

# SUMMARY

## CPW Trails Strategic Plan 2016 Focus Groups

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Central to the development of 2016 statewide strategic plan for recreational trails is input from trail users and interests groups from across Colorado. Public involvement to inform this plan took place over several months and involved several engagement methods, including public meetings, a telephone town hall, dedicated website, social media and focus groups. Below is a summary from the focus groups. These were focused discussions with invited participants who represented trail related interests in Colorado. The interest areas represented included: non-motorized and motorized trail users (OHVs, snowmobiling, equestrian, mountain and road biking, Nordic skiing, hiking, wildlife watching), natural resource conservation, hunting and fishing, local governments, and trail builders. CPW held four focus groups, each in a different region: Durango, Grand Junction, Colorado Springs, and Denver.

Each focus group convened between 8 and 12 people and entailed a facilitated discussion around a set series of questions (see attachment 1). Below is a summary of what was heard from participants during the focus groups.

### **Funding for trails is a top priority**

At all four focus groups, participants communicated that there needs to be more funding dedicated to trails in Colorado. Participants emphasized that the state population is growing, that there is a growing demand for trail-based recreation and there should be a new mechanism for raising money to support construction and maintenance of trails. When asked if they had specific ideas for how to generate more funding for trails, participants stated the following ideas:

- Annual pass required by all trail user
- Car registration fee
- Required fee for non-residents
- Tax – ideas discussed included tourism, sales, outdoor equipment rentals and/or sales, new home sales (or Real Estate transfer fee)
- Fee collection at the trailhead with a smart phone option to make payment
- Registration requirement or license for bicycles
- A percentage of supporting nonprofit organization membership dues
- Mandatory stamp required for trail recreation
- A fee imposed with an option to opt-out

- Fee for non-motorized and other trail users who have not already paid through an OHV registration or purchase of a hunting/fishing license or parks pass.
- Restrict portion of lottery fund specifically for trails projects
- Give funding authority to the Parks and Wildlife Commission and request the CPW allocate more funding toward trails.
- Private donations – ideas included a stamp, asking to support specific projects, a donation box (physical and digital) at the trailhead and asking for donations with tax filing.
- Parking pass
- Dedicated license plate

While discussing ideas for new funding, participants raised concerns about maintaining access to trails for everyone. They emphasized that any new funding mechanism should not be a barrier to children and economically challenged individuals for recreating on trails. Participants discussed the importance of considering enforcement costs associated with various mechanisms, impacts to other agencies and aspects of management and whether the mechanisms are politically feasibility. Some participants felt that a new funding source should be exempt from TABOR and indexed to population growth. Participants communicated that there should be restrictions in place to make sure the money gets spent on trails in Colorado and on the ground projects, including maintaining existing trails. There were concerns that a new source of funding might get diverted to other projects or that it would go primarily toward administration with little impact on trail opportunities.

Participants also discussed the value of convening a panel of experts to explore different options and analyze types of fee structures for non-motorized trail users. At one of the focus groups, a participant highlighted a recent effort conducted by non-motorized users to identify core values when considering different pay to play mechanisms. These were:

- Love of the land, consider impacts to resource.
- Funds go back to the land.
- Locally raised funds are spent locally.
- Efficiency, minimal costs for administration.
- Youth still have access - pay to play ensures no one is excluded.
- Apply to all recreational users.
- Shouldn't be a barrier to recreation.

## Other statewide priorities

Focus group participants discussed priorities for state leadership and the trails program. In addition to more funding for trails, here are the common themes shared during discussions:

Coordination - Engage with federal, state, local managers and organizations to facilitate and support the advancement of trail projects. Support local entities in navigating federal processes. Map and standardize data/information.

Convene stakeholders – Provide opportunities for diverse interests to continue discussion around trails-based recreation issues and needs. Look at Sportsmen’s Roundtable and regional trails groups as possible models.

Elevate trails statewide - Trail use is the #1 recreation activity in Colorado. Prioritize trail related issues. Raise visibility and profile of trails. Elevate the trails program within CPW. Implement a strong marketing approach with consideration for how we attract tourists. Identify and advance projects that will support a larger strategy in elevating the importance of trails.

Address population growth and the growing demand – Trails are getting more crowded. Need to identify priorities and gaps and invest in projects to accommodate more users.

Conserve natural resources – Wildlife and habitat must be conserved. Need to protect the natural resources that draw people to Colorado’s outdoors. A state program should overlay maps and strategically consider winter range and sensitive habitats when constructing trails. Program should identify wildlife needs, communicate these in trail development efforts, and work collaboratively to look for solutions.

Provide information – Use statewide program to provide central location for sharing information, including maps, closures and permitted trail activities. Provide information in print form, website and mobile app. Provide consistent messaging, materials, opportunities for idea sharing, along with best practices and lessons learned.

Balance interests - Provide for all types of users. Do not prioritize one use over another and consider the needs of youth, senior and handicap trail users. Take a statewide perspective to understand regional trail priorities and gaps.

Support communities – Foster key connections to support local communities. Help solve problems and move projects forward. Provide technical assistance to help small communities apply for grants. Continue to provide mini grants to pay for assistance getting bigger proposals

ready. Provide a framework and statewide/regional vision to help guide local initiatives. Give tools and guidance to get projects through by:

- Providing a clearing house for information
- Creating equity in trail application process
- Providing a user friendly guide to conduct trail projects and working with federal agencies
- Articulating timelines and expectations

Enforce rules – Enforce trail closures, address the construction of social (i.e., non-sanctioned) trails. Invest in wildlife managers and rangers to address population pressures and conduct education programs.

Promote trail etiquette and education - Prioritize next generation of stewards. Implement strategic education initiatives.

Maintain existing funding sources – Preserve GOCO and the OHV registration program.

Prioritize maintenance – Maintain existing trails. Ensure funding is available for maintenance and coordinate with clubs and user groups to help with maintenance. Clean up trails that are blocked by fallen beetle kill trees and other damage.

Foster volunteer efforts - Account for volunteer hours as match when funding projects (currently the trails program does this and GOCO does not). Standardize the certification requirements for volunteers, such as chainsaw certification, and make these consistent across local, state and federal agencies. Help volunteer efforts get liability coverage.

Leader in science – The state should serve as a national leader on the science around trails. Collect and analyze data on demand, look strategically at user interests and pressure across the state. Provide research on natural resource questions, design, visualization, and user preference. Evaluate the economic value of trails and opportunities to create a sustainable and self-paying trail economy.

Several other issues came up during discussion although didn't get the same level of attention across all four groups. These included the need to support federal agencies and particularly the USFS who has been allocating more resources toward fire management impacting their ability to maintain recreation trails. Participants mentioned the need to preserve access to public lands and keep these lands public. One individual inquired about the use of pack animals to

support maintenance and whether these services were as robust as they once were. Another mentioned that the expectations for the quality of trails and infrastructure are changing and that as users expect more over time, this will impact the funding challenges to provide for these users. The need for license plates on OHVs and more crossings over highways for trail users and wildlife were also mentioned. And finally, several participants recognized and appreciated the value of the current trails program and the work of Governor Hickenlooper to elevate the conversation around trails and to advance priority projects around the state.

## **A good trail experience**

When asked what defined a good trail experience, participants at all four focus groups spoke about the following:

Variety - Diverse trail opportunities that accommodate multiple interests and provide a range of experiences. Some participants preferred trails that provide solitude and a natural setting. Others emphasized the need for trails with varying degree of difficulty to accommodate different skill levels. Variety should include both remote and less developed trails as well as more urban and more improved.

Connectivity – Trails loop and connect to other trails and recreational opportunities. Trails connect communities to each other.

Good design - Trail design is done well to accommodate different uses and skill levels while providing for safe recreation. Strategic layout disperses use and minimizes conflict.

Well-maintained – Maintenance is prioritized, keeping trails clear and in good condition to accommodate the uses they are designed for.

Infrastructure - year-round parking and parking that accommodates trailers with room to turn-around. Cross walks and other considerations for safety. Many participants felt bathrooms were important to have available at trailheads.

Destination – Trails lead to a point of interest, such as a summit, view point, lake or other scenic location.

Good information - Updated information posted about trails. Signage at the trailhead and online explains what activities are permitted and direct trail users to areas that will accommodate their interests and meet expectations. Information is updated in regard to closures and provides emergency contacts. Maps are available onsite and online.

Conservation for wildlife and natural resources - Trail development considers impacts to wildlife and habitat to ensure lasting health of Colorado's natural resources. Information should be posted at the trailhead about how best to interact with wildlife and domestic animals encountered on the trail.

Access – Trails exist close to where people live. They are well marked and easy to find.

Respectful use – Users practice good trail etiquette and are respectful of other users. Stewardship and respectful use is promoted to all trail users.

Other topics discussed that support quality trail experiences included a standardized trail marking system according to difficulty, family friendly trails, having picnic areas and shade at the trail head, and more access for motorized users. Participants also discussed interest in gateway trails that help to engage new or beginner users and stressed the importance of the function of trails in terms of providing access to places of work and other useful destinations.