



**HELENA OPEN LANDS MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY
March 10, 2020**



GENERAL MEMBERS

- Betsy Ross
- Eric Sivers
- Karen Reese
- Brian Barnes
- VACANT

CITY-COUNTY PARKS BOARD

- Ross Johnson

HELENA CITIZENS COUNCIL

- Nick Sovner

CITY OF HELENA STAFF

- Brad Langsather, Open Lands Manager
- Kristi Ponzoso, Director, P & R, Open Lands
- Jennifer Schade, Recorder

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Helena Tourism Alliance Representative

- Andrea Opitz

PPLT Representative

- Nate Kopp

LOCATION: City-County Building, Room 326

TIME: 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm

Call to Order

- The March 2020 HOLMAC Meeting was called to order at 5:36 pm.

Welcome/Introductions/Visitors

- None.

Minutes Approval

- Eric had one correction to the previous minutes. His last name was misspelled under the “Call to Order”.
- With no further corrections to the minutes, Brian moved to approve as corrected. Nate seconded. Motion carried.

HOLMAC Action Items

- None.

New Business

- None.

Reports from Subcommittees

Open Lands Department:

2020 Helena Open Lands Maintenance Plan Projects Update (1st Draft)

- Brad distributed a copy of the Open Lands Maintenance Plan. He and Kristi recently met with the three groups involved in the creation of the public involvement process. The three groups include: Helena Hikes, Helena Trails Alliance, and the Helena Bike Guild. They are close to coming to a consensus on their process. One of the items discussed was the minor projects versus the more major projects. Their distinction was the types of things one would think of. Major items would include new trail, major trailhead construction projects, etc. These items will need to go through the public process. We have a proposal from the Rotary Club as well as a project at the Old Shooting Range (restroom project) that will both need to go through some type of public process.
- We are currently finalizing projects with PPLT under an annual maintenance contract, which is basic, minor items. We will begin our normal, every-year process in September.
- We will also be holding a public listening session mid-September where new projects will be presented. This will include projects that came in throughout the year or projects brought forward by PPLT or city staff.
- We will then work through a month-by-month process where HOLMAC will evaluate projects. Our goal is to have, by December, the final list of projects that will go to Commission for approval in the hopes of having them accepted at the first Commission meeting in January. We want this done by January so we don't miss any funding opportunities. We can still look at grant funding.
- Brad did not see anything in what will be presented this evening as an issue and he was thankful to see that social trails closures were moved to the minor projects list, although there still is some concern that some social trail closures could become a controversial issue which would move them to a major project.
- Kristi gave the committee until next week to finalize their plan as we still need to complete the ADA restroom and trailhead project.
- The plan being presented this evening will not include a public involvement process. This is the maintenance plan. As we work through the process in the fall, the items on that list will go through the environmental checklist process (if they are going to be ground-disturbing projects).
- Brad then reviewed the 2020 Helena Open Lands Maintenance Plan Projects Update (1st Draft). He went through the draft item by item. The first portion of this will be PPLT responsibilities. They will begin by doing a comprehensive inspection of all the trails (40 miles of designated trails). They will also be responsible for any repairs in that trail system that is discovered during their inspection.
- There will be two separate contracts with PPLT; one for the first part of the season and one for the second. We will also include a goal between both contracts of the closure of two miles of non-designated trails by ripping and scarring the trail surface, reshaping the existing trail profile, transplanting native vegetation, recruiting top soil, and seeding over with seed provided by City. Those have not been identified as of yet. We will post signage when we know what social trails will be closed. We will include information on signs to contact the Open Lands Manager with questions/concerns.
- We will also have PPLT do a comprehensive inspection of all trail signage to include kiosk signage and animal control signage. This inspection will be due June 1 so we can purchase and get the posts and new signage ordered where needed. This will also include unsigned junctions. These two items are a large undertaking when you are talking about 40 miles of designated trails. They will install 20 sign posts and/or trail identification signs as determined from their inspections. The City will provide PPLT with posts having affixed signs.
- PPLT will also be responsible for creating a trail-data collection plan and from that plan choosing four data-collection sites they will collect data on this year. We will then ask them to deliver a report to the city. They will be looking at different ways of collecting that data.
- PPLT will develop a trail etiquette signage program for the City's open space system trailheads. Additionally, they will draft, manufacture, and distribute trail etiquette literature at the City's open space trailheads and natural resource events occurring in the greater Helena, MT area.

- PPLT will develop a youth participation program for the South Hills trails system and conduct outreach efforts with schools occurring in the greater Helena, MT area. Additionally, they will facilitate 5 youth focused events related to the South Hills trail system.
- Trail data collection, trail etiquette signage and a youth participation program were three goals set forth in our plan.
- PPLT's contract is fairly involved.
- Brad reviewed the remaining sections of the 2020 Helena Open Lands Maintenance Plan Projects Update (which include city-identified projects). A copy of the plan is attached with these minutes.
- At this time, we are focusing on the 360 project on the newly acclaimed property, LeGrande. We recently had a meeting with the neighborhood of LeGrande to inform them of what we are doing on the property. We presented Bruce Newell's trail analysis in an effort to get neighbors to decide what trails are important to them. Brad distributed a copy of the projects that we are currently working on at LeGrande. The ecosystem was completely out of balance. In doing an inventory of the LeGrande property, Brad discovered the property averaged over 1,600 trees per acre which put the total around 160,000 trees on the property. That total should be around 10,000. 1,530 of those trees were under 6 inches. We will address other issues such as trails in the fall. We will go through this process very gently. Right now, there is a petition to open the closed gate on the east side of this property. This will be a game changer for use as this is where our recreationalists are parking at this time.
- We will also be getting back to work on the Mount Helena project that we began last year. The Mount Ascension project is completed; however, we did not make much progress burning this year because of the lack of snow.
- As far as forestry, we will begin working between 1906 and Prairie. Brad anticipates that this could be controversial. We will go pretty light with our first entry there.
- Facilities: Last week Brad had his crew work on an informational kiosk which will be installed shortly. It will be located adjacent to the SW corner of the Disc Golf Parking Area (Donaldson Property) near the intersection of Saddle Drive and Cabernet Drive intended for the display of a map of the Saddle Drive Disc Golf Course, Fire Danger Ratings and any additional information deemed necessary. This kiosk is the size of the kiosk located at Mount Helena. Not only is the Golf course very busy in the spring, but the trail is getting a lot of use. We will include a trail map in the kiosk as well.
- Brad is working on getting new picnic tables at the Mount Helena trailhead. The picnic tables are completed; we just need to get them at the trailhead. We do need new picnic benches as well. The kiosk is very aged.
- There is just a little bit of work left to do at Charles VanHook.
- We have had a couple of requests for additional pet waste stations. Brad plans to install a pet waste station at the westernmost portion of the Le Grande Cannon Boulevard trail and analyze the potential installation of two additional pet waste stations, one at intersection South Davis/2nd Street and a second to be located at intersection Red Letter Street/Heritage Drive.
- Someone vandalized the new gate we put in at the Archery Range so we will need to repair that.
- We will be replacing the Mount Ascension traffic control gate located near the intersection of the Eddy McClure West Trail and Arrowroot Drive.
- We have been approved to move forward with the Beattie Street Trailhead. We will remove the Beattie Street Trailhead fencing and pet waste station prior to the start of construction activities.
- We need to get fencing in at the top of Mount Ascension as Brad is experiencing issues with off-roading.
- Brad moved on to the discussion of weeds. With Greta leaving, Brad has put more money into the weed program for open lands. We won't be funding that position anymore so we will place those funds in contractual power. Our staff member responsible for the maintenance of trailheads will now be responsible for the weeds directly surrounding the trails.

- At least 75 acres of the acreage to be treated this year will be at LeGrande.
- Brad added he will attempt to continue on Greta's efforts of biological releases. This won't be easy because of the loss of Greta's position.
- Brad is hoping that by the next meeting, HOLMAC members will have an opportunity to review the public involvement process.
- Brad did have some concerns over the environment checklist process. We may need to get City legal involved if this continues to be an issue. Right now, we are obligated to the natural parks. Brad feels our checklist is accurate.
- We will minimize projects outside of the fall efforts. We won't take DeFord or Limekiln through a process this summer. They can wait until fall.
- Eric then asked if we are considering changing/providing parking at the top of Arrowroot Drive. Brad stated this is on his radar and may go through in the fall. Eric stated there is a need at that location.
- Brad stated that "change of use" or "installment of features" will move a project to the public involvement process.
- Brad thanked HOLMAC for their support in the Beattie process. The price includes the restroom.
- In this workplan, Brad added that we will restripe the Mount Helena (Readers Village) and Dump Gulch Trailheads.

Budget Update

- We are having some issues with the two-year budget situation. We have been paying 75% of the salary of the individual working on the trailheads, but with the new trailhead at Beattie and possibly the Old Shooting Range, Brad increased that to 95%. As he mentioned earlier, we also have increased the size of the contract with PPLT as well as what will be done with weeds.
- We are paying a good portion of the engineering work for Beattie and will pay approximately \$200,000 of the actual trailhead work. This will draw our reserves down.
- The increased maintenance assessment will help.

PPLT Update - Nate

- Nate – PPLT is in the process of hiring the new trail coordinator. They have some good candidates.
- The contract is looking a little different.
- They have an environmental education program they started last year so Nate hopes to continue that program.

Next Meeting Date: ~~April 14, 2020~~

Future Agenda Items:

Adjournment:

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