

# Natural Surface Trails

## Committee Recommendations – Edited by John Norton

August 28, 2014

### Overview

The Natural Surface Trails Committee was formed in early 2014 to address a variety of topics related to the natural surface trail system on City of Durango property. The committee included representation from the Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board (Mark Smith, Kim Baxter and Paul Wilbert); Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (Frank Viehmann, Bill Zimsky and Richard Speegle), Trails 2000 staff and Board (Mary Monroe Brown, John Baxter, Daryl Crites and Melissa Youssef), La Plata Open Space Conservancy staff (Amy Schwarzbach) and City staff (Kevin Hall and Cathy Metz).

The trails committee met on the following dates in 2014:

- February 19
- March 4
- April 7
- May 6
- August 28

The trails committee discussed the following topics:

1. Overview of trails inventory map
2. Management Plans for Overend Mountain Park, Dalla Mountain Park and Horse Gulch
3. Conservation Easements held by La Plata Open Space Conservancy
4. Stewardship and maintenance of trails
5. Share the Trails philosophy
6. Social Trails
7. Directional Trails
8. New Trail Development
9. Easement needs due to trail encroachment
10. Trailheads
11. Education
12. Interface with other public agencies
13. Trail system way finding signage at Horse Gulch, Raider Ridge and Twin Buttes

The goal of the trails committee was to develop recommendations for the management and stewardship of the City's natural surface trail system for review and approval by the Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and Trails 2000.

### Summary of Recommendations

The trails committee would like to advance the following recommendations on key areas related to the City's natural surface trail system.

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### **Trails Inventory Map**

The trail system maps on display as way-finding signage in Overend Mountain Park, Dalla Mountain Park and Horse Gulch should reflect the approved system trails. This approved trail system should be consistent with trail maps displayed on the City of Durango website and Trails 2000 website.

Currently, the City natural surface trail maps have included the primary trail system which is mapped on the way-finding signage. The secondary trail system, which is existing and approved, is not mapped on signs. This leads to confusion of what is a legal trail. All trails that are approved should be mapped and signed.

### **Management Plans for Overend Mountain Park, Dalla Mountain Park and Horse Gulch**

The Management Plans for Overend Mountain Park, Dalla Mountain Park and Horse Gulch should be updated with the current approved trail system map and approved recommendations from the trails committee analysis.

### **Conservation Easements held by La Plata Open Space Conservancy**

There are multiple conservation easements held by La Plata Open Space Conservancy, including City properties in Overend Mountain Park, Dalla Mountain Park and Horse Gulch. The conservation values, which include recreation as a value, [11] identified within each easement should be consistently protected through City stewardship and effective communication between the City, La Plata Open Space Conservancy and Trails 2000.

### **Stewardship and maintenance of trails**

The Parks and Recreation Department is ultimately responsible for the stewardship and maintenance of the natural surface trail system. Trails 2000 has an integral role and a long history in the planning, design, development and maintenance of the natural surface trails on City property and beyond. Due to the acquisition of open space by the City and expanding responsibilities for trail system stewardship and maintenance, the Parks and Recreation Department should hire an Open Space and Trails Crew Leader to work with Trails 2000, La Plata Open Space Conservancy and other community groups that assist in the stewardship of City assets. The Trails 2000 Crew Leader will continue to supervise and direct the work of Trails 2000 volunteers on City property.

### **Share the Trails philosophy**

Maintain the Share the Trails philosophy by continuing support of a non-motorized multi-use trail system for appropriate user groups including walkers, runners, cyclists, and equestrians. Trails 2000 ongoing education on this topic is an important component. Fragmentation of the trail system by restricting certain user groups is not supported.

### **Social Trails**

Trails 2000 and City staff will evaluate existing social trails [12], with input from community volunteers, and either perform maintenance on the trail to ensure the trail is sustainable or remove the trail. All trails

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that are approved system trails will be mapped. There must be a continued effort by the City and Trails 2000 to remove and remediate social trails with the assistance of community volunteers.

### **Directional Trails**

The City and Trails 2000 promote multi-use and two-direction trails in the City's natural surface trail system. However, signage shall be installed on existing trails with limited sight distances, including Star Wars in Overend Mountain Park and SnakeCharmer in Horse Gulch, recommending downhill travel and caution all users to be aware of potential conflicts with uphill users. There may be cases in the future where one-way trails will be included in the system. [J3]

### **New Trail Development**

New natural surface trail development is considered by the City with input from Trails 2000, and interested citizens. New trails shall be consistent with the adopted Parks, Open Space, Trails, and Recreation Master Plan. Generally, IMBA and Forest Service guidelines are followed for the development of new trails. Also to be considered are the principles set forth in "Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind: A Handbook For Trail Planners". The City, and Trails 2000, and individuals with the expertise to assess impacts to wildlife and natural habitat shall collaborate on the design and development of new natural surface trails on City property. Full consideration will be given the impact of new trail development on wildlife and natural habitat; particularly those properties purchased with funding from Great Outdoors Colorado. Appropriate environmental and cultural resources are evaluated and considered in advance of trail development to mitigate potential impacts to these resources. An analysis of the characteristics of the trail, terrain, geology, anticipated maintenance and connections to existing trails is performed. In those circumstances when it is determined that a proposed new trail will have a significant impact on the wildlife or natural habitat of the immediate area or region that cannot be adequately mitigated, a "no trail construction" decision will be rendered. [J4]

The following future trail connections are recommended for priority evaluation and potential implementation:

- Animas River Trail to Lake Nighthorse [J5]
- Overend Mountain Park to Twin Buttes [J6]
- Hidden Valley connection [J7]
- Skyline Trail to Horse Gulch Road and Mike's
- Skyline Trail to Florida Road
- Community connectors
- Colorado Trail to Overend Mountain Park [J8]
- Bodo perimeter trail
- Powerline Trail to the top of Raider Ridge, southern route
- Chapman Hill Bike Park

### **Easement needs due to trail encroachment**

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The City should continue to identify and resolve trail system easement gaps, including the Powerline Trail, Fairfield property, Raider Ridge, Oak Ridge Energy property in Horse Gulch, Rea property to Chapman Hill, Falcon Heights and the Spirit Trail.

### **Trailheads**

In addition to the completion of the development of the Horse Gulch trailhead parking lot, the City should develop improved trailhead parking at Twin Buttes, Dalla Mountain Park and Overend Mountain Park.

### **Education**

The City and Trails 2000 shall coordinate educational efforts and public outreach on the City's natural surface trail system. Updated trail system maps shall be available on the City and Trails 2000 websites for public information and may include a QR code on future trail way-finding signs to direct the public to the City and Trails 2000 websites.

### **Interface with other public agencies**

The City and Trails 2000 shall continue to work collaboratively with other public land management agencies including the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Bureau of Reclamation regarding the area natural surface trail system.

### **Trail system way finding signage at Horse Gulch, Raider Ridge and Twin Buttes**

The City shall develop the trail system way finding signage in Horse Gulch, Raider Ridge and Twin Buttes with consistent signage similar to Overend Mountain Park and Dalla Mountain Park. Snakecharmer, Medicine Trail and the Secret Trail shall be included in the Horse Gulch/Raider Ridge Trail system.