

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

Date: Monday, September 27th, 2021

Time: 4:00 p.m. MST

Attendance:

OSC Members: Susie St. Onge, Roger Wickham, Jason Merritt, Yvette Henson, Olivia Coe, Sefra Maples

Absent: Angela Dye, Laura Kudo

SMC Staff Liaison: Janet Kask

Guests: Sarah Carlisle, Chris Hazen, Ellie Wachtel, Rich Hamilton, Madeline Allen, Justin Criado

The County Open Space Commission meeting was called to order at 4:03 P.M. by Mr. St. Onge. A quorum was established when the meeting began.

Meeting Minutes Approval

- The OSC unanimously voted to approve the 8/30/21 minutes as presented with a motion from Roger Wickham and a second from Jason Merritt.

Topic Overview:

New Horizon Mine Update - Sarah Carlisle, Tri-State

Ms. Carlisle noted the New Horizon Mine ceased operations in 2018.

- Items of note:
 - Dakota Springs is a groundwater spring that resurfaces on mine property.
 - The focus is being able to release more treated water into the San Miguel River.
 - A motion has been filed in court to change water rights from power plant cooling to industrial and environmental use.
- Mr. Merritt noted the water temperature would require decreasing. What other quality issues are there?
 - Salinity and heavy metals are additional issues.
- Mr. Wickham requested information about water quality data in the river before and after the water reintroduction.
- Ms. Carlisle will provide details about the next steps via email.
 - Tri-State's Colorado natural resources advisor could attend the next OSC meeting, if necessary, to better explain the project details.

Conservation Easements/Values - Chris Hazen

Ms. St. Onge noted SMC holds two easements that are not currently addressed in the OSC's Work Plan.

- She noted the San Miguel Conservation Foundation is the holder of both easements.

#1 CE - Down Valley Park

Mr. Hazen noted the history of the conservation easements.

- The OSC has helped to support other land trusts in the County as well.
- This land trust is required by tax code.
- The conservation easement at the Down Valley Park impacts the pond and riparian corridor along the river.
- The values of the conservation easement include natural, scenic, open space, educational and recreational values. Animals/wildlife are included in the “natural” category.
- OSC could develop a management plan for the parcel that directs the use of the properties.
- Protected areas of the park have been improved by the funding from the Idarado Natural Resources Damage Settlement Fund. These funds also paid for the improvements to the pond.
 - If the CE were to be amended, the SMCF is a partner and would need to be consulted.
 - General easements can only be made more restrictive, never less.
- Ms. St. Onge asked if he thinks there needs to be changes made at this point.
 - Mr. Hazen noted he keeps in contact with Rich Hamilton and the Down Valley Park is being managed very well.
 - Mr. Hamilton noted he pays special attention to invasive plants in the area.
 - He noted beavers, otters, osprey, and other animals are utilizing the area as well as individuals.
 - He recently taught a class to the Norwood 6th and 7th grade classes at the pond.
 - Mr. Merritt noted baseball in the area does allow for recreation for all local areas.
- Mr. Hazen noted the County OSC could create a management plan for the DVP parcel - i.e., if we see recreational use becoming a negative impact, etc. We could prioritize usage.
- Mr. Hamilton confirmed the County has a management plan in place for the DVP.
- Ms. St. Onge noted future discussions about water testing and invasive species will be added to the agenda

#2 CE - Kentucky Placer - East End of Telluride

- Mr. Hazen noted another easement exists in the Kentucky Placer area near town park near the confluence of Bridal Veil and Ingram Creeks.
- This CE involved Idarado and the Town of Telluride. Kentucky Placer - the County owns parcels D & E. Parcel E is the larger portion. Conservation values are the same as the DVP.
- The easement guidelines are roughly the same as the Down Valley Park.
- GOCO is the partner for this easement and contributed funding.
- Mr. Hazen noted a trail is presently being considered on parcel D of this easement. This CE was created for a trail. All values are consistent with the CE and a trail.

Mr. Hamilton noted he has a management plan for this CE as well. Black Swifts came up in a study years ago. A rare plant study was also conducted, but nothing was found.

Mr. Hamilton mentioned the County has 2 other CE's with The Nature Conservancy - the Keystone Gorge Loop trail area and the Bilk Creek climbing wall area as well.

Ms. Kask noted that awareness of these conservation easements is important for the OSC members to know in order to assist them and be knowledgeable of the needs of the community within these areas.

Mr. Hazen noted the practice of San Miguel County covering the upfront cost of easements is unique and special within the State of Colorado. The County contributes funding to land conservation easements with private landowners and this isn't common in the State of Colorado. The State recently changed their tax law credits so landowners can now obtain tax credits for 90% of their LCE and land value.

Ms. St. Onge asked if this verbiage needs to be added to the OSC's Work Plan under the Land Heritage Program.

Ms. Kask mentioned the different required criteria outlined in the LHP - from GuSG habitat to scenic vistas to wildlife corridors, etc.

Norwood Area Trail Planning – Ellie Wachtel, SE Group

Ellie Wachtel noted they are a planning group for recreation and trail planning purposes.

- The Norwood Parks & Recreation District and the Telluride Foundation discussed plans to build motorized trails but were never able to move forward.
- The SE Group is more experienced with this process and has started to meet with user groups and stakeholders.
 - She noted there aren't many motorized trails in the Beaver Park area at the moment.
 - They're trying to prepare to build trails there before social trails are developed.
 - Per the US Forest Service planning, several parts/sections may become wildlife areas, which would limit trails to 1 per square mile.
- Ms. Kask asked if the SE Group plans to hold public hearings. Has the SE group mapped GuSG habitat and leks? Have they also mapped wildlife migration corridors? These are all topics and areas of County concern. We've had problems in the past with motorized trails.
- St. Onge echoed Ms. Kask's comments and noted GuSG are likely the biggest concern of the OSC.
- Ms. Wachtel mentioned they will hold a public meeting the week of October 11th. They will also conduct a NEPA process (2023?). She will also check GuSG mapping with CPW.
- Mr. Merritt asked which groups would be involved in this project.
- Ms. Wachtel mentioned the Sheep Mountain Alliance, BHA (Backcountry Hunters & Anglers), WETA, etc. are all involved. The Telluride Foundation was their initial connection in 2019.
- Ms. Kask suggested they also include the Telluride Mountain Club, as they address trails from a regional perspective.

Old Business/Other –

- The Nature Conservancy – 2 Parcels – Janet Kask

Ms. Kask noted The Nature Conservancy is looking to convey 2 parcels to SMC.

- One is in Illium known as the South Fork Preserve (67 acres) and the other is the San Miguel Canyon Preserve (279 acres) located on highway 62 between Telluride and Norwood.
 - TNC doesn't have adequate staffing to manage and maintain these parcels.
 - Ms. Kask and Mr. Hamilton met TNC's rep. at the South Fork Preserve site to walk it and familiarize ourselves with it. This site also includes a very large deck. The SFP is adjacent

to USFS land and has a kiosk. The site has a trail and allows for hiking and fishing, but no overnight use or camping are allowed. We need to take management and maintenance into consideration when it comes to the deck, etc.

- Ms. Kask and Mr. Hamilton will meet TNC's rep. at the SMCP site when she returns to town. This site allows for fishing, but doesn't really have a trail. People lay by the water.
- Ms. Kask mentioned TNC has stated they'd prefer no deed restrictions and no construction and to maintain both parcels as open space in perpetuity.
- TNC still needs to consult with their attorney so Ms. Kask will keep the OSC in the loop as the process moves forward.

Bridal Veil Trail -

- Ms. Kask stated the new Bridal Veil Trail Bridge will be installed on Tuesday, October 19th. She will post this on the County website, the County Facebook page and also notify the Daily Planet and KOTO. The lower portion of the BVT from the parking area up to the base of the falls will be closed that morning.
- Mr. Hamilton noted the BVT will be closed 12/1-4/30 for the winter months/avalanche season.
- Ms. St. Onge wants to schedule a site visit with the OSC to visit the proposed area for the steel steps just above the base of the falls. She will email all to schedule a date and time.
- Ms. Kask mentioned that based on the cost estimate for the steel steps, she will have to issue an RFP and include money in the 2022 budget for this project. It has also been requested a rock hydrologic study be performed.

- ToT OSC – Crossover Report - Susie St. Onge

Ms. St. Onge noted the TOT OSC is discussing how to get the regional trails map out to the public.

- They are putting it on their work plan for 2022.
- She will continue to chair a committee in this vein.
- Does the County want to take the lead for the regional trails map process?
 - Ms. St. Onge offered to be the person leading the County effort if it is so decided.

She also noted the TOT OSC is working on the Bear Creek downhill bike trail as well.

Ms. St. Onge requested new OSC members familiarize themselves with the County's OSC Work Plan to guide our decisions going forward.

With a motion from Ms. Coe and a second from Mr. Merritt, the meeting was adjourned at 5:29 p.m. MDT

Minutes respectfully submitted by Olivia Coe and Janet Kask

Next OSC Meeting - Mon., 10/25, 4:00 p.m. via Zoom