

# North TSA Recreation Alliance Requests

## Non-Trail Recommendations (Not Necessarily in Priority Order)

### 1. *Re-Designate Lands West of US36 from HCA to NA or PRA*

The HCA designation of the West Beech and Joder Ranch properties is inconsistent with their historical use and also with the characteristics of HCAs listed in Chapter 4 of the Visitor Master Plan. The VMP states that HCAs:

- Tend to be located in more remote areas;
- Typically represent the largest blocks of an ecosystem type with few, if any, trails or roads;
- Have a lower level of visitor use: no or few trails or trailheads; and
- Are naturally functioning ecosystems (but may contain areas with evidence of human use and impacts).

Neither the Joder Ranch nor the West Beech properties is remote, considering that each borders a major highway in Boulder County. In addition, the Joder Ranch property has eight miles of existing roads and trails. The VMP best describes these properties as having most of the characteristics of a Natural Area, which includes:

- Locations can be both close to and remote from development;
- Varying levels of visitor use, types of activities, and availability of facilities;
- Conditions of natural ecosystems are variable – many areas with ecological systems in good condition, some with evidence of human use and impacts; and
- May be in proximity to agricultural production and operations.

Although there may be rare species in the properties west of US36, which we respect, there is room for both natural resource protection and recreational opportunities. The land here is in most cases within a few hundred yards of either a major highway or well-travelled secondary roads, and forms the connection between heavily used and loved trails to the North and South. The Joder Ranch property, until recently a working horse ranch, is already heavily altered and doesn't meet the requirements of HCA designation. We agree that some sub-areas containing species of concern ought to be protected as much as possible from human encroachment, but the entire area does not meet the standards of a true HCA. Therefore, these properties should be designated as Natural Areas.



## **2. *Reinstate Equestrian Use at BVR and Joder Ranch***

Boulder Valley Ranch and Joder Ranch have long histories as horse properties. In the Boulder Valley case its acquisition came with a promise to manage the property, in part, for equestrian recreation; in the Joder Ranch case its sellers have expressed a clear desire that the property remain available for horse-based recreation. Because of their long histories, neither property should be considered pristine wildlife habitat or in an unaltered condition.

In general, traditional uses of OSMP properties, such as agriculture or horse-based ranching, should be honored, and both BVR and Joder Ranch are ideal candidates to satisfy the community's desire for equestrian recreation opportunities. The current lease arrangement at BVR should be re-examined to reinstate public equestrian use at the ranch, including a riding lesson program possibly through Boulder Parks & Recreation, a livery operation, and access to the existing outdoor arena. There should be horse trailer parking at the ranch complex, possibly in its historic location near the Silver Nickel. The fencing and drainage at the ranch should be improved, moldy hay removed, and the Silver Nickel building either restored (it would make a great public event facility) or demolished.

## **3. *Make Trailhead Improvements, Especially at Joder Ranch, BVR, Sage, and Foothills***

Substandard trailheads are among the most mentioned negative experiences among OSMP visitors. Joder Ranch, BVR, Sage, and Foothills in particular are insufficient to handle the volume of visitors, especially on weekend days. The trailheads also miss opportunities to provide engaging educational resources for visitors, both of the “soft enforcement” and science-education varieties. We believe a major priority of the department in the coming years should be to upgrade and modernize trailhead resources throughout the system, starting in the North TSA. All OSMP trailheads should incorporate additional parking spaces, including for horse trailers, as well as landscaping, angled parking, kiosks, better signage, and restrooms.

## **4. *Add V&S Designations, Especially West of US36***

Additional Voice & Sight trails are needed in the North TSA to disperse users and accommodate the increasing population in the Boulder area. Hikers with dogs enjoy variety and diversity. Since 2005, however, 40 former Voice & Sight trails have faced increased restrictions, while only one new Voice & Sight trail has been added (located in the Flatirons Vista area). This disparity in Voice & Sight trails has occurred despite the acquisition of numerous acres of new Open Space properties and despite the additional fees that only hikers with dogs must pay.

The properties west of US36, including Joder Ranch, West Beech, and the areas north of Wonderland Lake, represent ideal opportunities for new loop Voice & Sight trails. These

properties are very close to a major population center and a major highway, with ease of access. In addition, the Left Hand Trail, north of Boulder Valley Ranch, is optimal for Voice & Sight designation. It will allow equestrians, bikers, and hikers the opportunity to enjoy extended outings with their V&S controlled dogs, from Boulder Valley Ranch to the Neva Road area.

#### **5. *Allow Dogs on Hogback Loop***

Changing the Hogback Loop designation to on-leash will allow the many nearby residents to avoid driving their cars to take their dogs on an enjoyable loop hike. The Hogback Trail lies in an HCA, where the default designation for dogs is on-leash. In addition, the re-designated Hogback Trail will serve as a small and partial replacement for the numerous acres completely lost to dog access when the former V&S Wittemyer Area was re-designated as no dog in the West TSA. The Wittemyer Area lies in a Natural Area, where the default designation is Voice & Sight for dogs.

#### **6. *Continue to Allow Off-Trail Equestrian Use at Joder and BVR***

This is a time-honored tradition on private ranches, on OSMP and on other public lands in the West. Most equestrians stay on designated trails most of the time (surveys show fewer than 2% of horse people leave the trails), but occasionally all find it necessary or desirable to spend time away from “civilization” by riding off-trail. The preponderance of evidence is that horses have minimal impacts on natural resources (the species *Equus* evolved here 50 million years ago), and horses neither spread weeds nor cause undue erosion. At the low rates of equestrian use on OSMP we believe this use should continue to be allowed.

#### **7. *Night Use Is a Critical Component***

Use of trails after sunset provides a unique recreational and educational experience, quite different than a mid-day outing. Additionally, during winter months many people can get out on Open Space only outside of normal work hours, which means going out at night. As such we continue to advocate that night access is a critical component of public access for all trails.

#### **8. *Emphasize Trail Alignment and Design***

OSMP trails are among the most heavily used in the Western U.S., and the user experience inevitably is affected by the volume of users. As such, trail alignment and design should emphasize getting away from roads, loops and stacked loops, primarily multi-use trails, and incorporate community input and interpretive signage.

Many comments during listening sessions conducted by OSMP in the North TSA process emphasized the importance of quiet and solitude on the visitor experience. Without

greatly expanding the amount of acreage available, the best way to achieve separation between users – and also minimize conflict – is to create stacked loops and to open most trails to multiple uses. Interpretive signage was another common point made at community input events, and is mostly missing from the North TSA area. This presents a missed opportunity for the community to learn about the resources protected by its open space investment.

***9. Agricultural Lands and Conservation & Trail Easements Are Compatible with Trail Access***

Trails on agricultural properties can enhance the public’s understanding of and appreciation for our agricultural heritage, and when designed properly do not need to inconvenience agricultural operations or lessees. Conservation easements are used in many other parts of the country specifically to acquire trail alignments to desirable destinations, rather than merely being used to prevent development (as often is the case in Boulder and Boulder County). Conservation easements can be a very cost-effective way of accomplishing trail connections, should be utilized for that purpose here, and should generally not be written to preclude public access in the future. Trail easements should be considered as a means of accomplishing trail connections, especially if the entire property is unavailable for acquisition.

***10. Safe Crossing of Roads/Highways Should Be Made a Priority***

The North TSA planning area is bisected by a major US highway (US36), and it contains many other roads as well, particularly east of US36. As roads are reconstructed, infrastructure for safe trail crossings, such as box culverts, should be incorporated. For other crossings such as Left Hand Canyon Drive some form of trail-activated traffic signal should be considered. This will become a bigger issue as more properties – and more attractive properties – such as Joder Ranch and West Beech come on line as trail centers, and OSMP should plan by creating safe trail crossing opportunities. Safe road crossings for trail users would also allow for more and longer loop opportunities through the area, thereby decreasing user conflict and increasing space between visitors.

***11. Ensure Seamless Intergovernmental Cooperation in Achieving Long-Sought Regional Trail Connections***

Many of the regional trails shown have been included in the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan for years. Now is the time to include them in the North TSA, and to build them. There may be opportunities for trail connections and recreational use in the “Northern Tier” (see #16 below), both east and west of US36, that will require this cooperation.

## **Trail Recommendations (Not Necessarily in Priority Order)**

### ***12. Complete the Trail Around Boulder***

Many cities now have an iconic “Trail Around ...” that gives these municipalities an important sense of identity and place. Boulder, which prides itself on its trails and public lands, should complete the 34-mile Trail Around Boulder (TAB) as soon as possible. The TAB would connect many existing smaller trails, and several municipalities, and would connect people with each other and the landscape. About 80% of the TAB is already in place, with only about 7-8 miles of new trail required. In the North TSA itself the TAB is complete except for a short segment along N. 55<sup>th</sup> St at Boulder Reservoir, which has been approved in the Boulder Reservoir planning process. The TAB project has been discussed for many years. Now is the time to get it done and OSMP should start promoting it.

### ***13. Joder Ranch Loops***

The former Joder Ranch is perhaps the most exciting new property to be added to the OSMP system in years, and already contains many former ranch trails. The property should contain a looped trail system with several access points: from the east on US36, from the south at West Beech, and from the north and west at Lefthand Canyon Drive. Providing these access points and a multiple-loop stacked trail system within the property would connect several now-isolated properties, and therefore allow for longer loops, spreading out visitors more evenly across the North TSA planning area. At least one significant loop at Joder Ranch should be pedestrian/equestrian only, while other trails connecting the regional destinations should be multi-use. The interim trailhead at US36 should be made permanent and enlarged to OSMP standards, including a kiosk, landscaping, angled parking, horse trailer parking, and restrooms. While the Northern connection requires access through private property, it is a route already used informally and should be acquired either in fee or as a trail easement. Extending the Western spur to federal land is also desirable as a regional trail connection.

### ***14. The Geer Loop, Which Forms Part of the Regional Trail from Lyons to Boulder***

The proposed Geer Loop would circumnavigate the access road to Heil Valley Ranch (Geer Canyon Drive) and provide a connection between Joder Ranch and other city-owned properties to the south with Heil Valley Ranch, a county property. This proposed trail is entirely on county-owned land, and is therefore outside the planning boundaries for North TSA, but planning for this regional connection is appropriate for OSMP to consider. Interagency cooperation and coordination is a high priority throughout the North TSA and getting this trail connection done would be an important first step toward that goal, as well as the goal of establishing a Lyons-to-Boulder regional trail (along with requests #13 and 15).

**15. *The West Beech Loop, Which Forms Another Part of the Lyons-to-Boulder Regional Trail***

This request is the trail linchpin, in some ways, of our vision for the North TSA area. A West Beech loop would connect the heavily used, semi-urban trails in Northwest Boulder, including the Wonderland Lake complex, with Joder Ranch and trail systems farther North. This would provide many benefits to users of existing North TSA trails, among them the ability to access northern trails without having to get in the car and drive to oversubscribed trailhead parking areas. A loop through the West Beech area would also spread out use from some of the most heavily visited areas in the North TSA system (Wonderland and associated trails). We note that there are species of concern in this area, among them plants, invertebrates, and reptiles. But in our judgment a well-planned alignment with appropriate educational signage would provide a remarkable addition to the overall system, well worth the care required to plan it correctly.

**16. *Northern Tier Trails***

Utilizing mostly existing public lands, a beautiful trail could be built from the north end of Table Mountain at Lykins Gulch all the way north via Potato Hill to the St. Vrain Greenway (a Legacy Grant Project of Colorado State Parks and Great Outdoors Colorado). On the east side, another trail could be built through the Clover Basin area connecting the Double Dove Loop trail to the St. Vrain Greenway at Hygiene. This proposal would result in a very large loop trail system, inviting trail users from throughout Boulder and Boulder County to explore and appreciate our open spaces and public lands.

Another ambitious but important regional trail alignment covers some private land as well as city, county and jointly held properties. It would connect Niwot to the northern trail system and create the potential for a very large loop through the eastern North TSA properties, all the way west to Joder Ranch, Heil Valley Ranch and US Forest Service land up Left Hand Canyon. The advantages of such a large loop would be more inviting trails for many residents of the City of Boulder and Boulder County, and spreading out users into lesser-used corners of the system. It could include a loop on Table Mountain (U.S. Dept. of Commerce), offering spectacular views in all directions.

**17. *Boulder Reservoir Trails, Including a Trail Connection to Jay Road***

This alignment would provide non-motorized access to the Boulder Reservoir from the heavily populated Jay Road area, as well as the heavily used (by bicycles) Diagonal Highway. It would create a sizable loop via existing Boulder Valley Ranch trails, thus providing a significant recreational advantage at the cost of a (relatively) short trail addition. The Kelso Road connection to Boulder Valley Ranch would be a valuable addition to the system.

***18. Boulder Valley Ranch Trails, Including New Mesa Trail and East Beech***

These are proposed primarily as short trails that create loops and connections around BVR. The new Mesa Trail alignment would create a challenging, interesting loop with the established trails on the top of the mesa. And a new East Beech alignment would allow for a loop for users starting at BVR trailheads, again dispersing recreation activities more broadly in the area. The latter proposed alignment could also be the basis for a connection across US36 to Joder Ranch and the other trail opportunities west of the highway.