

FISHERS PEAK STATE PARK

MARCH/APRIL INTEREST GROUP DISCUSSION OVERVIEW

Last revised 5/26/2021

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to document the input from Fishers Peak State Park Master Plan interest group sessions held in March and April 2021. The findings represent high-level takeaways, opportunities and challenges, and potential evaluation criteria for the project team to consider when identifying options for the Park. A complete list of interest group discussion notes are found in Appendix A - Full Report.

PROCESS OVERVIEW:

In January of 2021, the Fishers Peak State Park Master Plan team released a call for interest groups to sign up for interest group discussions with the intent to hold a variety of interest group discussions to engage governmental and non-governmental organizations and businesses with direct knowledge and expertise for the project. The purpose of these discussions was twofold: (1) to enable interest groups to share ideas, expertise, and thoughts on opportunities and challenges related to the park and (2) to build relationships between the project team and interest groups for the Master Plan process.

The registration process was open from January 29, 2021 - February 26, 2021. Interested groups were asked to fill out a brief questionnaire, which was distributed digitally through the Fishers Peak State Park master contact list as well as via partners including CPW, TPL, and TNC. Over 100 questionnaires were filled out. The attached Appendix B - Full Report includes a list of groups that were invited and participated in the interest group discussion process. The following interest groups were convened in March and April of 2021:

- Conservation / Environmental / Stewardship
- Wildlife / Hunting
- Outdoor Recreation
- Mountain Biking
- Equestrian
- Climbing
- Motorized Recreation
- Grazing and Agriculture
- Emergency Services
- Education and Interpretation
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Local Businesses
- Local and Regional: Colorado
- Local and Regional: New Mexico
- State and Federal Agencies

Each interest group conversation was held virtually and lasted 1.5 hours. The project team presented a high-level overview of the project and process (Appendix C - Full Report) and listened to interest group

ideas based on targeted questions. A complete agenda and list of questions can be found in Appendix D - Full Report.

The project team anticipates meeting again with the groups later in 2021 and following up with participants throughout the duration of the Master Plan.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

OPPORTUNITIES	
General appreciation to be engaged with the Master Plan	Participants were excited to be engaged in the Master Planning process and grateful to be given an opportunity to share their experiences and expertise. Maintaining this momentum and excitement will be a key factor for Master Plan success.
Emphasis on protecting natural resources and unique landscape of the Park	All groups noted the importance of conserving the special resources (wildlife, plant species, unique geographical features, etc) of the Park. While all wanted varying levels of access for the public to recreate on the Park, all recognized the importance of conserving habitat and designing recreation opportunities that have as little impact as possible on nature.
Desire for varied types of recreation opportunities that do not significantly impact existing nature	Groups noted the strong desire for a variety of recreation types for multiple skill levels . Not only is this an inclusive approach to recreation where recreationists can develop, grow and enjoy their specific skill sets, it also brings more people into the Park to learn about nature and the importance of stewardship.
Interest in unique experiences that aren't found elsewhere in the region (lookouts, wildlife viewing, challenging recreational trails, etc.)	One way to maintain visitation to the Park is to provide unique experiences (to the region and the state park system) that people want to enjoy on a regular basis. Considering how trails interact with viewing lookouts, specific rock or geographic features, wildlife viewing opportunities can create robust trail experiences that keep the user coming back for more.
Importance of tying park operations to the community (community economic	The community was an important part of interest group conversations. Recognizing this Park is a resource for the community at the foot of the peak, the community is and

<p>benefit, and community opportunities to learn and give back)</p>	<p>should continue to be engaged in a meaningful way in the Master Plan. Interest group participants mentioned the economic benefit of increased recreation and opportunities for the community to learn about stewardship and give back to the Park. Volunteer groups offered expertise on community engagement and volunteer programming to sustain this interest.</p>
<p>Opportunity for unique education, interpretation, and creative experiences</p>	<p>Planning a new state park provides a unique opportunity to have interpretive programming focused on the history of the property. Participants highlighted the need to engage elders, youth, and community members in the development of interpretation messages. In addition, the unique landscape offers a wide variety of creative experience beyond traditional recreation (artist engagement, photography, etc.)</p>
<p>Desire for inclusive and equitable recreation and visitation opportunities</p>	<p>Providing multilingual ways to engage with the Park’s interpretive content was an important component of inclusivity. Additional ideas included hiring Park staff and recruiting volunteers to reflect the diversity of the community and considering accessibility in the infrastructure development of the Park as well as the accessibility of transportation to/from the Park.</p>
<p>Preservation and recognition of history and culture of the park (Tribes, grazing and ag)</p>	<p>Many groups recognized the Park is not only an important resource for the life that thrives there, but it is an important cultural resource as well. Participants noted a desire to reflect <i>all</i> facets of the Park’s history and highlight important components including Tribal history as well as the tradition of grazing and agriculture on the land.</p>
<p>Quality trails for easier maintenance</p>	<p>Recreation user groups noted the importance (and unique opportunity) to develop a well-designed trail system from the onset of the Park that will minimize future maintenance needs. With an increase in public lands users due to COVID, increasing interest in outdoor recreation, and a growing population, building well planned, constructed and designed trails for a variety of uses is a great way to ensure long-term durability of the Park.</p>

<p>Opportunities to Partner with Local, Regional and State Organizations and Agencies</p>	<p>There were multiple offers from organizations and agencies to assist with Park operations, maintenance, emergency response, interpretation and education. For example, museums, libraries and schools (including Trinidad State) offered to host exhibits, as well as student and volunteer projects. Another example includes local and regional agencies offering support for fire planning, mitigation, response and restoration.</p>
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<p>CHALLENGES</p>	
<p>Recognition of the challenge of Park management and operations - opportunities to collaborate regionally (emergency services, businesses, volunteer groups, etc.)</p>	<p>The Park covers an extensive amount of land, creating challenges in Park management. There are many opportunities to collaborate with entities within the region to help address these management challenges. Emergency services organizations, businesses, and volunteer groups have offered their expertise and skill sets to ensure safe and enjoyable Park visitor experiences.</p>
<p>Need for appropriate infrastructure and staffing to manage visitation and respond to community/visitor needs and interests (education/volunteer coordinator)</p>	<p>With a variety of interest and user groups expected to visit the Park, infrastructure and staffing were an important component for many interest groups when considering park operations. Groups recommended staffing the Park adequately to not only enforce rules but also educate visitors and to be a resource to members of the public. With too little resources, both in terms of staffing and infrastructure, management of the Park could be a challenge from the start.</p>
<p>Landscape challenges and opportunities that may drive recreation and land use</p>	<p>Certain landscape challenges and geographical features may dictate recreation and land use opportunities. For user groups, there may be specific areas of the Park that are appropriate for specific uses, and it's unclear how difficult visitor access to these areas will be or if uses will conflict with one another.</p>
<p>Differing recreational interests and needs</p>	<p>The Project Team spoke with a number of motorized and non-motorized recreation groups, and one of the greatest challenges that arose from these conversations is that this</p>

	Park can't be everything to everyone. Many recreation user groups recognized the importance of positive interactions amongst recreation users and they identified that providing a large variety of recreational uses in the Park may pose a challenge for the team.
Community's desire for economic benefit may drive over-development of the Park	Community members are hopeful that increased recreation opportunities in the region will bring additional economic benefit. The challenge is to manage this hope and desire for economic growth with manageable recreational uses over the long term.
Visitor Management Across State Park Lines	Fishers Peak and Sugarite State Parks are adjacent to each other at the Colorado / New Mexico state borders. There is interest in addressing park visitation across the state line. One question that arose is whether it is possible to have park fees that allow access to state parks in both NM and CO. Another issue is addressing differing Park management approaches between the two state's park systems, such as allowing dogs. These issues may need to be raised to higher decision-making levels in the two states. There also is interest in coordinating and collaborating on trail connectivity, shared education and outreach, supporting the economy of neighboring communities, and other efforts.

POTENTIAL EVALUATION CRITERIA (BY FOCUS AREA):

These potential criteria represent two types of criteria used in the Master Plan to refine options and build a robust plan and management guide for the Park: 1) criteria that guide design and management approaches and 2) criteria that help evaluate options. These criteria do not reflect a full suite of what CPW will/won't do as a result of the planning process, but are concepts and ideas to be considered.

Focus Area 1: Natural Systems and Wildlife are Maintained, Conserved, and Protected

- Will the wildlife habitat remain inhabited and conserved in their present condition or better?
- Will the native plant and animal species diversity be maintained?
- Are wildlife migration corridors and winter ranges maintained or improved?
- Are facilities and trails in locations that avoid and/or minimize impacts to wildlife and important wildlife habitats?
- Are human impacts to the natural systems appropriate for/minimal enough to meet conservation goals?

- Does the management philosophy of the Park involve an ecosystem management approach versus a focus on wildlife species or the provision of recreation opportunities? (eg. holistic assessment of the overall health of the habitat and ecosystems)

Focus Area 2: Nature-based Outdoor and Recreation Activities Enhance the Visitor Experience

- Is the multi-use trail system allowing for each user group to have high quality outdoor experiences?
- Does the Park offer diverse recreation opportunities that can be used by many recreation interests and skill levels?
- Are recreation opportunities designed to minimize impacts to the Park's natural and cultural resources? (ie social trails, illegal parking, etc)
- Is recreation infrastructure and recreation opportunities planned to limit conflicts among users (hunters, recreationists, climbers, birdwatchers, etc.)?
- Are trails designed to appropriately accommodate planned uses?
- Will a diversity of seasonal visitor experiences be offered?
- Is there appropriate trail connectivity to other recreation opportunities (other parks, city, etc.)?
- Are trails designed to accommodate multiple uses and high visitation with minimal management and maintenance?
- Are there opportunities for longer (in mileage) trail experiences?
- Are there fun and entertaining opportunities to increase skill levels in different recreation opportunities?
- Is there easy access and connectivity to the park and it's trails (shuttles, connection to town, etc.)?
- Does the Park infrastructure offer opportunities to adapt to the needs of various users?

Focus Area 3: The Park Remains A Cultural And Historical Resource

- Does the story told about the Park reflect all facets of Park history?
- Are there resources dedicated to cultural and historical preservation?
- Are the recreation opportunities planned and developed in ways that preserve the cultural and historical heritage of the property?
- Have the tribes provided input on evaluation criteria, since it is so crucial to understand the resources tribes want preserved?
- Is the Park honoring its cultural history around grazing and agriculture?

Focus Area 4: Outreach and Educational Opportunities Exist for all Coloradans and Visitors

- Are there educational opportunities related to multi-use trails?
- Are there a variety of engagement opportunities for all users?
- Is there both diversity (in age, ethnicity/race, ability, recreation interest, etc.) of and significant number of individuals reached?
- Are there learning and experiential opportunities that involve and engage local and regional youth in the Park?

- Is the Park taking advantage of the potential for partnerships to support outreach and education? Does the Park have the resources and staff to accomplish this?

Focus Area 5: Economic Benefit Exists in the Context Of The Qualities and Character of the Local Community

- Is the Park creating a sufficient amount of revenue for CPW?
- Does the messaging in the Park highlight the unique character of the community of Trinidad?
- Is there trail/access connectivity to promote regional recreation, including New Mexico?
- Are there opportunities to work with local businesses to highlight Park resources?

Focus Area 6: Partnership Along With Park Development And Operations Advance Objectives From All Vision Focus Areas

- Is the Park providing educational and stewardship (ie volunteer) opportunities for the local Trinidad area community?
- Is there staff and budgetary capacity to maintain infrastructure for high-use recreational activities?
- Are there community forums established where people can share information about the Park?
- Are there criteria or a process that helps establish funding priorities?
- Are there opportunities to partner with agencies and local businesses and organizations for emergency response, fundraising, and investment management?