



BOARD OF DIRECTORS February 18, 2005

Guy Burgess To: City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Board of Trustees

Jim Knopf Subject: Final draft of the Visitor Master Plan

Adam Massey
Chris Morrison
Gary Sprung
Holly Tulin
Eric Vogelsberg

The Board of Directors of the Boulder Area Trails Coalition commends the Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) staff and Board of Trustees for the time and effort they have devoted to the development of this Visitor Master Plan (VMP). Although the process has been long and complex, the plan has grown better with each iteration. The overall tone of the latest VMP draft is a significant improvement over previous versions. The draft is a warmer, more welcoming, and acknowledges the value in providing opportunities for people to interact with the environment. The new chapter on monitoring and performance measures, the increased emphasis on future public involvement, and the inclusion of a specific project implementation schedule are all important, desirable additions.

Suzanne Webel

While we can support the majority of this draft document in its present form, one portion needs additional attention. The elements of the plan dealing with visitor access in Habitat Conservation Areas (HCAs) require more flexibility in management strategies and implementation scheduling. Specifically:

- The default HCA visitation management strategy requires on-trail travel. The VMP policies of least restrictive, adaptive management call out for the inclusion of an additional, alternative strategy that strongly encourages on-trail travel.
- As written, the implementation plan would apply the on-trail restriction immediately in all HCA areas. To avoid public backlash, the HCA area implementation plans must reflect the findings of the corresponding trail study projects. The HCA implementation plans should be coordinated with the completion of the trail study projects.
- The plan limits HCA off-trail permits to officially sponsored OSMP activities. Permits must also be available to individuals and to the general public.
- The City Council questioned the necessity and effectiveness of HCA nighttime closures. We agree with their concerns and recommend eliminating the closures. At a minimum, the HCA nighttime closures timings should correspond to the present parking lot closures.
- Prairie HCAs where cattle or horses are grazed should, at least, be considered for designation as off-trail equestrian areas.

Alternate HCA on-trail strategies

The VMP policies and guiding principles specify that a flexible, adaptive management approach be taken and that the least restrictive management strategies be applied. However, the on-trail requirement for all of Habitat Conservation Areas is the most restrictive available (See Attachment A, Items 1-7 for specific VMP wording). It effects almost 40% of OSMP properties. Although on-trail restrictions may be justified for significant portions of the HCAs, applying them indiscriminately to all HCA acreage is unnecessary and defeats the purpose of the least restrictive, adaptive management policies. The plan must allow for alternative management strategies within the HCA areas. Adding a strategy of "strongly encouraging on-trail use", as recommended by the Community Group Forum provides such an alternative to the on-trail requirement.

Phased HCA implementation

Until trail studies are completed and trails designated applying on-trail restrictions to HCAs effectively closes most areas. There are no designated trails or public access in more than 80% of the HCA acreage (See Attachment C). The trail study schedule extends beyond 2009, while the HCA implementation plan envisions posting and enforcing on-trail restrictions this July (Attachment A, Items 8-9). Complete closures to HCAs will create public dissatisfaction and lead to disregard to OSMP rules and regulations. At the December 14, 2005, City Council study session, OSMP Director Mike Patton committed to work with HCA visitors to designate appropriate accesses and to avoid such closures. The trail studies scheduled in the VMP Project Phasing for Current Funding Plan, pages 71-73, are intended to resolve these concerns. The HCA implementation process must coordinate applications of the HCA on-trail strategies to the corresponding trail studies and designations. Given that these areas presently experience low levels of visitation, implementing the plan in a deliberate, measured manner will pay large dividends in public support.

Public off-trail permits

The proposed system for HCA off-trail permits is limited to OSMP "officially-sponsored" and approved activities (Attachment A, Items 10-11). This approach can be seen as favoring particular individuals and groups over the general public, and will again create public dissatisfaction. Additional flexibility must be incorporated in the permit system. Off-trail permits should be available to any members of the community whose activities are accepted by OSMP as not damaging to the environment. It is vital that the permitting process be convenient and equitable.

Nighttime HCA closures

At the December 14, 2005, City Council study session, council members agreed that nighttime closures of HCAs were unnecessary and unenforceable. Council members also noted that creating unnecessary new regulations was unwise. Reconsider and eliminate the nighttime closures (Attachment A, Items 12-13). At the very least, make them coincide with the existing 11PM to 5AM parking lot closures, rather than the proposed one hour after dusk to one hour before dawn period.

Designated equestrian areas in grassland HCAs

The plan contains provisions to designate areas within HCAs for specific off-trail activities (Attachment A, Item 14). All of the grassland HCAs are open to grazing. These properties comprise almost 40% of the HCA acreage. Many of these areas are presently open to off-trail equestrian access. Include horseback riding in the list of activities for which off-trail HCA areas may be designated.

Our specific recommendations for VMP text modifications are in Attachment B. These recommendations are consistent with the policies and principles expressed in the draft VMP, and will add flexibility and balance to the plan. The changes will significantly improve public acceptance of the plan. Because public support is vital to the plan's successful implementation, we trust you will give these recommendations serious consideration. Upon the incorporation of these changes, we will whole-heartily recommend the final VMP to the Planning Board, City Council and the entire Boulder Community.

Sincerely,

Boulder Area Trails Coalition Board of Directors

Attachment A

Final draft Visitor Master Plan references

1. Page ii, Policy: "Follow an adaptive management approach that involves monitoring of the results of management programs and allows adjustments when necessary"
2. Page 31, Management Approach Guiding Principles: "**Flexible, Adaptive Management.** Implement an adaptive management approach..."
3. Page ii, Policy: "Use the least restrictive means possible to reduce visitor conflict and minimize impacts on the environment"
4. Page 31, Management Approach Guiding Principles: "**Least-Restrictive Management Approach.** Use the least restrictive means possible to achieve management goals. More restrictive solutions will be incrementally implemented if less restrictive solutions are ineffective."
5. Page 34, Resource Protection Initiative Polices: "Restricting visitor activities will be a last resort."
6. Page 43, Resource Protection Initiative Management Strategies: "**On-Trail Requirements.** Require visitors to stay on the trail in Habitat Conservation Areas and encourage on-trail travel in all management areas."
7. Page 51, Table 4.1, HCA Management Strategies: "Require on-trail use"
8. Page 56, Management Actions: "**Phased Implementation.** Begin phased implementation of the management areas and associated strategies and actions."
9. Page 72, Project Phasing, 2005: "Conservation Areas on trail travel and leash ordinance passed, areas signed, education and enforcement started by July"
10. Page 40, Recreational Opportunities Initiative Management Strategies: "**Off-Trail Permits.** Implement a permit system for Open Space and Mountain Parks sponsored off-trail use in Habitat Conservation Areas, to provide for officially-sponsored activities..."
11. Page 51, Table 4.1, HCA Management Strategies: "2) if an off-trail permit is obtained (for OSMP sponsored scientific research, monitoring activities, and guided educational hikes)."
12. Page 44, Resource Protection Initiative Management Strategies: "**Nighttime Closures.** Continue nighttime parking curfew and institute nighttime closure in Habitat Conservation Areas."
13. Page 51, Table 4.1, HCA Management Strategies: "Trailhead parking prohibited 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. and area closed one hour after dusk to one hour before dawn."
14. Page 47, **Issue-Based Community Collaboration.** Designating specific use areas for hang gliding/paragliding, fishing, model glider flying, orienteering, etc."

Attachment B

Recommended text modifications to the draft Visitor Master Plan

1. **Alternate HCA on-trail strategies:** Change the text "Require on-trail use" in the HCA column in Table 4.1, page 51, to "Strongly encourage or require on-trail use" and make a corresponding change to the On-Trail Requirements strategy (page 43).
2. **Phased HCA strategy implementation:** Add the following or similar text to Phased Implementation, page 56: "Implementation of HCA on-trail strategies will be phased in over the course of the five years of area trail study projects and will be coordinated with the corresponding trail projects."
3. **Public off-trail permits:** Replace "Off-Trail Permits. Implement a permit system for Open Space and Mountain Parks sponsored off-trail use in Habitat Conservation Areas, to provide for officially-sponsored activities..." , page 40, with "Off-Trail Permits. Implement a permit system in Habitat Conservation Areas, to provide for officially-sponsored OSMP activities and for controlled access by members of the general public." and make a corresponding change to Table 4.1, HCA Management Strategies, page 51.
4. **Nighttime closures of HCAs:** Remove the nighttime closure clauses (Attachment A, Items 12-13). At a minimum, change the Table 4.1, HCA Management Strategies: "Trailhead parking prohibited 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. and area closed one hour after dusk to one hour before dawn." on page 51 to "Trailhead parking prohibited and area closed 11 p.m. to 5 a.m."
5. **Designated equestrian HCA areas:** Change the page 47, Issue-Based Community Collaboration text "Designating specific use areas for hang gliding/paragliding, fishing, model glider flying, orienteering, etc." to "Designating specific use areas for horseback riding, hang gliding/paragliding, fishing, model glider flying, orienteering, etc."

Attachment C

Final Visitor Plan Major Habitat Conservation Areas

<i>Habitat Conservation Area</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Trails</i>	<i>Trail Access</i>	<i>Acreage Access</i>
North Foothills	1,486	11%	Foothills	1	16%	250
Eldorado Mountain	1,467	11%	Foothills	none	5%	75
Jewel Mountain	988	7%	Prairie	none	none	0
Tallgrass Prairie East	1,842	14%	Prairie	none	none	0
Southern Grasslands	2,525	19%	Prairie	none	none	0
Lower Boulder Creek	916	7%	Wetland	1	25%	230
Western Mountain Parks	4,209	31%	Mountain	several	50%	2,105
<i>HCA Total</i>	13,433	100%				2,660

Note: Accessible acreage is estimated as acreage within 1/4 mile of a designated trail. Designated trail corridors occupy less than 1% of the total acreage.

	Fee	Easement	
Mountain Parks	6,399	156	
Open Space	29,394	6,976	Total
<i>Sub totals</i>	35,793	7,132	42,925

The following figures are for OSMP fee properties only

- 38% Percentage of OSMP to be HCA
- 80% Percentage of OSMP HCA without access

- 40% Grassland percentage of HCA
- 22% Foothill percentage of HCA
- 31% Mountain percentage of HCA

- 100% Percentage of grassland HCA without access
- 89% Percentage of foothill HCA without access
- 50% Percentage of mountain HCA without access