



BOARD OF DIRECTORS July 22, 2005

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City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks Department

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Subject: Marshall Mesa-Southern Grasslands Trail Study Area Questionnaire

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The Marshall Mesa-Southern Grasslands Trail Study Area offers many opportunities for recreational improvements. On these properties we find important missing trail connections and several significant safety issues. Trail emphasis here should be on completing the missing connections, especially the external connections to regional trail systems, and correcting the safety exposures.

The existing trails and trailheads on the western edge of the properties have high visitor use and suffer from congestion. In contrast, the HCA components of the study area have a very low trail density and can support additional visitation. The HCA on-trail requirement and the existing protective fencing and closures of the riparian corridor allow for the construction of additional sustainable trails with minimal environmental impacts.

We have attached detailed responses to the survey and appreciate the opportunity to contribute our comments.

Sincerely,

Boulder Area Trails Coalition Board of Directors

BATCO Questionnaire for Marshall Mesa-Southern Grasslands Trail Study Area

Management Goals

- What goals should we shoot for, with respect to visitor access, visitor activities, and resource protection?

We should endeavor to improve the quantity, quality, and safety of visitor access in this study area. The size of the property and the lack of designated trails in most of the area offer real opportunities for significant enhancements. Because much of the property is classified as HCA, with a corresponding on-trail access requirement, and the riparian corridor is fenced and closed to the public, we can designate additional multi-use trail alignments with minimal effects upon the natural resources. In addition to providing new, better-controlled trail experiences, this will disperse the existing congestion on the western trails, reduce user conflicts, and improve the quality of the visitor experience.

Assessment of the Existing Situation

- How would you characterize the existing visitor use patterns—activities, level of use, use of designated and undesignated trails?

Existing visitor use is highly concentrated along the western edge of the study area, primarily along the FRICO Community Ditch alignment and the Greenbelt Plateau road grade parallel to Highway 93. The Community Ditch and road grade have heavy mountain bike use because they are the only alignments open to bicycles in the southern OSMP properties. They are also popular dog walking areas. There is some equestrian use in the central and eastern portions of the area. With bikes allowed only on designated trails and dogs prohibited on the eastern portions of the property, primarily hikers and equestrians use undesignated trails. Until the late 90s, the old farm road north of and parallel to Coal Creek was a popular undesignated trail (it actually appeared on commercially available maps as the Wind Tunnel trail). OSMP fencing of the riparian corridor, reclamation of the roadway, and closure of much of the area to the public has eliminated this trail and also reduced equestrian use.

- What information do you have or know of with respect to resources and resource protection needs in the area? Please include natural, cultural, and paleontological resources.

The Coal Creek riparian corridor has high habitat value. The entire corridor is fenced on both sides of the creek and closed to the public to protect it. There are blocks of relatively intact grassland habitat and blocks of invasive weeds. There is extensive cattle grazing on all the grasslands. Additional attention needs to be paid to improving the condition of the grasslands.

- What opportunities or problems do you want addressed by the Trail Study Areas project?

We can dramatically improve visitor opportunities in the area by connecting the existing western trails to the County's Coal Creek and Rock Creek trails to the east. Together with the County's planned north-south connection between the Singletree and Coalton trails this will ultimately provide a continuous loop of trails paralleling Highways 93 and 128, and McCaslin and Marshall Roads. As noted previously, this will also disperse existing congestion in the west, reduce user conflicts, and improve the quality of the visitor experience.

In addition to dealing with the congestion on the western trails, we need to address the serious hazards presented by the existing grade level crossings of Highway 93 and the inadequate and unsafe trailhead parking on Marshall Road.

Identification of Public Desires

- What are the desired destinations and visitor activities in the area?

Present destinations include the Community Ditch alignment, primarily for dog walkers and bicyclists, the Coal Creek corridor, primarily for wildlife viewing, and the open grassland areas for equestrian use. Desirable additional destinations are the western terminuses of the countywide Coal Creek and Rock Creek Trail Systems.

Visitor activities include hiking, biking, riding, dog walking, and wildlife viewing.

- What new or improved access do you desire (e.g., new trails, new trail connections, designation of undesignated trails)?

The OSMP Board of Trustees previously approved the following trails at their August 23, 2000 board meeting. These trails also appear in both the Boulder Valley and Boulder County Comprehensive Plans and were identified as priority future trails in

the March 2003 OSMP Trail Assessment and Prioritization Report and in the recently approved OSMP Visitor Master Plan. This TSA process should confirm them.

1) The Marshall Mesa Community Ditch Trail should be extended east to South 66th St. and then connected via county properties to the Coal Creek Trail.

2) A new trail should be constructed from the west end of the Coalton Trail to the Greenbelt Plateau trailhead. It should be far enough away from Highway 128 to minimize highway traffic effects on trail users.

The following trail alignments have not been approved by OSMP. The previous existence of the undesignated trails and off-trail access by equestrians shows a significant public interest in the alignments. The prohibition of off-trail access in HCA areas allows designation of these trails without significant environmental impacts. We believe they deserve serious consideration.

1) A new trail on the south side of Coal Creek should be designated connecting Greenbelt Plateau with Superior, to serve as a replacement for the undesignated and presently closed Wind Tunnel trail alignment. The trail can be built to avoid the riparian corridor entirely, while still providing visitors an opportunity to observe and appreciate the beauty of the valley.

2) A route around the south side of Marshall Reservoir would provide an excellent "stacked-loop" trail system compatible with the Marshall Mesa trail system.

3) The old road grade up to Coalton Drive should be utilized to connect to the Coalton Trail. This alignment is perpendicular to the riparian corridor and would have minimal environmental impact.

- What improvements to existing trails do you desire?

The following safety improvements should be made:

1) A safe crossing of Highway 93 at the Community Ditch must be built!

2) A new trailhead should be constructed at the City Limits property with connections to the Marshall Mesa trail system.

Consideration should be given to improving the quality of the visitor experience along the existing the Greenbelt Plateau road grade. Wide, straight gravel roads make low quality trails. Revegetating portions of the road and adding curves and contours, similar to the County's treatment of the Coalton trail would improve the situation. Given all the other items to be addressed, this is a relatively low priority.

- What specific resource protection measures are desired in the area?

Keep new trail construction near the periphery of the area whenever feasible. Make use of existing undesignated trail alignments for interior alignments to minimize new disturbances. Avoid the Coal Creek riparian corridor, except for necessary trail crossings.

Trail Study Area Project Results

- What do you consider the "must-have" products, outcomes, and processes for the Trail Study Area Project to be considered successful?

A trail plan for additional multi-use trail connections to both the Coal Creek and Rock Creek trail systems.

A trail or access plan that provides the public with opportunities to observe and enjoy the beauty of the Coal Creek corridor.

Resolution of the safety issues, especially the Highway 93 crossing.