



Parks & Open Space

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PARKS & OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TO:	Parks & Open Space Advisory Committee
DATE/TIME:	Thursday, Dec. 20, 2018, 6:30 p.m.
LOCATION:	Commissioners Hearing Room, 3 rd floor, Boulder County Courthouse, 1325 Pearl Street, Boulder, CO
AGENDA ITEM:	Update on Eldorado Canyon to Walker Ranch Trail Feasibility Study
PRESENTER:	Marni Ratzel, Resource Planner II
ACTION REQUESTED:	Information Only

Background

For many years, there has been a desire to create a multi-use link from Eldorado Canyon State Park (ECSP) to Walker Ranch. While the Eldorado Canyon Trail offers an existing pedestrian/equestrian link, the trail cannot reasonably accommodate bicyclists. Support for this connection is identified in the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan and Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan, the Walker Ranch Management Plan and the City of Boulder Eldorado Mountain/Doudy Draw and West Trail Study Area (TSA) plans. The connection also is identified as one of “the Colorado 16” (16 in 2016) priority trails in the 2016-2026 Colorado State Trails Plan and Department of Natural Resources Colorado the Beautiful program.

In 2013, Boulder County Parks & Open Space (BCPOS), the City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP), and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) partnered on developing a feasibility study to consider opportunities for the multi-use connection. From 2013 to 2017, the multi-agency partnership created a shared understanding of the project scope and hired a consultant to complete the feasibility study. In 2017 the project partners re-affirmed the commitment to complete the feasibility study and develop a preferred option in 2018.

On November 21 the project partners published the [Eldorado Canyon to Walker Ranch Trail Feasibility Study](#) and a preliminary partner recommendation on the [project webpage](#) for community review. The three partner agencies are jointly recommending the North Route (using segments N1-N2-N4) as the preferred alignment for an Eldorado Canyon to Walker Ranch multi-use trail connection. Public comments on the study and preliminary recommendation received through Dec. 9 will be considered by the partner agencies in developing a final recommendation.

The purpose of this memo and staff update is to share with POSAC a summary of community input following the August open house, the process for how the feasibility study was conducted, and provide initial community feedback on the preliminary joint project partner recommendation. This will be an action item for POSAC consideration and recommendation at the Jan. 24 meeting.

August Open House and Comment Period

In August of 2017 the project partners hosted an open house and comment period on: A) the project timeline and process, B) the analysis topics to be used to evaluate the alternatives, and C) the routes to be included in the feasibility study. Over 100 people attended the open house and approximately

475 comments were received. Two documents capture this feedback and are published on the project web page: A [Compendium of Initial Public Comments](#) and [Summary and Responses to Initial Public Comments](#). While the comment form did not specifically ask about route preferences, many respondents provided their preliminary preferences. All comments were considered in developing the feasibility study and preliminary recommendation. Several selected themes and/or changes to the feasibility study are highlighted below.

Comments on the analysis topics

Many of the comments relating to the analysis were supportive of the proposed topics. In response to comments, the project team added seasonality, access and parking, visitor density, and visitor conflict management as discrete analysis topics under the Visitor Experience Analysis Category to better describe and/or report out on the visitor experience.

Consider providing “both” as an alternative

Public comments suggesting a “both” (North and South routes) alternative was not incorporated into the feasibility study. The purpose and scope of the feasibility study is to evaluate a connection. A “both” alternative was not within the original project scope and would have required an expanded analysis, timeline, and budget. While the analysis of the Environmental, Cultural, and Trail Management and Maintenance categories for a “both” alternative would, for the most part, be cumulative, it would not be as simple for the other analysis categories and topics. In particular, the analysis to determine the benefits and impacts for the Visitor Experience and the Eldorado Canyon State Park Interface are more complex. Analyzing the benefits and impacts of adding bikes to the majority of hiking-only trails within the park (which a “both” alternative would do) is better addressed in a park master plan. An augmented analysis of Visitor Experience would also necessitate new visitor use estimates.

Consider connecting the Doudy Draw/Marshall Mesa trail network via the Fowler Trail

The purpose and scope of the feasibility study was to evaluate a connection between Eldorado Canyon State Park and Walker Ranch. Biking is prohibited on the Fowler Trail with the exception of a short section that connects with the Rattlesnake Gulch Trail.

Connecting the Doudy Draw/Marshall Mesa trail network to the Fowler Trail was evaluated during a previous City of Boulder planning process, the OSMP Eldorado Mountain/Doudy Draw Trail Study Area (TSA) Plan. The Fowler Trail is the only wheel-chair and stroller friendly recreation opportunity within the state park. The state park remains interested in maintaining this quality, all-abilities accessible trail opportunity. In coordination with the park, the OSMP sections of the Fowler Trail were designated as hiking only.

Increasing visitation and capacity-related challenges such as parking and access are a concern.

There is also agreement among the project partners that there are current challenges facing Eldorado Canyon State Park and the surrounding town of Eldorado Springs, as well as agreement that these issues must be addressed as part of future planning, design, and implementation phases. It will be necessary to explore tools, best practices, and strategies for reducing the impact of additional users, and develop a suite of options to address visitor management both within and adjacent to the state park.

Feasibility Study Findings

The feasibility study evaluated two corridors to make the multi-use connection between Eldorado Canyon State Park and Walker Ranch: a North Route and a South Route. The routes were evaluated using the following analysis topics:

Environmental and Cultural Resources

- Wetland and riparian areas
- Significant natural communities
- Wildlife habitat
- Undisturbed habitat
- Cultural resources

Trail Construction Costs

Visitor Experience

- Regional trail connectivity
- Trail aesthetic and character
- Access and parking
- Trail access opportunities
- Seasonality
- Visitor density
- Visitor conflict management

Trail Management and Maintenance

- Trail sustainability and maintenance
- Emergency response
- Interagency management

Eldorado Canyon State Park Interface

- Park capacity and visitation
- Access and parking
- Revenue and fee collection
- Trail and facility sustainability
- Visitor conflict and enjoyment
- Emergency access and response

The feasibility report also included an “overall” findings table and description, which summarizes the findings of the analysis topics.

The trail routes were assigned an impact score for each of the analysis topics and categories ranging from Major Benefit to Major Impact.

				
Major Benefit	Minor Benefit	Insignificant	Minor Impact	Major Impact

The impact scores were informed by best available and comparable data and were determined by reaching consensus among subject area experts from all partner agencies. The intent of the impact scores was to provide a foundation for developing a recommendation. Below is a summary table of the overall analysis category findings.

Summary of Overall Findings

Analysis Category	North Route	South Route
Environmental and Cultural Resources		
Visitor Experience		
Trail Construction Costs	\$360K to \$660K	\$410K to \$810K
Trail Management and Maintenance		
Eldorado Canyon State Park Interface		

A summary description of these ratings and the ratings and summaries for the analysis topics can be found in the [Summary of Analysis Findings](#) and in the corresponding section of the feasibility report.

Partner Agency Preliminary Recommendation

After collaborating to complete the feasibility study and consider the findings, the partner agencies jointly selected the North Route (using segments N1-N2-N4) as the preliminary recommendation for the preferred alignment. The project partners recommended this alternative because it completes the multi-use trail connection in a way that best balances the conservation and recreation needs of the area.

The North Route will:

- Provide a quality visitor experience for multi-use recreationists.
- Result in significantly fewer environmental impacts than the South Route.
- Meet multi-use design standards to accommodate bicyclists.
- Improve the sustainability of the existing Eldorado Canyon Trail.
- Integrate the new multi-use trail with current uses and future activities within Eldorado Canyon State Park.

There also is agreement among the project partners that current challenges facing Eldorado Canyon State Park must be addressed as part of future planning, design, and implementation phases. Eldorado Canyon State Park currently experiences visitation and capacity-related concerns during peak summer months, particularly on weekends and holidays. The feasibility study and public comments identified significant challenges to successful implementation of either route due to these existing conditions. The findings call attention to several constraints that exist in the park and the surrounding town site of Eldorado Springs, especially regarding access and parking. It will be necessary to explore tools, best practices, and strategies for reducing the impact of additional users and develop a suite of options to address visitor management both within and approaching the state park.

With the recommendation to pursue the North Route, the partner agencies commit to continue working collaboratively to address the associated implementation challenges. The partner agencies will continue to work together towards strategies that provide access, connect visitors to enjoyable experiences, address traffic and crowding issues, and protect resources. Some of these approaches will rely on strengthening partnerships with other stakeholders.

While the project partners recognize that the extent of impact on their lands and management varies between the two alignment alternatives, we are united by a commitment to address these challenges and implement the recommendation collaboratively.

Public Input and Next Steps

A second comment period began with an open house on Nov. 28. Approximately 120 people attended the open house. The project web page includes a questionnaire asking respondents how supportive they are of the preliminary partner agency recommendation and why. Staff will provide a verbal update at the Dec. 20 POSAC meeting summarizing themes emerging from the community feedback heard during this second community input period.

The graphic below outlines the next steps for this project and highlights POSAC involvement and input.

