



BOULDER COUNTY

HORSE ASSOCIATION

The Voice for Horses and Horse People in Boulder County

Boulder County Parks & Open Space

Attn: Patrick Malone
P.O. Box 471
Boulder, CO 80306

Re: **Heil-Hall Trail Planning**
Nov. 4, 2005

Boulder County Horse Association (BCHA) hereby provides our response to the latest round of trail planning for **Heil Valley Ranch to Lyons and Lyons to Hall Ranch**, and for a **new loop trail and connection at Heil Valley Ranch**.

1) Heil Valley Ranch to Lyons and Hall Ranch. We support staff's recommendation to exit Heil Valley Ranch at the north end of the property via either alternative illustrated, accessing Red Gulch Rd. From this point westward, again, we support staff's recommendation to use Old South St. Vrain Rd as a de facto trail, with a new bridge across St Vrain Creek and proceeding through the existing box culvert to the Hall Ranch Trailhead. In the future we would like to see this trail alignment pulled off the Old South Road onto BCPOS properties in the area as much as possible (such as Hall Ranch Meadows), but we believe using the old small road is acceptable in the short term.

Once again, we strongly oppose the notion of widening the shoulders of Highway 7 west of Lyons and calling the resulting feature a trail. It may be a transportation alternative, but it should not be a component of trail connections between Heil Valley Ranch, the Town of Lyons, and Hall Ranch. We will continue to oppose this highway alignment as entirely unsuitable for further consideration.

We reiterate our request for adequate horse trailer parking and equestrian access on any of the trail alignments selected on the northeast part of this planning area in Lyons, so that we may participate in the St. Vrain Greenway and its connections in the future.

2) Heil Valley Ranch New Loop Trail. We are disappointed with staff's recent recommendations for this area, as we can no longer refrain from calling it the "Incredible Shrinking Trail Plan."

BCHA has been involved in planning trails on this property since the days of the North Foothills Open Space Advisory Committee (1996). We supported the trail plan resulting from that process, which included a reasonably large shared-use trail that was subsequently replaced with the tiny Ponderosa Loop. The NFOSAC plan also included a pedestrian-equestrian trail to the north, which has not yet been built. You will recall that these alignments were agreed to by staff and the representatives of NFOSAC; we feel they were "promised" to us and should have been built long ago, just as the trails were at Hall Ranch. The NFOSAC plan also included a long connector trail northward to Lyons. Please refer to the attached map for these alignments.

Earlier this year staff came to the public with a rather ambiguous proposal for a new trail to extend from the Ponderosa Loop north toward Lyons, and offered the public several alignments (see map). We believed, instead, that we were being offered an opportunity to choose from these alternatives a route which would create the long-sought additional loop as well as the connector. BCHA made several recommendations in this regard in a letter dated August 8, 2005 (see map).

Staff has now returned with a recommendation to create another very small additional loop trail, as well as the northward connector (see map). We commend BCPOS for this effort, but we feel that there are better alignments – which maximize the use of old ranch roads, thereby minimizing new environmental impacts -- while offering recreationists a more meaningful experience. Our plan creates a stacked loop system at Heil starting lower than the current Wapiti/Ponderosa intersection, giving recreationists more trail choices earlier in their day. Currently all visitors must use the same section of the Wapiti Trail, both outbound and inbound, causing congestion and increasing wear and tear on that section of trail. Our proposal will allow people to spread out a bit more, with about the same total new trail mileage as that proposed by staff.

BCHA recommends that a new trail be designated along the rather small existing road which heads north from the old stone house for about .25 mile. This alignment would then join the main ranch road, which should be designated as a trail where it heads northeast, for approximately .25 mile. At this point the new loop trail should diverge and make its way northwest to the Ponderosa Loop using the same alignment suggested by staff (approx. 1 mile), while the connector trail heads north, as shown on the attached map.

Finally, we hope that someday soon BCPOS will follow through with its NFOSAC plan for a pedestrian-equestrian trail in the northern part of the property, which would also utilize an old road from the top of the ridge down to just north of the silo. It is our understanding that the state raptor biologist reports no problem with this alignment because the dense forest cover provides more than adequate sight buffers from the canyon beyond. The pedestrian-equestrian Nighthawk Trail at Hall Ranch is wonderful from our perspective, and we support additional trails like it wherever possible.

Finally, we would also point out, based on our knowledge of the terrain, that none of the trails need to be as heavily or artificially switchbacked as the recent staff proposals have laid out. Instead, staff's landscape designers should utilize existing topographic and historic features to ensure more natural, sustainable, and aesthetically-appealing trail alignments.

Thank you for your consideration of our equestrian needs and hopes for this area. We look forward to working together with BCPOS to make a meaningful trail system here a reality for all to enjoy.

Suzanne Webel

BCHA External Vice President, Trails and Public Lands Chair

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Heil Valley Ranch to Lyons: Recommended Routes

Boulder County Horse Association

