

Seeley Lake Trails Project Minutes
SLE Outside, Seeley Lake
November 18, 2015

Present were Jennifer Arnold (facilitating), Ladd Knotek, Steve Kloetzel, Ben Alexander, Vickie Edwards, Mike Biggins, Bill Wall, Kelley Hart, Amy McNamara, Jon Haufler, Rachel Fiegley, Mark Williams, Jenny Rohrer (taking notes), Dave Sharbono, Ken Kronensberger, Andy Baur, Cathy Kahnle and Kurt Friede.

Rachel Fiegley raised the question re: the makeup of the group, the Advisory Council, and working documents for the Trails Committee. Jennifer Arnold mentioned that is part of the agenda today. Jennifer passed around her notes from the Training Meeting last night (attached), and reviewed some of the comments that others made about what they learned and how they would apply it to creating success. Mark W., Ken K. and Bill W. talked about their impressions of the training and expressed that we needed greater community participation. Jennifer gave an overview of the concept of the “Groan Zone” and how to work through it as well as the Ground Rules that we’ll use today.

Cathy K. introduced the scope and scale of four possible Trails Planning Choices:

A) The most ambitious is to create a comprehensive trail system with full landscape analysis:

B) A comprehensive trail system w/minimal landscape analysis which would depend on agency implementation,

C) Low-Hanging Fruit Options: such as trails from DAR to Cory's Market, downtown to Big Larch, a trail around the lake.

D) A near community Trail system – probably summer-use only – without landscape analysis

Rachel F. asked why do these participants want a trail system? Jon responded that there has been an interested for a long time in a more extensive trail system, summarized the history of this group, and said at this time we need to make decisions about the scope and scale.

Rachel focused that part of her question is what user groups do we want to attract – we don't want to bring in Disneyland crowds – so we need to vet what stakeholders want out of a trail system.

Created a list re: the Value of Trails:

- community use
- use by visitors & a travel destination for specific user groups (nordic, hikers, equine, ATV)
- economic driver for the community
- community connectivity and regional connectivity w/o being on the road.

Mike Biggins mentioned that Moab, Utah area is a great example of a variety of trail uses and users. Mike feels that in Seeley we have hikers, bikers, riders, ATV, equine uses, and more. Jan mentioned that her family was able to go on-line and organize a full, varied trip in Moab,

on-line. Rachel mentioned that she's seen Moab grow in ways that local residents may not appreciate, and Mark also mentioned how he's seen it grow leaps and bounds from 1979 to now, yet Seeley is a different landscape. Bill noted that we have many native species that need consideration as we build trails. Jon mentioned that there is an educational value of getting people and youth outside to appreciate the outdoors. Kurt mentioned that there are spacial limitations here anyway because we have so little private land in our area. Plus, there are restrictions on our potential w/o a sewer system. Kurt also described the regional benefit of being a hub to connect different communities – we could have a shuttle service for one-way trips, and we're close to Helena and Great Falls. Businesses would benefit like SLE Outside w/o attracting big crowds. Dave S. mentioned there are many national and International travelers who want to experience what they can't in their countries. These travelers need support and good information. Steve K. said there are great roads and trails here already, and we need better information and maps for those trails that already exist. Ladd mentioned that the Drifriders have a good snowmobile map – and Dave said they intend to update that, and soon we need a MAP good for GPS.

Jennifer asked is the existing trail system good enough or is it lacking?

Kurt said that people like looped trails (snowmobilers & bikers), and ATV riders in the summer need a trail system. They come to Seeley and are worried about hiking without guides, which is an opportunity for a guide service. Some people felt the existing trail system had a lot of options, but it lacked signage, marketing and support services, which creates a barrier for people to use the trails if they don't already have local knowledge of the trails. Jennifer added this is as a fifth option for trails planning. Rachel added that maintenance of the existing trail system is also important.

The Five Choices for how we proceed were fleshed out further:

A) Comprehensive Trail System with Full Landscape Analysis: a trail plan for the whole valley with connectors ready for implementation in phases inclusive of connectors to regional communities.

B) Mid-Level – still Clearwater Drainage-wide, but without a landscape analysis – may create trails to 'nowhere', Dependent on agency implementation which will add a lot of time to implementation.

C) Near Community – no landscape analysis necessary but may not feed into larger trails system.

D) Low-hanging fruit trails – easier to act on quickly but will they fit into a comprehensive trail system later?

E) Focus on signage, information for current trail system, marketing support & maintenance.

Do we want to sequence these steps, and do we begin to work on the comprehensive plan while doing others? Steve K. enforced the perception that a comprehensive plan requires a 5-10 year time line and much patience. Rachel argued that we need an overall comprehensive plan to respect all user groups, and from that big plan we can choose low-

hanging fruit. Rachel encouraged this group to attend the Regional Trails Group meetings, including the meeting tomorrow.

Who are the Participants in the Seeley Lake Trails Planning Group?

Cathy Kahnle laid out the history of how the group formed and raised the question of what is the size of decision making group - and who participates. Jon described that the role of the Advisory Council is to guide the public participation process and bring that input into the group for consideration. Bill W noted that CRC convened this process to grow this community's ability to work together. CRC saw the opportunity to engage the community in this landscape, and if felt like a good fit because CRC doesn't have a dog in the fight (CRC is a non-voting facilitator). However, CRC needs the funding capacity to move this forward, and that has been problematic thus far. Should CRC continue to convene? Others said that the Advisory Council deserves respect in that the organizations on the Advisory Council represent a large part of the community. Jon described how the next steps in the process to involve the full community will require more support and resources. Mike asked what they meant by that and explained that he and others were ready to sit down and get to work, for example looking at maps and talking about options. Bill W. explained that it takes staff time and preparation to coordinate all this work, especially to launch the public process. CRC has been doing their best to dedicate as much staff time as they can to build the foundation for this effort, but it will take more to launch the planning effort and public process

What is the Trust for Public Lands Current Plans & Role?

Kelley Hart, TPL's national Director of Planning, described that TPL was interested in being involved in developing the new resources created by the Montana Legacy Project. She explained how it was a bit of an exploration for them to think about how they might be involved in a mid-level planning effort in Seeley Lake. After consideration of what it would take and the budget and time they have to dedicate to this work, they have come to the conclusion that it's a better fit for them to work on some low-hanging fruit options. Cathy thanked Kelley and Amy for their work and for TPL's continued interest in Seeley Lake.. She reaffirmed CRC's interest in working with TPL on these low-hanging fruit options. Amy mentioned that their experience this summer showed them that people are eager for better signage and usage on existing trails, and complemented the work that this group has done.

Expanding the group:

Steve K. added that hunters should find a way to participate in this group. Rachel said this group is ready to launch something larger – to be more inclusive and get the word out to the community. Bill said that the outreach/launch process is in our original plan, similar to TPLs, but we want capacity to pull it off. To complete a comprehensive Trail System, it may take 15 years! But completing a comprehensive plan alone could take just two years.

Mike Biggins expressed that we may need to come up with some preliminary trail ideas – develop some proposals for ATV, Equine, hiking trails, snowmobiles, other trails so offer some specifics to narrow down ideas and choices for the general public.

Jennifer summarized that there seems to be general agreement that the Comprehensive Plan (A) is a long-term goal, and the willingness for CRC to coordinate. However, the group needs to see some near-term progress. Early wins could include some trails and/or signage for

existing trails or development of specific trail projects as in the 'low hanging fruit' (D and E) . Ken stated that we still need funding. Dave S. said he hears that people need to see specifics – to evaluate maps and give input into the trails they would like to see. Ben said that we need to make something more concrete and give people a specific entry point.

What do we need for next steps:

Vickie mentioned that things are moving forward on the Town to Big Larch trail. Amy said that the TPL trails inventory will be complete by the first of the year. Steve K. said that TNC's trails inventory will also be ready by Jan. 1. Ben mentioned :there is an ad hoc group meeting that includes Kris Martin, Ken Barber, Kurt F. re: trails & economic development in the Seeley Community.

There is an opportunity for public outreach with the upcoming release of the TNC and TPL trail inventories. CRC has ideas about community-based funding opportunities and would like to get ideas from this group. Mark W. asked as part of the next steps can we identify some specific low-hanging fruit? Both Ladd (FWP) and Rachel (USFS) stated that they could then share the perspective of what their abilities and limitations are with respect to trail development and that it would probably be good to do it earlier rather than later in the process. Cathy K stated that we'd like to hear from TNC and USFS about what help they might need from community members so that we could collaborate on for mutual gain, such as weed management on TNC trails.

Next Meeting – Monday, January 25, 6 pm at SLE Outside.

Topics:

- both the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Lands trail inventories will be complete. Discuss how to share it with the community
- discuss realistic fundraising strategies for the planning phase
- clarify roles in the committee re: how to coordinate the comprehensive approach with low-hanging fruit to get community excited
- clarify sideboards and management challenges from land manager perspectives,
- ask land managers how community members can help them accomplish their work & goals.

Jenny Rohrer, Notetaker for CRC