

TOWN OF BRECKENRIDGE
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMISSION
Monday, April 13, 2009
BRECKENRIDGE COUNCIL CHAMBERS
150 Ski Hill Road

4:30 *Site visit to the East Adams right-of-way*
 Meet at Town Hall.

5:30 Call to Order, Roll Call

5:35 Discussion/approval of Minutes – March 9, 2009

5:40 Discussion/approval of Agenda

5:45 Public Comment (Non-Agenda Items)

5:50 Staff Summary

- 2009 Budget cuts
- Highway 9 widening and Recpath closures

6:15 Open Space and Trails

- Mayor Warner Presentation
- Cucumber Gulch Preserve monitoring
- Summit Huts Proposal
- East Adams Trail
- 2009 Forest health initiatives
- Joint Town/BOSAC meeting
- BOSAC date and meeting location

7:45 Executive Session

8:00 Commissioner Issues

8:15 Adjourn

For further information, please contact the Open Space and Trails Program at 547.3110 (Heide) or 547.3155 (Scott).

Memorandum

To: Breckenridge Open Space Advisory Commission
From: Heide Andersen, Open Space and Trails Planner III
Mark Truckey, Asst. Director of Community Development
Scott Reid, Open Space and Trails Planner II
Re: April 13, 2009 meeting

Staff Summary**2009 Budget Cuts**

In light of projected budget shortfalls for 2009 (i.e., declining sales tax revenue), staff has recently evaluated the 2009 open space budget and has identified some initial cuts to the budget. These budget cuts include reductions in the consultants, forest management planning, and historic stabilization line items (Council direction has been to fund historic projects with non-open space dollars). The largest cuts we have identified are in the trails budget: a \$40,000 reduction in the Town trails budget (Wellington bridge will not happen this year), a \$20,000 reduction in the consultant's budget, and a \$10,000 reduction in the Golden Horseshoe trails budget.

With the above-described budget cuts, staff has identified a total open space budget reduction of \$101,511. The total open space budget for 2009 (prior to these reductions) was \$2,079,899.

We do not feel that any of the identified budget cuts will affect our ability to accomplish the open space work program for 2009. In evaluating potential budget cuts, staff made a conscious effort to maintain the land acquisition budget (\$475,000 plus another \$701,000 for debt on Cucumber Gulch and Golden Horseshoe) and the budget for forest management projects (\$150,000 on town properties and \$50,000 in the Golden Horseshoe).

Staff will continue to monitor the budget and revenues and if necessary identify additional budget reductions. We will bring a revised open space pro forma for review.

Highway 9 Widening and Recpath Closures

Beginning on or about Memorial Day, CDOT will initiate a Highway 9 widening project between Valley Brook Road and Fairview Road (across from the Breckenridge Building Center). This effort to make Highway 9 four lanes is anticipated to continue through the summer of 2009, with a pause in work for the 2009-2010 winter, and project completion to occur in the summer/fall of 2010. The first step in the road widening project will be to move and reconstruct the existing recpath between Valley Brook Road and Coyne Valley Road so that the walls for the new highway can be constructed. This work will require a recpath closure. CDOT has proposed closing the recpath to all users from Monday through Thursday between May 26 and June 26, 2009. The pathway would be open and usable between Fridays and Sundays during that period. Weekday users will be

encouraged to use Airport Road as a detour. Staff wanted to make BOSAC aware of the impending and necessary recpath closure. The newly aligned pathway is scheduled to reopen on June 26th.

Open Space and Trails

Mayor Warner Presentation

Mayor John Warner has requested an audience with BOSAC to welcome new commissioners and outline his expectations for BOSAC for the coming year.

Cucumber Gulch Preserve monitoring

Dr. Christy Carello will provide an overview of the Cucumber Gulch Preserve monitoring program results from the 2008 year. An executive summary of the final report is included in your packet.

Summit Huts Black Gulch Proposal

Mike Zobbe will be present to discuss a proposal to construct a Summit Huts backcountry hut on the Black Gulch property, which is a jointly owned Town/Summit County property on the north side of Bald Mountain. A memo is included in your packet from Summit Huts that outlines the history behind this property and this project, density issues, and parking and access proposals.

East Adams Trail discussion

Based on the site visit scheduled for 4:30, staff requests BOSAC discuss the East Adams Trail and decide whether the trail is a worthwhile project for the summer 2009.

2009 Forest Health Initiatives

In 2009, staff plans to implement most of the high priority forest health projects identified in the Mountain Pine Beetle Hazard Analysis study developed by Rocky Mountain Ecological Services in 2008. The goal of this year's forest health efforts is to remove dead, infested, and susceptible trees from open space parcels that were identified in the report as high priorities. These parcels are mostly adjacent to existing and proposed home sites and will benefit from reduced wildfire susceptibility and improved forest stand diversity. Actions on the open space parcels meet the spirit of the Town's draft defensible space and mountain pine beetle ordinances. Following Town treatment of the highest priority open space parcels in 2009, the remainder of eligible and appropriate Town-owned parcels will be addressed in priority order over the next three years.

Council has reviewed the staff forest health proposal and provided preliminary support for the goals outlined within it. Staff is also pursuing grant funding to offset costs for 2009 work on many of the parcels. Staff will keep BOSAC informed of any progress on these forest health initiatives for 2009 and over the next few years.

Joint Town Council/BOSAC meeting

Please bring your calendars to the BOSAC meeting so we can discuss potential dates for the joint Town Council/BOSAC meeting. The 2nd or 4th Tuesday in June work well for Town Council. Topics for discussion at the joint meeting were largely outlined at the recent BOSAC retreat and currently include: the ongoing pertinence of the “Regionally Significant Mountain Bike and Nordic Destination” goals outlined in the Comprehensive Plan and acquisition priorities for the open space program.

BOSAC Date and Meeting Location

Based on previous suggestions, staff requests that BOSAC discuss the opportunity to move the BOSAC meeting date to off weeks from Council meetings. Moving the date would allow the circulation of BOSAC minutes to Council in time for review prior to the Council meeting and would reduce pressure on the Council representative to report on the content of the BOSAC meeting.

Also, staff requests BOSAC discuss the opportunity to move the BOSAC meeting location to the third floor administrative conference room to provide a more intimate meeting setting, which requires less heating and allows more interaction with members of the public.

Roll Call

Matt Stais called the March 9, 2009 BOSAC meeting to order at 5:44 p.m. Other BOSAC members present included Jeff Cospolich, David Rossi, Ellen Hollinshead, Dennis Kuhn and Scott Yule. Staff members present were Heide Andersen, Scott Reid, Mark Truckey, and Peter Grosshuesch. Art Girten from OSAC was present. George Baumer of the Saddlewood Homeowners Association was present, as were Michael McCormack, of the Breck Epic, and Orion Paiement.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes were approved as presented.

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Staff Summary

Preservation Village

Ms. Andersen outlined the Preservation Village proposal, including Summit County's process for identifying potential affordable housing sites, including this parcel. Council reviewed it and requested more information regarding the wildlife values of the property.

Mr. Stais: At the UBPC meeting, the County was focused on identifying sites with development potential. They weren't necessarily focused on the wildlife values of this particular property.

Alan Evans and Scott Fisher were present, representing the Braddock Hills Board of Directors. According to Mr. Evans, he sees fresh elk and deer trails going down to the water from the Gold Hill and Fourmile Bridge area across the road. He is concerned about the proposed Preservation Village. He believes that a 20 foot tall berm is problematic. He concluded by commenting that their HOA just wants to learn more about this project. He pointed out that he sees the value of affordable housing, but thinks that this particular parcel is problematic.

Ms. Andersen: Laurie Best and Matt Thompson from the Town Planning staff are handling the projects from the Town's planning perspective (reviewing the project for annexation).

Mr. Rossi: Council reviewed the site plan a few weeks ago and the berm. The largest concern from Council's perspective was whether or not the wildlife issues could be resolved. They also had concerns with sprawl and traffic.

Mr. Girten: The property was for sale and may still be. It is a good town separator. I would like to see it acquired as open space.

Ms. Andersen: The Town and County have worked to preserve and protect that area through acquisition (Tatum Tracts, Fourmile Bridge and the Blue Danube County properties) and other means, such as obtaining the wetlands just to the south of the project that were dedicated as a part of the Highlands subdivision.

Open Space and Trails

Breck Epic

Mike McCormack provided an overview of the proposed Breck Epic special event. The Greenspeed Project oversees a few events that will benefit the community, including the Town, Summit County and USFS. Events cause trail impacts. The event runs Sunday evening through Friday, the week after the Fourth of July. It is proposed to be a small race on large loops. Approximately 250 people would compete daily with finishers completing the loops in over 4-5 hours. Our area has very little beginner or intermediate terrain and a very short riding season. We are also targeting a high end user- one who is very experienced and will spend money in Town. A portion of the proceeds from the events will go to help the area trails. It is targeted to be a small event that can make a big splash in terms of public relations and recognition. Mike's group plans to provide signage prior to the race to let people know which trails will be affected. They will provide Town, County and USFS with approximately \$15,000 in money or volunteer time. Rigid cutoff times will help ensure the course is cleared by 4 pm so that locals can have their trails back by the time they get off work. Alternate rain courses will be considered.

Mr. Kuhn: I am concerned about the three passes and potential overuse on Nightmare on Baldy after the Firecracker and this event. Will any of the loops impact Cucumber Gulch? (No)

Summer Dog Sledding Proposal

Ms. Andersen provided an overview of the summer dog sledding proposal. The use would be limited to roads only (mostly on Summit County rights of way) – mainly the Middle and South Fork roads.

Orion Paiement: We train dogs for sledding during the summer. Dog sledding trips in the winter are successful, allowing 8,000 people per year to go sledding. Improved cart technology now exists with suspension, so that this sort of thing can be done in our part of the country. Previously, it was limited to Alaska and Wisconsin. We are not sure how many trips we would plan to do each day exactly. Eight daily trips would probably be the maximum (with two carts running) - about one third of the guest capacity of winter months. Only routes that are open to motorized use already will be utilized. We are not motorized.

Ms. Hollinshead: Are you concerned about safety with the dog interaction with dirt bikers?

Orion Paiement: We are already training them on these routes. We have not had any problems with any users. It would cost about the same cost (\$75 for adults, \$35 for children). We will offer customers more of a behind-the-scenes education about the art and science of dog sledding.

Mr. Kuhn: How do you handle the dog waste?

Orion Paiement: As we already do, in the summer, we will monitor the main “poop spots” and keep them clean. It behooves us to take care of these sites as well. We’ll take care of it.

Mr. Rossi: Is heat a problem?

Mr. Paiement: When it is hot, we reduce speeds and increase dog numbers on each cart. Part of this proposal is to get a creek splash, which cools the dogs down. We are also good land stewards, and will continue to be.

Mr. Stais: What types of revenues are we talking about? (approximately \$6,000 for winter license agreement).

BOSAC agreed that the license agreement seems appropriate and directed staff to continue with the license agreement for the use.

Snowflake Ski Back discussion

Mr. Reid provided an overview of the Snowflake ski-back issue and the previous BOSAC discussion.

Mr. George Baumer, representing the Saddlewood HOA, separated the issue and focused on the grade of the dam. We are trying to be responsive to our members, who have some issues with renters. Is it ski in and ski out? The dam grading made the proposal more difficult. Regrading just past the dam would be a good solution. Minimal regrading could cost a few thousand dollars, spread among a number of residences. Creative snow moving could help with this issue. I don’t want the first issue to die, but I think we should focus on the easier and cheaper solution.

Mr. Yule: Changing the grade just past the dam seems to make sense.

Mr. Cospolich: If \$0 from the Town budget will be spent, I am totally in favor.

Mr. Kuhn abstained from the discussion.

Otherwise, BOSAC was in unanimous agreement to pursue the regrading approach this coming summer, with the HOAs funding the work.

East Adams trail

Mr. Reid provided an overview of the trail issue on the east end of Adams Street.

Ms. Girvin: I have seen this used for years and the scenario has changed. We should reestablish this route for dog walkers and other public users. There will be a trail there anyway, so you should probably formalize it.

Mr. Kuhn: I propose making this an early spring site visit. I see that it only gets people to Highland Terrace.

Mr. Yule: Is there a problem with leading a trail to a dead end or an unsecured trail access?

Mr. Reid: We could pursue getting easements for the social trail, but given the number of landowners that would need to agree to it, it is possible that we would end up losing the trail altogether. Sometimes its better to leave it as it is.

Ms. Hollinshead: I am all for little neighborhood trails.

All agreed that there should be a BOSAC site visit in April to reassess this issue.

Jesse Road/ Backdoor grooming

Ms. Andersen provided an overview of the Town's efforts to secure a 20-year special use authorization from the USFS to groom many of the currently groomed Nordic routes in the Golden Horseshoe. Mr. Cooney has indicated support for grooming across the permitted road in Dry Gulch, which would give access to the Jesse Road. This would create a loop in which one could ski up the Jesse and Backdoor routes, across on the Dry Gulch Road to Preston, and back down Gold Run Road. The Forest Service was supportive of including the Jesse Road in the existing application.

BOSAC was supportive of including this element in the existing Special Use Permit application to the Forest Service.

Commissioner Issues

Ms. Hollinshead: Unfortunately, I think that the Sallie Barber sign is gone.

Mr. Stais: There is a social trail that runs behind my house that I would be willing to help try to get into the Town trail system.

Next Meeting

The next regularly scheduled BOSAC meeting is scheduled for 5:30 pm on April 13, 2009 in the Town Hall Auditorium.

Ms. Hollinshead motioned to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Yule seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Cucumber Gulch Annual Conservation Monitoring Report 2008

*Breckenridge, Colorado
February 2009*



Prepared for the Town of Breckenridge, Colorado
by Dr. Christy Carello and Audrey Hoffa
Water section prepared by Barbara Galloway



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Cucumber Gulch, a fen wetland, contains a diversity of habitats including shrublands, lodgepole pine forests, mixed conifer forests and pronounced ecotones of mixed conifer and shrublands. Conservation monitoring of vegetation, avian populations, beaver and ungulate populations and water quality have consistently taken place since 2001. Recent anthropogenic threats to the integrity of Cucumber Gulch include private home construction and lodge development along the perimeter and a gondola that traverses the wetland and runs through the forested buffer of the wetland. Both development and gondola construction resulted in a large area of tree removal in 2006. More tree removal occurred in 2008 along the perimeter of an enlarged retention pond below the Peak 8 base area. Noise disturbance continues to be of concern as more construction projects are planned along the perimeter of Cucumber Gulch.

Water Resources/Water Quality

Ground water discharge to Cucumber Gulch is what maintains the fen wetlands in the Gulch. The source of the ground water is the topographically higher areas located north, south and west of the Gulch, which have been and continue to be extensively developed. If the infiltration of snowmelt and precipitation runoff to the ground water table is reduced as a result of development, either by increasing impervious surfaces or rerouting of runoff, the water supply to the fen wetlands may become inadequate. In 2008, the quality of the shallow ground water in Cucumber Gulch remained excellent. However, if the quality of the water infiltrating to ground water around Cucumber Gulch is impaired by the use of fertilizers, pesticides, salts, or other chemicals, this could negatively affect Cucumber Gulch.

Snowmelt and stormwater runoff from all roads and developments surrounding Cucumber Gulch can and should all be contained within stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as detention ponds, retention ponds, constructed wetlands basins or vegetated swales to prevent direct surface flows into Cucumber Gulch. In addition, any discharges from the stormwater BMPs to Cucumber Gulch should be avoided, if possible. If discharges to the Gulch are necessary to dispose of excess water, such discharges should have a turbidity of 5 NTU or less and the discharge water should be tested for chemicals that may be in contact with stormwater runoff (such as magnesium chloride, metals, fertilizers, or pesticides) prior to any discharges to ensure that such water will not degrade the quality of the water in the Gulch. Based on observations and water quality sampling results from 2008, specific recommendations are:

1. Remove the ripped stormwater channel in the Boulder Ridge development as soon as possible and eliminate any direct discharges of stormwater from the development.

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2. Avoid any future direct discharges of sediment-laden water from the Peak 8 sediment basin.

The consequences of not requiring construction and post-construction BMPs in developments around Cucumber Gulch, and regularly inspecting and maintaining such BMPs, is a decline in species diversity and a reduction in the health of the floral and faunal communities in Cucumber Gulch. For example, increased chloride concentrations (observed below the Peak 7 sediment basins and near the Boulder Ridge stormwater channel that discharges to the Gulch) are known to decrease wetland vegetation community diversity and cover, alter species dominance and reduce individual species abundance. There could be a shift to less desirable plant species that are more salt tolerant. Chloride can be directly toxic to certain plant species, and can also indirectly leach metals into the environment. Such affects may also negatively impact aquatic fauna, such as the boreal toad.

Vegetation

Cucumber Gulch is characterized by high plant species diversity. This in part is due to the variety of habitats in close proximity to each other and the significant amount of ecotone habitat. Thus far, 114 plant species have been identified, up from 106 species in 2007. This high species diversity, in turn, supports an abundance of fauna. Vegetation surveys at specified macroplots are used to evaluate any changes that may occur due to climatic events and/or human impacts. Between the years 2001-2007, we have statistically analyzed canopy cover, species richness, species diversity, species evenness, and plant productivity. These same parameters were examined in 2008, with the exception of plant productivity. Plant productivity is no longer monitored because sampling areas were not recovering from vegetation removal and because it is not likely to be a true indicator of biomass change since only herbaceous vegetation is used and woody plants such as willows are excluded from the analysis. Monitoring occurred within four habitat types between 2001-2004: lodgepole pine forest, mixed conifer, shrub, and mixed conifer/shrub. The mixed conifer/shrub habitat and the lodgepole habitat monitoring sites were eliminated due to trail construction in 2005 and ski area development in 2006.

Canopy cover in the shrubland habitat is significantly greater than in the mixed conifer habitat. Overall, there has been a steady increase in canopy cover habitat between 2001 and 2007. Precipitation in 2005, 2006, and 2007 was above the average annual precipitation of 19.68 inches. The increased canopy cover in shrubland habitat is likely a result of changes in total annual precipitation. There was a slight decrease in canopy cover in 2008 that was likely a result of the decrease in precipitation (16.7 inches). Overall species richness and species diversity are greater in shrubland habitat than in mixed conifer habitat, but results for each habitat type did not significantly differ from results of the 2005, 2006 and 2007 surveys. Species evenness, a measure of relative abundance of individuals among the species present, did not differ between habitat types and has remained consistent since 2003. The values for evenness are relatively low indicating that a few plants in each habitat type are dominant.

Exotic, invasive and weedy species have not significantly encroached in the wetland parts of Cucumber Gulch. However, the perimeter of the wetlands and areas such as the hillside below the Peak 8 base, the Nordic Center and nearby trails, and Josie's Cabin do have significant numbers of exotic, invasive and weedy species. The newly deforested path under the gondola also has numerous Canada thistle. Efforts should be made to control these species in order to prevent their encroachment on the wetlands. The weeds that pose the greatest threat to the wetlands and should be prioritized for removal are coast tarweed, dame's rocket, scentless chamomile and yellow toadflax.

The results of the willow study are interesting and point to possible diminishing willow numbers in Cucumber Gulch over time in areas where grooming occurs. Reproductive fitness is compromised in areas where willow clipping and ski grooming occurs. Significantly less catkins (the willow flower and sexually reproductive units) were found on nordic trails. In addition, growth rate was considerably reduced on nordic trails. Both results are likely due to snow remaining on the nordic trails longer than on the control plots as a direct result of snow compaction from snow grooming efforts. In groomed areas willow may miss the window of opportunity to flower in spring because they are still under snow. Also because willow shoots in groomed areas are under snow longer, their overall growth is limited. Because willow is such an important part of this community and because the present study certainly shows that there are potential effects from clipping willow and grooming for cross-country ski trails, further monitoring is planned. Future efforts should investigate the effect of disturbance on the overall community and not just the willow plant itself.

As vegetation is the predecessor to the overall quality of diversity in Cucumber Gulch, efforts should remain high to continue monitoring any changes within Cucumber Gulch's structure. Monitoring will reveal any significant changes that begin to take place as a result of construction or over-use of this natural resource. Continual vegetation monitoring is highly recommended so that necessary land use changes can be implemented if needed. In addition, direct impact studies on the effects of ski grooming equipment and trail maintenance on willow species will help us understand how direct use of the wetland in the winter is affecting this dominant natural resource.

Birds

Avian populations are of utmost importance to monitoring the quality of the habitats within Cucumber Gulch. Thus far 62 species have been identified in Cucumber Gulch. Avian populations are particularly sensitive to habitat disturbances and act as indicators of overall habitat quality. Thus, it is necessary to maintain and protect those aspects of the landscape that are important to birds. Many of the avian species found in Cucumber Gulch require regular monitoring because they are exceptionally sensitive to habitat alteration.

There was an observed increase in avian species diversity in 2007 and 2008 in the shrubland/mixed conifer habitat. This increase in diversity is a result of the presence of

the American Crow and the Common Raven, both of which have not been seen at these sites in past surveys. The Warbling Vireo was only observed at one location in 2007 and 2008 compared to six in 2004. The Violet-green Swallow population appears to have rebounded from a nearly 50% decrease in 2007. One bird that did increase in density in Cucumber Gulch was the Brown-headed Cowbird, a nest parasite. Brown-headed Cowbirds often result in a decrease in reproductive success of songbirds because the songbird will spend energy and resources on the more aggressive cowbird chick instead of their own. Nocturnal owl surveys were also conducted in 2008. No owls were observed during these surveys.

We recommend that point count surveys of songbirds throughout Cucumber Gulch continue in order to monitor any changes that may take place within the avian community. Anthropogenic disturbances should be minimized during nesting season (May-August). Also we recommend dusk surveys for songbird species that are more active at dusk than at dawn and a continuation of nocturnal surveys for owl populations in order to make specific recommendations for minimizing nighttime disturbances such as gondola operations and nighttime nordic tours.

Beaver and Muskrats

Beavers are the keystone species in Cucumber Gulch. Their activity substantially alters the landscape. Beavers created the wetland habitat in Cucumber Gulch by retaining water in ponds. The health of Cucumber Gulch is dependent on their continual activity. Beavers provide and enhance habitat for waterfowl, amphibians, fish and ungulates. In addition, newly metamorphosed toadlets may use beaver lodges and dams as winter hibernacula (Miller et. al. 2003). In particular the state endangered boreal toad, which has historically occupied Cucumber Gulch would use beaver ponds, lodges and dams as habitat.

A secondary monitoring project was started in 2006 in order to document both beaver and muskrat activity patterns in Cucumber Gulch. It is important to monitor the presence of muskrats as they compete with beavers for the resources that are available. Muskrats mostly pose a threat to the overall wetland system by the overuse of emergent vegetation. Consequently, muskrats could have the opposite effect of beavers on Cucumber Gulch thereby damaging the structure and contributing to a decline in beaver populations.

Within Cucumber Gulch the number of active lodges declined from eight to two between 2002 and 2005. However, within the last three years the population appears to be stabilizing at a lower value. Population crashes and subsequent recovery are common in beaver populations. The lower stable population of beavers may be a result of the habitat degradation and disturbance, particularly in the wetland habitat that is closest to Ski Hill Road.

In general, beavers and muskrats are significantly more active at dusk than at dawn. This result is important for land managers that will need to make decisions about anthropomorphic activity such as gondola operations and nearby construction activity.

It is important to continue monitoring beaver populations in order to protect the standing water habitat in Cucumber Gulch. It is unlikely that beaver populations will overpopulate Cucumber Gulch. Like most wildlife, beaver populations self-regulate by starting to decrease their rate of reproduction when occupancy reaches environmental carrying capacity.

Ungulates

Moose and deer use all habitat types in Cucumber Gulch. Most deer sightings have occurred in spring, summer and fall. Moose have been observed in Cucumber Gulch year round. We have direct evidence from motion sensor cameras that show that moose cows use Cucumber Gulch to rear calves.

New methods for quantifying habitat use by large ungulates were established in 2005. Evidence of large ungulates was found in all four habitat types in 2005, 2007 and 2008. However, we did not find that large ungulates used the mixed conifer habitat dominated by lodgepole pine in 2006. The change in use patterns by large ungulates may be due to the high amount of habitat augmentation from gondola and development activity. Moose appear to prefer shrubland dominated by grasses, sedges and small willows. This is the main wetland complex in Cucumber Gulch. Every effort should be made to maintain the integrity of the habitat in Cucumber Gulch as moose clearly use this area for a nursery. The protective cover offered by mixed conifer habitat and the availability of willows for browsing is very important for continued ungulate occupation.

Other Mammals

A large diversity of wildlife call Cucumber Gulch home, or at least utilize the habitat as a foraging ground. Pine squirrels are prevalent in all habitats with established trees. Snowshoe Hare tracks are frequently observed and could provide adequate food for the endangered Canada lynx. Muskrats, fox, coyote, porcupines and raccoons have been observed in Cucumber Gulch on numerous occasions. There has been some evidence of mountain lions and direct evidence of black bears. A mink was observed for the first time using Cucumber Gulch in July of 2007. Pine martins were observed previously, but were not seen in 2007 and 2008.

Conclusions

Conservation monitoring should be continued in order to protect Cucumber Gulch from the habitat alternation occurring on the perimeter. Deforestation and newly planned development pose a constant threat to the natural resources in Cucumber Gulch. Monitoring will provide information that will allow land use managers to make informed decisions to mitigate threats to the habitat and wildlife of Cucumber Gulch.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recent and future development is a threat to the integrity of Cucumber Gulch. In addition, increased recreational activity in the Gulch is also an environmental threat. Dogs are still frequently seen in Cucumber Gulch and are mostly seen off-leash. Every effort should be made to reduce human impacts on this critical natural resource.

- 1) Continue vegetation monitoring, in particular investigate the impact of nordic trail maintenance on biodiversity in the willow community.
- 2) Monitor weed encroachment on Cucumber Gulch and actively manage weeds at problem locations identified in the report.
- 3) Continue to monitor water quality in Cucumber Gulch, especially because of the recent and future development upstream
- 4) Continue to quantify ungulate populations and habitat use
- 5) Continue to determine relative abundance of muskrats and beavers
- 6) Continue monthly dawn songbird surveys throughout the summer months to get a more accurate estimation of population sizes
- 7) Restrict anthropogenic activity from May to August in order to minimize the impact on breeding birds and mammals.
- 8) Continue nocturnal owl surveys in order to understand how nocturnal human activity will impact wildlife.
- 9) Begin dusk bird surveys in June and July to record species that are more active at dusk than at dawn.
- 10) Continue motion sensor camera surveillance and develop methods for disseminating images.
- 11) Continue to monitor cowbird and corvid populations for increased threat of parasitism and predation
- 12) Educate the public on the value of Cucumber Gulch
- 13) Mark recreation trails clearly to keep people out of sensitive areas
- 14) Enforce dog restrictions

Summit Huts Association information sheet regarding potential of constructing a hut on Open Space property.

History and background:

During an earlier exploration to build a new hut in 2000, Summit Huts Association (SHA) had an option to purchase the Florence lode property located at 11,300' in an unnamed drainage to the south of Black Gulch on the east slope of Bald Mountain. The property was recommended by a committee made up of SHA board members, Forest Service employees, and interested citizens with input from wildlife and other resource specialists formed to find a site for a new hut. Only sites on private property were examined by this committee. For several reasons, SHA did not build the hut and instead, Summit County and Town of Breckenridge open space departments (from now on referred to as "open space or OS") jointly purchased the property and currently own it.

In 2005, SHA began the process of evaluating hut sites on public land (private property sites were not examined closely since the 2000 task force had already done an exhaustive inventory of over 20 properties). SHA selected two preferred sites – Wise Mountain and Weber Gulch. Wise Mountain was eliminated due to wildlife concerns and conflicts with White River National Forest plan prescriptions'. Weber Gulch was eliminated due to "suitable private property" (the Florence lode) being located nearby. It is Forest Service policy when a development is proposed to first exhaust possibilities on private property near the proposed site. Due to this, SHA has taken a second look at the Florence Lode OS property.

Purpose and Need:

A. SHA believes very strongly that the "hut experience" is a very positive, possibly even life changing experience. Today, when obesity and other health issues related to inactivity are an increasing problem, the hut experience promotes vigorous physical activity and sense of accomplishment due to self sufficiency. Hut users get away from computers, phones and televisions and get back to basics. The guest logbooks at the huts are full of entries in which guests revel in the sense of accomplishment of making it to the hut and a sense of appreciation for the wonders of the natural world. Hut trips are a way for people to encounter with the natural world in a relatively low impact manner.

B. For the last ten years SHA huts have operated at near 100% practical capacity. Demand exceeds supply to the point where reservations for the entire hut on weekends from late December through March require winning the spots in a lottery. SHA's purpose is to serve the public and provide shelters that allow people to use the outdoors in a non-motorized fashion. A new hut will allow SHA to better serve the demand the public has for that experience.

What is being proposed:

A. The Forest Service District Ranger has determined that she will not support a new hut on federal land on the Weber/Black Gulch divide when a potentially suitable site exists on private land nearby. This site is the 14.6 acre Florence lode open space property. Beginning in late January, SHA has been in discussion with open space staff, wildlife biologists, and the Forest Service to determine the feasibility of a winter/summer hut on this site.

B. SHA envisions a 12 person plus a hutmasters quarters hut on this site. Under backcountry zoning, the size of the parcel allows up to 1440 sq feet of livable space. At this time SHA is investigating if this size is sufficient to provide a quality experience. (For comparison, Janets cabin sleeps 20 people and has approximately 2400 sq feet of livable space and the Section House sleeps 12 and has a livable space of approximately 1700 sq ft). If a larger structure were desired, SHA's preference would be to purchase additional property in areas zoned for sending density and transfer up to 300 sq ft to the property. It is SHA's intention to build a hut using the best possible techniques for efficiency and low carbon footprint using techniques such as passive solar for heating and melting snow, SIP panels and so on.

Use of property:

If it is determined by the present owners that a hut is an appropriate use of the property, SHA would be receptive to either a long term land lease or a purchase of the property. A land lease could be modeled after the Forest Service special use permit that SHA currently operates Janets and Francies cabins under.

Access and trailheads:

A. Current access to site: Presently the site is accessed via French Gulch Rd and The Black Gulch Rd. Both are non-motorized public roads through private property. French Gulch Rd has three issues which make it unattractive for use by hut guests.

- Mountain Meadows Home owners occasionally plow the road from the Sally Barber trailhead to a property about 1/3 of a mile past the gate at the bottom of the wirepatch. SHA is concerned that in the future, as more new persons purchase property in the subdivision, pressure to plow even further will arise, making the road unsuitable for skiing.
- SHA wishes to provide as primitive of a trail experience as possible for its guests.
- SHA wishes to respect the privacy of the property owners of Mountain Meadows as much as possible and is sensitive to increasing the amount of use on the main access road through that property.

B. Trailhead and parking: Overnight parking for up to five cars would be required although typical use would be less. During the turnover period – typically between the hours of 10:00AM and 2:00PM when guests departing for and coming from the hut overlap, parking requirements would double.

Overnight parking is an issue that was preliminarily discussed during the Golden Horseshoe travel planning process and has yet to be resolved. During this process, the Lincoln town site area (the cat house) on Forest Service land was discussed as a potential major portal to in addition to the current Sally Barber parking area. After examining the issues of utilizing current parking areas, SHA believes that this site offers the best long term parking & trailhead opportunities for the potential Black Gulch hut site. This site could provide adequate parking for hut guests and the general public. SHA is willing to partner with open space & the Forest Service in the planning, construction and management of a trailhead facility at this site.

C. Alternate access: SHA has found a mining ditch that contours along the north facing slope above French Creek. This ditch could be used to bypass French Gulch Road through the Mountain meadows subdivision. This ditch goes from Weber Creek on OS property at the 10,630' level passes through several small strips of private property which either would have to be purchased or an easement for the trail granted, then goes through Forest land, intersecting the Black Gulch Road at approximately 10,720' on Federal land. It is approximately 1.75 miles long.

This ditch could provide for a non motorized alternate route for the general public as well as hut guests to get to the Black Gulch/Upper French Gulch area while avoiding most of the Mountain Meadows subdivision. The ditch is presently choked with blown down trees but would require relatively little work to make it a winter ski trail. To make it a summer trail would require more work, but still much less than a virgin trail to make it suitable for summer use. SHA would partner with OS on the NEPA for creating a new trail on Federal land and whatever improvements would be needed to make it a sustainable trail.

To access the ditch from the proposed trailhead, one would walk or ski from the Lincoln town site to Sally Barber road. They would climb Sally Barber road to the Weber Gulch two-track where they would cross Weber Creek to the ditch. Once the ditch intersected Black Gulch road hut users would then climb the road to the hut.

Currently the Black Gulch Road is a rugged 4WD route and has numerous drainage issues and crosses a wetland. SH desires to maintain the road in as primitive a state as possible and improve it only to protect resources. SHA envisions only using pick up trucks as vehicular access during construction. Delivery of heavy material during construction would be done by helicopter in 4-6 flights. The hut would be accessed by foot, ski or bicycle for routine maintenance except when vehicular access is required. If the hut is designed so as to eliminate the use of wood for heat, vehicle trips would be greatly reduced.

Timeline:

The timeline is roughly as follows. (All subject to change):

2009: discussion and approval from open space advisory commissions and elected officials, submission of proposal to Forest Service and beginning of NEPA process.

Preliminary field work done by road engineers, wildlife biologists, botanists, etc.

2010: Process with County building dept to obtain a building permit Fundraising by SHA, and planning conclusion of NEPA, trail work, process. Possible preliminary site preparation and work on Black Gulch Rd.

2011: Construction of Lincoln trailhead, trail work, construction of hut, opening for the 2011/2012 winter season.