionally, improvements to the user experience and education to assist with the increase in new users.

Sherriff's Office - Alex Bruchetta

Noted a 10%-15% increase in recreation in the backcountry. The Sherriff's Office is working on additional presence in the high use recreation areas.

Independence Pass Foundation - Karin Teague

IPF's role is to support the Forest Service and other land management up Independence Pass. There is an issue with dispersed camping and not enough sites to support increase in recreation, as well as campfire issues.

Public Works - GR Fielding

Public Works deals with backcountry roads and parking at recreation sites. There are issues with the increase in bike use, specifically e-bikes which creates a different dynamic and new user groups. Additionally, there are issues with enforcement and capacity.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) - Matt Yamashita, Dani Newman

CPW focuses on wildlife management. There has been a large displacement of wildlife due to recreation, therefore wildlife is moving to less desirable habitats. Specifically, this is unsustainable for the elk population over time (based on the past 20 year trend). CPW is looking at certain properties to focus on recreation to mitigate habitat conservation. The need is to conserve land and understand constraints when dealing with tourism.

Community Development - Cindy Houben

15% of Pitkin County is private land and it overlaps with desirable places to recreate. There are conflicts with development, recreation and wildlife. Planning and Zoning and the BOCC have helped with mitigating recreation areas, values and implementations through the Master Plans.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)- Alan Czepinski

BLM has increasing issues with enforcement, it is important to provide consistent messaging and to reach new user groups with education.

Town of Snowmass - Brandon Hawksley and Andy Worline

Noted issues with parking and capacity. Suggested solutions are public education and partnerships with other land managers.

Open Space and Trails – Gary Tennenbaum and Dale Will

Determining areas to conserve is difficult. The goal is to provide management to accommodate ecological systems and protect biodiversity of the watershed.

Themes and items discussed include:

- Data: The need for shared, systematic data collection in order to better understand trailhead-capacity issues and inform priorities and solutions.
 - Visitor Use / Social Considerations – trail counts (trail cameras/counters), parking/vehicle counts, time of day/season monitoring use, campsite monitoring, social considerations, user experience
 - User Safety – accident rates, compliance with rules (citations, ranger interactions)
 - Inventory – maps, trailheads, miles of trail per area, species counts, wildlife population estimates
- Social Trends and Impacts
 - “Chasing the curve” – Keeping up with social trends
 - Differing jurisdictional regulations creates confusion
 - Public awareness / Education
 - Access/closures – unregulated use

- Ebikes and motorized uses
- Paddleboards
- Dog Impacts
- Ecological Recreation Impacts
 - Erosion from social trails
 - Weeds
 - Displacement of Wildlife
 - Biodiversity impacts and the capacity to sufficiently manage

Where do we go from here?

Open Space and Trails Staff presentation of initiatives undertaken and cost magnitude.

Collaborative Partnerships: Identify jurisdictional responsibilities through property acquisitions, intergovernmental agreements, lease/license agreements, and special use agreements. Develop ways of how to educate and enforce regulations. There is an opportunity to leverage partnerships for education and outreach.

Example projects:

- Prince Creek Trail / Bull Pen parking area and Glassier Acquisition and Trailhead construction was approximately \$200k each plus the acquisition costs.
- Penny Hot Springs and North Star/Wildwood put-in: OST partnered with CDOT to establish ROW lease agreements in order to provide seamless management.
- Partnerships for outreach and education efforts.
 - City of Aspen Annual Trail Etiquette Outreach Campaign (\$2k split between COA and OST) CPW Wild Lives Campaign (Approx. \$60k to date).
 - E-bike maps and shop outreach (Staff Time / Printing Costs).
 - Town to Crown Education (\$7k).

Desired condition / Potential Action Items

- Comprehensive, multi-agency plan for trails and recreation
 - Determine indicators to better manage trails
 - Determine extent to which we can mitigate recreation
 - Avoid ‘analysis paralysis’ by taking action
- Conduct focused studies on key trailheads
 - Find acceptable resource, social and ecological impacts specific to each property
 - Defining typologies for trailheads
- Public outreach/forums
 - Educating “mountain migrants” by collaborating with jurisdictions at a public level
 - Expand volunteer programs and put funding towards responsible stewardship
 - Standardized cross-jurisdictional surveys regarding the visitor experience
- Diverting marketing funding to mitigate recreation issues and protection of the backcountry
- Define user groups for front and backcountry and provide education
- Enhance already established recreation sites vs creating more
- Recreation management collaborative at a watershed level (similar to RFTA collaboration)

- Utilize the Watershed Biodiversity Initiative Study which provides a valley-wide range of limits in regards to wildlife, ecology and recreation. This can help determine how to collaborate with partners and guide users.
- Equity and access consideration, how to increase diversity
- Collect accurate/specific data from the past 10+ years

Next Steps

1. OST to create retreat summary for OSTB/BOCC review.
2. Formalize interagency coordination and establish regular meetings of a coalition made up of key agency partners.
3. Identify priority list of initial data collection.

ADJOURN

The OSTB meetings of November 18, 2021 adjourned at approximately 3:00 p.m.

Approved:

Attest:

Michael Kinsley

Michael Kinsley, Chair
Pitkin County Open Space & Trails Board

Kim Arensdorf

Kim Arensdorf
Pitkin County Open Space & Trails
Administrative Specialist

2021.11.18 OSTB Retreat Minutes_Aproved

Final Audit Report

2022-01-12

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