

COLORADO DIVISION OF PARKS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

2008 El Paso County OHV Park Grant
TOPIC

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PREPARED BY

06/06/08
DATE

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- 1) **PURPOSE:** To provide an update on the 2008 El Paso County Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Park Grant.

- 2) **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** Grant funds for OHV projects are generated through the sale of OHV registrations. It is estimated that 146,300 OHVs will be registered this year. Approximately \$3,031,000 will be available for OHV grant projects. Non-profits, federal agencies, and state and local government are eligible for OHV grants.

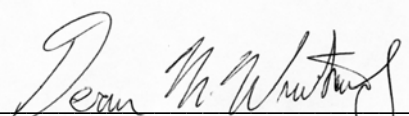
The application for the El Paso County OHV Park, Grant #31, went through a review and selection process with 40 other OHV projects. All projects were evaluated and scored and ranked. The OHV grant selection procedure follows a three-tiered recommendation and approval process. First, applications are scored and evaluated by the OHV Subcommittee who then makes recommendations to the State Trails Committee. The State Trails Committee then makes recommendations to the State Parks Board. The State Parks Board has final approval on all trail grant projects

The State Trails Committee and the State Parks Board approved \$20,000 for El Paso County to conduct a thorough public input process and environmental review. **On May 1, 2008, El Paso County elected not to proceed with the construction of an OHV Park in the Corral Bluffs area.**

- 3) **DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY:** Refer to notice from El Paso County confirming that they will not proceed with the construction of an OHV Park in the Corral Bluffs area. (*Attachment A*)

- 4) **DIVISION RECOMMENDATION:** El Paso County has elected not to move forward with the OHV Park project at Corral Bluffs. They have requested that the \$20,000 in planning money be available for the research of potential sites for an OHV Park. This request for funding will be considered at OHV Subcommittee meetings during June and July along with the other 27 project applications. These applications were received by the May 15th deadline for OHV "Cycle B".

- 5) **SUGGESTED MOTION:** N/A



Approved for submittal to the Parks Board

June 11, 2008
Date



PARKS AND LEISURE SERVICES DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of County Commissioners
Jeff Greene, County Administrator

FROM: Tim Wolken, Director of Parks and Leisure Services

RE: Off-Highway Vehicle Park Project

DATE: May 1, 2008

Background

The El Paso County Parks and Leisure Services Master Plan was updated in 2005 and included the enhancement of Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) opportunities in El Paso County. The project was included in the Master Plan due to El Paso County having the most OHV permits of any county in the state, OHV permits increasing approximately 14% per year statewide, and the number of OHV riding opportunities shrinking in our region.

Locally, we have approximately 20,000 acres of city and county parkland and 185 miles of trails, but none allow OHV activities. The City and County have spent over \$55 million of taxpayer funds over the past decade to expand non-motorized recreation opportunities with no funds being spent to establish OHV trails. It is apparent that those of us involved in park and trail development in our region have failed to address the need for additional OHV trails.

During 2007-08, the County pursued the development of an OHV Park to address the need for additional OHV trails. We researched a variety of sites and determined that developing a public – private partnership with Aztec Family Raceway (Aztec) would have significant economic advantages as the business model for the proposed OHV Park included no tax funding for the development or operation. The partnership would allow the County to use Aztec's existing parking, restroom, and concession facilities which would result in a cost savings of approximately \$400,000 in development costs. In addition, Aztec expressed interest in managing the proposed OHV trail system and would return a portion of the entry fees to the County. Finally, the area has a long history of motorized recreation activity.

The County conducted a meeting with OHV advocates in early November, 2007 to gauge the interest in developing an OHV Park in our area. The meeting was attended by approximately 75 individuals. County staff requested the group demonstrate that there is significant community interest in developing an OHV Park. Supporters gathered petitions with over 1,400 names and \$26,000 in pledges.

The County entered into a sales agreement to purchase the Case parcel north of the Aztec site, and obtained permission from area landowners for easements and license agreements to connect the Aztec and Case properties. The County negotiated a closing deadline of August, 2008 to allow adequate time to complete an extensive planning process to determine if the property is suitable for OHV trails.

The financial package for the project included a \$320,000 grant from the Colorado State Parks. The County's OHV grant application was rated the top application by State Parks OHV Sub-Committee. The grant was then reviewed by the Colorado State Trails Committee which recommended the following:

“Recommend approval of OHV Grant #31 El Paso County OHV Park however, with a two step process in the contract. Planning money would be made available right away to complete the site master planning process. The land acquisition money would be made available contingent on the outcome of the site master planning process presentation made to the State Trails Committee in June”.

The Colorado State Parks Board approved the motion at their meeting on February 22, 2008.

Planning Process

Over the past two months, El Paso County has coordinated the planning process for the proposed OHV Park. We initiated the process with self-imposed restrictions that included a single track trail system limited to motorcycles and the trails will not exceed twenty miles.

Our initial focus concentrated on environmental issues that included extensive research on flora, fauna, cultural resource, and noise abatement. The process included data collection by County staff, consultants, and qualified volunteers. The County also coordinated public planning meetings on April 1, 15, and 29 that attracted approximately 175 individuals to each meeting. The meetings included a comprehensive review of the findings and a spirited discussion on the merits of

establishing an OHV Park in this area. Please find below a summary of the environmental review:

1. Archeology survey work to date indicates one archaeological site and three isolated occurrences of cultural material. Evaluation of artifacts indicates they likely date to 6,200 B.C. or older. Given the anticipated significance of these artifacts, testing of the identified archaeological site to determine eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places may be merited. It is feasible the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) may require a Class III survey of the entire area. This survey would consist of transect surveys across the entire property with surveyors walking no more than 30 feet apart. If a Class III survey is required to evaluate archeological resources, it is estimated the cost could exceed \$100,000. Alternatively, assuming approval from the SHPO, a Class III archaeological survey may be limited to the right-of-way of the motorcycle trails and boundary fences. Should any sites be recorded during this survey, re-routing of the trail or archaeological testing for significance would then need to be undertaken.

2. The Fauna / Wildlife studies have indicated the presence of golden eagle and prairie falcon nests. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's guidance documents suggest a ¼ to ½ mile radius buffer around the nests depending upon the time of the year.

3. The County contracted with SWCA Environmental Consultants to complete a preliminary paleontological assessment of the Case parcel. Please find below an excerpt from the report that summarizes their findings:

"The following factors combine to demonstrate the high paleontological sensitivity of the Case Property: 1) the density of fossil occurrences in the Corral Bluffs area is high, and it has yielded well preserved fossils of plants and early Paleocene (Puercan) reptiles and mammals; 2) the Corral Bluffs area is particularly noteworthy from a scientific perspective because it contains a well-exposed and relatively thick sequence of the Denver Formation, including the rarely exposed K-T boundary; and 3) the Corral Bluffs Denver Formation sequence which is so well-exposed within the Case Property is extremely relevant to ongoing NSF-funded scientific research being conducted by scientists and students at the DMNS and UCM whose work documents late Cretaceous and early Tertiary paleoenvironments and biotas of the Denver Basin. It is important to point out that although the Corral Bluffs area is known to be of scientific importance as the result of the limited amount of work that has taken place there previously, the area has been largely inaccessible to paleontologists for the last several decades. Therefore, the area has not been adequately studied in the

broader context of current K-T boundary research and questions regarding earliest Tertiary faunal and floral radiation and diversification following the K-T boundary extinction event.

Without mitigation, ground disturbance associated with development within the Case Property will undoubtedly result in the destruction of scientifically significant fossils. However, given the limited amount of data generated during the field reconnaissance for this preliminary assessment, it is not yet possible to develop meaningful development-specific mitigation options. Prior to development within the Case Property, it is strongly recommended that a full stratigraphically-controlled paleontological survey be completed in order to compile the information required to fully evaluate development alternatives and generate study mitigation options. Any future paleontological surveys and all project-specific mitigation measures should be designed in such a way as to lessen adverse impacts on non-renewable paleontological resources to below the level of significance while supporting the ongoing related research of scientists from the DMNS and UCM. Because of the abundance, diversity and scientific importance of fossils in the Corral Bluffs area, together with the fact that it is the largest exposed sequence of late Cretaceous and early Tertiary rocks in the Denver Basin, mitigation strategies should include avoidance of highly fossiliferous areas, monitoring of construction excavations, and salvage of scientifically significant fossils. Importantly, if development of the Case Property proceeds, the mitigation of adverse impacts on paleontological resources should be regarded as an opportunity for community involvement with possibilities for on-site interpretive exhibits and education.”

* K-T Boundary indicates the presence of the geologic features that distinguishes the end of the age of dinosaurs and the start of the age of mammals.

4. The proposed OHV Park design process includes meeting the County’s noise ordinance which requires sound levels to not exceed 55 db(A) at the property line. It is estimated the trails would need to be a minimum ¼ mile from the property line depending upon natural barriers.

Recommendations

1. As indicated in the environmental studies conducted on this site, the Case property contains a variety of natural resources that are both sensitive and unique. El Paso County has a long history of preserving our County's "special places" that contain unique natural environments. These sites include the Paint Mines Interpretive Park, over 2,000 acres of conservation easements, and the upcoming Pineries Regional Park. Staff is concerned that the unique cultural and natural resources found in the Corral Bluffs area may be jeopardized with the installation of an OHV trail system. In addition, the wildlife and noise ordinance issues will restrict the ability to design an effective trail system. With this in mind, staff recommends that we discontinue the assessment process for an OHV trail system at this site.

2. Staff recommends the Board of County Commissioners instructs the Park Advisory Board to appoint a citizen advisory committee to continue the research of potential sites for the OHV Park. It is further recommended that staff approaches the State Trails Committee and the Yamaha Corporation to consider allowing our existing planning grants to be used for the site research.

Conclusion

This process has produced significant community debate regarding the need and the possible site for an OHV Park. During my conversations with even the most strident opponents to the Corral Bluffs site, most have agreed that the need for the OHV Park is apparent. I hope this recognition will make the development of an OHV Park a priority in our County.