

Public Comment Highlights from the 11/15/05 Meeting on the Draft Marshall Mesa-Southern Grasslands Trail Study Area (TSA) Plan

11/18/05

Supporting the Overall Package of TSA Recommendations

- It is important to support the overall package of recommendations, which strikes a balance between access and preservation and provides a workable compromise; do not pick it apart or else support for the overall package could collapse; do not add or eliminate any new trails.

Marshall Lake Trail

- Need to further investigate the following:
 - Study bald eagle use of Marshall Lake for roosting and hunting and the implications for whether or not to build the trail, picking the best location, and how to manage visitor use on the trail.
 - Study wildlife use of the Marshall Lake area to provide baseline information to inform the new trail / trail management decisions.
 - Work with the City of Louisville to assess potential water quality impacts on Louisville's water supply and evaluate possible impact mitigation measures or best management practices to minimize potential impact; remember the need to provide water utility access in the Trail Study Area.
- Don't lock into a Marshall Lake Trail alignment until more investigation and analysis are completed. Maybe a trail alignment farther from the Marshall Lake shore would better protect eagles and other wildlife and better protect the water quality. If the trail were off the road bed and winding, it would have much more visitor interest.

Identification of a Process to Revisit Marshall Mesa-Southern Grasslands TSA Decision Items

- Need to identify recommendations that should be revisited and possibly revised, depending on new information / learning from experience, success of management efforts, and progress in building recommended trails and improvements.
 - Decisions in other Trail Study Areas dealing with trail connections and habitat connections may justify rethinking some of the MM-SG TSA recommendations. OSMP needs to decide at what point to revisit individual TSA recommendations--after some or all of the TSA plans are completed.
 - Decisions on the Habitat Conservation Area (HCA) off-trail permit program need to be integrated with TSA decisions. A more restrictive program may justify providing more trail access opportunities (or vice versa). TSA recommendations need to be revisited after the HCA off-trail permit program is put in place.
- The plan should specify how the plan is formally amended over time, as needs change.
- Maybe the recommendations from all the TSA plans should not be finalized until all of them are complete and linkages between them are addressed.

Additional No-Dog Opportunities in the TSA

- A proposal is to provide additional no-dog opportunities and specifically to provide a no-dog trail connection from the City Limits Trailhead to the no-dog Marshall Lake Trail...a proposal is to make a continuous no-dog opportunity from City Limits Trailhead to the Community Ditch Trail (using the new connection # 5b) to the Marshall Lake Trail.

Various Proposals

- Organize Trail Study Area field trips involving the public to increase understanding of both recreational and resource protection needs and specific conditions and opportunities “on the ground”. These field trips will foster dialog among the different community interests and help create “win-win” solutions that jointly meet recreational and resource protection goals.
- Make the trail connections to County Superior-area trails happen sooner rather than later, as they will add to a new stacked loop trail system.
- Reconsider the new trail connection across Coal Creek that would connect the Coalton Trail and the Coal Creek Trail.
- Provide a more robust proposal for how to provide interpretive opportunities that provide visitors with connections for the Coal Creek Valley / Southern Grasslands HCA (more than just a sign at the Coal Creek bridge crossing).
- Provide more geological and cultural interpretive opportunities in the TSA; especially work with Boulder County on interpreting mining history.
- Ensure that the central management purpose of HCAs in conserving and sustaining habitat is not compromised by trails and visitor use.
- Change the seasonal wildlife protection requirement for dogs on-leash on the Greenbelt Plateau Trail—make it seasonal on-corridor voice-and-sight instead.
- Adjust the alignment for the Coalton to Greenbelt Trail to pull it closer to the road and thereby better protect the prairie habitat and prairie dog colony.
- Educate people on why the special or valuable qualities of the habitat justify the limitations on visitor use in the HCA or Natural Areas.
- OSMF should utilize expertise to locate and design trails that are “fun” and therefore likely to motivate people to stay on-trail (BOA and IMBA can provide expertise and possibly can offer volunteers to reduce the cost of building new trails).
- Re-look at whether or not the plan provides too many trail opportunities close to roads with consequent poor quality of visitor experience.
- Leave the current visitor gate in place (near Marshall Road and S. 66th), as it is valuable to horseback riders crossing from Davidson Mesa to Marshall Mesa. Don’t prejudge the outcome before the Tallgrass Prairie East TSA plan is completed.
- Re-orient the justification for not constructing trails in the core of the Southern Grassland HCA from reliance on “habitat block” arguments to an emphasis on protection of the valuable Coal Creek Riparian Restoration Area (concern is precedent that could be applied to W. Beech or other areas).
- Address the “fairness” issue around allowing cattle grazing that compromises restoration goals and recreational opportunities (i.e., if cattle can graze there, why can’t horseback riders or others go there).

- Provide adequate resources to monitor recreational and resource conditions over time, in order to allow assessment of the impacts, project success, and adaptive management. Determining baseline conditions is critical to effective monitoring.
- Create a separate staff-public group to develop ideas on how to operationalize the “balance” between access and recreation: optimal trail location and design features, observations and experiments to determine impacts, what to monitor (and how) to guide ongoing management efforts and adaptive management, how to create connections between visitors and the land that foster taking good care of it, how to enhance visitor compliance with new rules, how to prevent spread of weeds, etc.
- Use science to drive good decisions; use the limits to acceptable change concept to manage impacts.
- Hire staff who have expertise in recreation resource management, who can improve the way that OSMP provides high-quality visitor opportunities that are compatible with resource protection, e.g., providing trails as a tool to protect resources by channeling visitor travel.
- Provide more “on-the-ground” staff to educate, enforce, monitor, etc.
- Address the basic conflict with protecting open space values and the proposed Xcel natural gas compression station.

Additional Information Needs

- Provide more specifics on the design and cost of the bridge over Coal Creek for the new Coalton to Greenbelt Trail.
- Study elk movement patterns and use of the Southern Grasslands HCA, in order to ensure that visitor use is managed to minimize impacts on wintering elk.
- Provide more detailed information and aerial photo mapping on prior and current land use and travel patterns, current cattle grazing and trails, and undesignated trails and road impacts on the land in the TSA.
- While focusing planning on the recreational and resource protection needs and opportunities in individual Trail Study Areas, consider the system-wide context for recreational access and trail connection needs and for landscape-level restoration and habitat connection needs. This system-wide context will assist in jointly meeting recreational and resource protection goals.
- Research the implications of the Marshall Landfill on visitor use issues and opportunities.
- Follow up on leads to identify all significant mining sites in the Trail Study Area, in order to identify interpretive opportunities and public safety protection measures.