

Overland Mountain Bike Association Stakeholder Input for Horsetooth Mountain Open Space 2021 Management Plan

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Prepared for:

Larimer County Commissioners
Larimer County Open Lands Staff
Larimer County Trails Community

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Summary

Overland Mountain Bike Association (OMBA) includes over 650 members and advocates for an estimated 30,000+ northern Colorado mountain bikers. The proposals contained in this document have been developed in collaboration with other mountain bike organizations and trail user groups.

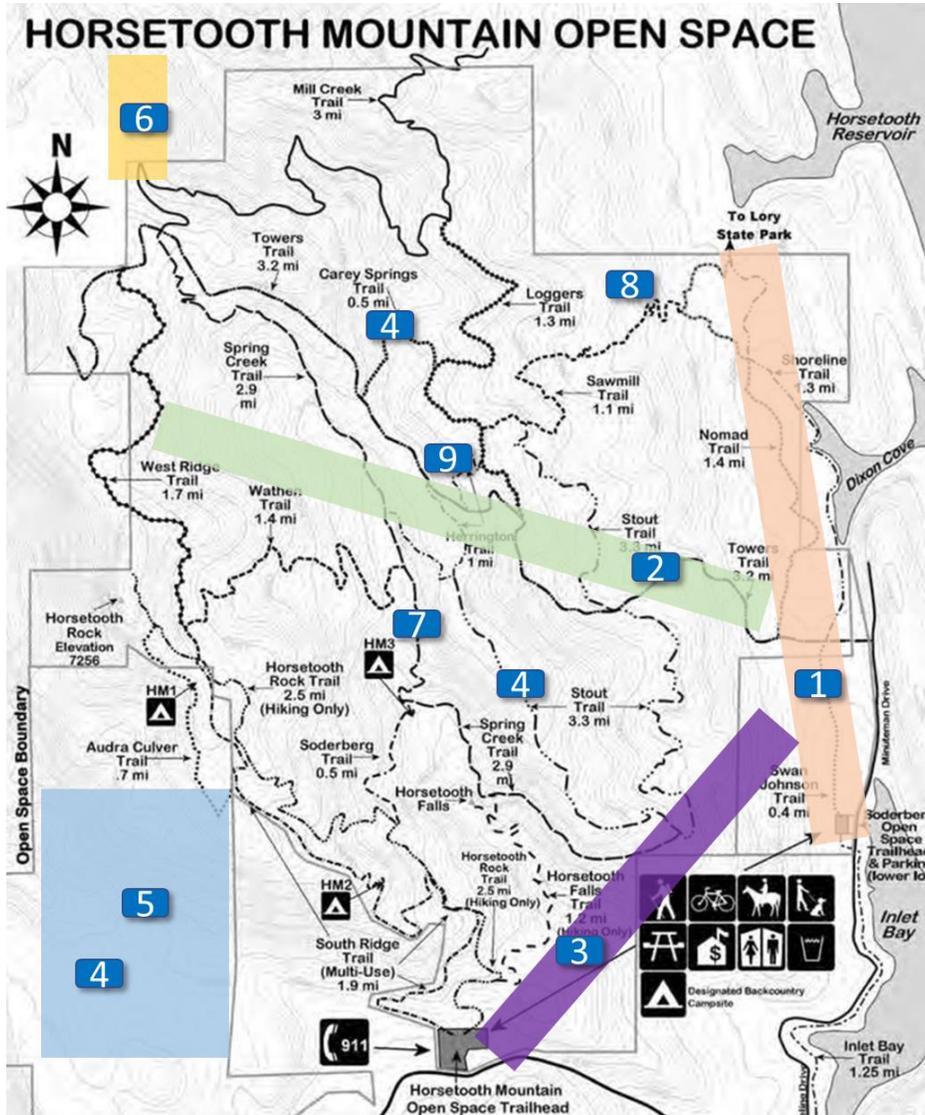
OMBA has a long history of collaboratively engaging with all land agencies in northern Colorado to improve the natural surface trail experience for all users. This has included monetary support, countless volunteer hours, trail crew training, and trail design. In continuing with this tradition, OMBA is excited to support the management planning process for Horsetooth Mountain Open Space (HTMOS). HTMOS stands out as a unique and cherished resource for many members of our community, and especially OMBA members.

OMBA has developed a number of proposals to include in the HTMOS management plan update. These proposals are dispersed throughout HTMOS, but are aligned with four overarching objectives:

- Dispersing trail users and avoiding conflict
- Providing new/unique trail experiences in the region
- Improving trail access and connectivity
- Safety and land management

Proposals were formulated by gathering input from OMBA members, other trail user groups, Larimer County survey data, OMBA survey data and the general mountain biking community. We all know that many people want to see “more trails”. By diving into survey data and having discussions with trail users, we have identified more precisely what kinds of trails and trail experiences most are looking for, not simply “more trails”.

The proposals contained in this document span from detailed suggestions on specific trails to conceptual corridors and policies. OMBA hopes these ideas provide discussion points for the future of HTMOS and how it can best be enjoyed by our community.



ID*	Description	Disperse Users	Unique Exp.	Connect.	Safety, Mgmt
1	Valley Corridor: MTB specific trail between Soderberg and Towers; Off trail equestrian use- align with Lory SP	X	X		X
2	Towers Alternative: Intermediate-level, climbing-only trail for bikes from valley trails; multi-directional for other users	X	X		X
3	Upper Lot Intermediate: Multi-use, intermediate-level trail from HTMOS upper parking lot to Stout/Towers/Soderberg area	X		X	
4	Potential Directional MTB Specific Trails: Bike-only descending; Bike-optimized w/ optional expert-level trail features	X	X		X
5	Hughey/Culver Open Space Rim Trail: Multi-use rim trail around plateau located in Hughey and Culver Open Spaces	X	X		
6	Upper Mill Creek-Lory Connector: Advanced-level trail connecting upper Mill Creek to upper Howard Trail in Lory SP	X		X	
7	Spring Creek Eagle Avoidance: Re-route lower portions of Spring Creek trail to avoid annual eagle nesting site.	X			X
8	Sawmill Optional Features: Further development of optional trail features on Sawmill	X	X		
9	Herrington Minor Reroute: Re-route Herrington between Towers road and Loggers	X		X	
*Note: Numbers do not imply priority					

Proposal Details

1. Valley Corridor

Priority: High

Description: The Swan Johnson Trail heading north from the Soderberg trailhead is the gateway to the extensive trail network accessible from the valley. This makes it a highly trafficked thoroughfare for all trail users, often leading to conflict. OMBA proposes developing a mountain bike (MTB) dedicated trail that connects the Soderberg trailhead to Towers road, one of the primary destinations for mountain bikers from the Soderberg trailhead. This is a similar concept to the Hidden Valley Trail in Devil's Backbone open space, where the trail serves as a fun route for new riders and an 'express lane' or 'bypass' for more experienced users looking to quickly access the deeper areas of the open space. OMBA recommends making this a family-friendly trail, like Hidden Valley Trail, with optional MTB specific features for learning and skills progression. Recent OMBA survey data shows nearly 66% of respondents identifying additional family-friendly trails as a major need, with an overwhelming 80% of respondents stating that intermediate-level (or blue level) trails are their favorite to ride. This trail can be a big step in bringing more youth and families who ride together into HTMOS.

Nomad trail is frequently closed. OMBA proposes rerouting Nomad to reduce frequency of closures.

Another suggestion, for reducing potential conflict within the valley corridor, is to open the valley for off-trail equestrian use. This would align with equestrian use in the adjacent Lory State Park.

2. Towers Alternative

Priority: High

Description: Towers road can be a daunting climb, even for experienced mountain bikers. Additionally, riding on single track trails is the much-preferred experience over a service road. OMBA recommends developing a single-track trail from the valley to the upper reaches of HTMOS, providing an alternative to Towers road. This could be an uphill only trail for MTB users and multi-direction for other user groups.

3. Upper Lot Intermediate

Priority: High

Description: From the upper parking lot, mountain bikers only have one option, climb Southridge road. This is a strenuous climb that accesses expert level trails (Wathen Trail, Westridge Trail), which is a primary reason why only 5% of those parking in this lot are mountain bikers. Providing an option for an intermediate trail that accesses similar terrain (Herrington Trail, Stout Trail) would provide an important new routing option for intermediate riders and significantly help in dispersing use from existing highly congested areas.

Also, continuing this trail to the Soderberg trailhead would introduce new loop options and disperse users.

4. Directional Mountain Bike Specific Trail

Priority: Medium

Description: Some mountain bikers love the grind of the climb and have several great options in HTMOS. Others live for the descent. Around the country and the world, many MTB trail systems provide select trails that are bike-only and downhill-only to cater to this user group. Northern Colorado has no location that provides this. OMBA believes it would be a unique trail experience that could be added to HTMOS. This could be accomplished with new trail or with existing trails, such as, Carey Springs Trail, upper Stout Trail, or Hughey/Culver Open Space area.

Several other Front Range locations have implemented this type of trail, including Jefferson County, Clear Creek County, Town of Blackhawk, and Colorado Springs.

5. Hughey/Culver Open Space Rim Trail

Priority: High

Description: With the land acquisitions adjacent to HTMOS, there are opportunities to provide new experiences to users, as well as disperse users from existing trails. OMBA recommends building a new multi-use trail on the plateau to the south of Horsetooth rock. This new trail could tie into the existing trail system. This terrain and the views provided are unique for this area, and a well-routed trail along the rim of this plateau would create a new and highly valued user experience. It would also aid tremendously in dispersing use from existing high-traffic areas.

6. Upper Mill Creek – Lory State Park Connector

Priority: High

Description: The proximity of HTMOS and Lory State Park provides great opportunity for users having many recreation options. The upper reaches of both parks attract a specific user group. OMBA recommends building a multi-use trail that connects upper Mill Creek Trail to the upper trails in Lory State park. This would provide new connectivity options and disperse users. Most of this trail (if not all) would be located on State of CO land outside the boundary of HTMOS.

7. Spring Creek Eagle Avoidance

Priority: High

Description: The annual closure of Spring Creek Trail, for eagle nesting, disrupts connectivity and user flow through HTMOS. For example, some users are unaware of the closure during route planning. This causes them to add additional miles/elevation onto their route, which they may not be prepared for. OMBA suggests an exploration of options for rerouting this trail to avoid the eagle nesting area, allowing Spring Creek Trail to remain open year-round.

8. Sawmill Optional Lines

Priority: Medium

Description: Several years ago, OMBA worked with HTMOS on the addition of a number of optional MTB features on Sawmill Trail. Only one of these have been implemented. It has been well received by users. OMBA recommends continued development of Sawmill Trail with optional lines. These optional trail features are highly valued by mountain bikers and are a part of what makes HTMOS a popular area for mountain biking, and a reason why the average HTMOS mountain biker makes over 30 visits per year.

9. Herrington Minor Reroute

Priority: Low

Description: Herrington Trail is bisected by Towers road, producing an unnatural jog in the trail. OMBA recommends rerouting Herrington on the north side of Towers road to align with Herrington Trail on the south side of Towers road. This will also provide a more sustainable trail grade.

General Feedback

Outside of specific trail/corridor improvements, OMBA has a few additional suggestions for the HTMOS planning group to consider.

Signage

Clear, accurate signage is a great way to ensure a positive user experience throughout HTMOS. In addition to current signage, OMBA recommends adding a trail difficulty rating system. This system could be harmonized with Lory State Park and Fort Collins Natural Areas, to provide a common approach for the region. Additionally, recommending loops, based on experience, available time, etc. could be included on the signage to further assist users. Added user etiquette signage may also help avoid user conflicts. Other regional land agencies have added signs for user right-of-way and leaving headphones out of one ear, to allow communication between trail users.

IMBA Trail Solutions Collaboration

HTMOS leadership has previously worked with IMBA Trail Solutions to evaluate the property and determine future trail and management options. OMBA supports this approach and hopes to see this effort go forward.

Community Awareness and Participation

To increase community engagement with Larimer County Open Lands, OMBA recommends developing a method for community members to see details, timelines, and status updates for future/current projects. Also, a process for community members to submit ideas for future projects would also be a great addition.

Conclusion

Not only does Horsetooth Rock provide an iconic symbol for Fort Collins, HTMOS is cherished for the recreation it provides for many of our community members. OMBA is excited to participate in the planning process for this wonderful place. As a representative for a large contingent of the northern Colorado mountain biking user group, OMBA has provided the included proposals and suggestions to actively participate in a thorough and robust planning process. OMBA looks forward to the upcoming feedback, discussion, and collaboration on these topics.

External Organizations Consulted

The following entities participated in a review of this proposal:

Larimer County Horseman's Association
Backcountry Horseman's Association
Gnar Runners
International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA)
Team BoB
NCGR – Northern Colorado Grass Roots
First City Cycling Team
Your Group Ride
Horsetooth Cycling Team
PUSH Industries
RSD Racing
Niner Bikes
Cyclismo Racing
Send Town Bike Club
Fort Follies
Bike Fort Collins
Sugar Beets
New Belgium Brewing

References

OMBA Trail Vision Plan - <http://overlandmtb.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Overland-Trail-Vision-Plan-Final.pdf>

BLM Guidelines for a Quality Trail Experience - <https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/Guidelines-for-a-Quality-Trail-Experience-2017.pdf>

IMBA Trail Solutions - <https://www.imba.com/explore-imba/trail-creation-and-enhancement/trail-solutions?param=trail-solutions-project>