



**BOARD OF DIRECTORS** May 16, 2005

**Guy Burgess**

To: Jim Reeder,  
City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks Department

**Jim Knopf**

Subject: Trails Suitability and Evaluation Criteria Survey

**Mike O'Brian**

Properly sited and designed trails are positive visitor management tools that support the Open Space Charter objectives of preserving passive recreational opportunities while furthering the Charter objectives of preserving environmental, cultural, and agricultural resources by channeling and controlling visitor access.

**Adam Massey**

**Chris Morrison**

We strongly support an increased investment in the visitor infrastructure. Deferred maintenance should be completed, missing trail connections constructed (or designated), and visitor safety issues addressed. Better use should be made of the existing infrastructure with a corresponding dispersal of visitors from presently heavily used areas. Some of this dispersal can be achieved through the removal of arbitrary constraints on user activities (e.g. the restriction of most bicycle access to east of Highway 93, Broadway, and Highway 36), through the recognition of presently undesignated trails, and through external connections to regional trail systems.

**Gary Sprung**

**Holly Tulin**

**Eric Vogelsberg**

**Suzanne Webel**

Within the historical Mountain Parks properties, we would like to see emphasis on maintenance and rebuilding of the existing trail infrastructure. Given the challenges of the steep terrain, it is a fine trail system suffering primarily from insufficient maintenance. Although there are local adjustments that are appropriate, destroying the historic trail system to reduce maintenance costs will not be a successful strategy. Let's not fix anything that isn't broken.

The Open Space properties offer many opportunities for future improvements. It is on these properties that we find most of the missing trail connections and safety issues. We would like to see emphasis here on completing the missing connections (especially the external connections to regional trail systems). The low trail density and mostly undeveloped trail system also allow for the design and construction of additional or alternate sustainable trails that could provide enhanced quality visitor experiences.

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

Sincerely,

Boulder Area Trails Coalition Board of Directors

## **BATCO Trails Suitability and Evaluation Criteria Survey**

**Trail Suitability and Evaluation Criteria.** What factors or trail suitability and evaluation criteria should be considered when decisions are made on:

- Actions for existing trails-improvements and relocations.

Factors to be considered here include the cost/benefits and the impacts of modifying existing trails. Major deficiencies related to poor physical or environmental sustainability should be addressed, but trail relocations should be carefully considered. The effects of trails that have been in long term use have already occurred. The process of relocating and restoring such trails will create additional effects. The losses may exceed the gains and the benefits may not justify the costs (e.g., last year's proposed reroute of the Royal Arches Trail).

Avoid developing a bias against trail configurations that require more than the absolute minimum of maintenance. For a cost, sustainable trails can be created in almost any terrain configuration. When the terrain is particularly challenging, the effort involved in the initial trail construction and the level of regular maintenance subsequently required is increased. This issue is demonstrated by the fact that almost half the Mountain Parks trails, which have been in constant use for more than half a century, have been rated as unsustainable by OSMP. The criteria used to establish the sustainability of a trail and the definition of regular maintenance for the trail should take into consideration the nature of the terrain the trail traverses. In difficult terrain a designated trail, even if it does not meet ideal sustainability measures, is to be preferred to a series of unplanned, undesignated trails.

Improvements that enhance the visitor experience are important (e.g., improving the scenic quality of the trail experience, providing more direct access to desired destinations, or reducing congestion or overcrowding by increasing trail capacity). A major factor here is creating an infrastructure that will keep visitors on the trails and help prevent the creation of undesirable social trails.

- Actions for undesignated trails--designation and relocation or improvement, designation without improvement, and elimination and restoration.

It is important to understand why the undesignated trails have developed. Undesignated trails are results of visitors voting with their feet. There are reasons for their existence. Undesignated trails often highlight deficiencies in the designated trail system (e.g., aesthetically or physically unattractive existing trails, lack of access to desirable destinations, lack of connections to access points or other trail segments). Closing an undesignated trail without understanding and correcting the reasons for its existence will only lead to the development of yet another undesignated trail.

The extent of previous or historical use is a key factor in evaluating undesignated trails. Undesignated trails include historical trails and old roads that are no longer on the official map, historical climbing access and descent routes, and cattle, game, and human created trails that make connections or access locations not available via designated trails. Some undesignated trails receive regular maintenance and are indistinguishable from the designated trails. It is unlikely that many visitors draw these distinctions when asked to evaluate the quality of their experiences or the condition of the infrastructure. A significant number of presently undesignated trails are considered by visitors to be legitimate components of the trail system. Successful elimination of these trails could be very difficult and could generate significant public dissatisfaction.

Many undesignated trails correct deficiencies in the designated trail system. Use them as guidelines to system enhancements. They are often indicators of the alignments to adopt to improve the visitor experience and engender visitor stewardship. When the undesignated trail is physically or environmentally unsustainable, relocation or improvement of the undesignated trail may be the most effective course of action. There is usually a reason for the undesignated trail and controlled access is better than uncontrolled access.

When there are undesignated trails that provide similar access to that of a designated trail, it is again important to understand why the undesignated trails have developed. If the undesignated trails reflect

deficiencies in the designated trail, it may be desirable either to correct the deficiencies in the designated trail or designate the undesignated trail.

- Actions for new trails--construction of new trails and linkages

Recognizing the importance of appropriate trail placement and design in enlisting public support is essential for the protection of the trail system. The scenic quality of the trail experience and the provision of access to desired destinations are critical to successful trail design. For new trails to be sustainable it is essential that they take people where they want to go in the way they want to go there. Appropriate trail design techniques can minimize maintenance expenses and reduce user conflicts.

Specific factors to be consider in the evaluations of the locations of new trails include:

- Wherever possible grades should be limited to less than 10 percent and to a maximum of 20 percent to minimize maintenance requirements.
- Wherever possible trails should be constructed along the contours of hillsides and incorporate frequent grade reversals to provide adequate drainage and limit visitor speeds.
- Avoid creating tightly fenced trail corridors ("cattle chutes"). If fencing is necessary, limit it to one side of the trail corridor and remove it from the immediate vicinity of the trail.
- In general avoid riparian zones and wetlands, but provide occasional accesses along the trail alignment to allow visitor appreciation of the beauty of the areas and to provide water for equestrians and dog walkers.
- Allow some crossings of riparian areas to complete essential trail alignments and connections.
- Farm and access roads can make poor quality and/or unsustainable trails. The development of parallel natural surface trails in areas like Marshall Mesa and the Boulder Valley Ranch demonstrate some of the issues. If a road is to be designated as a trail, consider reclaiming the majority of the tread and introducing curves and contours as was done by the County on the Coalton Trail. If the continued existence of the road is essential for other reasons (emergency access, etc.), designate an alternate natural surface alignment immediately adjacent to the road.

The priority new trails identified in the Visitor Master Plan and recommended by the Community Group Forum represent a significant effort by the community members and stakeholders to identify desirable enhancements to the existing trail system. The trail connections and area accesses identified by these trails should be important considerations for new trail construction and linkages.

- What uses should be allowed on the trails (hikers, bikers, horseback riders, dogs, etc.)

To disperse visitor concentrations, maximize the return on infrastructure investments, and avoid apparent discrimination against specific user groups, trails should be designated as multi-use whenever possible. This is particularly important for trails in areas with limited access opportunities and for trails that provide regional connections to surrounding communities or County open space properties. In areas with high trail densities and high visitor concentration, designation of parallel trail alignments for use by specific visitor types may be appropriate to reduce visitor conflicts and provide recreational opportunities for visitors who are unable or unwilling to share their trail experiences with other visitor groups.

**Relationship to Management Areas.** Do you have any thoughts on how trail suitability and evaluation criteria should be varied for different Open Space and Mountain Parks management areas?

OSMP should be proactive in the designation of undesignated social trails and the construction of new trails in Passive Recreation Areas and Natural Areas. OSMP should attempt to focus public attention and visitation in these areas by enhancing the existing trail infrastructure and creating new recreational opportunities in these areas.

In Habitat Conservation Areas, OSMP should strive for an overall low trail density, but should provide sufficient access opportunities to desirable locations and to surrounding community and regional trail connections to minimize public temptation to venture off-trail or create undesignated trail alignments. Provision of at least the community connections and regional trail alignments that traverse these areas is essential.

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