

Public Comments on the Marshall Mesa-Southern Grasslands Alternatives Report at the September 8, 2005 Meeting

Overview Summary

There was polite, frank, constructive, and informative discussion among the diverse community interests represented at the meeting. The public conversation seemed to provide for some increased understanding and common ground. Significant differences in philosophy and interest were clearly articulated, which could facilitate continued conversations to narrow the differences.

Common Ground:

- Points of agreement included: The overall environmental quality of the Habitat Conservation Area (HCA) should be preserved for the long term; the Coal Creek Riparian Restoration Area should not have a trail running through it; the eagle closure should be respected; highly sensitive resources should receive extra protection.
- Possible agreement that a trail close to Coal Creek (# 22 on the north side, # 35 on the south side) could be dropped for consideration, in order to support the restoration / preservation goals of the Southern Grasslands HCA. For certain members of the public this position depends on whether one or two other trail connections are implemented—the trail connection south of Marshall Lake (# 23) that would create a new trail loop, and a newly-suggested trail connector from the “elbow” of the Coalton Trail north crossing Coal Creek and connecting into the Coal Creek Trail, which would create another loop. In either case, environmental protection / mitigation measures would be needed—a creek bridge crossing, fencing to keep people out of the creek corridor, seasonal wildlife closures, etc.—and there seems to be support for that. Building this kind of agreement would be difficult, but it may be possible.
- Possible agreement on the concept of applied adaptive management, where less restrictive means are tried initially if there is a reasonable expectation of success. Success is then monitored and assessed, and tighter controls would be put in place if needed.

Key Differences:

- Differences in opinion as to how much public access is acceptable in the core of the HCA, centered on whether or not a single fenced trail crossing on the eastern end of Coal Creek should be built. Some feel it would be very damaging to the overall ecological integrity of the HCA and the potential for restoration. Others feel that fencing, education, and strict enforcement designed to keep people on trail and out of the creek corridor (and keep people on trail elsewhere in the HCA) would provide sufficient resource protections for this very valuable trail connection so as not to create undue ecological harm.
- Differences on the Marshall Lake trail connection (# 23) also were present. People felt that not enough information is not available at this point for this option, as well as for the 66th to Singletree trail connection (# 13).

Sticky Note Comments

West Marshall Mesa Subarea

Alternative # 1 Marshall Mesa Trailhead (mapped)

Option 1: Reconfigure existing trailhead (fewer parking spaces with expanded bike lanes, strict enforcement of no-parking rule on S.H. 170)

Option 2: Close trailhead and replace with City Limits Trailhead (remove vehicle parking and reclaim areas to natural condition)

Option 2A: Maintain pedestrian / bicyclist access with pedestrian gate

Option 2B: Close public access with fencing

COMMENTS:

- BOA strongly supports alt 1.
- Option 2A is favorable. If parking is allowed, limit it & align as parallel parking.
- Don't expand here – maybe option 2A.
- Under measures to mitigate, how would a pedestrian/bike crossing be appropriate on 2-lane Marshall Rd.?
- Support option 2A.

Alternative # 2 New Trailhead at City Limits (mapped)

Option 1: No-action; no new trailhead built

Option 2: New trailhead built and new trail connection to Community Ditch Trail

COMMENTS:

- BOA strongly supports alt 2.
- Option 2 good.
- Option 2 is good with connector trail(s) to Community Ditch trailhead (full-service).
- Option 2 is good if incorporate park-n-ride functionality, may get funding from RTD, GO Boulder, or Transportation Enhancements.
- Support option 2.

Alternative # 3 New Community Ditch Trail Crossing under S.H. 93 using Existing Community Ditch Underpass (mapped)

COMMENTS:

- BOA strongly supports.
- Support.

Alternative # 4 New Trail Connection from the New City Limits Trailhead (# 2) to Marshall Mesa Trailhead (mapped) (on the old railroad grade), which would form a new trail loop with the Community Ditch Trail

COMMENTS:

- BOA strongly supports.
- Pro. Additional trail helps disperse users from City Limits trailhead; show off & explain the area's history.
- Oppose.

Alternative # 5 Improvements to Existing Trails (mapped)

- **Marshall Mesa Trail:** trail tread and erosion control improvements
- **Community Ditch Trail:** trail tread and erosion control improvements

COMMENTS:

- Support.

Alternative # 6 New Spur Trails to Historical or Geological Sites (not mapped) (Where?)

COMMENTS:

- Designate as official & educationally sign small spur trail to Fox Hills Sandstone that trends northwest from the main Marshall Mesa Trail.
- Support depends on where.

Alternative # 7 Elimination of Social Trails, Trail Widening, and Parallel Trails (not mapped) and appropriate reclamation of natural areas...Where are priority improvements?

- Eliminate all social trails that do not become designated trails through the TSA process.

COMMENTS:

- Designate as official small spur trail on east side of Community Ditch where canal enters Marshall Reservoir. The "keep out" sign has been ignored from day one.
- Support.

Alternative # 8 Enhanced Education and Enforcement to Improve Compliance with Dog Regulations (not mapped)

COMMENTS:

- Support.

Alternative # 9 Improvements for Bike Access on the Community Ditch Trail (not mapped) (making trails narrower, planned obstacles, reroutes, etc.)

COMMENTS:

- Con list re "obstacles" causing higher bike speeds. This is WRONG! Opposite is true.
- Support.

East Marshall Mesa Subarea

Alternative # 10 New Trail from Marshall Mesa Trail to South 66th Street (mapped)

Option 1: Mid-slope alignment

Option 2: Lower-slope alignment

COMMENTS:

- Is some kind of compromise possible here?
- BOA strongly supports option 1.
- Good trail has been designed to avoid native vegetation, animals and minimize soil loss.

Alternative # 11 Stabilization / Hazard Mitigation Measures on Damyanovich Property East of South 66th (mapped)

- To ensure public safety from contaminated soils, OSMF should apply clay topsoil over contaminated soils to prevent airborne exposure of the public and add fencing and warning signs.

Alternative # 12 Existing Pedestrian Gate south of S.H. 170 (mapped)

Option 1: Remove the pedestrian gate (could be reinstalled in the future)

Option 2: Maintain the gate until public access / trail decisions are made for the Tallgrass Prairie East Trail Study Area

COMMENTS:

- Support option 1.
- BOA strongly supports option 2.

Alternative # 13 Trail Connection from South 66th Street to Coal Creek Drive (mapped)

Option 1: Trail built within the 66th Street road right-of-way (ROW) or on-street

Option 2: Trail located east outside the road ROW onto County Open Space connecting over to the Boulder County Open Space Singletree Trailhead

COMMENTS:

- Support option 1.
- Option 2: redundant with approved alignment on 66th; wetland issued in Damyanovich property.

Alternative # 14 Dog Management on New Trail to South 66th (not mapped)

Option 1: Voice-and-sight control

Option 2: On-leash, on-trail requirement

COMMENTS:

- Option 2: on leash, on trail necessary here!
- Voice & sight pros: consistent with dog regs on all other current trails in this TSA; will not confuse the public with inconsistent regulations; easier to enforce because regs are consistent; voice & sight will prevent alternate social trails. (This is in a natural area and on-trail is not required). Voice & sight cons: The argument about access to the wetland does not hold water. The wetland is at least 100 yards from the preferred alignment.

Alternative # 15 Elimination of Social Trails, Trail Widening, and Parallel Trails (not mapped) and appropriate reclamation of natural areas...Where are priority improvements?

Alternative # 16 New Interpretive Improvements for Historical or Geological Sites (not mapped) (Where?)

Coal Creek Subarea

Alternative # 17 No New Trails in the Fenced Riparian Restoration Area (mapped)
No option other than continuation of the public access closure.

COMMENTS:

- Support NO new trails.
- Important to support no new trails in this area.
- BOA strongly supports this option (except for 90 degree crossing at Alt 35).

Alternative # 18 Continuation of the Eagle Nesting Closure (mapped) (within ½ mile buffer area)

COMMENTS:

- BOA strongly supports.
- Continue eagle protection per law.
- Yes! Continue closure.
- No blanket closures. Appropriate seasonal closures only.

Alternative # 19 Elimination of Social Trails, Trail Widening, and Parallel Trails (not mapped) and appropriate reclamation of natural areas...Where are priority improvements?

COMMENTS:

- Eliminate social trails, trail widening and parallel trails.

Alternative # 20 Limited Guided Hikes into the Coal Creek Riparian Restoration Area (not mapped)

COMMENTS:

- Support limited hikes.
- This should be brought up under future permitting process and NOT NOW!
- Yes!

Alternative # 21 Interpretive Signs / Materials Explaining the Restoration Process from a Remote Viewpoint? (not mapped)

- Possible suitable sites: Coal Creek crossing S.H. 128; near the Varra gate on South 66th

COMMENTS:

- Support signage.
- Yes!

Southern Grasslands—Greenbelt Plateau Subarea

Alternative # 22 New Trail North of Coal Creek (mapped) (public suggestion was to designate and improve the no longer used and partially re-vegetated gravel haul road, which gets a small amount of visitor use currently)

COMMENTS:

- Should NOT cut through exclusion zones – leave area whole where possible; do not fragment.
- Do not support trails through habitat conservation areas – these are sensitive areas.
- Crosses only 1 to 3 exclusion zones. Existing trails elsewhere already cross prairie dog colonies. New interior trails with seasonal raptor closures ok.
- The reasons to not fragment this area extend beyond City of Boulder considerations – the grassland communities are relevant to state grassland support goals. Therefore, #22, 23 & 35 should not be pursued.

Alternative # 23 New Trail South of Marshall Lake (mapped) (from Community Ditch Trail to South 66th / Coalton Road)

COMMENTS:

- Should NOT cut through exclusion zones – leave area whole where possible; do not fragment.
- Do not support trails through habitat conservation areas – these are sensitive areas.
- Crosses only 1 to 3 exclusion zones. Existing trails elsewhere already cross prairie dog colonies. New interior trails with seasonal raptor closures ok.
- Very important connector trail.
- BOA strongly supports this option.

Alternative # 24 New ADA Trail Loop from the Greenbelt Plateau Trailhead (mapped) (into Doudy Draw Natural Area)

COMMENTS:

- Please look for an alternative location away from critical habitat.
- ADA trail possible near new city limits trailhead.

Alternative # 25 New Trail from the Greenbelt Plateau Trail to the Existing Cattle Underpass near the Old Matterhorn Site (mapped) (with connections to Community Ditch Trail and Doudy Draw Trail; open to equestrians)

COMMENTS:

- No!
- BOA strongly supports.

Alternative # 26 New Trailhead in the Vicinity of South 66th (mapped)

Option 1: Location near the intersection of South 66th and Coal Creek Drive

Option 2: Location near the intersection of S.H. 170 and South 66th Street

Option 3: No action; no new trailhead

COMMENTS:

- Yes to option 3.

Alternative # 27 Elimination of Social Trails, Trail widening, and Parallel Trails (not mapped) and appropriate reclamation of natural areas...Where are priority improvements?

COMMENTS:

- Yes! Elimination and closures should occur.

Alternative # 28 Seasonal Wildlife Closures / On-Trail and On-Leash Requirements in the Douby Draw Natural Area (mapped) (to protect ground-nesting birds)

COMMENTS:

- Yes!

Alternative # 29 Allow Continuation of Parallel Biking Trail alongside Greenbelt Plateau Trail (mapped)

COMMENTS:

- 1. Such parallel paths show un-met need for single track. 2. Assumption of “bike trail” is biased and inaccurate. Runners use this heavily.

Alternative # 30 Retrofitting of the Existing Trail for Biking Interest (mapped) (narrowing the trail and building in some serpentine curves or add a separate single-track bike loop)

COMMENTS:

- What does “retrofit for biking” mean? Bikes are not asking to have their own trail. Trail narrowing/winding helps reduce user conflict and breeds appreciation for the land.

Southern Grasslands—Rocky Flats Subarea

Alternative # 31 Elimination of Social Trails, Trail Widening, and Parallel Trails (not mapped) and appropriate reclamation of natural areas...Where are priority improvements?

COMMENTS:

- Yes – eliminate social trails.
- Support elimination of social trails.
- If existing trails exist from old ranching and mining activities and they don’t cause erosion, then they should be developed for hiking, etc.

Alternative # 32 Implement the Habitat Conservation Area Closure to Current Off-Trail Activities (mapped) (hiking, dog training, model airplane flying)

COMMENTS:

- Yes – closure necessary.
- Support – these activities don’t belong in HCAs.
- If existing trails exist from old ranching and mining activities and they don’t cause erosion, then they should be developed for hiking, etc.

Southern Grasslands Core Area (Subarea)

Alternative # 33 New Trail Connection from Greenbelt Plateau Trailhead to Coalton Trail (mapped)

Option 1: Trail that hugs the OSMP fence close to S.H. 128 (to minimize penetration into the HCA and impact to agriculture)

Option 2: Trail that moves into the HCA to a limited extent (to provide visitors more separation from the highway)

COMMENTS:

- Important trail!! Option 2: is more environmentally friendly and provides a better user visit = breeding stewardship. Contour trail minimizes soil loss and blends with natural topography. Narrow trails reduce user conflict (slower speeds) and limits weed introduction.
- Option 1: Friends of Colorado Natural Areas Program supports to avoid fragmentation of the HCA.
- Option 2 acceptable to Audubon, but we need to keep our large tracts of prime prairie grasses as intact as possible. (can cite species of concern for us here).
- BOA strongly supports option 2.
- Please do not create a cattle chute along the highway. Noise pollution, bad air and visual impacts are all problems.
- Not a cattle chute – have hiked 3 times – beautiful views, long distance will appeal to bikers and long distance runners. We can pull trail slightly into grassland where necessary to accommodate contours and distance from road.
- If existing trails exist from old ranching and mining activities and they don't cause erosion, then they should be developed for hiking, etc.

Alternative # 34 New Trailhead at Intersection of S.H. 128 and the Coalton Trail (mapped)

COMMENTS:

- No.

Alternative # 35 New Trail South of Coal Creek (mapped) (connecting Greenbelt Plateau Trailhead to the Coalton Trail and to Coal Creek Drive)

COMMENTS:

- The reasons to not fragment this area extend beyond City of Boulder considerations – the grassland communities are relevant to state grassland support goals. Therefore, #22, 23 & 35 should not be pursued.
- No.
- Is not acceptable. It would break up habitat.
- Should not be pursued: unique & uncommon grassland resources need to remain unfragmented to retain natural function.
- Oppose any new trail in this area – important nesting habitat for ground nesting birds & foraging (hunting) for raptors.
- Severely disrupts last quality grassland ecosystem on OSMP; redundant with # 33.
- BOA strongly supports this alternative.
- Please consider connection from Coal Creek Trail to Coalton Trail separately.
- If existing trails exist from old ranching and mining activities and they don't cause erosion,

then they should be developed for hiking, etc.

- The eastern-most section of alternative # 35 that crosses Coal Creek will be an important connection for hikers and nature watchers. It only crosses the creek and does not travel along it.

Alternative # 36 Improvements to Existing Greenbelt Plateau Trailhead (mapped)

- Ingress, egress improvements
- Expansion of capacity and paving
- Accommodation of horse trailer parking

COMMENTS:

- Should not enlarge parking lot – too much impact on HCA plant communities.
- If the use is exceeding the capacity, then the parking lot should be enlarged. Paving is unnecessary.
- BOA strongly supports.
- Improving Greenbelt Plateau trailhead; this is best place for access by horse trailers (Flatirons Vista has too much traffic).

Alternative # 37 Grassland Ecosystem Interpretive Trail / Overlook (not mapped)

- Possible sites that offer dramatic vistas of the large block of native prairie may exist near the intersection of the Coalton Trail and S.H. 128, at the 90 degree turn of the Coalton Trail, and one or more “bump ins” along the Coalton to Greenbelt Trail alignment (on a mesa high point).

COMMENTS:

- Support bend in Coalton trail as site for interpretation; limit other areas.

Alternative # 38 Fencing of Trail Corridor for New Trail from Greenbelt Plateau Trailhead to Coalton Trail (not mapped)

Option 1: Use fencing to limit visitor use to the defined trail corridor

Option 2: Do not create any additional fencing; rely on the HCA on-trail, on-leash requirements to adequately protect resources

COMMENTS:

- Protection of HCA imperative; fence design should direct human traffic to trails but allow passage of wildlife; agree (BOCO Audubon).
- BOA opposes option 1, supports option 2.

Alternative # 39 Elimination of Social Trails, Trail widening, and Parallel Trails (not mapped) and appropriate reclamation of natural areas...Where are priority improvements?

COMMENTS:

- Yes!
- Support – elimination of social trails is highest priority.

Alternative # 40 Management of Hang Gliding (mapped)

Option 1: Close area to hang gliding

Option 2: Create limited-use area for hang gliding

COMMENTS:

- No hang gliding here – too much potential for trampling prime grasses, disturbing sparrow & meadowlark area, prairie dog prey base for raptors etc.
- Hang gliding should be prohibited in HCAs – landing areas are too variable.
- Hang gliding not appropriate for any HCA – should not be allowed.