

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

WORK SESSION DATE: September 7, 2010

AGENDA ITEM TITLE: Woody Creek Road Safety Task Group Report and Recommendations

STAFF RESPONSIBLE: Brian Pettet, Director of Public Works
GR Fielding, County Engineer

ISSUE STATEMENT

Residents of Lenado and the Woody Creek Caucus requested the County address winter recreational parking issues, related road safety concerns and impacts to adjacent properties on Woody Creek Road.

BACKGROUND

On March 16, 2010 the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) formed the Woody Creek Road Safety Task Group by ratifying its membership and approving the Group's mandate. Since then, the Group has met five times and has developed recommendations for the BOCC to consider (see memorandum from facilitator, Bob Schultz).

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

Regional Transportation

Provide funding necessary to sustain safe, efficient, and high-quality County Roads and Commuter trails.

Safe and Healthy Community

Pitkin County residents, employees and visitors will live in a safe, secure and healthy environment.

KEY DISCUSSION ITEMS:

- Does the BOCC agree with the road safety recommendations and signage plan?
- Does the BOCC agree with the winter parking and access recommendation?
- Considering the series of potential actions to reduce impacts to adjacent property owners; which action(s) would the BOCC support?

BUDGETARY IMPACT:

Implementing the signage and road safety plan would cost the County approximately \$2100 including labor, equipment and materials. Approximately \$1500 represents out-of-pocket costs (materials) that can be paid for through the existing Road and Bridge Department's 2010 sign budget.

RECOMMENDED BOCC ACTION:

Approve the sign plan and direct Staff to continue to monitor impacts of the existing winter access parking above Lenado as currently delineated.

ATTACHMENTS:

Bob Schultz memorandum

Sign Plan map will be presented at work session

Access Matrix

MEMORANDUM

TO: Brian Pettet, Pitkin County Public Works Director
Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners

FROM: Bob Schultz, Robert Schultz Consulting

RE: Woody Creek Road Safety Task Group Process and Recommendations

DATE: July 6, 2010

Background

On March 16, 2010, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) formed the Woody Creek Road Safety Task Group by ratifying its membership and approving the group's mandate.

The group was asked to review and provide recommendations to the BOCC regarding:

- travel lanes and road safety
- winter parking and access issues
- impacts to adjacent properties

The group met five times for an average of 2.5 hours per meeting and staff performed analysis in order to inform group decision-making between meetings. At our first meeting, we reviewed the Group's mandate, discussed existing conditions and previous work, and identified criteria for assessing alternatives. At our second meeting, the Group received input from a Forest Service Planner and the District Ranger about forest planning issues, discussed each winter access alternative, and performed a "fatal flaw" analysis to remove alternatives that did not merit additional study by staff. At the third meeting, the Group focused on road safety issues and came to agreement on the general framework for GR Fielding to create a proposal. At the fourth meeting, the Group finalized a road safety plan and instructed staff to include the Meredith winter access in the comparative level of analysis. At the fifth meeting, the group reviewed the alternative analysis and voted on winter access and then provided direction related to reducing impacts to adjacent property owners.

The Task Group completed its work on June 23. While all of this sounds very logical and methodical, in reality we struggled with hard issues and at times tempers/emotions flared. Some Group members even left the process. At the same time, the Task Group continued to work hard and took the mandate created by the BOCC very seriously. This memo provides an overview of the process and documents group recommendations.

Key Issues and Recommendations

1.) Travel Lanes and Road Safety

Road safety was a central concern of all task force members. The key issues identified were:

- reducing overall travel speed in order to minimize accidents
- informing drivers of narrow and winding sections of roadway
- informing delivery vehicles that the road was not an alternative access to Aspen, and
- lowering speeds near homes in Lenado.

There was also discussion of enforcement of existing traffic and parking requirements.

The group discussed a wide range of techniques to address road safety, including motion-activated, solar powered flashing lights, high versus low volume signage, traffic calming techniques, and deputizing area residents.

There was discussion of specific problems with regard to the road, including one-lane sections, areas in which the roadway is disintegrating, and areas in which precarious rocks lie above the roadway. It was noted that Pitkin County has limited resources to address such issues and numerous needs across the county. Given the relatively low level of vehicle trips on the roadway, the immediate need seemed to be slowing drivers down.

In the end, the group unanimously agreed to a safety plan (see attached Safety Plan) that relies largely on signage in order to increase safety.

There is also a request that Pitkin County Sheriff enforcement of winter parking limitations take place during during peak hours, between noon and 4 pm on weekends and after snow storms, as possible. The goal being to optimize the effectiveness of whatever enforcement the Sheriff's office can provide.

From the perspective of the facilitator, this was the greatest area of unity and clarity from the group work. The group has recommended a practical plan that is likely to improve safety.

2.) Winter Parking and Access Issues

Winter parking and snowmobile access discussions were heated and ultimately led to the resignation of a couple of task group members. There has been previous county work regarding winter access and there is built up frustration by some parties, even a lawsuit by an adjacent property owner. One task group member stated several times that she has "been fighting this since 1989".

A few background points regarding snowmobiling:

- there are 1.65 million registered snowmobiles in the U.S. with more than 33,000 in Colorado.
- There were more than 61,000 new sleds sold in the U.S. in 2009, that is down from 170,000 sales in 1997
- Most of the snowmobiling on Forest Service land is on groomed trails forest roads¹

Like any other recreational activity that includes a significant capital investment, snowmobile sales area likely to be affected by the current economic conditions, however, the long-term trend is toward increased ridership. One can expect increased demand for access to Kobey Park over time. There may also be other winter access growth from Nordic skiers and/or future recreation activities.

The key issues considered in examining winter access included:

- providing safe access (width and slope of track) from valley floor to Kobey Park
- providing winter motorized access along a route in sync with Forest Service management plans
- identifying a second access route with a safer roadway to the access point
- identifying an access point that has ability to provide adequate parking and minimize impacts to adjacent property owners
- examining the suitability of snow cover from the access point to Kobey Park.

The existing Lenado access has good snow conditions, including trail grooming by the commercial operator Howard Vagneur, and safe access to Kobey Park. The ongoing unresolved issues have been around adequate parking, impacts to adjacent property owners, and the safety of the roadway.

The sense of the majority of group members was that a second access point could provide snowmobilers with a choice that might have better roadway access and parking while still meeting the other criteria.

The group identified a number of access points and criteria by which to assess the viability of those accesses (see attached Access Matrix). A number of alternatives were eliminated at the “fatal flaw” level of screening and of the remaining alternatives, only the existing access received support from Task Group members (unanimous) at the “comparable” level of screening.

Two alternatives, one from the area near Meredith and one up Hannon Creek, were the subject of much discussion and staff analysis. Both were feasible with regard to snow conditions, Forest Service management, roadway access, and potential parking. However, neither alternative enjoyed an existing road or trail wide enough to provide a track for snowmobiles.

¹ http://www.snowmobile.org/pr_snowfacts.asp

Both would require construction of a track on steep slopes that would require environmental clearance and a construction cost that staff estimated to be greater than \$100,000. The group did not recommend pursuing either alternative although each is possible.

Another alternatives that received consideration were two accesses from the SH 82 side of Woody Creek, up Dry Woody and Forest Road 523 above the Chaparral Ranch. Both alternatives would require trail access at higher elevations in order to ensure snow cover and that would require crossing private property. The Chaparral route is currently under legal review in order to resolve an access dispute between property owners and Pitkin County. In the absence of public access for vehicles to the upper elevations where parking might be constructed, the Task Group did not recommend those alternatives. Should Pitkin County acquire access, then these alternative could be revisited.

The facilitator's assessment is that a majority of the group desired to create a second access point to Kobey Park in order to reduce road and neighborhood impacts over time. However, we failed to find an alternative that achieved group support. While most task group members are comfortable that the information has been developed and that the additional expense for a second access is not warranted, others feel that a second access point is the only viable long term solution.

3.) Impacts to Adjacent Properties

The only alternative to receive support as a recommendation to the BOCC was the existing access point and thus discussion of impacts to adjacent properties was focused on the Lenado area. The impacts of vehicles dominated the discussion: parking for trailers and haulers, vehicular trips adjacent to homes, travel speed, and the pollution associated with snow machines.

The Task Group recommended a series of potential actions for the BOCC to consider in order to reduce impacts to neighbors:

- researching potential road realignment through the Lenado area away from structures
- examining potential berming within existing right-of-way to screen vehicles and calm traffic
- consolidating the commercial operator and private snowmobile parking into a single screened lot at the current location of commercial operator's lot
- implement traffic calming techniques near town site and straight sections of road
- widen Woody Creek Rd. where parking exists
- investigate moving parking above bridge onto USFS land (noting the potential costs and impacts of such a move, this alternative received a bare majority of support)

The facilitator sees these proposals as recognition that if the single access is maintained, then we have additional work to do in order to minimize impacts to adjacent property. Given funding and time constraints, the Group was not in a position to explore detailed analysis of the potential mitigation strategies. These might be appropriate for discussion between Public Works staff and neighbors.

Minority Views

Most of the votes were pretty decisive related to the Groups mission, however, it is important to note that a few Task Group members expressed concerns about the formation or management of the effort. At least two members expressed concerns that the initial selection of Task Group members was skewed in favor of members who they perceived as in favor of the status quo. One member, Daniel Delano, resigned from the Task Group in protest.

The facilitator perceived a majority of the Group in favor of pursuit of a second winter access to Kobey Park, a couple Task Group members were skeptical of that view. Those members see the need for a second winter access that meets the criteria above even if that requires additional research or an investment in environmental review and new trail construction. The roadway and neighbor impacts can be improved but will not be resolved while relying exclusively on the existing access.

Braden Cohen, a task force member and adjacent property owner, was unable to attend the final meetings but sent an email explaining his support for the existing access and a second access point. He is concerned that there is no plan to accommodate additional future growth without a second access. Branden also supported requiring 4-stroke engines in the area.

Linda Luke began a new job during the process and had to miss the last few meetings. Linda felt that the costs to make the improvements necessary to reduce impacts in Lenado would justify the costs to create an alternative access point. She was disappointed that a second access point was not supported.

A draft of this memo was distributed to Task Group members for comment prior to creating this version. Heather Rydell made several comments about the process and representations. I have invited her to submit a letter that would be attached to this memo.

Alternatives Work Sheets Draft 4.12.10

Impacts to Adjacent Properties	Existing Access	Forest Rd. 523	Collins Creek	Hannon Creek	Meredith (528/522)	Little Woody Creek	Dry Woody	Miller Creek	Rocky Fork Trail
Dust Control	Dust suppressant used during summer, portions of road left snow packed during winter	No current dust control applied on FS roads Probable on Discovery Way	Not likely in current state WCR paved to Flying Dog Ranch	None currently on this stretch of roadway	None currently, cabins could be affected	Not allowed access	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Visual Impact	More road signs adjacent to residential area More trucks and trailers in front of residential area	Discovery Way can be seen from SH 82 New traffic on private road through Chaparral	Bisects current parcel bringing traffic right by houses	Not much except for parking area	Unknown	Not allowed access	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Noise Impact	More trucks and trailers in front of residential area	New trucks on private road through Chaparral	Bisects current parcel bringing traffic right by houses	Closest neighbor approx. 1/4 mile	Unknown	Not allowed access	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Water Impact	No water crossings	Unknown, no access at present time	Crosses Collins Creek	Unknown	Unknown	Not allowed access	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Air Impact	Negative air impact to neighbors	Negative air impact to neighbors through Chaparral	Negative air impact to two residences	Unknown	Unknown	Not allowed access	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Connection between parking and Trailhead	Parking at winter closure	Parking is available to equestrian travel and hikers at gate to Chaparral	No established trailhead or parking at this time	No established parking at lower trailhead, although plenty of space	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown There is no established parking in this area	All on USFS	All on USFS
Proximity of Neighbors-Privacy	Parking and trailhead within 1/4 mile of residence	Access would cut through Chaparral Ranch	Passes two existing houses on Ranch	Closest neighbor approx. 1/4 mile	Unknown	Would likely bisect highest property	Would cut through Aspen Valley Ranch Subdivision	Unknown	Unknown
Likelihood of Trespassing issues	Established ROWs and easements through entire corridor	Currently no vehicular traffic is allowed on trail through Chaparral	Currently no public access is established (although there may have been a historical road)	All on USFS	Unknown	Not allowed access	Currently in litigation regarding access.	All on USFS	All on USFS
Parking Capacity for Future	10-12 established for this past winter	3-5 if allowed (although not likely) at ranch gate	Unknown	Plenty of flat space for a parking lot	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Relationship to FS Adopted	Complies with current FS plans	523 is open to licensed and	No current trails on FS plan	Non motorized use only (mechanical	Unknown	No current trails on FS plan	No current trails on FS plan	Not currently open to motorized use	Not currently open to motorized use

plans		unlicensed travel Discovery Way is a private Road		travel OK on Bicylce)					
Relationship to FS Draft TM plan	Complies with future FS plans	523 is open to licensed and unlicensed travel Discovery Way is a private Road	No future FS plans for trails as per Travel Management Plan Alt G	Non motorized use only (mechanical travel OK on Bicylce)	No access between 528 and 522 shown 528 shown as non-motorized	No future FS plans for trails as per Travel Management Plan Alt G	No future plans on connecting trails at this time	Non motorized use only (mechanical travel OK on Bicylce)	Non motorized use only (mechanical travel OK on Bicylce)
Relationship to Pitco plans & Regulations	Complies with current Pitco practices	No plans to acquire any public right of way or easement on Discovery Way	No plans to acquire any public right of way or easement on Flying Dog Ranch	No plans to acquire any public right of way or easement	No plans to acquire any public right of way or easement	No plans to acquire any public right of way or easement	Currently in litigation regarding access.	No plans to acquire any public right of way or easement	No plans to acquire any public right of way or easement
Landowner Awareness/ Participation	Landowner awareness high and participation high	No participation at this time from Chaparral	Caretaker on task force	Unknown	Unknown	Spoke with caretaker, who denied access	Currently in litigation regarding access	Unknown	Unknown

Winter Parking & Access	Existing Access	Forest Rd. 523	Collins Creek	Hannon Creek	Meredith (528/522)	Little Woody Creek	Dry Woody	Miller Creek	Rocky Fork Trail
Fair to Different Users									
Reasonable Capacity	Up to 15-20 vehicles	Unknown	unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Enforceable									
Economically Viable	Yes	Guess: Expensive to acquire ROW through Discovery	Guess: Very expensive to acquire ROW through Flying Dog Ranch	No Significant investment to widen trail in several areas. Additional routes may need to be investigated due to steep slopes. Additional funds would be needed to build parking lot	Unknown	Not allowed access	Guess: Expensive to acquire ROW through	Unknown	Unknown
Provides Access to Terrain	Yes	Yes	Maybe: Narrow sections (single track) up to Kobey Park	With trail improvements	528 shown as non-motorized in future USFS Travel MGMT Plan Alt G	Not allowed access	??	528 shown as non-motorized in future USFS Travel MGMT Plan Alt G	528 shown as non-motorized in future USFS Travel MGMT Plan Alt G
Safe Travel Route for Users	One death from person exiting roadway while snowmobiling this year (March)	Unknown	Narrow sections and a creek crossing	Avoids upper narrow area for travel with truck and trailer Significant widening and new routes may need	Unknown	Not allowed access	Likely	Unknown	Unknown

