



City of Helena

HELENA OPEN LANDS MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE SUMMARY August 13, 2019



GENERAL MEMBERS

- Betsy Ross
- Eric Sivers
- Karen Reese
- Brian Barnes
- Mark O'Keefe

CITY OF HELENA STAFF

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

CITY-COUNTY PARKS BOARD

- Ross Johnson

HELENA CITIZENS COUNCIL

- Nick Sovner

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Helena Tourism Alliance Representative

- Andrea Opitz

PPLT Representative

- Evan Kulesa

LOCATION: City-County Building, Room 326

TIME: 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm

Call to Order

- The HOLMAC meeting was called to order at 5:31 pm.

Welcome/Introductions/Visitors: Eric Gomes, Coleen Street, Cory Sena, Bradley Murfitt, Jim Barnes, Cole Johnson, Dan Ellis, Chris Shaffer, Kurt Valiton, Tim and Piper Lynch, Tony Zammit, Shannon Stevens, Eric Sullivan, Jake Larson, Rita Vincello, Megan Heltan, Ed Leas, Jamie Masheu, Robin Shopshire, Matt Culpo, Christine Thennis, Gretchen Bingman, Brian Elliott, Sean Tippin, Cole Johnson, Mike Williamson, Sarah Norcott, Scott Mincemeyer, Steve Cooper, Julie Cox, Dan Bury, Denise Roth-Barber, Jason O'Neil, Amanda Greese, Lindsey Gilstrap, Dave Ellis, Jesika Fisher, Andy Fitzhuh, Tim Chisman, TJ Lehman, Heather O'Loughlin, Amada Opitz.

Minutes Approval

- Evan noted one correction on the May 2019 minutes. Page 5, second bullet should read "Don't Fence Me In Run".
- With no further corrections, Brian moved to approve the May 2019 minutes as amended. Karen seconded. Motion carried.
- Denise Roth-Barber has stepped down as chair of HOLMAC. Eric has volunteered to serve as Chair. With no discussion, Mark moved to approve Eric Sivers as the new HOLMAC Chair. Ross seconded. Motion carried.
- Betsy volunteered to serve as Vice Chair. With no discussion, Eric moved to approve Betsy as the Vice Chair of HOLMAC. Mark seconded. Motion carried.

HOLMAC Action Items

- None.

New Business

2019 Open Lands Work Plan Comments/Responses (See “Exhibit A”)

Kristi stated that we are currently reviewing our open lands work plan. We put this out for public comment at beginning of July. We held a public meeting on July 25 with a few community members present. The comments that were attached to the agenda were the comments that we received. We have attached a copy of the comments along with the city’s responses to the comments. Brad reviewed the comments/responses. There were three subjects: Weeds, Forestry Management, and the Directional Trail.

Weeds

- The first comment included more education regarding weed pulling. We are attempting to do a better job of this. We have organized weed pulls that PPLT and the city co-host. Brad agreed with this comment in that we need to have more education regarding weed pulls. We had a lot more weeds this year which meant a lot more trash. Next season, we will work on some education that we can post at the trailheads, formalizing the process a little more.
- Another comment was that we should prioritize weed control within the open lands system. This year we have had trouble keeping up with weed control and are now trying to address hot spots. We will have more money budgeted for next year because of some changes in management. Activities will include a combination of herbicide and string trim work and more biocontrol. Parks department will evaluate the request of biocontrol efforts. Biocontrol works over time. The results are not as obvious with instant results that we get from doing chemical control. We have been doing releases in remote sites.
- It was also recommended we take another look at livestock grazing as a form of weed control. This has failed miserably in the past due to lack of water availability and presence of off leash zones.
- There was a comment directing the city to eradicate yellow and white sweet clover. Yellow and white sweet clover are not listed by the county as noxious weeds and therefore are not subject to management within Helena’s open lands system. We have included a noxious weed list in the packet.
- City staff will work on mapping weed reservoirs adjacent to system trails/trailheads and prioritize weed control methods within identified areas.

Close Social Trails on Mount Helena’s Lower Slopes

- Social trails have always been an issue on Helena open lands. We have made a lot of effort in dealing with social trails, i.e. mapping them, physically attempting to close them, putting carsonite signs up, and use social education. Off-trail recreation is not prohibited. We have a lot of trails especially on Mount Helena’s lower face. This will be addressed as part of the Open Lands Management Plan, Chapter 7, Recreation Plan Update.

Pet Waste

- A few years ago we created the on and off leash signage in an effort to get more compliance. We had specific pet language on the signs. HOLMAC has looked at other signage dedicated to more awareness in managing pet waste. We will need to reevaluate this issue in the 2020 open lands work plan. We certainly have the facilities. We have the mutt mitts and trash cans.

- The last comment was regarding the installation of pet waste composting stations at major trailheads. City staff has determined that separating and composting pet waste at city trailheads is not financially or logistically practical.

Forest Management

- There was a concern that tree thinning dries out forest and increases fire spread. There is fire science to back that claim is true. Tree thinning methodology currently employed within Helena's open lands system is consistent with the ecological restoration activities identified for implementation within chapters 3 and 4 of the open lands management plan.
- We need the quick moving, low intensity fires that are not damaging to the forest. We are also trying to increase the resiliency of forest. Our open lands average about 850 pretreatment trees per acre. We need to be between 50 to 80 trees an acre. We go there very slowly. The process could take 25 years. The goal is to get fewer trees, bigger trees and stronger trees. We have frequent fires in our low elevation forest. There are reasons we do what we are doing.
- This commenter also objected to logging and thinning Helena's North Face. First, we don't log. The definition of logging is:
Logging is the cutting, skidding, on-site processing, and loading of trees or **logs** onto trucks or skeleton cars. ... In forestry, the term **logging** is sometimes used narrowly to describe the logistics of moving wood from the stump to somewhere outside the forest, usually a sawmill or a lumber yard. The only thing the open lands departments converts is some material that goes to LEAP (Low-Income Energy Assistance Program). Volunteers break it down for firewood that goes to those in need. We do this at sites where the material is accessible.
- The tree thinning activities have been completed in accordance with the management activities approved within Helena's 2004 Open Lands Management Plan.
- The next area of concern is that logging and thinning increase weed populations. We have some prolific weed populations within our forestry areas pretreatment. Thinning allows us access to get into the area to treat the weeds. Any areas disturbed to bare mineral soil (areas where we burned) are hand raked and grass seeded in the vegetation growing season. The seed is native grass seed. We have also had great success of keeping the weeds from getting into the burned areas. wanting to get into that thinned areas.
- The commenter wanted more details regarding thinning projects. Specific details regarding forest management practices and methodologies scheduled for implementation are generally included within the associated narrative portions of each grant document accepted by the city commission. We are obligated to perform project duties per specifications.

Recreation Management

- There were three concerns from this commenter. They suggested that bikes used within Helena's Open Lands system poses a dangers to hikers; Bikers using Helena's Open Lands system build illegal trails; and we should ban bikes on Mount Helena. Brad stated the Helena Open Lands are managed for multiple use, including biking, hiking, dog walking, etc.
- There are several user-created trails in HOL's. The staff has worked to obliterate these trails as they are made. Brad added these trails are made by all different types of users.
- In Brads 11 years with the city, we have never had a biker strike a hiker on HOL's. We have had biking accidents and slip and fall accidents, but we have not had any situation of bikers striking hikers. Brad does not feel this is a problem.

- The second comment was that bikers are building illegal trails. Brad stated we have had illegal trails, but we don't know who is building those trails. When we find a rogue trail (different from social trail) we close them to where they can't be open again.
- Lastly, we will not ban bikes on Mount Helena. The Helena Open Lands system is a multi-use city park.

Recreation Management: Mitigating Impacts, Reducing Conflicts, and Maintaining the Directional Trail

- Helena Parks, Recreation, and Open lands staff will review the use and functionality of the Directional Trail this Summer/Fall. We will, working with user groups, identify any issues and if needed formulate potential mitigation to address those issues.
- Brad does not see much use on Eddy West. It is not a heavily-used trail.
- Sessioning (**Sessioning** is the art of practicing and developing your skills in areas that you are not as proficient in. These skills that you pick up through practicing hard sections of **trail** carry on into every aspect of riding). Brad stated we will do another tour through the directional trail. We have talked about better access to Eddy West. HOLMAC visited the directional trail in the spring. It was functioning very well. We are getting very good drainage. We were also were also successful on seeding side areas and the disturbance was pretty much was confined down to the tread which was our goal. The parks department moved all the lumber up there for the two wood features. The two wood features will be constructed.
- As with all our trails, the open lands department will continue to monitor our trail system.

Comments from HOLMAC

- Betsy asked if any of these items reviewed be moved to the 2020 work plan given the fact that 2019 is almost over. Brad stated the big push will be to get fencing done at the end of Beattie Street before it freezes. Brad is very committed to get the Wetland Conservation Group project completed this summer as well.
- This is the first time HOLMAC has viewed this revised work plan. Brad would like to get the support from HOLMAC to take this to the commission for final approval.
- Ross stated that some of the comments discussed today seem more relevant to the update of Chapter 7.
 - Kristi – We have hired a consultant who is working on the Chapter 7, Recreation portion of the work plan.
 - The consultant has engaged focus groups and stakeholders in the rewrite of this section of the plan. We have gone through the first phase. The consultant interviewed 50 people which included 23 different user groups. We are now working on phase two (Kristi received a draft of that phase). Phase two will be more specific (i.e., what are we going to do regarding safety, trail maintenance, etc.). We are hoping to have a final draft of Chapter 7 out sometime in November. Everyone is invited to attend any or all of the meetings.
 - Mark moved that HOLMAC recognizes and supports the 2019 Open Lands Work Plan presented to the board this evening. Brian seconded. Motion carried. Presentation to the commission is tentatively scheduled for the August 26th commission meeting.
 - Betsy asked how we will proceed with next year's work plan? Kristi stated that we are looking at doing the work plan differently. That will be discussed in the Chapter 7 rewrite. Chapter 7 will address new trails, new infrastructure, land management

changes, etc. Our current “work plan” will be for internal purposes only (i.e., general maintenance of our system, etc.). New projects will go through a process that will include public input.

Reports from Subcommittees

Report from PPLT

- PPLT acquired and donated 72 acres of land to the city. Evan thanked Brad for getting resources up to the property so quickly. PPLT has gotten good comments from the public and are excited about the long-term protection of LeGrande Cannon trail. There are a lot of trails on this land.
- PPLT has been working on trail maintenance (i.e., weed pulls).
 - Next, they will be reassessing the trails from weekend storms. There is a foot-deep rut on Carriage Lane that needs some work.
- Thanks to PPLT for all your hard work.

Public Comment

- Denise - What prompted the city to reopen the public comment period for the work plan for a second time? HOLMAC went through entire process, and now HOLMAC was told to put it out again. It seems like a few individuals going to city commissioners who in turn are requiring us to put the brakes on this. This is a major problem with the process.
 - Kristi stated that there was concern that the final draft play was not published and therefore there were concerns there was not enough public process.
 - Tony Z follow-up: Kristi was then asked if this will be the process going forward? Kristi stated that no it shouldn't. The work plan will be used for internal planning (to include general maintenance, etc.). Any projects such as land management, new trails, new infrastructure will go through a separate, public process.
- Tony Z thanked HOLMAC and city staff for getting the process to this point. He thanked us for clarification on the information sent out. Lastly, Tony thanked Brad for his very metered and reasonable responses to every comment proposed, including that he recognized the Recreation, Chapter 7 comments will be addressed in the Chapter 7 rewrite.
- Tony then asked what opportunities for private funds and grants for weed control would be available? Can private organizations or citizens of Helena help with weed control measures? Brad stated that we have received a number of grants over the years. Not only do we use grant money to do weed work on open lands, but Brad has reached out to the adjacent landowners to see if they want to participate in the process. Brad is more than willing to work with any entity on any type of grant that would benefit open lands.
- The reality is that with our current weed situation on open lands, the city does not have enough maintenance dollars to cover all the areas, but we really try to hit the hot spots.
- When asked if the city can quantify the shortage in funding, Brad stated that we certainly can. We know the cost per acre and we know how many acres we have. Obviously the terrain within the open lands system makes the treatment more difficult. Brad is more than happy to meet with any group to discuss fundraising efforts. Perhaps this could be an annual thing.
- Lastly, Tony asked that given the situation with the open lands work plan (not going back to commission until the end of August), what can he do as a citizen to help complete some of

these open projects. Brad stated he will look through volunteer opportunities within the project list. Evan has already been helping with some of the items in the plan. The work may be mundane.

- Robyn S – Robyn is representing Helena Trails Alliance. They currently have 319 members that are very interested in working with the city and other stakeholder on the trail management process. The alliance was very concerned about the agenda item that discussed banning mountain bikes from trails in Helena. There are many multi-use trail users who really care about this process. There needs to be a better way of communicating clearer processes. Robyn was concerned that HOLMAC could have voted tonight to ban mountain bikes on trails. We need to clearly communicate the process on the city website.
- Matt C stated that it would be helpful to know that the trails we have and users on said trails will stay. In regards to the Recreation Plan Update, the majority wants to know that what we currently have in place will stay, understanding that new trails and new infrastructure could be on the table.
- Sarah N asked for clarification. HOLMAC voted to adopt the work plan, not the comments. Per Eric – HOLMAC voted to support city staff in regards to the presenting the work plan to the commission. Brad stated the comments are an attachment to the agenda. There were over one half dozen comments that we received in April regarding the 2019 work plan. We addressed those comments and incorporated changes as necessary. The comments reviewed this evening were not applicable to the 2019 work plan and therefore they will not be incorporated into the 2019 work plan. We will respond to a couple of the commenters and let them know that we will address their issues in the 2020 work plan; however, there are no changes to the 2019 work plan.
- Jake G – most people, when making comments to this work plan, made very specific comments. Should commenting on work plans be limited so we don't see this undo focus on the plan. Kristi stated that because we are a government entity, we have to accept all comments. That doesn't mean that we act on all comments. They must be substantive.
- Robyn S inquired about how someone is brought on to the HOLMAC Board. When there is an opening on the board for new members, what is the process? HOLMAC is composed of seven voting members: five at-large citizens, one representative from the Helena Citizen's Council, and one representative of the City-County Parks Board. The five at-large citizens apply to the board. Based on qualifications, these representatives will be appointed by the commission. The HCC representative and the City-County Parks Board representative are recommended by their respective boards based on someone interested in wanting to serve on HOLMAC. Board vacancies can be viewed at the following website:
<https://www.helenamt.gov/commission/boards-and-committees.html>.
- Matt C then added that he believes anyone serving on HOLMAC should be representing the broad spectrum of trail users.
- Rita V stated she is amazed of all the people present at this meeting. She would like more information in how to participate in the workshops and how to get involved in the process. She asked that the city get this information out to the public.
- Kristi added that in the Chapter 7 rewrite of our work plan, we will include what the processes will look like when making final decisions on the plan.

- Eric added that currently HOLMAC is an advisory committee; we are not a decision-making body. When we vote, we are making recommendations to support the Open Lands Department.
- Tim C – can HOLMAC vote out a board member if they are not fulfilling their duty as a member of the board. To date, we have never had that issue. Kristi stated this may be addressed in the bylaws.
- Kara A asked what is the representation of HOLMAC? Brad stated we have a crossover of people. Brad knows of representatives who hike and bike. Over time, we have had good representation on the committee. We have a lot of individuals who are very knowledgeable of our trail system. Brad said that this is the best HOLMAC committee he has seen in his 11 years with the city. Evan added that affiliation is not the deciding factor on who serves on HOLMAC. People are selected by first expressing interest in being on HOLMAC. Karen added that in the application process, you are not asked to specify your use of the trails – you are asked why you are interested in serving on this board. Betsy stated she took herself (her personal views) out of the role. She believes her role on this board is not put her personal agenda before the benefit of all.
- TJ L stated he believes a lot of the people in this meeting this evening look at HOLMAC as a board that serves the community. We need to look beyond our own purpose. TJ feels we should move to the bigger issues such as social trails and/or weeds. We have something really great here in Helena. We need to move forward with this plan.
- Dan B – does HOLMAC look at what is going on in the community? Jim and Dan support the community (Boys and Girls Clubs, middle schools, high schools, colleges). It is sad that three comments have such a negative effect on the cycling industry. We are very fortunate in that we have a friendly community.
- Christine T – representing Girls Thrive and other youth organizations that promote biking, hiking, the outdoors, and all around health for our youth. Other youth organizations in Helena include the Helena Dynamos and NICA (National Interscholastic Cycling Association). The only interest of these groups is to promote health for our youth. Dan donated water bottles to Girls Thrive. Both bike shops in town have done safety checks on bikes. Working with this community has been amazing. Christine has been biking on our trail system for 30 years and has never had any conflict on the trails. These groups are teaching good trail etiquette.
- Karen agreed and added that we must remember that our youth are our next ambassadors for our trails. What these groups are doing is so important for our trail system.
- Evan stated that many want to deny that the conflict on trails Eric exists. This is not a good strategy moving forward. The challenge for us is to ask what is a proactive step we can do to help with this problem? What is a proactive step we can all do to show that we are good ambassadors of the trail system.
- Kristi – a good example of that is the PPLT trail tips which have been very popular. Encourage good trail etiquette – don't just deny the problem.
- Lindsay G – Lindsay agreed with Evan and stated we need to lead by example. Be proactive in your user group. Be the best part of someone else's day and someone else's experience.
- Jason O – sometimes that is not enough. We need to encourage collaborative trail usage within our system yet there is still the squeaky wheels getting the ears. We can practice good trail

etiquette, but at some point, that doesn't seem enough. For those in attendance this evening, there is a deep fear of losing accessibility.

- Everyone in this room today is an excellent example of responsible trail users. We need to help with raising awareness trail etiquette.
- An example of being proactive is placing bells on the bikes. As runners, hearing that bell allows the runner an opportunity to step out of the way. With more and more people on our trails, at some point there will be conflict. We need to figure out how to move forward.
- A representative from the Beattie Trailhead area stated that she and her family hikes Beattie Trailhead almost every day. She stated she has never had any issues with bikers. She encouraged everyone that when city asks for comments, please respond. We need to get out, go to open houses, and make our opinion known.
- Cory S – as a local business owner, Cory is looking to modify their business plan to incorporate something similar to the Whitefish Bike Retreat. Cory's question is where would he find a strategic plan (three, five, ten-year plan) that talks about where the city is going, what we are looking at developing, and information on open lands in general. Brad stated this is where we are headed with the Chapter 7, Recreation rewrite.
- Regarding the trail etiquette discussion – while it is important to practice trail etiquette, this citizen stated she feels people are silently pointing finger at mountain bikers. We should not single out bikers and what they can do to make trails safer. Runners need to share in that awareness – perhaps not listening to music, being bell-aware, so you can hear what is happening around you. Everyone needs to practice safer trail etiquette.
- Eric – PPLT has a permanent position on this group. Evan is not a voting member. He attends the meetings and offers updates. Brad stated anyone can attend HOLMAC meetings. They are open to the public.
- Kurt V – his entire reason for attending this meeting wasn't just because of an action item on the agenda. What really struck a chord with Kurt was a concern about a recent interview with the City Manager where she suggested that in order to avoid use conflict, we should consider scheduling biking and no longer allowing animals because of a dog feces problem. Can HOLMAC recommend to the city that we not talk about banning ANY user groups? No one in this room wants to ban hikers or bikers.
- Kristi – again, this process should become more clear with the Chapter 7, Recreation plan rewrite. We will address multiple use management. At this time, we don't allow horses or motorized vehicles.
- Mark O – this is an evolutionary process. Part of HOLMAC's job is to go out to the trails and see what is happening. Part of HOLMAC's decision process comes from user comments and from being out on the trails. We need to ask what does the recreationalist wants, what are the environmental impacts, and how can user groups work together? There has been good comments here tonight.
- Brian asked about processes and communication. Are there flow charts for new projects mapping? Brad stated the process has been staff bringing the first draft of the work plan to HOLMAC, getting HOLMAC's input and then putting it out for public comment. However, as Kristi stated, we will be changing the work plan to be more related to new projects; however, the nuts and bolts for maintenance purposes would not go out for public comment.

Next Meeting Date: September 10, 2019

Future Agenda Items:

- Report on the City Commission Meeting with this year's plan.
- It was recommended HOLMAC have a field trip next month. The property donated from PPLT (LeGrande) was suggested. The board agreed with this suggestion. Brad recommended everyone meet at the east entrance off of LeGrande and Silverette at 5:30 pm. We will get this information on our website.

Adjournment:

- With no further business, Ross moved to adjourn the August 13, 2019 HOLMAC meeting. Mark 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.