

**MINUTES
OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS BOARD
REGULAR SESSION
November 14, 2024
530 East Main Street
Aspen, CO 81611**

OSTB Present:

Graeme Means Dist. 1	Howie Mallory Dist. 2, Chair Not Present	Amy Barrow Dist. 3	Michael Kinsley Dist. 4	Wayne Ives Dist. 5
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Staff Present: Gary Tennenbaum, Kim Arensdorf, Carly O’Connell, Liza Mitchell, Janet Urquhart, Paul Holsinger, Rich Englehart, Dale Will

Others Present: Holly McLain & Susan Cuseo, Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council, Shelly Braudis, City of Aspen, Mike Pritchard & Rich Grange, Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association (RFMBA), Hilary Boyd Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Glen Horn

Amy Barrow called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Wayne Ives motioned for the OSTB to approve the 09/19/2024 Pitkin County & City of Aspen OSTB Regular Draft Minutes and the 10/03/2024 OSTB Regular and Executive Draft Minutes. seconded. Motion passed (4-0).

2024 Smuggler Mountain Open Space Management Plan Update

Carly O’Connell stated that the Smuggler OS Management Plan was released and opened for public comment from late September to late October. 85% of survey responses supported the proposed management actions in the Management Plan. Of the listed management actions, the top 5 management actions supported by respondents include:

- Advanced Downhill Trail: 79% of respondents cited this as one of their top three priorities.
- Portal Trail: 75%
- Healthy forests: 17%
- Hut Access: 14%
- Dog Waste: 10%

O’Connell explained that a change to the Plan includes clarifying Hunter Creek Trail access. Due to potential conflicts with hikers and leased dogs along the lower portion of Hunter Creek Trail (Trailhead to the intersection with the BLM Parking Lot Access Trail), mountain bike use will be prohibited.

O'Connell noted that the Management Plan action items have been translated to Spanish.

O'Connell explained that following approval by the County OSTB and completion of any specified edits, staff will present the final plan to the BOCC for adoption in December.

Michael Kinsley asked what the City of Aspen's role is with the Management Plan update. Gary Tennenbaum stated that the City of Aspen is a partner on Smuggler Open Space and helped develop the Plan. Shelly Braudis added that the City of Aspen Parks and Open Space Board has reviewed the plan as well, and is involved in the process. Tennenbaum commented that Aspen Valley Land Trust (AVLT) is also involved in the planning process and in support of the Management Plan.

Kinsley recommended adding language that "Pitkin County was opposed to water diversion in the 1970s" to the water and riparian resource section regarding "Water quantity on Hunter Creek is impacted by diversions upstream that divert water into the transmountain diversion system, which conveys water to the Front Ranger."

Tennenbaum provided Howie Mallory's comments regarding the action item under Natural Resources to "Maintain habitat quality for potentially occurring federally protected species". He stated that Mallory wanted to ensure all threatened and endangered species were covered. Liza Mitchell clarified that the State of Colorado also has a list of threatened and endangered species, and all species will be integrated throughout the Plan.

Mike Pritchard, RFMBA, stated that the mountain bike community is on the same page for priorities within in the Management Plan. RFMBA is look forward to being involved in work on the trails and partnering with the County and the City of Aspen, he said.

Kinsley mentioned a public comment regarding spraying for noxious weeds. He asked if there an official statement regarding the chemicals being used. Tenenbaum stated that there is not a policy specific for OST, however there is an overall Noxious Weed Management Policy for the County based on states requirements. Mitchell stated that there is an integrated approach for Smuggler, as well as site specific weed mitigation in the Management Plans. The public can be directed to the County policy on the website, she said. Graeme Means asked if RFMBA has provided assistance with weed mitigation. Pritchard stated that RFMBA has worked to mitigate weeds on trails in the past and is willing to be involved in the future.

Board action below

BLM Crown E-Bike Environmental Assessment Update

Hilary Boyd, Assistant Field Manager for the BLM, explained that in January the BLM received a letter request from the local mountain bike community to consider authorizing class-one e-bikes on traditional mountain bike trails. She stated that coordination with adjacent land managers is a key issue, noting that OST's Glassier Open Space and lower Prince Creek trails and trailheads connect to the Crown. Coordination will allow for clear communication in trail use designations and better management across shared boundaries. Boyd commented that today's presentation is a starting point for discussion and is requesting feedback from the OSTB.

Rich Grange, RFMBA Board Member, commented on the dramatic increase within the last couple years in e-bike usage. RFMBA has worked with the Forest Service, Pitkin County OST, and the BLM to address issues and work on solutions, he said.

Grange noted that the only e-bike access currently being considered is a class 1 e-bike (pedal assist, no throttle, max speed of 20 mph). This proposal is seeking to authorize class 1 e-bikes on BLM land including the Crown, Pitkin, Eagle and Garfield Counties, the Lorax trail, and the New Castle Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA) in Garfield County.

Grange commented that in late 2023 RFMBA coordinated a public survey with e-mountain bike (eMTB) related questions provided by BLM. There was 1,300+ respondents, with the majority of responses from mountain bikers. 63% would like to use class 1 e-bikes to access BLM trails. Another survey question asked “when riding trails where Class 1 eMTB’s are allowed have you had experiences that would discourage you from continuing to ride trails open to such use”, 71% said no.

Grange stated that the survey data showed that allowing e-bikes would increase the frequency of trail use by approximately 15%. Grange anticipates receiving more data regarding environmental assessment of increase use.

Grange explained that RFMBA reached out to the BLM in Fruita, the City of Glenwood Springs, Jefferson County Open Space, and Arkansas State Parks about their experience with managing e-bike access over recent years. Positive experiences that were reported include:

- E-bikes enable older riders and those with physical limitations to enjoy the trails
- Positive feedback from trail riders and local bike shops
- Land manager staff are now utilizing eMTB for efficiency during ranger and maintenance operations

He stated that negative experiences include the following:

- Initial backlash; Some users were upset when the policy was introduced
- Issues with adolescents using higher class e-bikes as dirt bikes on paved trails frequented by pedestrians

Grange stated that the survey revealed no significant difference in perceived accident rates and no increase in emergency calls.

Grange provided the potential e-bikes benefits to community:

- Increased Opportunities: Provide more people with the chance to experience the health and wellness benefits of using singletrack trails on public lands
- Older Riders & Physical Limitations: Enable older and physically limited riders to ride singletrack trails longer, and on more challenging trails
- Reduced Vehicle and Trailhead Parking Use: Many eMTB riders choose to ride to trailheads from their home
- Health Benefits: Access to health benefits of Class 1 eMTB riding for individuals not riding traditional bikes
- Economic Benefits: Boost local economic benefits through eMTB use

- Trail Quality: Current eMTB-allowed areas don't meet the high-quality singletrack trail experience that riders seek

Boyd stated that the Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVFO) manages 570,000 surface acres across Garfield, Eagle, Pitkin and Rio Blanco Counties and 34,100 acres of designated Special Recreation Management Areas. Additionally, CRVFO manages approx. 1,632 total miles of routes (roads and trails).

Boyd explained that routes currently open to class 1 e-bikes include:

- ~1,632 miles of routes managed by the BLM CRVFO
- 675 miles open to motorized uses / all modes of transport, mostly dirt roads
- ~200 miles of routes open to mechanized use / dedicated mountain bike trails
- ~20 miles currently open to class 1 eMTB use at Grand Hogback Trails
- Therefore, ~110 miles of singletrack trails currently open to class 1 eMTB users.

Grange explained that the Crown Special Recreation Management Area has ~16.2 miles of dirt roads open to motorized use, ~9.2 miles of motorized singletrack open to motorized & mechanized use, and ~43.5 miles of singletrack trails open to mechanized use. The Crown Jewel Horse Trail is ~4.3 miles open to equestrian and pedestrian use only.

Pritchard explained that the RFMBA trail stewardship work includes maintaining dozens of miles of BLM trails in the Roaring Fork region each season, focusing on erosion control, corridor growth cutback, invasive weed control, and improvements to wayfinding and allowed use signage. Thousands of maintenance hours are provided each season, including 6,861 hours in 2024, he said.

Pritchard noted that the majority of eMTB users have been traditional mountain bike users for many years and typically adhere to the rules of the trails.

Wayne Ives asked about agency coordination with the Forest Service. Boyd clarified that the trails that are being considered at the Crown do not directly connect with Forest Service trails. Grange added that Forest Service land on Teton Pass and Lake Tahoe is being considered for allowing e-bike usage.

Amy Barrow asked about penalty enforcement with BLM ranger staff. Boyd explained that people who qualify for ADA are required to carry a permission letter allowing e-bike usage, however it is not ticketable offense.

Graeme Means commented that the Board is just seeing data from the mountain bike community. When looking further into this issue the OSTB will want to look at other user groups (equestrians, hikers, etc.), as well as wildlife and enforcement issues, he said. Boyd explained that the BLM will be analyzing wildlife impacts, and will plan separation with different user groups based on the trail dynamics. Tennenbaum stated that staff will forward that data to Board when available, which will help make a more informed recommendation.

Kinsley commented that if e-bikes are allowed for certain trails at this time, it would be very difficult to take away that access in the future as it will then be a perceived public right. The policies being made now will become essentially permanent; therefore, land managers need to think long term, he said.

Barrow challenged the BLM and RFMBA to educate new e-bike users to use specific trails based on ability levels.

BOARD AND STAFF COMMENTS

Paul Holsinger presented to the Board the Turnabout Ranch land use application which will be presented to the BOCC on 11/20. The Board previously discussed this application at a regular meeting and a site visit in May 2022. Staff has been working with applicant to encumber 120 acres with a conservation easement, he said. The BOCC requested that the applicant prohibit indoor and outdoor riding arenas, barns, and stables. Additionally, the conservation easement is to include:

- A fencing plan that is approved by Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- A land restoration plan that converts the hayfields to an alfalfa mix and only one cutting will be harvested off that area each season with subsequent growth left for the benefit of wildlife
- Irrigate the Upper Meadows at least twice after first cutting as long as water is available

Graeme referenced a recent article that mentioned the OST 2025 budget. He suggested staff emphasize that OST projects are specifically funded by the OST budget, and the general fund is not utilized for those projects. Tennenbaum explained that he reached out the reporter to clarify how the OST budget works as it was mis-characterized in the article.

Tennenbaum commented that there is currently a huge shortfall in the Forest Service budget, which could significantly affect the OST program. OST staff working with Forest Service on the participatory agreement in place for seasonal staff (Forest Protection Officer) funding, he said.

Tennenbaum mentioned attending the Colorado Gray Wolf Restoration meeting on Nov 8. He noted that the four counties for relocation efforts will include Pitkin, Rio Blanco, Eagle, and Garfield. Up to 15 Wolves will be translocated from British Columbia to Colorado between December 2024 and March 2025. The area of release was chosen due to 60-mile buffers from Wyoming and Utah, he said.

BOARD ACTION

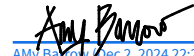
2024 Smuggler Mountain Open Space Management Plan Update

Wayne Ives motioned to recommend Board of County Commissioners approve the 2024 Smuggler Mountain Open Space Management Plan Update. Michael Kinsley seconded. Motion passed (4-0).

ADJOURN

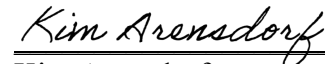
The OSTB meeting of November 14, 2024 adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

Approved:


Amy Barrow, Dec 2, 2024 22:22 MST

Amy Barrow, Vice-Chair
Pitkin County Open Space & Trails Board

Attest:


Kim Arensdorf
Pitkin County Open Space & Trails
Administrative Specialist

2024.11.14 OSTB Regular Session Minutes_Approved

Final Audit Report

2024-12-03

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