



Balcones Preserves Trail Master Plan Stakeholder Committee Meeting

October 21, 2008 6:00-8:00pm

Waller Creek Center, Austin Water Utility

1. Welcome and Agenda Review – Mike Hockmuller

Mike reviewed the contents of tonight's packet of handouts.

- Meeting agenda and process constraints
- Design Phase Trail Planning Questions drafted by Sheila Holbrook-White
- "In" Tract Grouping List and Map
- Trail Uses spreadsheet
- Proposal/MOA Process drafted by Willy Conrad and Megan Sembera
- Planning Considerations for a TMP Proposal drafted by Willy Conrad and Megan Sembera
- February 2008 Convening Committee TMP Process Document. This document was included because stakeholders had several questions about monitoring and required responsibilities of sponsors at the last stakeholder meeting.
- WQPL MOA for Bull Creek Foundation
- BCCP Public Access Approval Process Application. This document is meant to be an example of how the group may give a more well-defined process for an advocate to propose a trail. It was written mostly for non-trail activities and would need to be revised to address what the group is doing in this process.

Stakeholder Questions

- *Has the Coordinating Committee also approved the process document?* No, the document didn't go through the Coordinating Committee. It was accepted by the Convening Committee and was not required to go through Coordinating Committee.
- *I noticed in the minutes from our last meeting that 3M is not included in the final list of "In" tracts. I'm confused, because I thought we were leaving it open for now.* Willy said the logistics team talked about it and decided it's really a moot point. We won't be accepting proposals for new trails on 3M, but the current trail will continue to be open.

2. Process Regroup – Willy Conrad

Willy introduced Mary Ann Neely, the new stakeholder representative for the Citizens Advisory Committee. This was Mary Ann's first meeting.

Willy said this meeting is hopefully the wrap-up meeting for this process. In their policy statement, the Coordinating Committee asked the stakeholder group to consider four specific uses as part of the Trail Master Plan: hiking, hiking with dogs, trail running, and biking. Willy said he would also like well-defined constraints and management expectations to be a part of the final plan. Willy and Scott will have an expectation to see specifics about use in trail proposals.

Willy also said that Megan will email the draft Trail Master Plan to stakeholders for input over the next few weeks, and then the entire group will reconvene one more time to gain formal consensus on the final Trail Master Plan document before it is submitted to the Coordinating Committee.

3. Gain Consensus on Trail Uses for “In” Tracts – all

Mike reminded the group that “In” tracts are those for which the Wildland Conservation Division we will be accepting trail proposals.

Stakeholder Questions and Comments

- *Is it your understanding that Barton Creek Wilderness Park, which was purchased with park and preserve acquisition funds, was to be included with grandfathered provisions?* Ted explained that Barton Creek Wilderness Park is 1,000 acres in the Barton Creek macrosite and is an extension of the original Barton Creek greenbelt. It was purchased with funds from the 1992 bond proposition. This was four years before the permit was sought and was clearly intended to be part of BCP land although it was a parks bond. Proposition 10, the BCP bond proposition, was for \$22 million and included Bohls, Reicher, Forest Ridge, and Double J & T. Proposition 10 money is preserve money and tracts bought with it are not grandfathered. Proposition 10’s language included “passive public access”. Proposition 11 was for \$20 million and included Barton Creek Wilderness Park. Proposition 11 was to purchase parkland.
- *I thought Commons Ford and Stillhouse Hollow were not included as “In” tracts, but they are on the list.* The group decided at the last meeting to include grandfathered tracts. “In” doesn’t necessarily mean accepting proposals for new trails, but could also mean refurbishing an existing trail or converting an unauthorized one to authorized. Willy said Barton Creek Wilderness Park and Greenbelt are grandfathered tracts, but the expectation is that we will be doing some working on existing trails there.
- *I suggest we work vertically across the Trail Use spreadsheet. We should start by looking at hiking and decide whether or not it will be allowed on each tract.* The group agreed with this method.
- *If we approve hiking but not hiking with dogs on a particular tract, could it change later?* Bill said that would be a permit issue, and he wouldn’t want to mislead people by saying that would be okay.
- *What exactly is trail running?* Gabe said trail running is generally an individual sport, but sometimes you may see three or four people running together. Many trail runners are ultra (long-distance) runners. They train on trails rather than roads because of their softer surface and because the races they run are on trails.

Willy offered some background on the trail running issue. He said a Wildland Conservation Division staff member encountered a group of ten or twelve trail runners on the Forest Ridge tract several years ago. The City staff member told the runners that

group size on that BCP tract is limited to three people or less. This applies to any groups on the trail, not just trail runners. The rationale is that smaller groups will create less wear and tear, and staff will be able to keep up with maintenance and upkeep. That group of trail runners lobbied for several years that trail running was being prohibited on BCP tracts, but it never was. Only larger group sizes were prohibited.

- *Could group size be enlarged on a particular trail if a sponsor group can help with maintenance and upkeep?* Willy said this could be a possibility if the trail proposal outlines how maintenance will be provided.
- *Will trail running be defined in terms of group size in the Trail Master Plan?* Willy said no. The groups of three or less are on Forest Ridge only to keep up with maintenance.
- *I was on the Forest Ridge tract once before the City acquired it, and I encountered a group of trail runners, yelling and hollering while they ran.* Willy said people should not be surprised about what they might encounter on any trail. There are people out there who just don't follow the rules.

The group began reviewing hiking. Mike said they were only determining yes or no for hiking on potential trails on the tracts, and later the group could decide on the maximum number of miles of trail or other constraints.

Willy talked about the permitting system on Bull Creek trail. He said permits work well there because it is a trail that Wildland Conservation staff manages. However, the permitting process is very workload intensive involves 80 hours of staff time per year to plan, give tours, and more. This system can handle 80 students each year with current staff and budget. Willy said if the group talks about expanding the permit process, they could be boxing themselves into constraints that staff may not be able to handle without huge financial and personnel inputs. He said the group may want to look at other considerations that limit effects to species without adding hundreds of permits.

We are not at the point of discussing trail design or management. Willy said is it a use that is compatible with the site if it does not violate the permit – that's what we are looking at here.

- *Some areas need trail restoration and/or redesign, but not new trails. Maybe we should try to capture this in the process. There is not group consensus on expanded trails on any of the tracts that I know of. The first order of business is to get the trails there under control and not build new trails.* Mike said proposals could be for new trails, refurbishing trails, or trail restoration.

Willy reiterated that when Bull Creek Foundation came forward with the proposal for a trail on WQPL property, it was a negotiation. The group was first allowed access on the property. Then Bull Creek Foundation and Wildland Conservation Division negotiated what they thought was acceptable for the trail. They all came to an agreement, then the MOA was written, and later construction began.

Mike said the Planning Considerations for a BCP Trail Master Plan Proposal document would address many of the concerns stakeholders were bringing up. Willy said this document would be used for all types of proposals – a new trail, converting an unauthorized trail to an authorized one, making a trail more sustainable, etc. Mike said the proposal packet may need some sort of narrative like a cover letter to bring more clarity.

- *I propose adding a column to the Trail Use spreadsheet that says “Proposals can consider additional mileage of trails? (Yes or no)”.*
- *I won’t support that addition because it boxes people in and is hard to decide without being out on the land to thoroughly examine it. Also, would rerouting a trail be considered new trail? I won’t accept that constraint because sponsors will need to work with BCP, WQPL, and PARD. Willy added that if the group builds in that column, they will stray from the Policy Statement, which requests plans for “as many tracts within the BCP as practicable for increased access beginning in 2009.”*
- *We could end up with a proliferation of trails if every sponsor group wants to build new ones. I don’t see that anybody will be interested in doing things with existing trails. I don’t think it would be a good recipe for making the system manageable.*
- *Regarding the previous comment, your set of assumptions about what trail advocates bring to the table is discouraging. We as trail advocates have expressed much interest in solving problems on Barton Creek and Emma Long and want to provide mitigation there. There is a considerable amount of common ground here in consideration for what the BCP is trying to accomplish.*
- *I’d like to see a focus on getting the existing trails under control first. The discussion about what constitutes a new trail and what constitutes a reconstructed trail still needs to happen.*
- *We need to follow the carrot and stick approach. The stick is maintenance and improvement of existing trails. The carrot to get people excited is the promise of some new access, however limited.*

Willy said the group already reached consensus on standards that must be met when allowing access, permitted uses, not permitted uses, and how the policy statement impacts the interpretation of previous documents. All of these things are included in the Strategic Vision. He said the group agreed to these things about why they are here and what they want to accomplish. All of the fears stakeholders have expressed tonight have been discussed in previous meetings and the group already reached consensus on this. Willy said the bottom line is that for this to work and for a proposal to move forward, negotiation will be necessary. We will have to talk and not just check a box yes or no.

Charlie said the MOA process for Bull Creek Foundation lasted about a year. From creation of the MOA to beginning construction on the trail was about two and a half years, and construction on the trail was completed in nine months. He agreed with Willy that the BCP

staff and the potential sponsor will be stuck with each other. Willy said the WQPL process was complex, but he's proud of the trail. Mike said the proposal is really just the starting point.

- *We need to get a general sense of what uses will be appropriate but not attach all of these strings.*
- *It doesn't seem really honest or fair to say we will allow hiking and have people expect it will happen when it really won't. So a fair way is to address challenges and restrictions rather than people going through the work of an inappropriate proposal. Willy said he hoped the Planning Considerations document would address those concerns.*
- *Regarding the previous comment, the presumption is that proposals on these "In" tracts will be considered because we've already thrown out the other tracts that aren't as appropriate.*
- *I think we are all saying the same thing and have the same general idea of what should occur on each of the tracts. I'm concerned that it may not be captured in the TMP document. Someone completely outside of this process could submit a proposal and not understand what this group has agreed on. We need to put it in a document or chart and get it in writing. It needs to be in the Trail Master Plan.*
- *We already went through the conversation about specifics of proposed trails. We need to give potential sponsors and land managers room to discuss and negotiate. Every proposal will be specifically negotiated. This conversation is unnecessary because these things will be addressed in negotiation.*
- *People like me are afraid of the political process. My concern is how to make sure we are insulated from any kind of political process and that we stick with the scientific criteria. Willy said the bottom line is that we will never get that kind of insulation with where we are in the City of Austin. Everyone here is close to the legislative body. If a document has gone to the Coordinating Committee from a diverse group of stakeholders representing a broad section of the community, it does give City Council some assurance.*

Mike proposed that the group shift directions and begin to look at the Proposal/MOA process outline.

4. Review Draft Proposal Template - all

Willy said that Sheila's Design Phase Trail Planning Questions was used as a resource to help draft the Proposal/MOA Process and Planning Considerations for a BCP Trail Master Plan Proposal documents.

The group first reviewed the Proposal/MOA Process document, which is found below.

BCP Trail Master Plan Proposal/MOA Process

1. Sponsor request to plan a proposal and obtain City of Austin (COA) access letter (for non park land).
2. Proposal submission and review
 - a. Clarification and discussion between COA and sponsor.
 - b. COA proposes revisions to sponsor.
 - c. Acceptance
3. Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)
 - a. Use Water Quality Protection Lands MOA as template.
 - b. Initial Trail Master Plan MOA will require revision to mutually agreed items (committees, reviews, administration, etc.).
4. Initial design
5. Permitting
 - a. Revisions to design as required
 - b. COA Austin Water Utility/PARD general permits
6. Construction
 - a. Problem solving
 - b. Permit compliance certification

Stakeholder Comments and Questions

- *I propose adding “informal discussion back and forth” or “continuous feedback process” to Number 1.*

Willy said he and Megan are working with the IT department to get everything from the Trail Master Plan website on discs so potential sponsors can have access to the history of the process.

Willy noted that the general template used with WQPL probably won't be applicable for the BCP and another general template for the BCP will have to be negotiated. The first sponsor will be the trailblazer for all sponsors that come later.

The group then discussed the Planning Considerations document, which is found below.

Planning Considerations for a BCP Trail Master Plan Proposal

Use

1. What uses are being sponsored?
2. Who is/are the sponsors?
3. What resources is/are sponsor(s) offering to provide?
4. What resources is/are the sponsor(s) seeking from the land manager?
5. How will this trail comply with the BCP (from TMP and Strategic Vision)?
6. How will user conflicts be avoided?

Trail

1. What is the approximate length of the proposed trail? (Please provide a map.)

2. What is the proposed surface of the trail?
3. Are there any potential structural components?
4. What is the type and expected extent of clearing created by the proposed trail?
5. What type of habitat expected to be affected? (Use TMP process documents as a guide.)
 - a. Can habitat, karst, springs, and plants be avoided by >100 meters?
 - b. If habitat cannot be avoided, what are the proposed actions to mitigate?
6. How will IMBA design standards and specifications be met?
7. How will cultural and other sensitive resources be protected?

Facilities

1. Will parking be onsite or off BCP property?
 - a. If the parking is onsite, what is the proposed mitigation?
 - b. Is any impervious cover proposed?
2. Are structural facilities proposed?
 - a. Will they be located onsite or offsite?
 - b. If onsite, what is the proposed mitigation?
 - c. Is any impervious cover proposed?

Operations

1. User management
 - a. How will intensity of use be managed and/or maintenance be adjusted to address intensity?
 - b. How will enforcement and security be addressed?
 - c. What design and education components are proposed to keep users on trails?
2. Resource impacts (protected species, soil, water, and plant communities)
 - a. What design components are proposed to avoid impacts to protected species, soil, water, and plant communities?
3. How will uninterrupted preserve operations be provided for:
 - a. Species monitoring
 - b. Animal population management (deer, hogs, brown-headed cowbird)
 - c. Habitat manipulation
 - planting/restoration
 - burning
 - mechanical and chemical treatments
 - d. Safety of personnel and users
4. How do you propose to provide long-term maintenance and repairs, enforcement, and monitoring?
5. How do you propose to support monitoring of the potential impacts from this trail on protected species, soil, water, and plants?

Stakeholder Comments and Questions

- Number 6 under Use says "How will user conflicts be avoided?" We might want potential sponsors to specify direction of travel on the trail. Willy said he included this question in

reference to the group decision that the golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo should be considered trail users.

- *Are the IMBA design standards being proposed for all trails or just trails allowing bikes?* The group said all trails because the IMBA standards are benchmark standards for sustainability.
- *I think we should include a specific mention of hours of use and seasons of use. We need to include seasonality for issues during nesting season.*
- *I propose that we change “design components” under Operations 2a to “design and/or management components”.* The group agreed to this change and Megan will revise the document.
- *Where do proposed hours of operation and seasonal closures fit?* Charlie said with the WQPL process, they had a separate section for trail rules, including maintenance and closures. Willy said there is a list of potential trail closures for Charlie’s group’s trail. There is also a notice provision, which is a notice to close the trail, but they haven’t had to use it. Willy said there really isn’t animal management going on at that specific tract, but if animal management was going on, one person would stay at the gate at closing while another would run the trail and get everyone off the property. Once everyone leaves, the trail would be closed overnight to trap the animal(s). Trails could also be closed for a week or so to do a prescribed burn.

Mike asked Bill what was missing from the document. Bill said as long as the group follows the guidelines they all agreed upon, he thinks the document is comprehensive.

- *Do we want to identify the process by which proposals will go to the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC), the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), the Coordinating Committee, US Fish and Wildlife, and City Council?* Willy said he’d write something up showing those steps to include under number three on the Proposal/MOU Process document. Megan will send the revised document out with the meeting minutes. He added that before the Coordinating Committee approves a proposal, they’ll ask for recommendations (not actions, just recommendations) from the CAC and SAC.
- *I’m really happy with everything I’ve read so far, but I still want to know what information and background potential sponsors will be given up front.* We won’t expect people to have maps available to plan trails. Potential sponsors will receive maps, the disc with all Trail Master Plan website files from the process, recent annual reports, monitoring data, and natural resource information to give them enough background information.

Mike asked if everyone in the group could support the Proposal/MOA Process and Trail Considerations documents. All stakeholders answered that they had been heard, could live with the decision, and can support it. Consensus was reached on using both documents and following the procedures outlined within them.

The group then returned to the discussion of the Trail Uses spreadsheet.

- *I don't know that it's a good use of our time to put checks in the boxes on the spreadsheet. I think it's better to leave that question in potential sponsors' hands via their proposals.* Willy proposed as a compromise that the group agree that only these four uses proposed by the Coordinating Committee (hiking, hiking with dogs, biking, and trail running) can come under proposal as constrained by the TMP Strategic Vision.
- *What about rock climbing and swimming?* Willy said if the group wants to go beyond the four uses, they need to plan for more meetings. The group agreed to stick with the stated four uses.

Bill had a concern about hiking with dogs on nongrandfathered tracts. Willy proposed adding "Hiking with dogs will only be allowed where grandfathered." He also noted that proposals for biking will have to comply with details about experimental use, and resources given to applicants need to include constraints and rules for each set of tracts.

After discussion, the proposal before the group was that only the four uses listed by the Coordinating Committee could be proposed as constrained by grandfathering and uses allowed or prohibited in the Strategic Vision.

- *I would hate to exclude hiking with dogs on nongrandfathered tracts.* Bill said allowing dogs on all tracts, including nongrandfathered ones, could require a permit amendment or be brought up when the permit is brought up for renewal.
- *I would love specificity in the Planning Considerations document. I propose adding "Would this trail be used when habitat is occupied?"* The group agreed to add the word "occupied" before habitat on Trail question 5a.
- *I cannot support the wording of the proposal with regard to dogs.*

Willy recommended that the group only approve the four uses as constrained by grandfathering and the outlined permitted/not permitted uses in the Strategic Vision. Gary didn't agree to this proposal.

- *Our charge in this process was to avoid permit amendments.* Bill reiterated that dogs on nongrandfathered tracts would lead to a permit amendment. Willy said when stakeholders filled out an application to be a part of this process, they agreed to abide by the constraints of the process.

Mike said he'd like to see Gary's proposal in writing and Bill to cite the passage of USFWS's word on this issue.

Gary said that site-by-site basis for dogs and bikes was included in the Strategic Vision. Willy said Gary was correct and that number six of the Strategic Vision does contain that language.

Willy proposed that the group move forward even though no consensus on hiking with dogs was reaching during the meeting.

Willy and Megan will work on the final document and give Bill and Gary the opportunity to do additional research. If consensus is not reached on this issue, this can be noted and communicated to the Coordinating Committee as part of the Plan.

Mike asked if we did reach consensus on trail running. Willy said yes, we agreed that it will be proposed in the same way that hiking would be. Scott read from the Strategic Vision that group walking/hiking/jogging within 100 meters of occupied habitat must be supervised. Willy said if a trail proposal does encroach on the 100 meters, mitigation can be proposed. Bill said USFWS would consider this.

Megan will send out Table 18 from pages 3-90 to 3-92 of the Habitat Conservation Plan with the meeting minutes. This table shows a breakdown of Recreational Facilities West of Loop 1 including ownership, acreage, and activities allowed. This document will also be posted on the [Trail Master Plan website](#) under the October 21st meeting. Revised Proposal/MOA Process and Planning Considerations documents will also be posted on the [TMP website](#).

5. Next Steps – Mike Hockmuller

The group will meet once more (date and time TBD) to attempt to reach consensus on the dog issue and reach final consensus on the TMP document. Megan will be emailing the Trail Master Plan to stakeholders for their input before our final meeting. The Plan is due to the Coordinating Committee on November 28, 2008.