



PARKS & OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Time/Date of Meeting: 6:30 p.m., Thursday, July 28, 2022

Location: Virtual Meeting

TO:	Parks & Open Space Advisory Committee
FROM/PRESENTER:	Jeff Moline and Brent Wheeler
AGENDA ITEM:	Update on Rocky Mountain Greenway and Coalton Trail
ACTION REQUESTED:	Information Only

Summary

Two projects are anticipated to herald the arrival of the Rocky Mountain Greenway (RMG) to Boulder County in the coming year! The Rocky Mountain Greenway has long been envisioned as an important regional trail connection. It already connects federal and local lands across the northern Denver metro area, and it will ultimately link the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, Two Ponds, and Rocky Flats Wildlife Refuges with Rocky Mountain National Park through an interconnected, multi-use trail system. Boulder County Parks & Open Space (BCPOS) is involved in two separate efforts to formally connect the RMG into Boulder County. First, the department is participating in a multi-agency project to design and construct an underpass of State Highway 128 which will physically and safely connect the Coalton Trail to the trail system at Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge (RFNWF). Secondly, BCPOS is leading a project to improve Coalton Trail, a designated segment of the RMG north of the underpass location.

Rocky Mountny Greenway: State Highway 128 Underpass Background

In 2016, after POSAC's recommendation for approval, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) conditionally supported participation in an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with partner agencies to connect Boulder County trails to the RMG through the application of a Federal Land Access Program (FLAP) grant. At that time, the BOCC requested that the partner group conduct soil sampling to confirm the safety of the project out of concern for the potential presence of radionuclides in the project area which borders the RFNWR. Since that time, the partner group conducted and implemented a Soil Analysis Plan (SAP) study of the site which showed conditions there are consistent with radionuclide measurements at the refuge itself where the federal government and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) have declared the area safe for visitors and workers. Therefore, the partner group of agencies (the Cities of Arvada, Boulder, and Westminster along with Jefferson County) developed an updated IGA to proceed with the FLAP project.

Rocky Mountny Greenway: State Highway 128 Underpass IGA and Project Update

The IGA formalized an arrangement for equitably funding the monetary match requirements of the FLAP grant to design and build two crossings for the RMG trail in Jefferson and Boulder Counties into the RFNWR at an estimated total cost of \$3.93 million and an estimated cost to Boulder County of \$89,894 (2021 estimates). Boulder County's share will apply solely to expenses related to an underpass of State Highway 128 that will create a safe crossing for trail users connecting from existing trails in Boulder County to the greenway and existing trails in RFNWR. The partners approved the IGA in April 2021 and were awarded

the grant. Since then Jefferson County staff have been coordinating the initial design work with the agencies and the project has reached the 30% phase and developed an alignment that does not directly impact county open space property. However, with the investment in the IGA and the greenway itself, county staff is involved in the design review process. Design is expected to last through the fall of this year and construction begin thereafter and extend into 2023. The Rocky Mountain Greenway website (<https://www.jeffco.us/3639/Rocky-Mountain-Greenway>) hosted by Jefferson County Open Space includes the staff report and packet for the April 6, 2021 BOCC hearing which along with other links to the report attachments provides extensive detail and history of the project. Three figures are attached to this report provide a vicinity map, Rocky Flats trail context, and the current underpass design.

Coalton Trail: Background

Coalton Trail is a heavily visited multiple use trail that provides access to a large portion of intact grasslands and associated wildlife species located in southern Boulder County. The trail has expansive views of the foothills, Eldorado Canyon, and the Flatirons. The trail was initially created in 1996, when Boulder County Road 76 was vacated, and its footprint designated to serve as Coalton Trail. The former road lacks proper drainage along its 10-foot width and 2.9-mile length. Additionally, there is a steep section, approximately 1,500 feet in length, that averages a 10% grade with portions that exceed 15% for several intervals. This steep section provides a challenge for many trail visitors, and it often erodes, resulting in high maintenance costs and degraded user experience, particularly after storm events.

Boulder County evaluated other potential routes in the area to incorporate improvements that would meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility requirements. However, to avoid the steep section, the alternate trail alignments would have encroached into the adjacent South County Grasslands open space, designated as a Habitat Conservation Area for prairie dogs. The alternate alignment also was expected to impact additional wildlife species, including burrowing owls, northern leopard frogs, and Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse.

BCPOS and OSMP have management authority over the entire 2.9 miles of trail and it is under mixed ownership. The City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) has fee ownership of approximately 960 feet (0.19 miles) of the southern terminus of the trail connecting to Highway 128, and shared ownership of approximately 1.68 miles of trail. Reciprocal Conservation Easements (CEs) are in place between the City of Boulder and Boulder County to further protect these jointly owned lands. The Town of Superior owns approximately 300 feet of the southern half of the trail corridor as it approaches Coalton Trailhead. Per an IGA with the Town of Superior, BCPOS has management rights to this section of trail. Boulder County holds CEs over the Superior owned property at the north eastern terminus to the Coalton Trailhead.

Coalton Trail: Status of Planned Improvements

The objective of the capital maintenance project is to bring Coalton Trail up to a consistent standard that is more sustainable and easily maintained. In 2019, BCPOS produced engineering design plans to improve the trail, better conform to regional trail standards, make it more sustainable and minimize future maintenance costs and impacts to environmental resources. Significant drainage features have been designed to stabilize the trail. It will be surfaced with aggregate road base (ABC) or recycled asphalt (RAP) along

its entire length to stabilize the trail surface and enhance the visitor's experience. Given the sensitivity of the surrounding lands, the trail will stay within the old road corridor.

Approximately 540 feet of soil rip rap ditches, three new culverts and seven rolling grade dips will be constructed to catch and redirect surface flows along the steep portion of the trail. Several small pullouts will be created to allow visitors to rest in the steep sections and allow faster-paced visitors to pass easily. All areas disturbed will be revegetated with native grasses and wildflowers.

In the fall of 2021, BCPOS worked with OSMP and the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) to submit a maintenance grant to Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to complete the necessary improvements. Although the Coalton Trail Project scored well, it did not receive funding. In order to keep the project moving forward and to utilize the financial support of our partnering agencies, BCPOS developed a phased approach to use existing funding and make improvements to the most critical portions of the trail. Phase 1 of the project will be to make trail improvements from Coalton Trailhead to the top of the steep hill to the west. These improvements are estimated at approximately \$450,000. BCPOS has committed \$200,000, OSMP has committed \$100,000 and TPL is willing to commit \$150,000. While the Town of Superior has prioritized improvements to Coalton Trail as part of their community requests to BCPOS, the town is not able to partner on the project at this time.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been drafted to firm up these financial commitments and outline the responsibilities of each party. The MOU is currently being reviewed and is projected to be finalized later this summer. Once the MOU is finalized and the funds have been secured, staff anticipates using one of OSMP's continuing service contractors to complete Phase 1 work this fall. Due to the sensitive nature of the surrounding grasslands and its associated wildlife, there is a narrow construction window of November 1 until March 15 of the following year. If we can successfully get a contractor under contract by this fall, we hope to start construction in early November and be complete with the first phase by the end of 2022. Phase 2 is currently unfunded and is estimated to cost approximately \$200,000. BCPOS and OSMP will work together to fund this phase in future years.

Attachments

Figure 1. RMG Planning Coalton Trail Vicinity Map

Figure 2. RMG Alignment and Crossings on Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge

Figure 3. Design Plan for Rocky Mountain Greenway SH 128 Underpass