



Planning Partners Team

Spring Meeting Summary

Clear Creek County
Recreation in the Outdoors Management Plan
BOCC Update

May 16, 2023



KEYSTONE
POLICY CENTER

Planning Partners Team - Progress to Date

Draft vision statement

Outdoor recreation in Clear Creek County will enrich local communities and welcome a diverse range of visitors in a way that protects and improves the integrity of the area's natural and cultural resources for the long term.

Planning Partners Team - Progress to Date

Draft Goals

Clear Creek County will maintain and continue to build on

- A vibrant local economy with locally accessible outdoor recreation opportunities
- An authentic mountain culture and high quality of life for residents
- Being desirable and easily accessible from the Denver Metro area
- A wide variety of high-quality recreational amenities and experiences
- The integrity of natural resources and ecological communities
- The interpretation and preservation of natural and cultural resources
- A clearly communicated expectation that visitors will plan ahead to recreate safely and responsibly.
- Resilient recreational facilities that reduce user conflicts

2023 ROMP Milestones

January-April

- Community Survey Complete
- PPT spring workshops
- CAT meeting for input on strategies

May-July:

- Draft the ROMP based on workshop inputs and prior feedback (vision/goals/etc.)

August-October: Share Draft ROMP

- Final PPT meeting
- BOCC
- Community/CAT

November-December: Final ROMP

Planning Partners Team - Progress to Date

The Identified Priorities

1. Identify conservation and/or sustainability priorities.
 2. Assess the connectivity, resilience, and condition of the trails network
 3. Components of an OHV mini master plan,
 4. Making 14ers/High Use areas more resilient
 5. Envision alternative transportation to and from recreational amenities
 6. Water/Creek recreation planning
 7. Wayfinding, parking, signage and educational/stewardship messaging
 8. Evaluate winter visitation non-alpine activities
 9. Permanent group or committee to manage rec plan
 10. Coordinate on front country parks and facilities
- Others were Greenway alignment and more pie in the sky ideas.

Spring Workshop Plan

We grouped and tweaked the ten priorities across the 4 spring workshops as follows:

- February 23 PPT Workshop: Conservation priorities and trail network concerns
- March 13 Interagency Team Meeting: Rec coordination and management, permanent committee or citizen's group
- March 16 PPT Workshop: OHV use, High use trailheads, River Access
- April 26 PPT Workshop: Transportation networks, destination management, economic drivers

PPT Workshop Questions

Questions to Identify Strategies

- What would you like the agencies and the permanent recreation advisory committee to consider as they reference and implement the ROMP?
 - **Issues-** Which issues need to be addressed or prevented?
 - **Partners-** Which partners should be engaged as part of project development?
 - **Process-** By what process or criteria should projects be selected, defined, and implemented?
 - **Strategies-** Which strategies would enable the prevention or resolution of identified issues?
 - **Funding-** Which resources are available for these kinds of projects?

February PPT- Conservation & Trail network and trailheads

Overall issues

- Crowding - parking and trailhead areas
- Environmental degradation - human and pet waste, trash, erosion
- Wildlife and habitat negative effects
- Visitor experience - mismatch between preparedness and selection of experience/location
- Lack of connectivity - limited access points to large networks, potential for larger loops

February PPT– Conservation & Trails network and uses

For existing trails and amenities, consider

- Both system-wide and site-specific responses including
 - Hardening of surfaces, as appropriate
 - Closure and/or improvement of social trails based on context
 - Enhancing trail connectivity
- The impacts of trail recreation on habitat and wildlife
- Identifying and communicating tiers of usability (e.g. green, blue, black) and purpose (e.g. viewpoints)
- CAT supports focusing resources on improving existing amenities.

February PPT– Conservation & Trails network and uses

For potential new trails and amenities, first evaluate

- Purpose, need, and benefits (what and for whom) for new trails should be clear
- Implications of increased connectivity
 - Habitat, wildlife, cultural resources and human communities
- Location and Design
 - Fragmentation and overall trail density
 - Consider how trails and access infrastructure allow for and influence carrying capacity (e.g. does the size of the parking lot reflect the capacity of the trail?)
 - The behavioral influences of providing or not providing infrastructure such as trash removal
- Tradeoffs and unintended consequences
 - If visitation is restricted in one area, where will visitation go elsewhere?

March PPT– OHVs, High Use Areas and the Creek

OHV Issues

- Inconsistencies in ordinances/policies/communication/enforcement between jurisdictions
- Negative effects to the environment
 - Trash
 - Erosion
 - Damage to infrastructure
- Negative effects to residents
 - Fire danger
 - Trespassing
 - Interpersonal aggression
- Potential for increased use if currently informal areas are formalized
- Limited resources to respond with enforcement to conflicts
- County has limited ability to dictate what happens, since they own the routes by which users access USFS lands

March PPT– OHVs, High Use Areas and the Creek

OHV Strategies

- Align communications and enforcement on trailhead access.
 - Establish and implement consistent policies and communication about regulations
 - Ensure consistent enforcement of regulations
 - Produce and maintain consistent signage
- Ensure correct online information (COTREX, ONX, others)
- Better match desired experience to the places where they are appropriate
 - Evaluate which county land is appropriate for these kinds of activities
- Establish additional monitoring and more frequent reporting of impacts
- Evaluate potential trailhead connections, and identify places to park besides in and around Empire, for example
 - St. Mary's
 - Red Elephant
 - Other locations, some outside the county
- Develop an OHV master plan

March PPT– OHVs, High Use Areas and the Creek

High Use Areas - Issues

- Keeping up with needed maintenance, esp. first 3 miles
- Visitor capacity
- Resource protection
- Human waste
- Safety
 - Access for emergency services
- Access for visitors
- Bighorn sheep and other wildlife
- Human based E. coli (human waste) issues

March PPT– OHVs, High Use Areas and the Creek

High Use Areas- Strategies

- Ensure the County is involved in the ongoing/existing efforts regarding the 14ers.
- Priority is to invest in and fix what we have now in terms of high use/popular trails.
- Focus on safety, signage, parking, bathrooms, trail maintenance, education on wildlife conflict, etc.
- Concentrate use if possible and work on some of the less lengthy trails for family friendly accessibility.
 - Communities can emphasize these trails knowing that they are able to handle high use, the bathrooms are stocked, etc. This helps create the culture and community for the users around knowing which high use trails to recommend.
- Education and community connection, including for CDT users, can be emphasized for these areas.
- Be really engaged on digital platforms, direct everyone to COTREX and make sure it is accurate.
- Consider weekend vs. non weekend challenges.
- Apply an adaptive management approach for identifying and addressing other emergent high use trails/trailheads.

March PPT– OHVs, High Use Areas and the Creek

Creek Access Issues

- Varied water resources: drought
- Coordination:
 - There is a lack of permitting coordination among jurisdictions
 - Limited permitting per jurisdiction (e.g., significant bottleneck at Empire)
- Access:
 - Parking access constrains use more than demand for river recreation
 - Access via parking and availability of permits are biggest barriers to entry
 - Limited access points create traffic and congestion in areas adjacent to access
 - Anticipate short- and long-term disruptions to key access points (e.g., anticipated construction at Floyd Hill)
- There are impacts to locals due to crowding at and nearby staging areas
- Private boaters are experts; commercial operations generally do not negatively impact private boaters
- Impacts to environment:
 - Need for remediation of rebar in stream
 - There is a lack of a wilderness experience in the Creek

March PPT– River access and recreation

Creek Access Strategies

- There is a need to evaluate the state of rafting and recreation on Clear Creek.
- Consider strategic development of access points to mitigate impacts to locals:
 - Develop a process to propose, evaluate, and implement the development of access and staging
 - Evaluation principles could include river condition, proximity to other access points, quality of staging, management jurisdiction of proposed staging areas, impacts to traffic and local communities
 - Leverage underutilized infrastructure and partnerships with landowners in potential access zones
 - Specifically, disperse demand away from Town Park with additional put-in and take-out areas around Chicago Creek
 - Improve traffic flow at access points via shuttles and other transportation infrastructure
- Approach the Creek holistically
 - Coordinate permitting alignment and strategies among land managers and commercial businesses
 - Coordinate administrative approaches across jurisdictions regarding enforcement, fees, and reporting use for commercial operations
- Develop educational guides, including best recreation practices in collaboration with outfitters and maps and educational materials for tourists
- Consider annual clean-up activity to improve waste quality in and around the river
 - Collaborate with commercial operators and water and land managers

April PPT– Transportation Networks, Destination Management and Economic Drivers

Destination Management Strategies

- Need for baseline studies to evaluate peak days, hours, numbers, and uses
- Consider shuttle opportunities and off-site parking (e.g. Loveland for G-T and Hermann Gulch)
 - For winter trailheads, consider requiring guides and classes to park offsite and shuttle to lots.
- Blue Sky Collaborative and the major road and Echo Lake reconstruction
- Add real-time capacity to know-before-you-go communications
- Add variable message signs at key points, such as at off-ramp to St. Mary's

April PPT– Transportation Networks, Destination Management and Economic Drivers

Destination Management Issues and opportunities

- Crowding, parking
 - Issues:
 - Mostly on parking, trailheads, and outdoor areas at the beginner level
 - Opportunities:
 - Use/develop an app like COTrex that shows use/capacity in real time
 - Use webcams to show how full it is
- Environmental degradation:
 - Issues:
 - Human and pet waste
 - Trash
 - Erosion
 - Trail maintenance/upkeep (hiking, biking, OHV)
 - Opportunities:
 - Stay the trail messaging and education to inform proper use of outdoor venues
 - Care for Colorado and Leave No Trace Principles
 - General marketing and education
- Visitation:
 - Issues:
 - Lack of overnight accommodations (hotels, STR, camping, RV)
 - Lack of wayfinding information/resources
 - Lack of camping opportunities – dispersed and developed
 - Permitting for larger groups
 - Opportunities:
 - Messaging and education to prepare for spontaneous camping trips and organized group camping

April PPT– Transportation Networks, Destination Management and Economic Drivers

Destination Management Strategies

- Targeted marketing to reach desired demographics
- Identify the ideal visitor:
 - Target individuals who will stay, spend money, and recreate responsibly.
 - Someone who wants to see Colorado's outdoors:
 - Marketing should guide these individuals towards lodging, food and dining, and other activities.
- Marketing and Education
 - Audience: Front Range and out-of-state visitors of all ages
 - Marketing:
 - Close to Denver
 - Live WILD (responsible visitation messaging)
 - Adaptability and inclusivity of messaging for all things tourism related
 - Education: Responsible recreation and where to go/other opportunities available

April PPT– Economic development and drivers

Issues

Visitation

- It is a challenge to balance mitigating impacts on natural resources and local community
- There is a lack of resources to mitigate impacts of current visitation trends
- Recreation-focused employment opportunities, such as hospitality-focused jobs, are often low salary and/or seasonal opportunities

Recreation culture

- Outdoor recreation in the context of tourism may be rejected by some members of the local Clear Creek County community.
- Recreation-focused economic development may not always be received positively by local communities due to perspectives that visitors do not engage in reciprocal relationships with local communities.

April PPT– Economic development and drivers

Strategies

Recreation culture

- Encourage responsible visitation: responsible visitation should include spending money in the local economy or contributing to the local community in some way.
 - Encourage longer visits by making Clear Creek a destination.
 - Learn from Leadville and other areas that have balanced outdoor recreation tourism and local community culture.
 - Review stay options
 - There is a lack of hotels and other overnight opportunities (e.g., camping)
 - A new RV park is being developed.
- Develop messaging that highlights the unique and distinct picture of the County's recreation experiences.

Transportation and economic hubs

- Transport hubs would connect regional transport to local transportation services.
 - Local transport ideally connects municipalities and the front country to the back country.
 - Transportation for summer recreation activities is currently a challenge, although winter activities have good models (e.g., CDOT SnowStang)
- Explore public-private partnerships near transportation hubs to direct visitors to local businesses.
 - Public-private partnerships could also leverage permitting, ticketing, or coupons to access recreation the County.
- Offer paid parking, bike rentals, etc.

March Interagency Team - Recreation management capacity

Process for interagency recreation management

- Form an interagency team for the purpose of ongoing management of the outcomes of the ROMP, with clarified roles and objectives and some ongoing collaboration outside the planning of specific projects.

Permanent stakeholder/citizen group or committee for recreation management

- Volunteer group with loose affiliation and broad membership organized by interest
- Responsive with directional feedback to occasional issues as they arise
- Periodic convenings to address recreation ideas broadly
- Leverage the memberships of existing entities that currently fill this function in part (e.g. SOLVE, Open Space Commission, Friends of Clear Creek)
- Permanent group disseminates requests for broader public feedback (e.g. through the Clear Creek Forum)

Next Steps

- Drafting of the ROMP over the summer in response to
 - SE Group research report
 - Community survey
 - PPT notes and recommendations
 - BOCC input
 - CAT feedback
- Next meeting of the PPT will be this fall