



PLAN JEFFCO UPDATE

DECEMBER 2020

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Multi-agency GOCO study aims to reduce trail conflict

Work in progress to identify most effective messages promoting cooperation

By Vicky Gits
PLAN Jeffco Board Member

Jefferson County Open Space has always encouraged user groups to get along with each other and share the trails, but now it's trying to figure out somewhat methodically what messages work the best to get the point across.

Along with partners Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP), and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), Jeffco is spearheading a \$150,000 Interagency Trail Courtesy Study, funded by Great Outdoors Colorado. JCOS is providing \$20,000, with CPW and OSMP each contributing \$15,000. The grant award was announced Oct 2018.

As stated in the grant application, the purpose of the two-year study is to evaluate the effectiveness of existing trail courtesy signs and to develop messaging that – based on visitor feedback and field observations – is the most effective.

The desired impact is improved social norms around trail courtesy, specifically improvements in trail runners and mountain bikers slowing down and communicating when they pass slower traffic on a single-track trail, said Matt Robbins, Jeffco Open Space community connections manager.

Study locations are North Table Mountain Park, Marshall Mesa, and Eldorado Canyon State Park.

Phase 1, involving mainly field observations, visitor surveys and focus groups, is complete. But the pandemic has delayed Phase 2 and study results won't be available until March 2021 and possibly later. Phase 2 includes creation, deployment, and evaluation of newly designed signs.

Lack of communication

Conceived in 2017, the timely study activity coincides with the pandemic, which is driving more people to seek healthy recreation close to home. As a result, park visitation is at its peak and conflict among visitors, namely hikers, mountain bikers, dog walkers and equestrians, is a growing issue.

The main source of conflict in the parks is off-leash dogs, not bicycles, said Mary Ann Bonnell, director of visitor services for Jeffco Open Space. The second is failure to slow down and communicate.

Reducing Trail Conflict



Mary Ann Bonnell, Visitor Services Manager

Failing to communicate includes trail runners passing hikers from behind, as well as mountain bikers coasting rapidly downhill.

The Multiagency Courtesy Study chose the three park study areas, due to their high visitation rates and known trail courtesy incidents, according to the 2018 grant application.

The nature of these known trail courtesy incidents is difficult to determine. Jeffco Open Space told PLAN Jeffco that it does not keep records of close calls or complaints about problem encounters. Open Space does track the number of medical-assist responses, both in aggregate and by park, but these are generally about lone individuals who suffer injuries rather than conflict-related cases.

Preliminary Observations - GOCO Interagency Trail Courtesy Study (Phase 1)

While the complete results and final conclusions have yet to be revealed, some of the key preliminary observations and recommendations are the following:

1. Out of 98 observed hiker-runner interactions, 94 percent were classified as non-compliers, that is, runner did not verbally announce and travel at a walking speed within 10 feet of the observer.
2. Out of the 180 observed hiker-biker interactions, about two-thirds were classified as non-compliers, meaning biker did not verbally announce and slow to walking speed within 10 feet of the observer.

Preliminary Recommendations (Final report due in 2021) 1. Overarching courtesy message: Our core

Continued

message is for all visitor groups to practice two key behaviors: Slow Down and Communicate when passing on trails.



Slow down and communicate.

- Slower traffic keep right.
- Hike, run, and ride single file.
- Pay attention. Keep one earbud out.
- Keep pets leashed. Shorten lead when approached.
- Downhill traffic yields to uphill traffic.



jeffco.us/open-space

Above is example of an existing courtesy sign being used in Jeffco parks, but is not part of the GOCO Interagency Trail Courtesy Study.

2. Overarching issue: Park visitors broadly understand the yielding hierarchy, but social norms on the specifics of how to yield the trail are poorly understood or do not exist.

Different messages are proposed for trailside versus trailhead or social media exposure:

For trailside or interior use:

- Use only the triangle without additional text.
- Show bike at the bottom of the triangle.
- Add symbols of runner and hiker with dog to make sign more inclusive.
- Don't use outdated bike symbol.

Reducing Trail Conflict

Continued

For use at trailhead or with social media:

- Always Slow Down and Communicate when passing on trails.
- Slower traffic keep right.
- Downhill traffic yields to uphill traffic.
- Hike, run and ride single file.
- Limit group size to less than 8 bikers and less than 14 hikers or runners.
- Pay attention; keep one earbud out.
- Keep pets leashed; shorten your lead when approached.

The dilemma of asking to pass:

Recommendation: Reassure visitors that while people may be startled when you announce yourself, the end result is ultimately positive. Offer suggestions of what to say when approaching park visitors.

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In the next phase of the regional courtesy study new signs will be deployed in the three selected parks and observers will track the results. At that point managers should be more able to answer the question how best to persuade people to slow down and communicate on the trails.

“I think the message, slow down and communicate, is a huge step forward from the yield triangle”, Bonnell said.

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Apex Park Trail Management Changes

Biker-Only v. Hiker-Only

It's common knowledge that for years there has been a growing element of friction on the bike-friendly slopes of Apex Park in Golden, where blind curves and steep gullies are prevalent. This year, conditions led to a new trail-management strategy, which went into effect Sept. 10 on a one-year trial basis.

The centerpiece of the new plan is separating bikers and hikers on different days on Magic Mountain and Enchanted Forest trails, about 2.5 miles combined, one-

way. Even calendar days are for bikes only, no hikers or equestrians. Odd calendar days, only hikers and equestrians can use the trails.



There are plenty of signs, but physical barriers are prominent. Jeffco has invested in about a half-dozen metal swinging gates with signs attached. The gates force users to stop, read and understand their access is limited or excluded.



Even that won't work 100 percent of the time. Recently, as Visitor Services Manager Mary Ann Bonnell was writing a ticket for wrong-day hikers just outside a gate, three hikers walked past, opened the gate and hiked in without reading a single word. “It could have said ‘human-eating velociraptor inside’ gate”,

Reducing Trail Conflict

and they would have entered,” Bonnell said. “Proof no approach is going to work 100 percent of the time.”



Volunteer Park Patrollers speaking with visitors – see next page for details.

PLAN Jeffco to Sponsor a Stewardship Academy

PLAN Jeffco is excited to announce that we are working to design and implement a stewardship educational program in coordination with Jefferson County Open Space (JCOS). The PLAN Jeffco Stewardship Academy will provide an opportunity to become more intimately familiar with the JCOS system and other land conservation projects, the challenges these systems face, and the participants' role in preserving and improving our open lands.

The Academy will operate like other “citizen academies,” with a group of citizens enrolling at the outset and participating in all sessions as a cohort. The Stewardship Academy will meet for seven sessions of 2 hours each, every other week, and may require a nominal fee. Each session will consist of a presentation by at least one subject-matter expert, a break for refreshment and casual conversation, and a guided discussion to dig more deeply into the topics at hand. At the end of the course, attendees will participate in a stewardship project on JCOS land and receive recognition for their participation in this program.

Topics will include the past, present, and future of PLAN Jeffco and JCOS; Front Range ecology;

threats to biodiversity and ecosystems; advocating for land stewardship as a concerned citizen; responsibilities of open-land visitors; and understanding the needs of different open-land visitors to ensure a better experience for all. PLAN Jeffco hopes to include a broad cross section of our community in each of these workshops to provide the most productive discourse. Open lands are for all, regardless of color, age, gender, ethnicity, or political affiliation. We want everyone with an interest in open lands to be able to participate in this Academy. Participants will hopefully come from a mix of visitor groups, so that each group (bikers, hikers, trail runners, equestrians, dog walkers, and non-visitors) gets to hear the other groups' perspectives. Eventually, the Academy may host 30-35 participants. However, to test the program and to accommodate current restrictions in gathering size, the first cohort of the Academy will be a pilot group of 10 participants. Given the current public health crisis, it is highly likely that the first session will take place primarily online in the Spring of 2021. Please stay tuned for more details!

Share the Trail COVID Campaign Off To A Good Start

Shaun Howard,
Ranger Lead
Jeffco Open Space



Last year, Jeffco Open Space Parks received approximately 7 million visitors. This year, with the pandemic, we have seen a drastic increase in people finding much-needed stress relief while enjoying our parks. For several years, Rangers and Volunteers have collaborated to host dozens of Share the Trails pop-up events. What's a pop-up you ask? A pop-up is a focused low-key event where volunteers and staff talk with visitors at the trailheads regarding various pertinent park issues. For example, if a park has an increase in dogs off leash, rangers and volunteers will staff a Love Em' Leash Em' table and talk to visitors about dog safety messages (i.e. leashing, picking up waste, providing for dog safety in hot weather, etc). Over the years, pop-ups topics have covered living with wildlife (rattlesnakes, bears, lions, coyotes, etc), share the trails, dog safety and education regarding park management changes. The goal is to educate visitors BEFORE they enter the park and BEFORE they make a mistake. Feedback from visitors has been extremely positive. They seem to really appreciate the one-on-one contact with representatives of Jeffco Open Space.



As I write this article in mid-November, rangers have already responded to more than 1000 calls for service. Some of these calls have been responding to visitor courtesy complaints on North Table Mountain. While rangers routinely patrol the park, a few of our volunteer equestrian Park Patrollers recognized our stretched staff resources and approached me to request they would like to help out by hosting several Share the Trails events at North Table Mountain. These pop-ups generated 550 conversations with our park visitors. Volunteer Frank Blaha, said “often all of us were fully engaged” in conversations with several visitors. He goes on to say, “many people seemed appreciative of us being out, and a few commented it is good to know Rangers and Volunteer Patrollers were working to keep Jeffco Open Space in good shape.” Special thanks go out to Volunteer Patrollers who were instrumental in moving this series of pop-ups along: Dan B., Frank B., Jack M., Jan K., Lydia M. and Sylvan R. Thanks also go out to the many volunteers who dropped by and who spent over 725 hours in 2020 routinely patrolling North Table Mountain Park. I am privileged to work with such an amazing group of volunteers. Jeffco Open Space truly appreciates all they do to support the Jeffco Open Space mission in caring for our parks!

Greenprint Goals

For the past few decades, the Open Space Department has prepared a five-year planning document to set goals for the next five years. The document was called a “Master Plan.” The documents actually were a combination of Master Plan items and goals. Unfortunately, the term Master Plan caused problems when setting acquisition goals in the Plan with maps. These maps were mistaken as identifying specific properties that others might be considering for development. Open Space Staff determined that the best way to avoid the problem was to call the document a “Greenprint.”

Goal 1 - Visitor Stewardship & Courtesy

To interact with 350,000 park visitors to share important stewardship and safety information, from at least ten areas of concern. The increased visitorship during the pandemic has accelerated the need for Stewardship and Courtesy training.

Goal 2 - Information Sharing

Engage 10,000 community members in conversations that will positively impact our environment. Implement a bilingual communications program. Increase use of JCOS website and social media platforms.

Goal 3 - Personal Involvement

Inspire community members to share their talents and energy by volunteering 270,000 hours. Engage volunteers to expand JCOS' organizational capacity.

Goal 4 - Land Acquisition

Coordinate land conservation efforts in Jefferson County to preserve an additional 3,000 acres of public open space and parkland. Prioritize acquisitions that are geographically distributed across Jefferson County. Strengthen relationships and communications with landowners.

Goal 5 – War on Weeds

Treat 48,000 acres of Jefferson County Open Space lands for harmful and invasive floral species. Will focus on parks with high infestations:

South Valley Park, 2020 - 995 acres,
South Table Mountain Park, 2021 - 1,484 acres,
Van Bibber Park, 2022 - 164 acres,
Flying J Ranch Park, 2023 - 418 acres,
Elk Meadow Park, 2024 - 1,658 acres,
Apex Park, 2025 - 702 acres.

Goal 6 - Forest Health

Update Jefferson County Open Space Forest Health Plan and reduce tree density and fuel sources on 1,000 of the 17,000 acres of forested lands. Identified lands include:

Reynolds Park - 10 acres,
Alderfer/Three Sisters Park - 403 acres,
Coal Creek Canyon Study Area - 50 acres,
Elk Meadow Park - 159 acres,
Lookout Mountain Preserve - 127 acres,
Meyer Ranch Park - 26 acres,
White Ranch Park - 132 acres.

Goal 7 - Habitat Restoration

Restore 325 acres of land disturbed by human activity and natural events.

Identified lands include:

South Table Mountain Park - 30 acres,
Elk Meadow Park - 106 acres,
Matthews/Winters Park - 40 acres,
Alderfer/Three Sisters Park - 60 acres,
White Ranch - 33 acres,
Beaver Ranch Park - 23 acres,
Mount Falcon Park - 36 acres,
Hildebrand Ranch Park - 33 acres.

Greenprint Goals, Continued

Goal 8 - Easy and Equitable Access

Applying guidance from the Jeffco Countywide Trails Plan, collaborate with the cities and districts to provide access to a trail or greenspace within a 10-minute walk or drive from home.

Goal 9 - Park System Trail Expansion

Build 50 miles of new trails and increase designated use trails from 27 to 48 miles. Implement nine of the 20 Community Trails proposed in 2018.

Trails include:

- South Table Mountain Park - 8 miles,
- Clear Creek Canyon Park - 6 miles,
- Elk Meadows Park - 3.25 miles,
- Beaver Ranch Park - 7 miles,
- Windy Saddle Park - 0.25 miles,
- Van Bibber Park - 2 miles,
- Lair o' the Bear Park - 2 miles,
- Matthews Winters Park - 7.2 miles,
- North Table Mountain Park - 1 mile,
- Deer Creek Canyon Park - 4 miles,
- White Ranch Park - 7.5 miles,
- Meyer Ranch Park - 2.5 miles,
- three new parks at the urban edge - 12.5 miles.

Goal 10 - Quality Visitor Experience

Implement visitor experience standards at all 27 Jefferson County Open Space parks and improve or develop 17 trailheads.

New or improved restrooms:

- White Ranch, East Trailhead,
- South Valley, South Trailhead,
- Clear Creek Canyon (4 locations),
- Mount Falcon Park, Morrison Trailhead,
- Beaver Ranch Park,
- Hildebrand Ranch,
- Coal Creek Canyon Park,
- Meyer Ranch Park.

New or improved parking lots:

- White Ranch Park, East Trailhead,
- South Valley Park, South Trailhead,
- Clear Creek Canyon (4 locations),
- Mount Falcon Morrison Trailhead,
- Elk Meadow Park,
- Beaver Ranch Park,
- Mount Galbraith Park,
- Hildebrand Ranch Park,
- Coal Creek Canyon Park,
- Meyer Ranch Park.

PLAN Jeffco is the county-wide volunteer citizen's group that organized and drafted the Open Space Resolution that resulted in the formation of the Jefferson County Open Space Program in 1972. We currently function as a monitoring group, observing meetings of the Open Space Advisory Committee, participating in subcommittees, and issues groups, proposing and working for important acquisitions, and keeping citizens informed of what is going on in their Open Space Program. PLAN Jeffco provided the leadership for the successful vote for bonds in 1998.

If you have not!!! Join PLAN Jeffco or renew your Membership today!

Our membership rates are:

- Member: \$35/year - Hardcopy newsletter, voting
- Friend: \$10/year - Hardcopy of newsletter
- Acquaintance: \$0/year, informed when newsletter has been posted on website.

Make checks payable to PLAN Jeffco and send to:
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 11010 W 29th Avenue
 Lakewood, CO 80215

The online payment will only accept full memberships.

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Goals Already Accomplished

The passage of the 1998 bond election allowed the Open Space Program to double the acres of parkland under management; however, the slow growth in sales tax revenue and County hiring moratoriums did not allow the increase in staffing required for adequate development and maintenance of the additional properties. One-half of the bonds were retired in November 2019; about \$8 million was available for catching up on deferred maintenance and staffing. Open Space staff have been able to accomplish a number of small and large projects to improve the Open Space facilities since these monies came available.

Since the last PLAN Jeffco newsletter these accomplishments include: New trailhead for South Valley Park off of Deer Creek.



Installation of new bridge for Peaks to Plains Trail.
Extending the North Table Mountain mud lab.



Remediation and building supports for the stairs at Crocodile Creek, Dinosaur Ridge.
Remediation of the switchbacks on middle Longhorn Trail, White Ranch Park.



Revising trail management in Apex Park.
Using the asset management software package, JCOS determined that the parks contain 57 acres of asphalt paving.
New boardwalk at Alderfer Three Sisters.



Goals Already Accomplished

Agreement for using the parking lot at Wilmot School, Evergreen, when the school is not in session.

Issuing an RFP for three more miles of the Peaks to Plains Trail; much of the funding will come from a \$10.5 million grant from the Denver Regional Council of Governments' Transportation Improvement Fund.

Completed forest mitigation project at Flying J Park.

New climbing access trail at Cathedral Spires.

Reopening camping beginning November 27.

Planning to add Lot Spot parking lot monitoring to 10 more parks, for a total of 17 parks being monitored by Lot Spot.

Adding a second parking lot at the Morrison Trailhead of Mt. Falcon Park, 56 more spaces.

OSAC Notes - OSACNotes

The July through November OSAC meetings all were virtual, but in some cases were preceded with in-person study sessions.

July 9 meeting started with a field trip to Clement Park plus visual observation of the 'Mt. Glennon-Adkins' property. Foothills P & R has been doing major improvements at Clement Park with about one-half of the funds coming from an Open Space grant. The facilities at the park are about 35 years old and probably were not top of the line when they were installed. Foothills has replaced most of the irrigation system, most of the lights, and replaced or modified the restrooms. The replacement facilities look excellent.

Continued on page 10



OSAC Notes - OSAC Notes

July 9 continued: The Mt. Glennon-Adkins property is mostly an in-holding in the Mt. Glennon Open Space (the hogback West of C-470 between Turkey Creek and Bear Creek). This home and acreage offer the opportunity for good access to the Open Space allowing the possibility to develop a small, close-in park.

The Countywide Trails Plan was presented. The Implementation Plan for the Greenprint was presented. Open Space had requested staff increases. The Commissioners had approved an FTE Ranger and an LTE Park Services Specialist. The additional requests for three FTEs will be included in the 2021 budget.

Improvements to the East White Ranch parking lot have been completed and allow for 28 more vehicles.

August 6 meeting was cancelled.

September 3 meeting started with a field trip to a property adjacent to Filius Park north of Bergen Park. The property had an area suitable for use as a dog park. However, Denver Mountain Parks was not interested in maintaining the balance of the property. OSAC moved not to proceed as the balance of the property was too remote from existing Open Space properties.

The Countywide Trails Plan was approved by the Commissioners.

The budget for 2021 was approved. Revenue was estimated to grow 3% from the 2020 budget value. The budget includes the first significant staffing increase in more than 20 years - 1 FT GIS, 3 FT Rangers, 1 FT Natural Resources, 1 FT Building and history, 4 LT trail specialists, and 2 LT Forest Technicians. For the first time since the bonds were

issued, there is a \$7,000,000 line item for acquisitions. A \$3,000,000 line item is included for trails partnerships with cities and districts. The budget also includes setting aside \$1,800,000 in a reserve for major stewardship and repair needs.

October 1 started with a field trip to the Peaks to Plains Trail developments in the mouth of Clear Creek Canyon. The Committee crossed over Clear Creek on the new bridge and reviewed progress on the two restrooms. The Committee approved an easement for Westminster to move sewer and water lines in Big Dry Creek as it crossed Westminster City Park. The Commissioners had approved the Trails partnership program and requests would be accepted by the end of October. The Commissioners also had approved the Heritage Square Land Exchange. Closing on the exchange will occur once Martin Marietta can add the 47 new acres in their mining permits, probably in 6 to 12 months.

November 5 started with a field trip to the soccer fields on the old dump between Colfax and I-70 on the east side of the hogback. At present the property ownership is split between the General Fund and Open Space. At the regular meeting, the Committee approved a resolution that would exchange properties so that the soccer fields, the hazardous waste facility, and space for slash processing all would be on General Fund property. Open Space then could develop the balance of the property and the hogback into a small close-in Open Space Park.

PLAN Jeffco Update - 2020

* PLAN Jeffco (PJ) has four new Board Members. They bring fresh views, talents, and enthusiasm for PJ projects.

* PJ continues to observe the Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) meetings (via Webex since April) and regularly meets, personally, with the Jefferson County Open Space (JCOS) Director, Tom Hoby and other staff members.

* PLAN Jeffco produced three newsletters in 2020 which included summaries of OSAC meetings as well as original articles, relating to Open Space, of interest to community members.

* Action taken by the PJ Board:

- 1) Review and comments on the proposed South Table Park Trails Plan.(4/24/20)
- 2) Review and comments on the JCOS Conservation Greenprint 2020. (6/26/20)
- 3) Review and comments on the proposed Heritage Square Land Exchange. (8/16/20)
- 4) PJ files (1972 - present) were officially gifted to the Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Department. They are identified for perusal and research as "PLAN Jeffco Records, WH2437." (July 10, 2019)

* Our website -

www.planjeffco.org is available on your mobile device and online. It not only includes more information about PJ, but our latest blogs, JCOS park information, an extensive library with old newsletters, OSAC meeting notes and links to JCOS documents.

* The PJ Board currently has three active sub-committees.

- 1) A Stewardship Academy Committee which is developing a "citizen academy" in conjunction with JCOS to provide an opportunity for participants to become more familiar with the Open Space system and the participants' role in the preservation and advancement of open spaces.
- 2) A Membership Committee to develop a strong membership program for PJ.
- 3) A Courtesy Committee to develop methods to promote courteous and responsible park visitor behavior. Follow Miss Mountain Manners at @MannersMountain.

* The major expenses for PLAN Jeffco are: the website, the newsletter printing and mailing and insurance.

Your membership, contributions and participation will determine our success in ensuring that the Jeffco Open Space Program remains consistent with our vision. "A Jefferson County that preserves and connects open spaces that benefit wildlife, ecosystems, recreation, economic vitality and quality of life."



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Jefferson County Citizens for
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PLAN JEFFCO NEWSLETTER



New Peak-2-Peak Trail bridge at Tunnel #1 in Clear Creek Canyon