



# Parks & Open Space

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## PARKS & OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Time/Date of Meeting: 6:30 p.m., Thursday, May 25, 2023

Location: Boulder County Courthouse  
1325 Pearl Street, Third Floor, Boulder

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| <b>TO:</b>               | Parks & Open Space Advisory Committee                      |
| <b>FROM/PRESENTER:</b>   | Jarret Roberts, Recreation and Facilities Division Manager |
| <b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>      | <b>Wapiti Trail Reroute Update</b>                         |
| <b>ACTION REQUESTED:</b> | Information Only   |

Summary: In response to inquiries about conceptual trail alignments flagged on the ground at Heil Valley Ranch, the BCPOS Trail Staff presented a preliminary trail design for rerouting the Wapiti trail posted to the Heil Valley Ranch website on April 25. The department continued to pursue improving the alignment, and comments from multiple visitor groups reiterated the desire to refine the reroute further if possible. Below is the updated conceptual alignment based on the work of BCPOS staff in coordinating and balancing resource protection, visitor experience, construction time/cost/feasibility, and trail sustainability.

### Background:

In October 2020, the Cal-Wood Fire burned more than 10,000 acres, including a portion of BCPOS's Heil Valley Ranch. Subsequently, Heil Valley Ranch was closed to the public while trails and other infrastructure were repaired. During this time, a golden eagle nesting site relocated. Boulder County works with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to follow federal guidance on the protection of sensitive species such as golden eagles. The new nest location is near a section of the Wapiti Trail and falls within the buffer zone required by CPW and the USFWS. To avoid this buffer zone, the Wapiti Trail was detoured to a nearby maintenance access road, where it has remained as alternatives have been evaluated.

Starting in 2023, BCPOS trails staff worked with BCPOS wildlife, ecological, and cultural staff to examine several reroute options. Following common practice, trails staff seeks to design trails to balance the experiences of multiple visitor groups, reduce long-term maintenance needs through sustainable trail grades, and protect and conserve sensitive ecological communities and habitats. Geographic constraints such as deep ravines, sensitive plant communities, and the federal eagle nesting buffer largely constrained the potential area for a reroute. While the staff delineated a trail alignment that fit the parameters described above, it required more switchbacks than the department would have preferred in such a small area. This option was shared with the public while trails staff continued to pursue the feasibility of an improved route if resource and geographic constraints allowed.

Public engagement in high-level conceptual trail design is part of BCPOS's typical process where possible. This is especially true during site management plans where compromises are looked at across the entire site, and desires can be captured from a multitude of visitor groups. Engagement is focused on the types of experiences and major control points rather

than specific alignments. Trails staff balances desires from and between visitor groups along with cultural/ecological constraints to find the best alignment that meets maximum desired grades. Trails staff also spend days in the field taking measurements and refining trail alignment to meet the actual topography, something that cannot be captured through GIS layers or topographic lines on a map. Often a conceptual alignment that looks feasible on a screen or paper cannot be actualized once reviewed in the field.

The updated alignment of the Wapiti reroute does just this. By compromising a more difficult construction across a drainage, four switchbacks were able to be eliminated in the upper section of the reroute, greatly improving the visitor experience. In the lower section, another three switchbacks were removed by altering the alignment further east than the preliminary plans allowed. This lower refinement was partially considered thanks to a concept brought forward by a partner organization. Again, BCPOS welcomes community input, ideas, and concepts that can bring great ideas to the table and always needs to make sure the concept is possible/equitable to implement. At the same time, staff must work internally, verifying grades in the field, ensuring permitting requirements are met, and overlapping sensitive ecological/cultural constraints. All while considering the county and department's goals, available resources, and balancing different visitor group desires.

This proposed alignment is still a draft and under review by US Fish and Wildlife Service. Through this POSAC update we continue to welcome feedback and comments from the public.

See attachment A: Heil Valley Ranch- Wapiti Reroute Options.

# Attachment A: Heil Valley Ranch- Wapiti Reroute Options

