Ridge to Rivers

2nd Quarter Partnership Meeting

Minutes

February 4, 2016

Partners present: Scott Koberg, Ada County Parks and Waterways, Sara Arkle, Boise City Department of Parks and Recreation, Stephaney Kerley, Boise National Forest Service, Tate Fischer and Larry Ridenhour, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Steven Dempsey, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, David Gordon, Ridge to Rivers.

Others present: Will Taliaferro, Ridge to Rivers, Tim Breuer, Land Trust of the Treasure Valley (LTTV), Matt Bishop and Mark Iverson, minutes recorder. .

- **Recreation Permits Policy Discussion**

D. Gordon explained that there was a recreation proposal from Matt Bishop, who wanted to use a pack mule to sell coffee and other goods on the Ridge to Rivers' trail system. He mentioned that several years ago the City of Boise tried to address the issue of non-competitive special events and had not come to a resolution. One example was "A Climb for Cancer" on the Table Rock trail system that generally had several hundred participants. No permit was granted to them and it was not necessary to give the organizers an event permit.

He also explained that an adaptive athlete climb was being organized for Table Rock with some of the athletes requiring two to three assistants to help them climb the route. The organizer for the Adaptive Athlete Climb was working with Travis Miller; the Special Event Coordinator for Boise Parks and Recreation (Department), because the event began on City property at Quarry View Park. T. Miller was working with Amber Beierle of the Idaho State Historical Society because a large portion of Table Rock Trail is located on Idaho State property. D. Gordon explained that Ridge to Rivers had a solid competitive event policy and non-competitive events shared many of the same issues including large numbers of people.

M. Bishop introduced his proposal of selling mule-side coffee in the Boise Foothills during the summer. He had identified ten possible trail intersections where he proposed stopping his pack mule to sell fresh coffee and pastries. He intended to provide this service on Saturday and Sunday mornings for roughly four to six hours each day. He also proposed full-moon nights for special events. He added that he would presell the coffee online and then deliver the orders to preselected locations. His intended goal was to become a venue and an experience, and provide the incentive to get customers onto new trails. All the trails that he identified were on BLM land and he had previously submitted his paperwork with L. Ridenhour. Some of the trails crossed onto Boise National Forest Service land towards

Bogus Basin. He would also traverse other agency land, but not sell goods from these parcels. His belief was that the impact on the trails would be no different than any other equestrian user. He opened the floor for questions.

S. Dempsey asked how many prospective customers he believed would purchase goods.

M. Bishop answered that the weight he could put on his mule, per trip, was enough to serve a sixteen ounce cup to seventy-five people. He added his plan to presell coffee was in order to limit the weight his mule was required to carry each time.

S. Koberg asked BLM for their feedback. L. Ridenhour replied that the BLM had a monthly meeting about new project proposals and needed feedback from the botanists, archeologists and wildlife experts on proposals and the possible impacts on BLM lands. He informed the group that the main concern for BLM was the impact of a mule on one location after four to six hours.

T. Fischer added that the meeting raised some of the standard recreational concerns such as growth of wild onions.

S. Koberg asked how M. Bishop came up with the idea. M. Bishop replied that his family and friends frequently used the trails and he also enjoyed planning outdoor events and had organized some races. He was looking for a new event venue and opportunity and this offered him a new challenge and means to engage the community.

D. Holloway commented that the pack-mule business sounded intriguing, but asked the partners what their stances were on commercial ventures in the Foothills. He asked if this could lead to bigger proposals in the future.

D. Gordon replied that Ridge to Rivers had not dealt with this before.

L. Ridenhour brought up the topic of permits for Google Trekker and outfitted horse rides. He was surprised they had not received more proposals for various business ventures. Since Ridge to Rivers had a blanket policy for mountain bike and foot races in the Foothills, then a draft of a partner-wide commercial activity policy needed to be written.

T. Fischer stated he had no problem making a policy decision, but he wanted to be sure other partners were comfortable with his decision. He also indicated he agreed with L. Ridenhour that a commercial policy discussion needed to be an interagency discussion. If the commercial policy was not done carefully, Ridge to Rivers would be faced with challenging issues.

L. Ridenhour explained that it would be challenging for operators to conduct business on BLM land and not cross over to Ada County or City of Boise property.

D. Gordon asked for the partners' thoughts regarding how to best move forward. He stated that when drafting the race policy, Ridge to Rivers ended up having a smaller subset of partners working on different details and each ended up as part of the overall policy. He stated that Ridge to Rivers use this approach for a commercial use policy. He also pointed to the difference between a recreational use permit and a noncompetitive event permit. He added that an outfitter guide license or special use permit was different than a special event like "Climb for Cancer" which was a onetime permit.

D. Holloway asked if other agencies had a fairly comprehensive event policy. He added his opinion that a new policy did not need to be drafted, but could be created from other existing policies.

L. Ridenhour replied that both BLM and Boise National Forest Service had regulations in place to handle commercial, competitive and large group events. Regarding social events, he stated the BLM did not have a specific policy and asked if the City of Boise might have regulations for social events. D. Holloway answered that the City did, but the policy was inadaptable to the Foothills.

L. Ridenhour specified that a partner drafted policy needed to focus on what impact the events might have on the Foothills from a partner-wide perspective. He suggested putting a cap on the number of events permitted each year. He questioned if there was some social parameters Ridge to Rivers might want to consider.

D. Holloway asked for clarification on what L. Ridenhour meant by social parameters. L. Ridenhour used that example of limiting the number of participants as Ridge to Rivers had done with the foot race policy, which allowed for no more than two-hundred participants in a race. That limited both the impact to trails and the social impact of having too many participants in an event, making it overcrowded.

S. Kerley added that having a vendor on every trailhead detracted from the overall experience of solace and peace offered by the Foothills.

T. Fischer commented that the lower Foothills had a more social aspect versus mid to upper level trails which offered more solitude.

S. Kerley cited the example of the proposed guided mountain bike outfitter in the Foothills and the process the National Forest Service would need to implement, starting with a prospectus to determine the public demand for guided rides.

D. Holloway confirmed that the Department followed the same process. The City used a competitive bid process and very year the Department does a call for vendors to inform them of the open bid process with permits lasting for multiple years so the bid did not need to be done every year. He voiced his concern that allowing one vendor would lead to many other vendors coming forward for permits. He also commented that vending in the

Foothills had not been contemplated or added to the reserve plan. He doubted that vending had been contemplated in the Ridge to Rivers Trail Plan either.

S. Dempsey added he envisioned local breweries wanting to sponsor events on the trail system.

D. Gordon used fishing outfitters and mountain biking outfitters in describing the Forest Service Special Use Permitting process. Only so many permits are issued per Ranger District. If a permit was issued to an outfitter or business, then the permitting agency is essentially in a type of partnership with that person. As a business partner, it would not make sense to inundate the area with vendors. That also would create paperwork buildup because more permits required more processing. By setting limits at the start, it would create solid relationships. He concluded that Ridge to Rivers could form a subgroup to draft a vendor policy.

D. Holloway asked if M. Bishop wanted to start sooner rather than later. M. Bishop replied that he was interested in starting as soon as possible and that he needed to market and to train his mule. He intended to package his service as a presale service, not as a vendor.

S. Kerley explained that it would be a minimum of three years before she could look at M. Bishop's pack mule proposal. Boise National Forest Service would bear the cost of the prospectus.

T. Fisher stated the BLM was not three years out, but many big projects were on the BLM schedule. The botanist, archeologist, and wildlife expert would be busy and they would be required to evaluate the pack-mule proposal to assess whether the proposal would pass the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements.

D. Holloway clarified that M. Bishop needed to be approved by Ridge to Rivers and then meet any NEPA requirements.

S. Koberg shared his view that a collaborative decision on a vendor policy was important to Ada County. T. Fischer agreed and added that the use of public lands for profit could be viewed negatively by the public.

D. Gordon informed the partners and M. Bishop that Ridge to Rivers was busy implementing the trail plan process, in addition to a busy upcoming field season, making it unlikely that a meeting about vendor permits would be on any upcoming agenda.

M. Bishop shared his willingness to remain constructive to execute his business plan within the parameters set by Ridge to Rivers.

D. Gordon mentioned the possible use of private land that Ridge to Rivers' trails cross. He added that they may need to formulate a plan for vendors who would be crossing public lands, but vending on private parcels in the Foothills.

- **Friends of the Foothills**

T. Breuer summarized that LTTV's activity helped the Foothills by providing volunteers and funds for staff to coordinate the stewardship of the Foothills, working alongside D. Gordon and his staff. He stated the LTTV's intent to increase the support the organization provided Ridge to Rivers. He believed resurrecting the Friends of the Foothills was possible with the infrastructure provided by the LTTV through a restricted endowment account set aside solely for the management of the Foothills. Friends of the Foothills would be managed by a committee which would determine if; a specific project proposal helped the Ridge to Rivers partners achieve their mission; if the project helped the community and the land, and whether it would benefit the LTTV's awareness in the community. This year was the twentieth anniversary of the LTTV and, as a celebration a film festival had been organized for March 5, 2016. The LTTV was looking for the support of each agency individually so the Friends of the Foothills would be able to state the organization was in partnership with these agencies. The Friends of the Foothills would be a group which would look to the Ridge to Rivers partnership to decide the best use of the Friends of the Foothills funds and volunteer manpower.

D. Holloway stated that he believed Friends of the Foothills was a good idea and it was time to finalize this project as it had been planned for a number of years. The City would support the development of this group. T. Fisher commented that the BLM would definitely support the Friends of the Foothills.

S. Koberg asked if the Friends of the Foothills would be organized as an independent 501 (c)(3) or if the organization would be under the umbrella of the LTTV. T. Breuer stated that it would be under the umbrella of the LTTV.

S. Arkle commented that there was an increased capacity for Friends of the Foothills because it had an organization to attach the group to.

- **8th Street Gate**

D. Gordon informed the partners the 8th Street gate, on BLM land, prohibited full size vehicle access, but did not restrict four-wheelers or motorcycles during the winter. He questioned if this information may have been incorrect. If it was incorrect, he suggested the topic be discussed.

T. Fischer replied that they needed to be certain that this was occurring even if it was only seasonally. He added that before L. Ridenhour drafted a press release, he needed to be sure of the situation at the 8th Street gate.

L. Ridenhour commented that in the fall the BLM put out a press release informing the public the gate would be closed for the winter season and that this had been the precedent for a long time. In the BLM Land Use Plan, it stated that 8th Street would be gated and shut during the wet, winter months to close it off to four wheeled vehicles. When the Land Use Plan was drafted, four wheels implied full size trucks and cars. In 1988, when the Plan was written, the off-road vehicles were three-wheelers. He noted that small sized vehicles caused the same, if not more, damage than full size vehicles to the trails. He introduced the strategy of closing the trails to all motorized vehicle use to maintain the integrity of the roadbed during the wet winter period.

D. Gordon informed the group of a first gate on 8th Street below the BLM gate above which, when closed, prevented a steep slope of road from being torn up over the winter. He commented there was also an upper gate on Boise National Forest Service land.

S. Kerley explained that the Boise National Forest Service's gate was covered in their Travel Management Plan and she needed to conduct a public process in order to close that gate. L. Ridenhour stated that the BLM needed to conduct that same process for gate closures.

S. Kerley commented that many of the decisions to close gates were to prevent the disturbance of wildlife and, due to a lack of funds, to continually repair and maintain damaged roads.

L. Ridenhour informed the partnership that in order to adopt the closure of 8th Street, they would be required to conduct an environmental assessment of the entire Land Use Plan.

S. Kerley commented that the upper gate closure on Boise National Forest Service land applied to all motorized vehicles above that gate.

D. Gordon stated that as a road, Ridge to Rivers was only responsible for the opening and closing of the gate and if the area was closed to all motorized traffic, then Ridge to Rivers would work with its partnering agencies to close the area to potential motorized use through signage and education.

- **Ridge to River's 25th Anniversary Discussion**

D. Gordon stated that Ridge to Rivers was formed in 1992 and suggested the discussion of ideas for the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration in 2017.

S. Arkle offered to host the celebration at Jim Hall Foothills Learning Center (JHFLC) and suggested a special map to commemorate the occasion and raise awareness of the Foothills.

S. Dempsey suggested Ridge to Rivers organize volunteer Foothills cleanup days.

L. Ridenhour suggested that, instead of a day celebration, Ridge to Rivers needed to organize a yearlong celebration of the entire trail system. S. Koberg agreed with the idea of a yearlong celebration and added that, with the conclusion of the ten year trail plan, the anniversary offered the perfect chance to showcase the one-hundred and ninety-two miles of trails.

- **Mountain Bike Race Discussion**

D. Gordon informed the partners there were no applications for mountain bike races on the system in 2015. James Lang, a race promoter, showed some interest in the fall, but was working directly with Bogus Basin on a race, so it would fall under their permit. He added that Bogus Basin was hosting a number of mountain bike racing events including a Thursday night racing series for a few weeks. In October, there would be an Enduro Race organized by James Lang. There had been no mountain bike races in the past, but Bogus Basin needed to diversify. They were interested in developing a downhill flow trail on their property on the Bitterroot side of the mountain. D. Gordon said he was asked to help them with the design of the flow trail and he had agreed to do so, adding that he suggested Bogus Basin hire a contractor specializing in flow trail designs. He explained they would probably use Judd Duvall, the contractor responsible for developing the Eagle Bike Park.

S. Dempsey asked if Bogus Basin was responsible for trail damage brought about by mountain bike races. D. Gordon replied that they were aware that they needed to stay ahead of trail repairs between events and that they planned on working on damaged trails in conjunction with those organizations sponsoring the races. His intention would be to evaluate these trails after races in order to find damage Bogus Basin's staff may have overlooked. He noted that Ridge to Rivers and Bogus Basin had a terrific working relationship.

S. Koberg asked how he would determine the damage, specifying if he intended to use a prerace photo inventory and a post-race inventory.

D. Gordon answered he did not think a photo inventory was practical because there were miles and miles of trail. He added that pre-riding the trail would help in diagnosing trail damage after the races.

L. Ridenhour suggested the use of a Go Pro camera to evaluate the trail.

S. Koberg mentioned the importance of a defensible position on race routes and damage from a prerace standpoint, in order to detract from race organizers claiming preexisting damage to trails after a racing event.

S. Dempsey suggested showing race organizers footage of trails and areas to avoid, as a consideration to wildlife.

S. Koberg added that this policy would also work for spectators of the events who could be lining trail routes and possibly damage trails and wildlife.

- **2017 Winter Trail Closure Pilot Program**

D. Gordon explained that they were looking at a pilot program for next year and they were seeking partner agency ideas before the coming year. He added that W. Taliaferro was leading the project and would share some information with the group.

W. Taliaferro explained the initial goal was to create a framework for muddy trail closures to build upon. He presented an outline of research he had conducted of other organizations' open space management plans. All of the plans shared seasonal closures as strategies to mitigate erosion and protect resources. He had researched soil science because they had been criticized in the past for not having geologists on staff to determine what types of soil the Foothills had and how these soils had eroded or degraded. The Ridge to Rivers System used single chain gates to close off trails, but theses gates did not bar entry to trails and only acted as a deterrent to trail use during muddy conditions.

Facebook and some other online media outlets were used to educate trail users. He questioned if the muddy trail closure was a closure policy that was enforceable, or a strategy to deter use; but not enforce. He introduced the strategy for planning closures on the five most heavily used trails over the upcoming winter with open or closed signs. The idea of new gates displaying open or closed signage was brought up and he asked the partner agencies to consider whether crews could lock the gates or not.

W. Taliaferro stressed the importance of exploiting more media tools such as Twitter and Facebook while expanding the Ridge to River's readership as well as the possible solution of creating maps to be placed at trailheads that would display alternative trails to be used other than the muddy, closed trail systems.

S. Dempsey stated that Idaho Fish and Game had used alternative routing maps and signage and it had been successful.

W. Taliaferro stated that an important aspect of the plan was the monitoring of the trails. He suggested a winter ranger program, similar to the summer ranger program that was currently used. He hoped that in the future they would have a fulltime ranger on staff. He added the importance of finding dedicated volunteers willing to check specific trailheads every day, and sometimes a few times a day, over the muddy season.

D. Gordon explained that in the past people have ignored closure signage and the need for enforcement to stop unauthorized use on muddy trails.

S. Kerley suggested the use of trail cameras and posting violators of the trail closures both onsite and online. She stated that this tactic stopped elicit behavior quickly and was a useful tool for educating trail users by listing the number of violators and the impact of these users on muddy trails.

S. Arkle stressed the importance of communities supporting closure initiatives.

W. Taliaferro informed the group he had been contacting other counties to get an idea of their closure policies. He reviewed press releases from Jeffeson County, CO, and determined that they did not want to resort to closures either and stressed the importance of education and awareness factors.

S. Arkle informed the partners that Ada County had recently purchased pedestrian counters to be placed at trailhead locations.

S. Koberg stated the importance of offering other trail options to counter the use of closed trails and presented the idea of trail user photography projects to reach a wider audience and advertise other trail alternatives.

D. Gordon explained that he appreciated these options and that they used many of these. He stated that it was time to take the next step. He explained that they would need to use Heritage Trust Funds in order to build new fencing and gates. He would draft a policy all the partners agreed with.

S. Arkle shared that Ridge to Rivers evolved in their use of Facebook and had enhanced how the tool was used. W. Taliaferro explained that there were many trail users who did not use Facebook and added that, due to signage overload, many ignored signs posted at trailheads.

- **Full Sail Trail Construction Project**

D. Gordon stated that they had received a grant for this trail as part of the Hillside to Hollow project. This was the trailhead for the western Hillside to Hollow trail system. Full Sail Trail would tie Hillside to Hollow trail system to Hillside Park. However, the easement connecting Hillside Park to the Foothills was in legal dispute and needed to be resolved prior to beginning construction on the project.

Discussion by D. Holloway regarding the status of the legal dispute between Kipp Bedard and Boise City.

S. Kerley asked how this case affected the timing for spending the grant money. D. Gordon explained that it was not a major problem because they could request an extension.

S Kerley asked which agency had provided the grant. D. Gordon answered that it was an Idaho State Parks and Recreation grant for non-motorized recreational trail programs.

D. Holloway informed the group the City hoped to have the case resolved by midsummer.

D. Gordon explained that the original Full Sail Trail Master Plan concept had been reworked to take the trail farther away from some homes, but the trail users felt the trail was too far from the original master plan so they had reflagged the trail to closer match the original plan. The hope was to finish the trail this summer.

- **New Maps/Kiosk Maps**

D. Gordon praised L. Ridenhour and Chris Clay for completing the bulk of the work on the updated Ridge to River's Trail Map. He added that the maps turned out great and applauded the partners for enabling the production of these maps year after year. He added that kiosk maps were being generated as well.

T. Fischer asked when those maps would be distributed.

D. Gordon replied they had them, adding that the current kiosk maps were blown up PDF versions of the entire Ridge to Rivers system map. Those kiosk maps were planned to be redone with new imagery by Antonia Hedrick of the BLM.

- **Trail Plan Update**

D. Gordon notified the group of an upcoming equestrian meeting that would be held at JHFLC. He planned to keep the meeting informal to encourage an open dialogue between equestrians and Ridge to Rivers partners. He wanted to generate ideas for compromises because he believed there was not enough of an equestrian trail user base to justify equestrian only trails.

S. Dempsey stated that he was concerned that equestrian trail users would pose questions or complaints they would not have answers for.

D. Gordon explained that they were going to bring up those complaints, which was the reason for a focus group. He wanted to present equestrians with options they might not have considered, and added that equestrians were not aware of many parking areas that accommodated horse trailers such as the Old Penitentiary Trailhead or trails with open visibility such as Corrals Trail.

D. Gordon stated that he had been in communication with Jennifer Tomlinson and S. Arkle with the City, regarding the heavy use Hull's Gulch and the Military Reserve systems received. A prominent idea was the construction of a bike specific flow trail as far up as the Sidewinder Trail summit or Fat Tire/Trail Five saddle. Those trails started on BLM property and finished on City property, but crossed through property owned by Claremont Reality Corporation, which was owned by the Simplot family, as well as property owned by Highland Livestock and Land Company, principally Brad Little. They had sent a letter informing these private landowners of their intent but had not heard back as of yet.

D. Gordon informed the partners there would be a trail plan meeting in early April, 2016. He shared that he had gone to the Stack Rock parking pullout with Boise National Forest Service employees and the group had decided it would be an acceptable location to construct a trailhead in 2017 or 2018.

- **Additional R2R Partnership Updates**

S. Kerley shared that Boise National Forest Service had decided to refer to the trailhead as Stack Rock Trailhead.

S. Koberg informed the partners that Ada County was forming a strategic business plan called Twenty Twenty-five. This was a plan to gather public information on open space, recreation, and trails. He stated they were calling this an Open Space Policy Summit, to be held on February 23, 2016.

S. Dempsey stated Idaho Fish and Game were fine with Google Trekker filming and that he needed them to sign some documents.

T. Fischer said that BLM cleared Google Trekker as well, but that they would need a filming permit.

S. Kerley explained that the Boise National Forest Service also needed them to fill out a filming permit.

S. Koberg said Ada County did not need a special permit, but needed insurance while Google Trekker was filming which would be provided by signing a consent agreement.

D. Gordon answered on behalf of S. Arkle, stating that the City had approved Google Trekker's event.

The meeting adjourned at 9:53am.