



BOARD OF DIRECTORS October 27, 2005

Guy Burgess

To: Matt Jones,
City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) Department

Jim Knopf

Subject: Off-Trail Permit Alternatives

Mike O'Brian

We have reviewed the Off-Trail Permit Alternatives developed by the OSMP staff. We note that the alternatives represent two different philosophical approaches to adaptively managing off-trail access. Alternatives 1 & 2 "Adapt down", taking a liberal initial approach to issuing off-trail permits while leaving open the option to become more restrictive if subsequently necessary. Alternatives 3 & 4 "Adapt up", taking the opposing approach by significantly restricting the number of permits while allowing for less restrictive future requirements if feasible.

Adam Massey

Chris Morrison

Gary Sprung

We believe the more liberal "Adapt down" approach is the most appropriate for the following reasons:

Holly Tulin

Limited existing impacts together with the new HCA restrictions make the more restrictive approaches unnecessary at this time.

Eric Vogelsberg

The OSMP department's own review indicates that overall conditions are fair to good (City of Boulder, 2003, "Condition, compatibility, and trends"). The primary concern raised in the review, and a major justification for the subsequent Visitor Master Plan (VMP), is the potential for future impacts due to projected population growth and corresponding increased visitation. The VMP requires on-trail travel in Habitat Conservation Areas (HCAs). This requirement alone may prove to be sufficient to deter continued or future impacts.

Suzanne Webel

County studies indicate few visitors ever leave the trail. Typically those that do engage in activities that require off-trail access, e.g. fishermen, climbers, hang gliders. These activities are site specific and can be managed as such. Combining site specific regulations with an educational permitting process may make strict system wide restrictions on numbers of off-trail permits unnecessary.

Before we apply significant off-trail permit restrictions we should determine the effects of the other restrictions already in place.

Practical considerations make the more restrictive approaches undesirable and potentially unworkable.

Any permit process needs public support to be successful. It is essential that the permitting process be accepted and utilized by off-trail visitors. The initial permits must be simple to obtain and open to all to avoid creating a culture of disregard for the process.

Given that the direction of the visitor management process has been from unrestricted access to more restricted access, it will be difficult to convince the public that beginning with the most restrictive alternatives will ever lead to a future easing of restrictions. Beginning with a less restrictive approach and making it incrementally more restrictive if conditions warrant it is much more likely to gain public acceptance.

Low cost and ease of administration are also important. We've better things to do with staff time and public funds than running a complex permitting process.

Turning to the specifics of the alternatives offered, we support an initial permit process based on a combination of Alternatives 1 and 2. In particular:

Permit Number as per Alternative 1:

- On-line application
- Adapt down – Decrease number of permits if impacts detected

Fines/Enforcement as per Alternative 1:

- Phase-in grace period
- Graduated fine starting at \$50
- Only leader pays fine

Group Size Limit similar to Alternative 2:

- 10 per leader (larger groups require additional responsible leaders)
- Leader required to get permit and responsible for practicing and educating group about low impact practices
- Leader agrees to responsible off-trail use through signature or electronic signature

Resource Issues as per Alternative 2:

- Have rules and low impact information known on back of permit

Area/Reporting as a combination of Alternatives 1 & 2:

- Annual permit with reporting after visit: area visited, where in area visited, activity, and length of stay.
- Area or seasonal restrictions for resource protection (with on-line posting of the restrictions presently in effect)

Finally, there are unanswered questions about the effects of the VMP HCA restrictions. Although the general objective of preserving sensitive areas by controlling impacts due to human visitation is clear, the magnitude of the present problems, the amount of present and future off-trail use, and how to structure a permit system that allows access without damage is not. Given the amount we don't know, we suggest the initial stage of the permitting process be treated as an experiment. Use the first year or so to see how visitors respond to the HCA on-trail requirement and how off-trail permits are used, then adapt the permitting process as necessary to meet the objective.

Once we know how the HCA on-trail requirement is working and understand when, where, and how often visitors want to travel off-trail, we should be able to refine the permit process as required to offer visitors maximum flexibility while still preserving HCA resources.

Sincerely,

Boulder Area Trails Coalition Board of Directors