

3. OPPORTUNITIES, CONSTRAINTS, AND PLANNING ISSUES

3.1 Overview

During the management plan development process, input was received from Parks and Open Lands staff, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the general public regarding opportunities, constraints and/or planning issues. These issues may be divided into four key components: 1) natural resources, 2) cultural resources, 3) visitor experience and 4) park administration.

3.2 Natural Resource Opportunities, Constraints and Planning Issues

The natural resource objective of the Horsetooth Mountain Park Management Plan is to:

- ***Protect, manage and enhance natural resources, including maintaining and promoting healthy ecosystems and their processes.***

Natural Resource Opportunities include a variety of options such as:

- Maintenance of the continuity of vegetation communities is important for protecting species within the larger CNHP-designated Horsetooth Reservoir Hogbacks Regional Conservation Site (see section 4.2e Conservation Site).

Constraints and Planning Issues related to natural resource management include:

- There is a significant fire hazard in the Park due to fuel build-up.
- There are several areas in the Park where there is a significant presence of forest disease.
- Grassland and shrubland health is impaired due to the extensive existence of undesirable weeds, non-native species and fuel build-up.
- Rare butterfly habitat is currently threatened by non-native species and habitat fragmentation due to trails and loss of larval host plants/nectar sources.
- Potential Preble's meadow jumping mouse habitat may be impacted by multiple trails that bisect drainages and future management activities within 300 feet of these drainages will require clearance.
- Wildlife, nesting raptors and other sensitive species may be disturbed by recreation.
- Some trails are close to riparian areas and bisect the Spring Creek drainage. These are sensitive areas that are easily impacted by recreational use.
- Noxious weed species have the potential to impair grassland and shrubland health.
- Horse manure can spread weed seeds along trail corridors.
- Off-trail use causes some vegetation disturbance and soil erosion.
- Dogs off leash may disturb wildlife or other users.
- Existing or additional fencing in the area may prove detrimental to raptors and impede movement of other wildlife utilizing the area (i.e. mule deer adults and young).
- Rattlesnake habitat may be disturbed and conversely rattlesnake/visitor interactions



may be a safety concern.

- Additional trails will further fragment the larger intact landscapes of the Park, which serve to provide unregimented wildlife corridors/habitats such as on the Culver and Hughey open spaces as well as along the eastern valley and western and northern portions of the Park.

3.3 Cultural Resource Opportunities, Constraints and Planning Issues

The cultural resource objective of the Horsetooth Mountain Park Management Plan is to:

- ***Protect, manage and enhance cultural resources including preserving historic architecture, landscapes, gravesites and ancient artifacts.***

Cultural Resource Opportunities include a variety of options such as:

- Continue to lease the Soderberg house as a private residence
- In the future if dollars are available, it could be considered to use the Soderberg house for a variety of purposes, including: a limited use facility that can be leased for small events appropriate to natural or cultural resource programs (i.e. similar to the Coyote Ridge Cabin); a public visitor center; a combined visitor center/office space; a living history or working ranch; leasing the space to a non-profit or other appropriate group that would provide in-kind educational or other benefits to the community; a caretaker's home or employee housing; or selling the house separately from the open space lands.
- Creating a self-guided historical walk around the house and ranch buildings with interpretive materials would allow visitors to have a more intimate experience with these historic structures.
- Stabilizing the ranch buildings and allowing visitors to enjoy them from a distance will both protect and allow visitation of these historic buildings.

Constraints and Planning Issues related to cultural resource management include:

- Leaving the Soderberg house vacant may increase incidents of vandalism and lead to dilapidation of the house and ranch buildings.
- Native American artifacts may be disturbed or taken because their location is known and unprotected
- Leasing the Soderberg house as a private residence provides dollars to maintain the house in good condition and a set of eyes and ears to help protect the historic structures on-site.
- Preserve the Logger's Cabin.

3.4 Visitor Experience Opportunities, Constraints and Planning Issues

The visitor experience objectives of the Horsetooth Mountain Park Management Plan are to:

- ***Provide and promote safe, enjoyable outdoor recreation opportunities while***



minimizing detrimental impacts upon natural, cultural and visual resources.

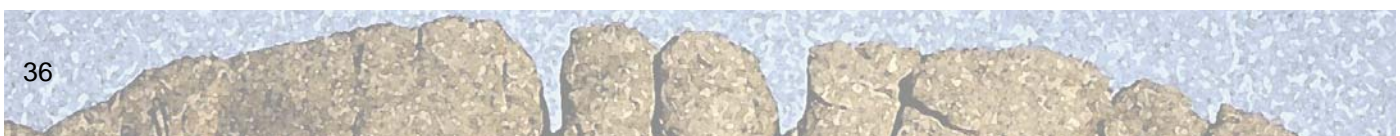
- ***Provide educational opportunities regarding the values of the natural, cultural and visual resources and the importance of responsible use and stewardship of the land.***

Visitor Experience Opportunities include a variety of options such as:

- Provide trails that are user friendly and well maintained.
- Improve visitor experience by providing a clearly marked trail system and naming nomenclature.
- Update the existing Horsetooth Mountain Trailhead to provide better circulation, facilities and parking to match the Park's carrying capacity.
- Develop an education plan for the Park.

Constraints and Planning Issues related to visitor experience management include:

- Trail designs should be user-friendly and include both trails with lower grades and structures that are horse and bike-friendly when possible.
- Trail location and maintenance needs to be coordinated between Lory State Park and Horsetooth Mountain Park.
- Trail users should be made aware of opportunities that exist to allow for volunteer participation in trail and Park maintenance.
- Visitor education is needed to mitigate user impact and conflict, as well as protect users from potential risks (i.e., lion, bear, snake and user interaction).
- There is a strong desire for education programs such as classes, nature and cultural hikes and tours, etc.
- There is a desire for brochures that provide educational material such as a bird list, plant list, etc.
- Multi-user conflict and lack of trail etiquette among some users of the Park exist. User conflict concerns focus primarily on biker/hiker and biker/horseback rider interaction.
- Due to user conflict, there is a fear that separate use trails or specific use exclusion will occur in the Park. While there is a recognized need for separate trails for various uses *in a few locations*, in general the users, TAC and management staff prefer to allow multiple uses of the trails and to avoid segregating trail users except where appropriate.
- Social trails are a problem in the Park. Social trails fragment viable wildlife habitat in the Park increasing user impact on the natural system.
- Trail damage occurs during wet seasons.
- Some trails (Horsetooth Rock Trail, Soderberg Trail, Horsetooth Falls Trail) in the Park are heavily used and there is a need improve these trails to prevent erosion and vegetation trampling.
- Excessive use of the Park will eliminate the primitive feel of the Park, particularly in the northern and southwestern portions.
- The current trail brochure is outdated and unclear.
- Trail signage is missing or inaccurate and does not match the brochures.
- Some trespassing occurs on private land.



- Dog and horse excrement on the trails pose a health concern as well as a safety issue for other users.
- Dogs off leash are a threat to wildlife and a nuisance for other users. (Note this is in violation of current Park regulations.)
- Use by large groups (e.g., commercial horseback riding trips, large group events, commercial tours, etc.) may overwhelm the capacity of the area.
- People using “nature’s restroom” may damage the natural environment and create a public health issue.
- Artificial lighting at the trailhead areas may be a visual eyesore.
- Interior fences and over-signage may be a hazard or a visual eyesore.
- Highlighting sensitive natural and/or cultural resources may result in their destruction or additional impacts.
- There is a need for updating the Horsetooth Mountain Trailhead kiosk information and providing improved educational materials and maps.
- Unauthorized bike races occurring in the Park could have impacts to natural resources, trail conditions and other visitors’ experiences.

3.5 Park Administrative Issues and Concerns

The administration objective of the Horsetooth Mountain Park Management Plan is to:

- ***Manage the Park to provide the best possible visitor experiences while conserving the Park’s resources through cost effective administration and visitor participation.***

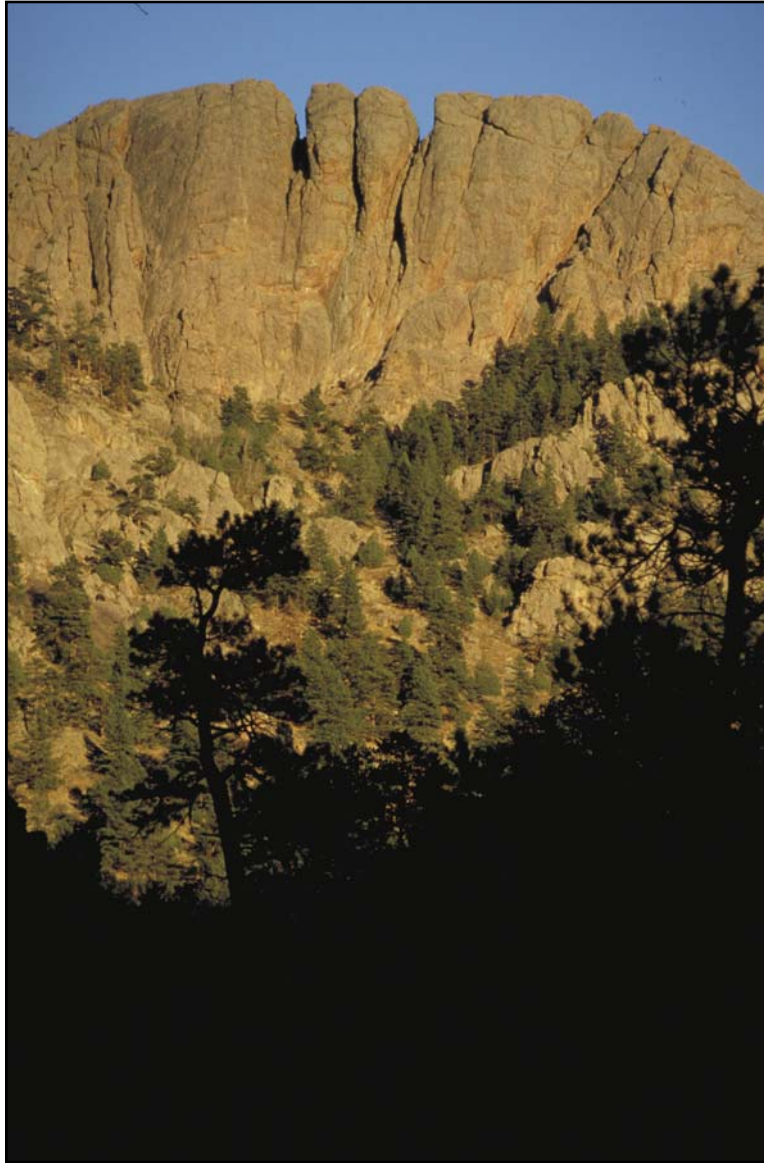
Park Administration Opportunities include a variety of options such as:

- In order to prevent future adjacent residential development from negatively impacting the Park, where feasible, additional buffers to the Park should continue to be acquired.
- Increase backcountry ranger patrols to improve safety and reduce impacts.
- Create an entrance station as the south entrance area to provide information and issue entrance permits
- Use diversity and a repetition of important information to improve visitor experiences and reduce visitor impacts on other visitors and Park resources.

Constraints and Planning Issues related to Park administration include:

- The Park does not generate enough revenue from entrance fees to cover management costs.
- The Park trailheads are occasionally used for illegal parties after hours.
- The Park has not been able to adequately engage user groups and neighbors in the management of the Park, perhaps due to lack of interest or lack of information about opportunities for involvement.
- Much of the surrounding lands adjacent to the Park is already developed for residential use.





Horsetooth Rock

(Charlie Johnson)

