



BOULDER COUNTY

HORSE ASSOCIATION

The Voice for Horses and Horse People in Boulder County

Nov. 10, 2005

City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks

Attn: Joe Mantione

Jim Reeder

Open Space Board of Trustees

66 S. Cherryvale Rd.

P.O. Box 791

Boulder, CO 80306

**RE: Marshall Mesa -
Southern Grasslands TSA**

The **Boulder County Horse Association (BCHA)** takes this opportunity to respond to the November 4, 2005 Draft Marshall Mesa-Southern Grasslands Trail Study Area Plan.

First, we commend staff for the recent and vast improvement in approach to the alternatives, tone of the analysis, table of contents with succinct outline and recommendations, and clear map linking by number the various items discussed with their geographic locations. In the text, we like the section on "Common Ground" as well as "Key Differences," so that all readers may understand what the issues are. And we find the "Table of Costs and Scheduling" very informative and clear.

We must point out that it is premature on everyone's part to pin themselves down to trail recommendations and support (or not) of staff's proposals when the Off-Trail Permit plan has not yet been ratified. These decisions are inter-related, and we would have preferred to see where the Off-Trail Permit plan was heading before having to commit ourselves to this Marshall Mesa/Southern Grasslands TSA Report.

Nevertheless, we support many of the staff recommendations and appreciate your favorable inclusion of some of our proposals. Specifically, we support Map Location items 1-5, 8-10, 12-13, 15-16, 18-21, 24, 26, and 28. We believe these measures will sufficiently constrain visitor use, expand recreational opportunities somewhat, and minimize their impacts.

The new trailhead at City Limits (#5) and its connector along Davidson Ditch (#10, a much better alignment than railroad grade) are particularly commendable, as is the proposed Marshall Lake Trail (#19).

However, we believe that the following Map Location items need further consideration:

Map Location 6a, 6b, and 7. We want to make sure these new or expanded trailheads are built, are designed aesthetically, will include sanitary facilities, and will accommodate horse trailers. We appreciate the need to work with Boulder County on a trailhead near Marshall Rd and S. 66th St. (#6a), but we see no reason to defer consideration of a new trailhead at Hwy 128 and Coalton Rd.(#6b). Furthermore, the redesign of the Greenbelt Plateau Trailhead (#9) is unrelated to the Flatirons Vista Trailhead since most people using the latter will go west of Hwy 93 and most people using the former will go east of Hwy 93. And distances around this TSA are so great that multiple trailheads will be necessary. Therefore, the redesign and expansion of at least the Greenbelt Plateau Trailhead should take place immediately.

Map Location 11. It had been our understanding that staff did not consider their future design of an underpass in Community Ditch to be safe for equestrians. Therefore, we are surprised to learn in #22 and #23 that equestrians will be “encouraged” to use the Community Ditch underpass. Well, which is it? How can we possibly respond coherently to conflicting information like this???

Map Location 14. We strongly object to the removal of this gate, as it has been an important link from the Marshall Mesa area to the plateau north of Marshall Rd. It would also facilitate future planning to connect a possible trail under the Turnpike, which has been one of the longstanding Open Space and Mountain Parks “vision of a greenbelt with trails encircling Boulder.” We understand that the HCA area north of Marshall Rd will have to be part of a future TSA; however we hold optimistically to the hope that some people will be able to access this area by obtaining off-trail permits. Therefore, we urge OSMP to leave the gate where it is.

Map Location 17. We do not support using the existing box culvert as a trail structure because it is too close to Hwy 128 and, therefore, dangerous and of a low quality visitor experience. We support a single bridge across Coal Creek slightly farther east, away from the traffic. We are encouraged by the recent progress OSMP has made in designing the #26 trail farther from the highway, and urge staff to continue this thinking by doing this creek crossing properly as well. When safety is paramount, this is not the place to cut corners.

Also we would like to preserve the idea of one additional crossing of Coal Creek farther east near the Rothman property. Therefore, we suggest that #17 be rewritten as follows: “Allow only one new trail crossing of Coal Creek near S.H. 128 to accommodate the new Coalton to Greenbelt Plateau Trail” and add #29 and #30 (see below).

Map Location 22, 23. As we observed in our earlier letter on the MM-SG TSA, this underpass connection was approved by the OSBT after many years of discussion. Why is it now being dismissed, with no new information and with no further discussion???. What good is the public process, and how credible are decisions by the

OSBT, if they can be overturned or ignored, like this? Also please see our comments under #11, above. Is the Community Ditch underpass going to be safe and available for equestrians, or not? And why is it acceptable for the barn swallows to put a trail underpass through one culvert (#11, at Community Ditch) but not at this culvert (#23)?

Map Location 29 and 30 (to be added). Consideration should be made of a creek crossing either east or west of the Rothman property, where the fenced riparian restoration area is narrow and where there have been historic creek crossings in the past. This would enable a desirable short (.75mi.) trail connection from the 90-degree bend in Coalton Drive to the 90-degree bend in Coal Creek Drive, and would create a truly adequate stacked-loop trail system on this part of OSMP. This opportunity is discussed at the bottom of p.9 and 26. We do not agree that this alignment would have the impacts described, especially in the context of the vast scale of this HCA.

If ALL the new trails discussed herein are built (approximately 5 miles, not including the shoulder of S.66th St) and if the trail effect for each trail is considered to be an environmental sacrifice area 100 feet wide, the total area of this TSA (3,865 acres) affected by trails will be only approximately 1.6%. Phrased another way, 98.4% of the entire area will be undisturbed for wildlife and plant habitat. Since we all know that trails are not 100% environmental sacrifice zones, and the trail effect even a few meters from the trail is minimal, the true environmental impact of this trail system will be vanishingly small -- while the opportunity for human enjoyment is very great.

We would like to draw your attention to the observation that horses (equestrians) should be allowed where cattle grazing occurs, which is the case in large parts of this TSA. This concept is spelled out on p.8 of the draft document under Plan Goals, Visitor Experience/Recreational Opportunity Goals.

With regard to Adaptive Management, we recommend that the language be changed to envision success (p.9), so that not all changes must be toward more restrictions, as follows: "Success is then monitored and assessed, and tighter or lesser controls would be put in place as warranted."

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with OSMP to make the Marshall Mesa-Southern Grasslands TSA the best it can possibly be, for nature and people alike.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Webel

External Vice President, Trails & Public Lands Chair

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