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City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department
Re: Oxbow Park and Preserve

I live in the Animas Park for mobile homes and am located on the north end near the railroad and river. For several years I have attended meetings for the Animas River Trail and purposed Oxbow Park. Very early on I came to agree with Cathy Metz, Director of the Parks and Recreation Department, that the best solution to the problems we were encountering along the railroad and the property owned by Cameron-Sterk was for the City to purchase the land and develop it into a park. That would bring the needed supervision and proper development of the Animas River Trail which would inevitably be built.

Now the question is how to develop the park. I want to share with you some of the insight I gained by talking with the couple who originally owned the land. They too, realized that in order to preserve the beauty and natural wildlife on their land they needed to develop a plan for managing the property and providing a measure of security that would prevent vagrants and unauthorized activity on their land. To be able to afford a property manager or private security guard they needed a method of funding that would make the park self sustaining. Their idea was to build a large covered shelter that could be rented out as an event center for weddings, photo shoots and private parties. Other suitable concessions would be brought in to complement the park amenities and provide supervision for picnic tables and BBQ grills that could be reserved in advance. They even considered placing a zip-line across the river to the land they owned on the other side. All of those things would allow the land to be carefully preserved while allowing a limited amount of public access to the property.

One of the clearest messages sent to Durango City officials has been the need for security along the River Trail and in the new proposed park. Above all else, security and protection of property, whether private or publicly owned, lies at the very heart of government's obligation to its citizens. A lesson can be learned from national parks like Yosemite that have found it necessary to limit public access. The demand was simply too great to open the gates and allow all who came to park, camp, hike, swim and explore wherever they chose without any regulation or control.

The City needs to give serious thought as to how best to manage parks like Oxbow and Lake Nighthorse. I agree with the concept of developing a "theme" for Oxbow as a preserve and limiting the amount and type of activity to be conducted there. As the Animas River Trail is developed I would suggest building a raised wooden bridge over the aviary and wildlife corridor. Make this into an inviting attraction for viewing the wildlife and central to the theme of the park. Set boundaries for the park that extend upstream and downstream and post signs along the river. Immediately ban all loose dogs in the water. They are chasing away the birds that normally fish the eddies along the banks. Limit the water activities to paddle boarding, canoeing and kayaking. This last week a large raft came down the river with an electric powered trolling motor it used to steer through the shallow flat water in the oxbows. Set these parameters for developing the park and do so quickly. Then the rest will begin to take shape.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanne Bignall". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned at the bottom center of the page.

Manage Oxbow for conservation values

Remember that Joni Mitchell song: "They paved paradise and put up a parking lot?" We've come a long way since the 1970s with the exception of the city of Durango's surprisingly retro plans to develop and pave up to 6 acres of Oxbow Park and Preserve's critical wildlife habitat and riparian buffer to service the commercial boating industry. The Parks and Rec staff is bulldozing ahead with complete disregard for the ensuing environmental damage to irreplaceable and much-needed wildlife habitat, wrecking a neighborhood and angering landowners up and downstream to build a commercial put-in on this calm flatwater section of the Animas.

The Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife has expressed concerns to the city about its plans for commercial development at Oxbow. The Oxbow property is a spring and summer home to migratory birds as well as a year-round home to wildlife.

Despite this, Durango Parks and Rec told the City Council that it considers this GOCO-funded open space one of three "primary river access points." (The other two are off East Third Avenue, at 33rd Street and 29th Street.) Development of commercial access translates into a wide

two-lane road, turnaround and paved parking lots. Visit Dallabetta Park, across from Home Depot, and envision the beautiful Oxbow scraped and paved.

Oxbow is different from other city-owned parcels and deserves a different blueprint. Oxbow is a big piece of the dwindling 1 percent of riparian land remaining in the county. If managed for city of Durango conservation values, with care given to the type and volume of access allowed, Oxbow can offer an opportunity for people to experience serenity, some peace and quiet, and privacy, even the chance to view wildlife and birds. That attraction is beyond valuation, but it will contribute to the city's economic and environmental value. We're not selling a Disneyland experience, right?

Can the city figure out how to provide for conservation and wildlife while allowing limited river access for private parties engaged in paddle boarding, canoeing and kayaking? "You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone."

Susan Ulery and Linda Whaley
Durango

Anne Parker
Sante Fe

Will bikes and boats lead to a train wreck?

On July 25, I attended the city's meeting for the proposed Oxbow Park and Preserve and was surprised at the turnout. Just a few years earlier the city had similar public meetings for the Animas River Trail that would end at the proposed 3-acre Oxbow Park.

Bicycle enthusiasts came out en masse to speak to the city Parks and Recreation Department in support of the trail and the need for access on the northern end.

It was stated that the 800 to 900 people a day who currently use the trail will have a need for restroom facilities, drinking water and ranger patrol along the trail, and therefore the need to purchase the Sterk/Cameron land for their use. Rumors quickly spread about what an economic boon it will be when professional biking tours start bringing busloads of

tourists to town and use Oxbow (Sterk/Cameron) as a drop-off point.

Curiously, none of those people showed up at the meeting last month when the commercial boating companies were asking for a boat ramp to be added to the park to alleviate the congestion along the trail at the current put-in sites.

They want to bring busloads of people who need restroom facilities and drinking water and, yes, there was talk of a ranger patrol to monitor all of the anticipated activity that rafting will add. Because just think of what an economic boon this will all be!

Is it just me, or does anyone else see a train wreck coming?

Jeanne Bignall
Durango