

Memo

To: Master Association Board
CC: Sean Warren, Open Space Manager
From: Open Space Committee
Date: 9/15/2017
Re: Docmann Trail

Members of the Master Association Board:

At the last Open Space Committee (OSC) meeting, its seven members voted unanimously to approve the proposed alignment of the Docmann trail. We are asking the Board to do the same. This approval does not include funding for construction, which the Board will be asked to review as part of the overall budgeting process. Nor does approval of the alignment guarantee any definitive construction date. What is under consideration is whether the proposed trail adequately addresses the Trails Master Plan (TMP) already approved by the community and if biological and other concerns have been mitigated.

Over the course of the last several meetings, the OSC weighed several factors in its decision-making to address the above points. The OSC feels that this trail alignment preserves significant intact portions of habitat while allowing recreation in this part of our open space. The Open Space Committee agrees that this alignment strikes the right balance of recreation and conservation. Further, the alignment for the switchback sections on the western boundary stays away from the most sensitive riparian areas, and another one-sixth of the alignment uses an existing right of way corridor already cut by Xcel energy.

More specifically, the concerns the OSC has considered are as follows:

Ecological

The rare plant survey identified one rare plant community along the alignment: Aspen-Beaked Hazelnut (A/H) Forest, and estimated the size at about 12.84 acres. The survey indicates that using the eastern alternate alignment would isolate impacts to the periphery of the A/H community, and is preferable. However, this finding is in conflict with the presence of ovenbird near the alternate alignment. The primary alignment impacts a very narrow strip of the A/H community between the edge of the pipeline easement and the drainage bottom (less than 0.2%) that had already been impacted by the pipeline vegetation clearing. The A/H community extends well to the west and south of the pipeline easement and trail alignment. Therefore, the primary alignment has minimal impact on the A/H community. The survey states that either alignment option is "not a significant threat to the continued existence of this community."

The Raptor Survey noted the presence of ovenbirds near the eastern alternative alignment in the mixed conifer forest. By using the primary alignment, this habitat is avoided. The Raptor Survey also identifies that the switchbacks in the dense gambel oak at the southwestern part of the alignment cause fragmentation of the foraging habitat for Cooper's Hawks and Sharp-shinned hawks, species which are fairly common in Colorado. As more fragmentation is caused in this area by the western alternate alignment, the primary alignment that traverses the hillside to the east into less-dense oak thickets is preferred and has been selected. Finally, the Raptor Survey finds that the proposed trail is "unlikely to disturb eagle nesting, because it is outside of the CPW-recommended 0.5-mile disturbance buffer and because eagles are likely habituated to human activity, given the nest's proximity to the Lockheed Martin facility." Nonetheless, no raptor nests were found on the alignment.

The reports indicate that dogs have a greater impact on wildlife than the presence of humans alone. This statement as written in the report was a general statement; the report did not indicate that this part of our open space is more susceptible to the presence of dogs than other parts of our open space. As dogs are permitted on other trails, the OSC saw no reason to exclude their use of Docmann, viewing it as more of an overall management challenge.

The alignment avoids nearly all riparian areas, with the exception of two well thought out and minimally invasive riparian crossings. Another example of avoidance is the western part of the alignment which purposefully traverses the hill above the drainages to avoid several riparian sections.

Trespassing

It is possible that creation of this trail will increase trespassing from neighboring landowners on Deer Mountain Drive and South Murphy Gulch Road. As the quantity of homes in this area is small, the impact is expected to be fairly small. However, there are several ideas that the OSC suggest be implemented:

1. The trail allows enhanced access to this part of our open space for staff, and patrols should be allocated to include the Docmann trail; this will also increase our knowledge and understanding of who is already trespassing as well as keep a handle on when and what Xcel is doing with our property as it concerns the pipeline easement.

2. Allow our bordering neighbors to use KCROS open space in order to make them even better stewards and have “eyes and ears” on the ground, so they can report unauthorized activity to staff. This access could be provided in exchange for allowing staff access across their property.
3. Staff should consider using wildlife cameras to monitor this area once trail is completed.
4. Add additional signage and enhance existing signage in the affected area.

Cultural

The Cultural Resource Survey identified that "no historic properties are adversely affected" on the primary alignment. Along an alternate alignment, one archaeological site was found. This site is avoided by not using this alternate alignment.

Preservation and Trail Density

The issue came up as to whether KCROS has a higher density of trails than Jeffco Open Space (JCOS) Parks. To address this, the OSC calculated density factors across the Front Range trail system at large. Within KCROS, the total length of trails (dirt singletrack and crusher fine trails) is about 32.6 miles. The 2-track trails are about 6.4 miles (Manor house, North hogback, Cathy Johnson). The total open space acreage is about 4700 or 7.34 square miles. The 39 miles of trail over this area yields a density factor of 5.3 miles/sq mile. With the Docmann trail added, the density factor will increase to 5.6 miles/sq mile, which is less than many JCOS parks. Many JCOS parks have trail densities in the range of 4.7 miles/sq mile to 11.6 miles/sq mile. These figures do not account for the fact that our trail system is private and experiences much less use than any other comparable JCOS trail system.

Forestry and Fire

The OSC discussed that trail access to this area would provide improved access for forestry work, so that the health of forests can be more easily assessed and addressed as needed. The trail would also provide improved access for firefighters should a wildfire occur. One member of OSC had a discussion with a South Metro fire contact and he indicated they view trails positively for this purpose.

Costs

The OSC recently asked the VTCs to summarize our maintenance expenses and plans going forward. Using trail maintenance data from the past several years, the projected cost for maintenance of the entire trail system is about \$16,500 annually (approximately \$3.60 per household per year assuming 4,500 households). The addition of the Docmann trail is projected to increase this cost by about \$1,100 annually (an additional 25 cents per household per year). The data show that the newer trails in our system have needed very little maintenance even after 5 years, due to the improved trail construction designs and standards, while older trails typically require more frequent maintenance due to steeper grades and less sustainable designs. Over time the OSC expects these to balance one another out so that the run rate would correspond with the above or less, depending on the year and maintenance cycle.

Allocated staff time for increased patrol will be dependent on our need over time and would likely be offset by easier e-bike access with this trail in place – the added benefit being increased interface, awareness and enforcement of what Xcel is doing on the pipeline right of way.

The trail construction costs will likely be split between significant volunteer time and resources from a contractor. The overall cost of “trails” (allocated and actual cash cost) has typically been 5% or less of the total budget. OSC would not expect that to change with the construction of the Docmann trail and additional maintenance costs. By comparison the MA spends nearly 20% of its budget on trash collection and a similar 5% on insurance fees. Estimating the cost of construction is still in progress, and the OSC will be discussing including the Docmann trail in a budget request for 2018.

Conclusion

Docmann trail is one of the last steps in implementing the build out of the TMP as approved by the community in 2009. The OSC believes the concerns and impacts listed above have been adequately addressed, and is a desired extension to the southern portion of Open Space trails.

The Cougar trail is experiencing high usage, and significant positive feedback. This is strong evidence that providing more trails in the southern part of the valley is a highly desired amenity. New trail experiences appear to be valued by trail users, and many trail users seem to be drawn to less technical trails. The Docmann trail would provide more trail of similar character.

The Docmann trail provides for a more complete stacked loop system to better distribute trail usage. The TMP indicates that a stacked loop trail system enables users to plan and combine routes into many different trail experiences, providing more options. Stacked loops efficiently disperse users, reduce impacts on natural resources, and reduce user conflicts. The Docmann trail would give users of the Cougar trail multiple looping options.

While it is not the driver of any trail addition, it should be noted that the Docmann Gulch area is already significantly impacted. Neighboring landowners have established and consistently use social trails in the area, as evidenced by *mowed* trails up to the KCROS property boundary. Similarly, social trails also exist in the area of the closed mines. Finally, a 50-foot wide corridor for the right of way for Xcel has been cleared by the utility and constitutes a substantial portion of what would be the Docmann trail.

The OSC appreciates the Board's consideration on this matter.