



COLORADO

Parks and Wildlife

Department of Natural Resources

Northeast Region
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 18, 2019

TO: Fletcher Jacobs, State Trails Program Manager

FROM: Mark Leslie, Northeast Regional Manager

SUBJECT: Wildlife Impacts Review, Colorado the Beautiful 2019 Grant Cycle

The Northeast Region received eight applications for wildlife impacts review. These applications were sent to CPW Area field staff (Area Wildlife Managers and District Wildlife Managers) for review and comment. The comments were then reviewed and discussed using the Wildlife Impacts Assessment Guidelines for the CPW Trails Program. Reviewers included Northeast Region Trails Coordinator Ben Plankis, Deputy Regional Manager Windi Padia, and Regional Manager Mark Leslie. In addition, Regional leadership emphasized the importance for CPW Area field staff to engage early in trail planning processes and grant application discussions to evaluate and address any possible wildlife concerns.

According to the 2019 SCORP, most of Colorado's population growth between 2000 and 2016 has occurred in the Denver Metro and North Central Regions. This region is expected to have the fastest population growth among regions in Colorado in the next 30 years. The number of trail users in the region is growing, as is the demand for new trails. This increase in trail use and new trail development has a cumulative negative impact on wildlife habitat. Increased trail use requires land managers to provide resources to maintain existing trails, actively enforce regulations and closures intended to protect wildlife, and conduct new trail planning and development in a broad landscape context.

Below is a synopsis of applications and their associated wildlife impacts:

Construction Grants:

#1 Bennett Open Space: Area 5, DWM Travis Harris

This project will include minimal habitat loss because the trail is being developed within a closed system currently designated as open space. Within existing prairie dog towns, CPW recommends a burrowing owl survey prior to any construction activities. Guidelines are available on CPW's website. CPW encourages a weed management program in accordance with Arapahoe County guidelines. Additionally, a former golf course pond is currently being considered for restoration in the open space area. Restoration of this pond would provide local wildlife with enhanced wetland habitat and improved nesting opportunities for migratory waterfowl and shorebird species. CPW recommends that dogs remain on leash and on designated trails to minimize impacts to nesting waterfowl and wetland species.



#2 Sand Creek Regional Trail: Area 5, DWM Megan Lacey

No wildlife concerns.

#4 Fall River Trail: Area 2, DWM Chase Rylands

No wildlife concerns.

#6 Evergreen Lake Trail: Area 1, DWM Joe Nicholson

This project has minimal negative impacts to wildlife in the area and will increase access for anglers on Evergreen Lake. Increased visitation to Evergreen Lake will add to increasing conflicts with elk and bears in this area. Cow elk with calves frequent Evergreen Lake during elk calving season, primarily May through June. Bull elk with herds of cow and calf elk frequent Evergreen Lake during the breeding season, primarily from late August through mid-October. CPW recommends posting education signs during this period of time to educate visitors on safe wildlife viewing distances and advising visitors that elk can become aggressive and pose a danger to people. CPW recommends bear resistant trash receptacles around the lake to reduce bear conflicts with visitors.

#7 Tolland Trail: Area 2, DWM position vacant, AWM Kristin Cannon

CPW is aware that the Tolland Ranch Trail is planned within the conservation easement for the property. There is substantial need for trail-based recreational opportunities in the area; however, the trail has the potential to impact elk during migration, winter, and calving. In addition, CPW is concerned about habitat loss and trail recreation impacts to the local elk population in the broader local landscape. CPW staff recognizes that several factors will help mitigate wildlife impacts for this project:

- The county sought the advice of multiple qualified biologists both internally and private who provided comments on how best to route the trail and execute its construction. For example, the final trail alignment avoids the south side of Buckeye Mountain which should benefit elk and is an example of how trail alignment, when properly informed by available data, can better mitigate potential impacts.
- On the private Toll property and throughout the broader local landscape, there are numerous existing social trails. The construction of this trail could help limit social trail construction if paired with effective patrol and enforcement. Boulder County has a track record of well-managed and patrolled open space properties.

CPW recommends that Boulder County consider the following actions:

- Because the property is remote and not owned by the county, it will be necessary to ensure adequate personnel resources to patrol and maintain the trail, and to prevent proliferation of social trails. CPW recommends closure and rehabilitation of social trails where Boulder County has management authority.

- Consider adaptive management actions, such as future seasonal closures, as additional elk population and movement data become available. CPW has secured funding to fit elk in the area with GPS collars to better understand migration patterns, populations, and use of critical habitat. The project is scheduled to begin in the winter of 2019-2020. As data becomes available, CPW will share it with Boulder County as it may inform future management of the trail.

Planning Grants:

#8 Central City Master Plan, Area 1, DWM Tim Woodward

No wildlife concerns.

#10 Cache la Poudre: Area 4, Multiple DWMs

No wildlife concerns.

#14 Outside 285 Master Plan: Multiple DWMs, Area 1 AWM Mark Lamb, Area 5 AWM Matt Martinez

CPW understands that the Outside 285 Master Plan project seeks to plan for trail development across a broad landscape comprised of USDA Forest Service land in the South Platte Ranger District, Denver Water property, and multiple other landowners. The project seeks to balance the desire for additional trail development and impacts to wildlife while consulting with a variety of land managers/owners, recreation groups and trail planners.

COMBA has met with CPW wildlife field staff in February 2019 and May 2019 (in addition to other consultations) about the specific proposed alignments listed on the application. In addition, because the plan crosses multiple CPW Areas and Districts, multiple DWMs and 2 AWMs have reviewed the proposal and the attached maps.

General comments on the proposal:

- CPW agrees with District Ranger Brian Banks' statement in his letter of support that the effort could be collectively utilized as a guide for recreation management within the study area, and that the plan would include "realignment of existing routes, current and future maintenance needs, and potential new trail segments." As new trail development occurs, it would benefit the plan overall to acknowledge and inventory maintenance needs for existing trails along with future maintenance needs of new trails. CPW recommends that COMBA, in consultation with land managers, clearly identify and plan for maintenance costs for new trails.
- CPW recommends that COMBA reach out to and consult with conservation and wildlife-focused organizations in addition to the trail organizations listed in the application.
- CPW recommends a focus on new trail development in areas of existing human impact, such as areas that are already heavily developed with trails. In addition, COMBA and the stakeholder process should consider the following recommended measures:

- Trail route selection to avoid sensitive habitat areas
- Consolidating routes and limiting trail density where such actions can protect large undisturbed areas of wildlife habitat
- As COMBA states in the proposal, mapping wildlife habitat areas with information provided by CPW, and considering a broad landscape level approach to trail development
- Incorporating physical buffers around sensitive wildlife features (e.g. active nests) and seasonal closures or avoidance for wildlife activities (e.g. lambing/calving)
- Restoration of social trails to improve wildlife habitat
- Consider whether suggested seasonal closures, or closures of non-designated trails, are feasible from an enforcement or personnel standpoint by the land management agency

Waterton Canyon, Indian Creek and South Platte CT:

CPW recommends that COMBA remove the Waterton Canyon and Indian Creek areas from the proposal. CPW wildlife field staff and COMBA have discussed these segments and CPW has expressed concerns to COMBA prior to reviewing this grant application. In addition, both Denver Water and USFS South Platte Ranger District do not support these segments (see attached letters).

The Waterton Canyon bighorn sheep herd consists of a small, isolated, and indigenous bighorn herd that resides in Waterton Canyon year round. This area includes summer, winter, severe-winter, and production (or lambing) range. If completed, the Waterton Colorado Trail (CT) Bypass will fragment the eastern portion of the bighorns' overall range contributing to the already high level of human pressure as well as the urban boundary to the east. Radio collar data and field staff observations indicate that bighorns utilize the relatively remote, eastern side of the canyon throughout the year. Any new trails in this area will reduce or eliminate bighorn habitat for the Waterton herd. Furthermore, if the Waterton CT Bypass were constructed, domestic dogs would present an additional threat to the bighorns. In general, Forest Service properties are multi-use and allow dogs off leash. Uncontrolled and untrained dogs are known to chase, attack, and sometimes kill wildlife. Denver Water does not allow dogs in Waterton Canyon, in part, to protect the bighorn sheep herd. The proposed trail would allow visitors with dogs to enter into bighorn sheep habitat creating another serious threat to the bighorn herd as well as to other species.

The South Platte CT transects the Waterton bighorn range on the west side of the canyon. Lambing is documented to occur in the areas near the eastern and southern section of the proposed South Platte CT.

In addition to the above impacts, the proposed trail would result in further fragmentation of land near a wildlife migration corridor preserved by Douglas County Open Space. In 1997, Douglas County worked with several public and private partners including CPW, to preserve a

corridor for the seasonal migration of wildlife through Douglas County. This corridor consists of large, contiguous portions of land including Pike National Forest, Roxborough State Park, and Woodhouse State Wildlife Area that allows wildlife to move around the county. Any additional trail development would contribute to further fragmentation of lands providing a buffer to this corridor.

Areas west of Buffalo Creek:

CPW is concerned about potential wildlife impacts including habitat loss and fragmentation to the following areas that contain large, relatively undisturbed landscapes. These areas are used heavily by deer and elk during calving/fawning periods and for winter range.

- North Fork CT
- Nice Kitty CT
- Raleigh Peak CT

Green Mountain trail listed on the map:

CPW is concerned about potential wildlife impacts in this area. This area is heavily used by elk year round. Green Mountain is an important migration corridor for elk and deer moving from the Lost Creek wilderness to the undeveloped lands east of CR 126. Furthermore, the meadows and bogs located in this area are a key habitat feature. Historical human use along these meadows and wetland areas resulted in significant resource damage. As a result, the USFS has recently taken steps to minimize human access and disturbance here to allow for it to be restored naturally and utilized by local ungulates and other wildlife species.

North Elk area - West Meadow Connector:

CPW is concerned about potential wildlife impacts in this area due to its use by deer and elk and the large, intact habitats that will be fragmented with trail development.

North Elk Creek Trail to Deer Creek and Guanella Connector (listed on map):

The Mt. Evans Wilderness area is a significant critical winter habitat for deer, elk and bighorn sheep, and is used year-round for bighorn sheep. The described trail bisects an important wintering sheep population and an area of recent habitat improvements in Deer Creek.