

## Comments ON CPW 2015 Strategic Plan

Colorado's recreational trails are amongst the best in the world and their value has been acknowledged by Governor Hickenlooper in his State of the State address in 2015 when he referred to the importance of recreational trails systems. So what is missing from this focus on trails that can be greatly improved by a revision to current practices in the Trails Program by way of strategic planning?

CPW is the state agency responsible for trails, but it is clearly apparent that Wildlife has taken the lion's share of time and effort while the old "Parks" is relegated to a poor player. Number one is to understand and address the fact that trails are a far bigger recreational activity in Colorado and generated at least as much money as hunting and angling. (See SCORRP Plan and the discussion of dollars toward the end of these comments)

All of Colorado's trails programs support 250,000,000 activity days per year. The Trails Program suffers from lack of personnel and resources. It is subject to a draconian grant process that makes it all but impossible for non-profit grantees to meet the ridiculous accounting requirements, insurance, delayed payment and failing to provide enough grant money to even begin the projects! It was never the vision to take direct USER funded monies and then ask volunteers to meet requirements of a \$500,000,000 highway construction project to obtain them. People are dropping out of the snowmobile and OHV programs because they simply cannot function under the current system.

We are at a point where it is not far from requiring bridge loans to complete projects, which of course is ridiculous and impossible. So where is CPW in this situation; absent without leave. The trails coordinators paid out of trails funds have been co-opted by Regional Wildlife managers. The trails program is 8<sup>th</sup> page news on the CPW website, it all appears to be about antlers and fish.

Much of Colorado's finest motorized and non motorized trails are on federal government land...land the feds cannot maintain and if not for our Trails Program will be lost. How would the public know that, CPW apparently doesn't. We have a leadership team in CPW and where is there a seat at the table for the Trails Program and I am not speaking of the Assistant Director of Parks who must juggle all recreational matters by himself? We have Wildlife members on the Team in numbers, yet not a single soul to represent as huge a recreational activity as trails...unconscionable.

We supported the merger and it appears to be a big mistake and worthy of a revisit by the General Assembly unless we have a Strategic Plan that seriously encompasses recreation, of which trails are a huge part. Please do not feel that because your initiated focus groups in the middle of the week that you are getting a crisp clear picture. The deck is stacked because most trail users do not have an idea in hell that CPW is the agency charged with trails and just how did we get to that point; because YOU have failed miserably to promote the greatest opportunities in Colorado because Wildlife runs the show. In short your trails promotion and education are the backwaters of state recreation. Colorado's motorized Trails Programs are recognized as among the best in the nation. Who knows? Not even our own citizens.

Allow me explain just one piece of the Trails Programs; the OHV program and ask yourself did you even know this?

CPW's Motorized Trails Program

A user fee system for the purchase of OHV registrations and use permits was instituted in 1990. Over the past twenty-five years collections for the Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) Recreation Fund has grown to \$4.5 million per year. The benefits generated from this funding are many:

- User generated fees directly support OHV riding opportunities in Colorado.
- User generated fees directly support many volunteer and non-profit organizations devoted to OHV trail maintenance and education programs.
- The fund has been used to plan and accelerate the adoption of motor vehicle use maps and trail systems for federal lands throughout Colorado, this process would not have been completed as quickly without this funding.
- OHV funding is essentially the principal trails funding mechanism for the BLM's trails program in Colorado.
- OHV funding provided to the US Forest Service allows that agency to direct most if not all of the trails funding it receives in its annual federal funding allocation to the maintenance of non-motorized trails. Without OHV funding, non-motorized trails on Forest Service lands would suffer.
- Colorado's OHV program is a model program that is the envy of many western states.
- The fund has been used to address many environmental issues through the construction of bridges and the rerouting of historic trails out of riparian areas and sensitive habitats.
- The fund supports aggressive education and enforcement efforts.
- OHV recreation in Colorado is completely self-supported by this funding.

How do you expect older hunters and anglers to get around the backcountry? You will lose what little you have without focusing on trails. Old legs use ATVs and ROVs and the public that does not like them is inevitably going to be a small minority. Where is your planning for that inevitability?

What is the role of the State Trails Committee? If you pull out your statutes you will see they are to advise the CPW Commission on all things trails, yet they have been relegated to being grant scorers. How do you so under use your advisory committee so that they are never asked to go out to their constituents, identify problems and seek solutions? We can fix problems, but not without using a tool box that is right under your nose. Better define their role will be a great place to start.

Twenty-eight thousand working volunteer trail hours a year by both the motorized and non-motorized trails communities and these folks deserve more than a passing nod. The non-motorized trails program has lost half its funding in 10 years. Where is the Strategic Plan on that and where is the Commission?

Perhaps most pathetic of all is the CPW's ancient MOU between it and the federal agencies. It seems like the 1963 agreement, yes, that is correct, an agreement that predates JFK's death by two days, has never been thoroughly revised to meet the needs of a world that is over 50 years past due on an update. Most of Colorado's trails are on federal land and CPW doesn't communicate with them unless the issue deals with wildlife.

A study performed by Southwick Associates for Colorado Parks and Wildlife compiled a number of data sources that quantified the economic contribution of outdoor recreation in

Colorado documenting that outdoor recreation constitutes a substantial part of the Colorado economy. The total economic output associated with outdoor recreation was estimated to be \$34.5 billion dollars per year, contributing directly \$19.9 billion dollars to the Gross Domestic Product of the state. This economic activity supports over 313,000 jobs in the state, which represents 13.2% of the entire labor force in Colorado and produces \$12.4 billion dollars in salaries and wages. In addition, this output contributes \$4.9 billion dollars in local, state and federal tax revenue.

That same study provided the following: *Outdoor recreation includes a diverse set of activities that participants pursue in Colorado. Of particular interest for this study are the contributions of fishing, hunting, and wildlife watching. These three activities together produce over \$5 billion dollars of economic output, which supports nearly 50,000 jobs within the state. Wildlife watching alone contributes \$2.2 billion dollars in economic output per year, supporting over 19,000 jobs in Colorado.* (and how do you get out to those great vantage points? I believe people use trails).

Why were hunting, fishing and wildlife watching the only outdoor recreational activities singled out for more detailed studies in that effort? Taking the difference between the total economic output of \$35.5 billion dollars and the \$5 billion generated by these three specific pursuits, approximately \$30 billion is generated by other outdoor recreational activities.

Knowing that trails related activities are the most popular and most important outdoor recreational activity in Colorado, why doesn't CPW put more emphasis on trails promotion particularly given the implied financial benefit to the state derived from trails related recreation?

In 2009, the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition (COHVCO) convened an economic contribution study for motorized trail recreation in Colorado. That study estimated the total economic benefit derived from motorized recreation in Colorado was just over \$1 billion in 2009. Given that motorized recreation is not as popular as non-motorized trail recreation, as shown by the recent SCORP (percentage of Colorado residents participating in walking activities 66%, hiking-backpacking 52%, fishing 36%, wildlife viewing 19%, ATV riding 17%), the multiplier impact of non-motorized trail recreation to the state's economic related benefit is likely 10 times that of motorized recreation or twice that of hunting, fishing and wildlife watching. Ironically, hunting did not make the list of the top fifteen most popular outdoor recreational pursuits cited by the public in the 2014 SCORP public poll. Yet trails related outdoor recreational support from CPW remains weak and largely ignored.

Important trails agenda and trails related focus areas for CPW:

- Trails are the most important and most popular outdoor recreational activities in Colorado and nationwide, CPW should do more to promote trails activities and its trails accomplishments directly through CPW's programs and website ;
- Trails based recreation promotes healthy lifestyles particularly among urban and underserved communities in relation to outdoor recreation;
- Trails are the most logical means for gaining greater use and access to the outdoors especially in underserved urban areas and in communities that traditionally don't participate in routine outdoor recreation;

- Trails can and should be used as multi-modal transportation corridors to and from urban areas to promote and encourage more non-auto based commuting to ease traffic congestion, build healthy lifestyles and promote better air quality;
- Exploring, accommodating and encouraging new and evolving trails based recreation such as E-bikes or fat tire bikes;
- Colorado's Recreational Trails Committee is an underutilized state resource that should be tasked to assist DNR and CPW to assist in promoting a statewide trails and outdoor recreation agenda;

So please pay attention to one of your greatest resources.

Jerry Abboud  
President  
Colorado Off-highway vehicle Coalition