

**San Miguel County Open Space Commission (OSC) Meeting Minutes
(Meeting held via ZOOM)**

Date: Monday, February 28, 2022

Time: 4:00 PM MST

Attendance:

OSC Members Present: Chairperson Susan St. Onge, Roger Wickham, Jason Merritt, Yvette Henson, Olivia Coe, Laura Kudo

OSC Members Absent: Sefra Maples, Angela Dye

SMC Staff Liaisons Present: Janet Kask, Deanna Drew

Guests: Rich Hamilton, SMC Parks Supervisor; Mark Caddy and Evan Phillips of Colorado Parks & Wildlife

Call to Order: 4:09 p.m. by Chairperson St. Onge. A quorum was established.

Approval of 1/24/2022 Meeting Minutes: The OSC unanimously voted to approve the 1/24/2022 meeting minutes with a motion from Jason Merritt and a second from Yvette Henson.

Agenda Items:

O.A. Greager (OAG) OSP Parcel- Discussion of Potential Future Uses with Mark Caddy, Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) Norwood District Wildlife Manager and Evan Phillips, CPW Wildlife Biologist:

Evan Phillips and Mark Caddy are present from CPW to have a conversation with OSC regarding potential future uses of the OA Greager Open Space parcel and the possible development of a County Use Management Plan for the site. The county property is landlocked with CPW or USFS property to all sides, and vehicle access is approximately ¼ mile down a gated dirt road through a CPW State Wildlife Area (SWA). Due to wildlife concerns, county uses and access could be limited. CPW's interest is in preserving the site for wildlife habitat, especially for the threatened Gunnison Sage Grouse (GuSG) and big game hunting. For this reason, there is no public access to the SWA during the grouses' spring breeding season from mid-March to mid-May every year, and only foot and horseback access is permitted the rest of the year. It was CPW's understanding that SMC's intent when purchasing the property was to manage the parcel similar to the adjacent State Wildlife Area with limited uses and access that would not impact wildlife and their habitat. However, CPW does not restrict access to OAG (except during breeding season when the CWA is closed), and people may walk back and visit the property as a day use area.

The SMC OSC purchased the OA Greager property to be deemed as Open Space in 2015 to protect the Gunnison Sage Grouse since bordering properties were partners in protection, and since it was such rich GuSG territory. OSC is also interested in protecting wildlife habitat, but would like to allow for environmental education programs at the site. Aside from the spring breeding season closure, OSC would like to ensure that this parcel is accessible and open to the public and schools for educational purposes, and would like to work with CPW to develop use guidelines that suit both entities. At the time of purchase discussions were had about hopes of possibly using the property for low impact uses and environmental education. It is the OSC understanding that the county had always wanted the parcel to be used for environmental education purposes after its purchase.

Big and small game hunting is permitted within the adjacent SWA and currently there is nothing to stop hunters with a license from traveling through the SWA and hunting the OA Greager parcel on foot or

horseback. This could create conflict with educational groups using the site during hunting seasons, an issue that must be clearly addressed in the management plan. Signage at the SWA access gate and/or at the OAG boundary could help to alleviate this conflict. There is not a licensed hunting season during June, July, or August until archery season starts on September 2, every year.

After discussion, both entities agreed to find a middle ground where wildlife concerns are respected but where the county may still allow small groups in for non-profit, non-commercial environmental education field trips. Signage, access, maximum use numbers, hunting, boundary delineations, camping and a permitting system will all be considered as part of a potential Use Management Plan.

A small committee comprised of Rich Hamilton, Mark Phillips, Mark Caddy, Laura Kudo, Yvette Henson, Janet Kask and Jason Merritt will draft a use management plan for the OA Greager parcel, which OSC will review at a future date.

ACTION ITEM: The OA Greager committee will schedule a site walk after the seasonal closure, to familiarize themselves with the site and begin developing a draft management plan for its use.

Bridal Veil Trail Signage OSC Discussion and Recommendations from Telluride Mountain Club:

County staff met with The Mountain Club (TMtC) last fall to review proposed BVT signage needs. It was agreed that BVTs are the heaviest used in the county so adequate signage is a priority. Currently the county policy for signage is to keep minimal, with green/white metal signs that are lightweight, UV resistant and affordable. But in Bridal Veil, TMtC proposed wayfinding signs of rusty metal or weathered wood, while staff recommended rusty metal sandwiched with colored PVC. Metal signs could be more expensive than existing materials but would match the mining history better than bright green, would last longer and require less maintenance. The OSC discussed and liked everything about the Rusty Metal Wayfinding signs.

The existing green trail signage with SMC logo was a branding concept intended to match across all county trail signs. The proposed rusty metal trail signs are nice but expensive, so staff does not want to replicate the expensive signs on all county trails. Instead, a rusty metal frame around the green signs could be a good compromise and be less expensive, while achieving a similar result. The Rusty Metal frames for the Bridal Veil signs at trailheads came from an Open Space site walk to the area while looking at the large signs.

Meet with TMC next meeting on 3/28 to review their recommendations. Start by updating BVT maps to identify difficulty of trail, wayfinding, etc. at all 3 access locations, and may not have to use a lot of signs.

Trailhead signage could include a kiosk with information about who to call in case of emergency, trail grades and layout, trail hazards, the mining history and costly reclamation of the area, and a good way to consolidate trail information. Explanation of trail could be put into the kiosk so people first get an idea of what they're in for in case they don't have a map when they arrive. The existing kiosk at the trailhead is already full of information, but the bottom of BV falls is a good place for an interpretive sign that is out of avalanche pass and up all year long. In addition, large maps with trail information and QR codes are posted at all entrances to trail.

Level of difficulty is currently posted as a Single Black Diamond, indicating it is Advanced. Trail has a lot of steps, with roots and is steep, and is not easy. The trail may not be appropriate for dogs. Maps and signage will indicate the BVT is "primitive" and "steep" and difficult hiking.

TMC recommended a rusty metal, custom BVT logo with an arrow on the trail wayfinding signs. The OSC likes the rusty metal arrows, but does not see a need for the custom BVT logo. However, plain rusty metal may not show well in the forest so prototypes of rusty metal arrows, and rusty metal with cut out green arrows, will be considered for wayfinding. Wayfinding trail arrows will be posted on dead standing trees and existing posts when possible.

The TMC will be invited to the next OSC meeting to discuss proposed BVT signage. Rich will coordinate with TMtC for assistance with installing the new signs on the trail once they are approved and fabricated.

ACTION ITEM: A prototype with cost for rusty metal frames around the large green trail signs, and a prototype with cost for small, rusty metal arrows and small, rusty metal with green arrows cutout wayfinding signs, will be brought by staff to OSC for consideration.

ToT OSC Crossover Report from Susan St. Onge:

ToT OSC approved Ride Festival to use Zone 1 Town Park Open Space during the 2022 festival; elk and wildlife monitoring on Valley Floor was approved to renew and move forward in 2022 with a couple more cameras in willows and additional program partners; citizen science wildlife monitoring is part of the VF Management Plan and SMA is taking the lead on this program; enforcement of dogs on Valley Floor is an ongoing issue and perhaps the town could put out the no-dog information instead of SMA; permitting requirements for activities taking place on the Valley Floor is being tightened up and all events must fill out an activity permit, and users must be familiar with the Valley Floor conservation easement rules and regulations.

Roger Wickham made a motion, and Jason Merritt seconded to adjourn the meeting at 5:59 p.m.

Draft minutes respectfully submitted by Deanna Drew

*Next OSC Meeting - Mon. 3/28/2022 @ 4:00 p.m.