



**HELENA OPEN LANDS MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY
December 8, 2020**



GENERAL MEMBERS

- Betsy Ross
- Eric Sivers
- Karen Reese
- Brian Barnes
- Claudia Clifford

CITY OF HELENA STAFF

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

CITY-COUNTY PARKS BOARD

- David McGuire *absent*

HELENA CITIZENS COUNCIL

- T.J. Lehman

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Helena Tourism Alliance Representative

- Andrea Opitz

PPLT Representative

- Nate Kopp

VIA ZOOM MEETING

Time: Dec 8, 2020 05:30 PM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/93411495787?pwd=SOQyTHFHUUh0S0FJWlpDNjJGb2VvUT09>

Meeting ID: 934 1149 5787

Passcode: 845177

One tap mobile

+16699006833,,93411495787# US (San Jose)

+12532158782,,93411495787# US (Tacoma)

Dial by your location

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington D.C.)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

Meeting ID: 934 1149 5787

Find your local number: zoom.us/u/adGjdOhUof

Call to Order

Chairman, Eric Sivers called the December 8, 2020 HOLMAC meeting to order at 5:34 pm. A quorum was established.

Welcome/Introductions/Visitors: Jerry Wells, Lisa Bay, Joan Miles

Minutes Approval

- Approval of September 2020 Minutes
 - + Betsy stated attendance was not included on the September minutes. **Jennifer will get that information from the ZOOM transcript and get that added to those minutes.**
 - + With no other corrections, Karen moved to approve the September minutes as presented. Eric seconded. Motion carried.
- Approval of November 2020 Minutes
 - + With no noted corrections, Brian moved to approve the November 2020 minutes as presented. Claudia seconded. Motion carried.

HOLMAC Action Items

Selection of HOLMAC Representative to a Davis/DeFord Working Group

- The first action item to be addressed is the selection of a HOLMAC Representative for the Davis/DeFord planning efforts.
- As the city worked through the public process, there were two projects proposed for the Davis and the DeFord area. One was to look at converting the DeFord trail to an ADA accessible trail, and the other was for making the dirt jumps at the bottom of Davis Gulch a more formal recreational area. These two locations are side by side so the uses are somewhat intertwined. Therefore, the city agreed to form a working group in an effort to come up with the best solution, with community buy-in, as a proposal for the next work plan process next fall. Again, the work group will consist of seven members to include:
 - + A member of HOLMAC
 - + The parties who proposed said projects (Matt Culpo and Meg Bishop)
 - + A representative from the City of Helena Community Development Department
 - + A representative from (1) Helena Hikes, (2) Helena Trails Alliance, and (3) Montana Bicycle Guild.
- The city has agreed to facilitate three meetings.
- Eric S, TJ, and Claudia all belong to one of the above listed groups so they have recused themselves from volunteering for this work group. Eric then asked HOLMAC members if someone is willing to represent HOLMAC on this work group. Karen volunteered. With no further discussion, Claudia moved to accept Karen as representative on the Davis/DeFord Working Group Committee. TJ seconded. Motion carried.
- As a reminder, Brad stated that the representative from the City of Helena Community Development Department will serve in the ADA role. This is the department within the city that handles ADA compliance for the City of Helena.

Discussion of a System-Wide Trail Assessment

- Eric S stated the second item opened for discussion is in follow-up to a request for a system-wide trail assessment and what this process would look like.

- Claudia stated that she understands the city is concerned about the cost of doing a comprehensive assessment to include all of our trails. In previous discussion, Jerry Wells and Lisa Bay suggested looking at a pilot program which would allow a group to, 1. Determine what should be assessed, and 2. select a small area using volunteers to do the work. Claudia recommends we use the winter months to create criteria and identify some potential sites for a project like this.
- Eric S stated that he believes there is a need/advantage for looking at the trail system holistically to determine whether or not it is functioning the way it should. What are the goals for our trail system on Mount Ascension. Is the trail network meeting those goals? Are there additional needs that are unmet? Are the trails in good condition? The existing trail network has expanded over the years. Some of legacy trails are not functioning as well as our more modern trails. The issues aren't just drainage and water. We have learned about ways to have more "frictionless/multi-use trails". These are the areas we can identify and use as an example for this process.
- Nate – As part of their contract this spring, PPLT put together a trail inspection report in an effort to identify maintenance issues and potential safety concerns. These will now become items that Brad and Nate would coordinate on as far as trail maintenance activities. This was not an assessment in determining how a particular trail is functioning (or not functioning). This was done to identify trails that have maintenance concerns which will need to be addressed over the next few years. By in large, the trail system was in fairly good shape this spring. It will be interesting to do this assessment again next year. We all have seen increased trail use this year as a result of COVID. Nate then stated that this process was not an assessment of trail functionality. There can be issues with the legacy trails that Eric S alluded to. There is benefit to well-designed trails; both from a safety perspective and multiuse engagement as well as sustainability. You don't have to do maintenance as often if the trail is built well. There is some merit to some type of reflection and self-assessment.
- TJ – in reviewing the assessment with city staff, do you make determinations of items needing work/completion in one year, two year, five years, etc. Or is it more a discussion of immediate needs (drainage ditches, brush cutting, etc.).
- Nate stated that this was first year of a formal trail inspection. Because PPLT has always been the "maintenance partner" with the city, this has always been done internally and relatively informally. PPLT does keep a list of potential future projects. This was the first year there was information put into a document for the city to use and be able to reference.
- Karen then asked Nate if all trails within the South Hills were surveyed. Nate stated the document he is referencing is solely city lands. The remainder of the trails were done more informally. The report is specific to the city.
- Brian added that as part of the maintenance portion of trail assessment, and as a hunter, it would be interesting to see which trails could be identified as access points for hunting on public lands.
- Claudia stated that it would be worth evaluating the current social trails and some of our newly acquired land. She added it would be worth looking at a more detailed approach than what PPLT has done.
- Lisa mentioned that we want to recognize when creating the criteria that we include the different needs for different user groups. Examples include tread conditions and high-marking. She would like to have some of these issues like this included in the inventory.
- TJ stated that he, Lisa Bay, representatives from Helena Hikes, the Montana Bicycle Guild, and Kristi went on a hike about 1½ years ago. They discussed the high-mark situation. This could be due to fast mountain bikers and kids perhaps going off trail and taking the turns a bit wider. You can't throw a jersey barrier along that area nor can you line rocks on those high marks. TJ asked if there

is a way to address this issue on the DeFord Trail or the Woodchip Trail. Brad stated that HOLMAC has discussed these issues in the past. We have always been hesitant to install obstacles as that, in and of itself, could cause potential safety issues. In the city system, these issues are not wide spread. In our discussions, we always be focused on city trails and not forest service trails. We have no authority over forest service trails other than McKelvey.

- Brad added that we do have our share of issues with social trails within the city. As Nate stated earlier, when he did his inspection, they were evaluating the existing condition of the trail, not an assessment of the functionality. The city trails were in pretty good condition. That is largely due to the work that PPLT has done over the years. If we are doing an assessment over functionality, that is completely different than what we did last year. Last year, PPLT executed an inspection in order for us to structure a maintenance contract.
- Eric G stated he has had conversations about the assessment with members of the Montana Bicycle Guild, Helena, and city staff and voiced support for the idea of a pilot project that does focus on a trail or constrained area. He stated he feels it would help if we all start to understand that trail design has evolved considerably. He also stated it would be helpful to get stakeholders together to look at some of these issues and to look at the criteria for the pilot project. Eric G also voiced support for bringing in an outside trail expert who has experience with multi-use trails systems and some of the contemporary design that goes into a trail system. How can our trails can be improved? Most of what needs to be done can be done with a volunteer group. If the process is successful, we can move out to a bigger landscape. Lisa agreed with Eric's comments.
- Jerry complimented Nate on all the work he did. When he saw the cost was for what was done, he was astounded. Thank you Nate! Jerry learned a lot from reading Nate's report. He added that he would like to spend time with Nate to learn about the criteria used in the report. Jerry then expressed support in Eric G's comments. He then stated he there is a need for criteria within this project to include social trails. They have to be dealt with. They need to be part of the trail system or destroyed. The longer the wait on this issue, the harder it will be to rectify the problem.
- Brad – starting in 2012, HOLMAC worked a couple of summers on mapping social trails. For the past eight years, we have been closing social trails, signing them, and/or placing out physical barriers. The last few years, there has been a lot of ongoing work. In 2012, HOLMAC went through the system and decided which social trails will become designated trails. At that time, there was between 6 – 8 social trails that became designated trails. This has been an ongoing process and is not something that hasn't had activity. We have had a lot of closed social trails reopened. This has not been an easy task by any means. We are willing to go through this exercise again and map these social trails again. We have GPS units and can put these trails on a map. We are more than happy to continue that effort. We will continue to have a goal in each contract with PPLT to close selected social trails and we always attempt to work on the worst offenders first.
- Jerry stated that he was not aware of the ongoing work the city has been doing. He believes we need to convince the users that it is in their best interest to deal with this.
- Brad agreed and added that this problem has become worse in the last decade. We have had social trails develop where we never had issues before. This is one of the reasons we have been unable to gain any ground with these issues.
- Eric S – this is something that is an important conversation within the context of a broader trail assessment. People need to respect existing trail network; however, we need to ask the question of whether or not a particular "social trail" is meeting a need that isn't there. An example of that is when we decided in 2012 to adopt the "No Trail" as a part of the system. It got its name because people started walking up behind the sign that stated "no trail". We (HOLMAC) recognized that this

trail did meet a need for the people wanting to go directly up Mount Helena that was preferable to the Power Line Trail. Eric believes that in most cases the majority of the social trails should be closed/obliterated (not just covered with wood). Unless that tread goes away, we will see continued use.

- Eric G – if we undertake this pilot project, we need to look at social trails and where they have been successful and where that haven't been successful. This would be another facet of the pilot project that would be very valuable and maybe allow us the opportunity to come up with some successful strategies. Eric was involved in the obliteration of some of the trails that went straight up through the switchbacks. He also assisted with putting in some of the carsonite signs. There have been many social trails that have appeared in the last couple of years and Eric feels it would be valuable to look at education and potential obliteration. This could be another part of the criteria for trail assessments on Mount Ascension and at how we successfully get rid of the social trails that aren't meeting the needs of the community.
- Eric S agreed with Eric G in that we have seen some of the best results with closures when using carsonite signs which explain that there is an effort to reclaim the area and to respect that. Generally, people seem to understand them most.
- As Brad eluded to, it is tremendously hard to get people to respect what we are trying to do and the signs definitely help. Nate stated that we do try to be as responsive as we can when a social trail is noticed. Nate added that he has seen plenty new trails appear in the last couple of years.
- Eric Sivers – likes the idea of potentially looking at pilot project that HOLMAC can evaluate and in turn forward on to city staff with an endorsement or recommendation. The next question is what is best way to move forward on this? Eric asked Nate if this is something he could facilitate through his role with PPLT. Nate stated he feels he should defer to city first and foremost. Perhaps this is something that would be pertinent to the maintenance contract with the city; however, for now, Nate feels this needs to be a city decision.
- Claudia stated she feels PPLT would need to be involved in the process by virtue of the work PPLT does with the trail system.
- Nate happy to lend knowledge and is happy to participate depending on how the city would like to proceed. Brad stated he, as the representative for the city, is very interested in this pilot project idea. He also feels this would be a good inclusion into PPLT's contract. Hopefully this is something we could kick off in the spring. While Brad agrees with bringing in someone from outside of the community to do a trail assessment. This is something where the city would enter into an agreement with that entity so they would be compensated for their time. They would coordinate with PPLT. Brad's reasoning for moving forward with the pilot project is that the items identified can then be turned into action the following year. If there are a number of items, they would go through the major project process. Rather than doing a system-wide assessment, we would be able to see the "fruits of the labor" right away. One trail that has been mentioned, and Brad is asking for HOLMAC's recommendations, is the 2006 Trail from Easy Rider to Arrowroot. Over the years, this is a trail that has been discuss in trail Committee discussions and is one that could be accomplishable as a pilot project to look at the functionality of that trail and what issues it does have.
- Eric S stated this would be a good trail to consider and he is aware that PPLT is looking at a potential realignment as one of the major projects going forward next year. Another one to consider is Eddy West. There has been a lot of conversations regarding Eddy West and being part of this pilot project might give those conversations some framework. Eric then stated that with what Brad said,

this is perhaps a project that can fall under the PPLT maintenance contract. Otherwise, we do have strong volunteer support as well.

- Lisa stated it is a great idea to bring in outside expertise. She is curious to know if there will be an opportunity for a group like those in attendance of this meeting tonight to look at the criteria to be used. Eric S has an example of inventory protocol. She asked Brad for clarification on how this process would work.
- Brad stated HOLMAC would be responsible for developing the criteria and the city would then use the approved criteria as the scope of services for the outside expert. Brad added that it could be part of PPLT's contract to reach out and find that expert. The criteria would be the scope of services that would have to be met. That individual would have to look at the criteria when analyzing the trail. Brad added that the volunteers could look at the results of what the outside individual thinks of a particular trail and then, if there are major changes that need to occur (if minor, they would become part of our general work plan), the volunteers could bring that forward as a major project in 2021. As we go into the future, we would identify trails in a similar fashion.
- Eric S stated that Lisa's point is very well taken in that the criteria in which the trails are assessed is paramount in this effort.
- **Eric then asked members of HOLMAC and members of the public who are participating in this process to forward some ideas of important criteria to Jennifer that she in turn can share with HOLMAC and interested parties for discussion at an upcoming HOLMAC meeting.**
- Lisa recommended that Eric S send out the criteria he submitted in the fall for people to review. Eric stated he will send that information to Jennifer to share.
- Karen asked if there are any other communities who have gone through an trail assessment like this. Eric stated that he is aware that Missoula has gone through a similar process. Karen then asked if there is any information Missoula could share to get us started. Eric recommended that it might be beneficial to research trail assessments on other similar trail networks (looking at the fact that they should be city-adjacent, multi-use, non-motorized, etc.). Assessments in wilderness areas would not be a proper analog for us.
- **Brad stated we can reach out to Missoula for their assessment. He will have Jennifer distribute that to members.**
- Eric G stated that he came across the Missoula assessment. It was an interesting assessment and it was there to educate. Volunteers all agreed to go out and assess each segment of trail. They were evaluating the right out-slope, back-slope, proper grade, etc. Eric G feels it would be a good place to start. He also mentioned that Missoula is doing a big project on one of their multi-use trail systems. This project is being facilitated by MTB Missoula. Brian Williams would be a good resource for us. (For more information on MTB, please go to: <https://www.mtbmissoula.org>). Brian has been involved in a lot of big trail use projects. Eric added that his vision for this process is that interested stakeholders could come together and meet with whomever the outside expert is and have that outside expert discuss how trails are assessed, what the considerations are in constructing new trails, and what are the technical features that make a good trail. He would like to see this process as more of an educational approach. If this pilot project is successful and we are able to move into bigger landscapes, we will have a group who really understand what is possible with our trails.
- **Eric S asked that Jennifer send out the criteria he submitted in the fall for people to review.** This information will then be part of the discussion of criteria for the pilot project moving forward.

Reports from City / Subcommittees

Update from City Staff on the following:

- Budget and budget process
 - ✚ Brad stated the requests for personnel is out. Each department is required to submit requests for seasonal/temporary employees. Brad is not anticipating many changes in open lands. We may need to shuffle our seasonal staff depending on how we structure our field season. We will continue on with Brad being the only full-time employee. Mike Dunlap's time is shared between open lands and parks maintenance with open lands work at 95% of his salary. He manages the trailheads. We will have a seasonal crew. There may be a different emphasis in their workloads if we are successful in obtaining a weed grant.
- Weed Control Activities
 - ✚ We have a volunteer who has offered to write a grant in getting additional funding for dealing with weed issues. Brad hopes we can obtain funding for two seasonal employees who focus only on working on weeds. Brad has also had preliminary discussions with the city's weed contractor about increasing the size of our weed contract significantly. Our hopes are to get an earlier start on tackling the weed issues.
 - ✚ This fall, Robert Rasmussen spent a tremendous amount of time on open lands mapping existing weeds (species and size of the patch) on Mount Ascension and Mount Helena and it is our hope that this will assist in structuring what areas we will be treating. We doubled our weed treatment this last year; however, we have a lot of properties that have a lot of issues.
 - ✚ Last year we trimmed all trailheads and this seemed to help with weed complaints. We will continue on with this effort. Many of you may not be aware, but we mow many of our open lands properties. We will be looking at upgrading to a better mower to expedite this work.
 - ✚ We were successful in getting the Dry Gulch PSR Forestry Grant (\$35,000) to work on areas adjacent to the Entertainment Trail that haven't had the first thinning yet.
- Upcoming Forestry Activities
 - ✚ Current projects: we just finished the last portion of Winscott Crystal Drive property above Gold Rush.
 - ✚ We will be starting thinning the area above the Old Shooting Range Trailhead so it would be the area adjacent to the upper skills course and upper DeFord Trail. The forest service requested we get this area thinned in an effort to help facilitate some of their burning on Rodney Ridge because that has never been thinned.
 - ✚ We had the opportunity to bring on a burning crew with the long college break so we have two individuals working up at the 10-Mile drainage up at Scott Reservoir. If we do get snow, Brad will move them down to Mount Ascension and Mount Helena. This crew will work until a week after the first of the year.
 - ✚ The work at Davis may necessitate temporary closures. A lot of the work is more on the skills trail which doesn't get a tremendous amount of use this time of the year.
 - ✚ Narrate Church completed its third firewood distribution project for the year. They have enough material for a fourth distribution in January. This goes to people in the community who need assistance in heating their homes.

PPLT Update / Nate

- This is PPLT's off-season.
- Once the work plan is finalized, Nate will begin working with Brad on contracts for next year. As they get closer to spring, PPLT hopes to complete the tasks from the previous contract with the city that aren't done.

- PPLT is working on Trail Etiquette distribution materials. This includes brochures and posters. The goal for distribution is targeting April 1 as this is when the trail season begins. Local breweries downtown are getting opened to the possibility of trail etiquette coasters, etc. More to come!

Public Comment

- None.

Future Agenda Items

1. Homework:

- **Jennifer will resend the memo Kristi sent in July to HOLMAC which discussed e-bike management.** This will be the predominant agenda item for our next HOLMAC meeting. Please take some time to research e-bike use in other areas (such as Spokane, WA). The more informed discussion we have the better.
- **Brian stated that back in August he sent out Missoula's E-bike policy. He will forward this information on to Jennifer to distribute.**
 - + Claudia recommended we ask someone from Missoula and/or Bozeman to perhaps do presentation on what they looked at when discussing E-bike use.
 - + Brad stated that if they have gone through the process, we can ask them to present. Brad then mentioned that Park City, Utah did an extensive analysis of E-bike use. We will be more than happy to invite someone to present at a HOLMAC meeting.
 - + Eric S would be very interested in looking at Spokane and Park City. He is aware that those locations both have extensive mountain bike use.
 - + Missoula would be good as they interface with the US Forest Service. Brad then reminded everyone that Kristi's memo stated that we need to remember to look at what our adjacent agencies are doing. Eric S stated the forest service published a draft rule that would effectively follow the BLM and would still allow for local discretion.
 - + Nate stated he could reach out to his counterparts with the local land trust in Bozeman as they are involved in some of the trail maintenance management activities with city and forest service. The land trust community may have some other ideas we could explore.
 - + Brian added that the E-bike conversation may also fall under the trail assessment process we are working on.
- Claudia asked if we will encourage people from the public to share their perspectives? Eric S stated that he feels this issue will eventually need some public input; however, Eric believes Kristi is asking HOLMAC to have discussions before bringing it to the public for input.
- Brad stated that our office has had individuals contact us asking us about what our policy is in regards to E-bikes. We now feel we need a clear policy.

Adjournment

With no further business, Brian moved to adjourn the December 8, 2020 HOLMAC Meeting. Karen seconded. Motion carried.

ADA NOTICE

The City of Helena is committed to providing access to persons with disabilities for its meetings, in compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Montana Human Rights Act. The City will not exclude persons with disabilities from participation at its meetings or otherwise deny them the City's services, programs, or activities.

Persons with disabilities requiring accommodations to participate in the city's meetings, services, programs, or activities should contact Sharon Haugen, Community Development Director, as soon as possible to allow sufficient time to arrange for the requested accommodation, at any of the following: Phone: (406) 447- 8490; TTY Relay Service 1-800-253-4091 or 711 Email: citycommunitydevelopment@helenamt.gov, Mailing address & physical location: 316 North Park, Avenue, Room 445, Helena, MT 59623.