

### Public Process for the Statewide Trails Strategic Plan

The public process for this plan included a number of distinct steps to obtain input and comments from citizens from the initial conceptual discussions to the completion of the plan. Highlights of the process appear below.

#### State Recreation Trails Committee discussion and review

- December 2015 - Workshop to discuss process and visioning session.
  - Review GAP analysis for previous plan and current situation.
  - Visioning Session to draft strategic goals and objectives.
- January 2016 – Commission review of the vision, draft goals and objectives and overall direction of the Plan, including public comment to the Committee.
- April 2016 - Draft Vision, Mission and Plan Goals presented to the State Recreation Trails Committee for review and approval.
  - Draft Vision, Mission and Goals posted on the CPW web site and opened to public comment.
- July 2016 - SRTC reviewed and commented on final draft of Plan. Final public comment period on the Plan during the meeting.

The State Trails Committee performed a highly critical role in the development of the “*2016 Statewide Trails Strategic Plan*”. The initial step in the process started with a “visioning” discussion at a State Trails Committee workshop that drafted the program’s vision, goals and objectives.

#### State Trails Program staff reviews

- November 2015 – Trails Program staff review and discussion.
- Periodic reviews by Trails Program staff throughout process.

Input from staff is not only vital to any strategic process, it is also an element specified in the SMART Act for state agencies. Trails program staff provided input throughout this process, beginning with an internal program meeting in November, 2015 to help inform the strategic goals, objectives and later actions. Periodically after that, staff were able to review and comment on aspects of the plan.

#### Focus Groups

- February 9, 2016 – Durango focus group
- February 10, 2016 – Grand Junction focus group
- February 29, 2016 – Colorado Springs focus group
- March 2, 2016 – Denver focus group

Central to the development of “*2016 Statewide Trails Strategic Plan*” was input from trail users and interests groups from across Colorado. The summary from the focus groups follows. The four meetings,

distributed around Colorado 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. Below is the summary:

### *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.

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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.

### Telephone Town Hall

- March 29, 2016, 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.
- Call out to 50,000 Colorado residents.
- 3,550 participants during the hour long session, with a peak of 616 callers at one time.
- Recording available at:  
[https://www.dropbox.com/s/0m85g2pydsw03wv/CPW\\_Teleforum\\_Recording\\_03-29-16.WAV?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/0m85g2pydsw03wv/CPW_Teleforum_Recording_03-29-16.WAV?dl=0)

On March 29, 2016, CPW conducted a telephone town hall, at the offices of CRL Associates in Denver. Over 3,550 people participated during the hour long session.

The “Phone-In Town Hall” was designed to give interested stakeholders or anyone from the public an opportunity to ask questions about the Statewide Trails Strategic plan and the State Trails Program. The town hall format uses a moderated question and answer approach, where people call in, ask a question and staff from Colorado Parks and Wildlife answer those questions.

Questions and comments from the participants tracked with the comments heard during the focus group sessions: need for quality trail design, trail maintenance, stable funding needs, concerns over wildlife impacts, interagency (and intra-agency) coordination, population growth impacts, and consideration of community needs.

### Colorado Parks and Wildlife Staff reviews

- January 2016 – Draft goals and objectives routed to CPW staff for comment.
- CPW staff updated periodically during process with opportunity to comment.
- June 2016 – Draft of the Plan presented to CPW Leadership Team, CPW Staff and the State Recreational Trails Committee for their review, approval and recommendation to move to the Commission for final approval.

CPW strives to balance a mission that is at times inherently conflicted. There is a clear and significant need to provide outdoor recreation for all Coloradans and millions of visitors to Colorado. Outdoor recreation brings people into contact with various species of wildlife. Those contacts may have, generally inadvertently, some level of deleterious effects on those creatures, their habitats and environments. At the same time, such connections to nature may be highly regarded and sought after by people, and a driving force in their enjoyment of the outdoors. CPW's mission is to manage wildlife and habitats as well as to provide high quality outdoor recreation. An essential aspect of the "2016 Statewide Trails Strategic Plan" is to ensure that trail systems across Colorado include ample and appropriate understanding of the affect trail recreation can have on wildlife and their environments.

Previous trail plans recognized and discussed the importance of working with wildlife managers on trail construction, design and uses. The "2016 Statewide Trails Strategic Plan" takes this to a much higher level, in large part due to the comments and input from CPW wildlife experts. Agency staff were notified of the planning process directly through internal communications and comments were solicited through regional and program managers. Such discussions with staff culminated with an internal meeting in late June where specific concerns were discussed.

A considerable effort went into making certain that CPW staff concerns were heard, and effectively understood. Still, that effort is not a one-time, one-shot, approach. The intent, mentioned in many of the objectives and actions of the plan, is to keep those communications open and modify grant requirements and processes in the future so as that those continue to improve consistent with CPW's mission.

### Internet posting and comments

- Preliminary web page for Statewide Trails Strategic Plan developed.
- January 2016 - Notification about process posted to web site with instructions how to comment.
- Interested constituents notified about process and opportunity to comment through email.

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- April 2016 – Draft Mission, Vision and goals posted to web page.
- Periodic updates posted to web and through email.

From the very start of the planning process, the intent was to utilize CPW's web services as a convenient, cost-effective tool for outreach and information. CPW staff created a specific web page for the Trails Program planning process, which they updated periodically with new or more current information.

### **Public Open House meetings**

- July 21 – Denver REI
- July 25 – Ridgway State Park

As the plan neared completion, CPW hosted two open public meetings where any interested person could attend and learn more about the plan. These meetings included stations where participants could ask questions about the process, strategic goals and the overall plan. Staff incorporated comments from meet participants into the plan.

### **July 2016 - "2016 Statewide Trails Strategic Plan" approved by State Trails Committee**

- Following Committee approval, the final draft of the "2016 Statewide Trails Strategic Plan" posted to website – July 27, 2016.

Following the July open house public meetings, the State Recreation Trails Committee approved the final draft of the plan, which was then posted to the Statewide Trails Strategic Plan website.

### **August 2016 - Parks and Wildlife Commission, August 11, 2016; Public comment accepted**

- The Parks and Wildlife Commission is briefed on the "2016 Statewide Trails Strategic Plan".
- This briefing provided the Commission with information for approval of the plan in September.

### **September 2016 – Action Item at Parks and Wildlife Commission meeting to approve the "2016 Statewide Trails Strategic Plan".**