

Flathead County Weed/Parks/Recreation

MINUTES

Meeting of the Board of Directors

Meeting Date: February 11, 2019

Members of the Board in attendance:

Jim Buechle, Clyde Fisher, Samuel Harworth, Jessica Treweek, Pete Woll

Members of the Board not in attendance:

All members of the Board were present.

Also in attendance:

Jed Fisher, Superintendent; Gordon Jewett, Assistant Superintendent and Michele Haarr, Clerk

Others Present:

1. Bigfork Area Chamber of Commerce – Jenny Evans
2. Carol Bibler
3. County resident – Carol Santa
4. County resident – Darin Fisher
5. County resident – George Everett
6. County resident – Heidi Roedel
7. County resident – Sally Cameron-Russell
8. Daily Interlake – Duncan Adams
9. Flathead County Parks & Recreation – Amanda Davey
10. Flathead Lake Lodge – Doug Averill
11. Flathead Land Trust – Paul Travis
12. Flathead Land Trust – Ryan Hunter
13. Flathead National Forest – Chip Weber
14. Flathead National Forest – Janette Turk
15. Forestoration – Greg Gunderson
16. Foys Herron Advisory Committee and trail user – Elizabeth Makman
17. Foys to Blacktail Trails – Kelly O'Brien
18. Foys to Blacktail Trails – Orrin Webber
19. Foys to Blacktail Trails – Richard Lauer
20. Foys to Blacktail Trails Board member – Seth Capon
21. Gateway to Glacier Trail – Sarah Dakin
22. Kalispell Chamber – Joe Unterreiner
23. Kalispell Convention and Visitors Bureau – Diane Medler
24. MT Fish Wildlife & Parks – Kris Tempel
25. MT State Parks – Fish Wildlife & Parks – Dave Landstrom
26. Northwest Montana Association of Realtors – Erica Wirtala
27. Private – Jim Watson
28. Rails to Trails – Gary Reese
29. Rails to Trails – Tony Patterson
30. Rails to Trails NW MT – Mark Crowley
31. Rocky Mountain Outfitter – Jandy Cox

32. trail user – Marli Davis
33. trail user – Rich Davis
34. Whitefish Shuttle – Kurt Schram

Call to Order

A meeting of the Board of Directors for Flathead County Weed, Parks & Recreation was held in the conference room at 311 FFA Drive, Kalispell, Montana, on February 4, 2019. The meeting convened at 8:31AM, President Woll presiding.

President Woll asked the two new Board members to introduce themselves. Sam Harworth has been in Flathead Valley about 5 years, and wants to get involved and give back. Jessica Treweek has resided in Flathead Valley for 44 years, is raising her children here, and wants to be sure they have a good environment.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes for the December 3, 2018, meeting of the Flathead County Weed, Parks & Recreation Board of Directors were distributed to the members of the Board.

Clyde Fisher moved to approve the December 3, 2018 Board minutes.

Jessica Treweek seconded the motion.

There being no discussion and all in favor – the motion was carried.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Parks & Recreation Department Report

° Trails Plan Update Draft Discussion

President Woll called for comment from those who were in attendance and wished to speak about the Trails Plan Update document.

1. George Everett stated that he was not in favor of many new trails. His family has been in the Valley for 72 years and has always recreated on trails. The 45% of people using the trails should pay for the trails – \$10 each per year. He approves of the bike path in Evergreen for the safety of kids. He uses trails and they should be paid for by people who use and participate in them.
2. Chip Webber, Flathead National Forest, stated that he strongly supports having a plan in place. He is aware of the Commissioners concern regarding money and the Forest Service is in the same boat. If you want to build you have to help pay. They need a 10 year maintenance agreement and need help paying to build. That being said, having a plan is a good idea. He appreciates the County's leadership in bringing the plan forward, and is really interested in finding ways to pay without taxing. A lot of partners support it. It doesn't make a fiscal commitment. He remains at the County's service with expertise or working on funding solutions.
3. Dave Landstrom, State Parks Division of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, has been involved with the plan development, and is here to support the County. Bring some grant support to the stable to help. All of the people present want to help with the challenge to help pay for maintenance. Trails in Flathead Valley are hugely popular and important to the economic engine in the Valley. Over the last 5 years approximately 2 million has been spent for maintenance and construction funds, representing 15 groups in the Valley. He strongly urged the Board to move plan forward.

4. Jeff Mow, Superintendent of Glacier National Park, stated that agencies have been participating in the planning of trails, which have always been supported in the collaborative fashion. The economic benefits and quality of life are part of the vision in moving forward. It is really important as collaborators to rally around and have a common vision. He really appreciates the Board looking at this and moving it forward.
5. Orrin Webber, a resident since 1981, stated that an important point is that the focus of the agreement is a document to provide direction. There is nothing in the document that binds the County to anything.

He read Parks and Recreation's mission statement to validate the effort. "Flathead County Parks and Recreation Department strives to provide a high level of service to the community through well maintained parks, facilities, and recreational programs. The County promotes a variety of economic, social, environmental and recreation benefits through our parks and recreation facilities. To optimize resources and achieve these benefits the top priorities of the Parks and Recreation Department are to provide outdoor recreation in a natural setting with an emphasis on water access; to provide opportunities and facilities for organized team sports; and to provide a non-motorized trail system that provides large scale connectivity and safe routes to schools, parks and recreation facilities...." He thanked the Board.

6. Sarah Dakin, a long-time resident of Valley, worked with Gateway to Glacier Trail. This is the only group that has been required to provide money to the County for maintenance. It works quite well as everyone works together. All that is needed is an updated plan to move forward. She has participated in the plan development for the past 1.5 years and is asking the Board to move the plan forward. Let's not talk about the cost.
7. Joe Unterreiner, President of Kalispell Chamber of Commerce, indicated their support for the plan. They receive a tremendous amount of inquiries regarding trails from visitors and residents. Connectivity is an ideal and very appropriate role for County to coordinate. He encouraged the Board to support the plan update.
8. Tony Patterson, with Rails to Trails, is a long time heavy user of trails, particularly biking. It is obvious that we need a plan to work out details. He encouraged the Board to move the plan forward. It allows people to go to find dollars and puts it back on users to participate. The State of Wisconsin has an annual fee to use their trails. Without a plan how do you implement?
9. Erica Wirtala represents 920 realtors here in Flathead Valley. What an economic driver trails are to this area. There are 300 characters to describe properties. Of 850 listings, 138 people use those characters to discuss proximity to trails or paths. Nationally and locally proximity to trails has up to a 10% impact. Most current information is required to apply for grants, which applications may be passed over due to a 2010 plan.
10. Darin Fisher is a business owner in Colombia Falls and on the City Council. He supports the plan update and stressed that it is very important to move forward.
11. Jandy Cox, owner of Rocky Mountain Outfitters, stated that economic drivers in Flathead Valley with trail use are going up exponentially. He bought RMO 8 months ago because of all of the use of the outdoors. It is a no-brainer that northwest Montana is all about recreation and it seems foolish to have an updated plan in place and not pass it.
12. Doug Averill of Flathead Lake Lodge stated the plan is forward thinking and has been in planning for a long time. We need to be thinking how the Valley will develop. Take a look at Whitefish and Missoula

to see how effective their trails systems work. It is a good social and recreational activity for everyone. There are so many advantages. We really need to take a serious look at this. The younger generation like bicycling and jogging, and we need to progress in that area. Over 90% of inquiries relate to trails. There are so any aspects of a trail system that enhance the community.

13. Diane Medler, Kalispell Visitors and Convention Bureau, stated that trails are important to residents and visitors. The University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreational Research indicates that non-residents spend 530 million per year, which is new money to County. All activities relate to the outdoors. We want to continue to attract people here through all seasons of the year to support local business.
14. Heidi Roedel, a County resident, stated that we need more input from the community. She did not see the survey. We need to think about the practicality of a trail over 12 months of the year. Paved trails cannot be used all year – be practical. She does not want to be pushed into a plan.
15. Jenny Evans owns a few businesses in Bigfork and is affiliated with the Bigfork Chamber of Commerce. She stated that trails are vital to all residents and visitors. Let's figure it out so that visitors pay for trails.
16. Carol Bibler, a long-time resident of the Valley, submitted a letter that discusses how to help pay. But, she stated, that's not why we're here – we are here to encourage passage of a plan that took many months from a wide variety of agencies that does not obligate any funding and cannot by law obligate. It is instrumental in helping secure grants and is simply a plan. She encouraged everyone to read the plan, and asked the Board to please adopt this plan.
17. Kurt Schram is a long-time resident of the Valley since August, 2018. He moved from Bend, Oregon, partly due to the proximity of recreation and started the Whitefish shuttle. Prior to this he worked for UPS Capital and was able to see the economies of communities and small communities excel that have a trails system. Last year the Central Trail Association had over 700 hours of volunteering. They have laid out the plan to see what can be done. It is a healthy plan that will have a positive effect on the community.
18. Carol Santa, a County resident said that the Bozeman trails have been a central piece to the whole development of the community.
19. Liz Makman moved to the Valley 20 years ago and stated that outdoor recreation is a major driver to the economy. The plan does not commit the County to spend money but to move forward. Please support it.
20. Mark Crowley is affiliated with Rails to Trails – one of primary developers of trails in the Valley. The plan will help lay a framework to use volunteers to help pay for maintenance. Trails are for everyone – children, working folks, and retirees. Even those who may not ever use them can see the value. He asked for support.
21. Janette Turk, Flathead National Forest, stated that many groups submitted their trail information to the County for the County website. Four season trails are represented. She is curious to know if the plan is not moved forward, how necessary maintenance will occur. A lot of hours were spent to provide quite a nice product. People are loving it to death here – instead of using the same trail over and over, there is variety. This is a factor in moving it forward. She is not sure of the outcome if the County is not willing to take it on.

22. Jim Watson referred to an article in Sunday's paper about the Montana Department of Transportation rebuilding a section between Whitefish and Columbia Falls, for the stated reason of vehicular safety. That highway is listed as an arterial trail. There is a need for a PATHS committee and trail plan update to negotiate with MDT to make the road safe for trails. There is no separate pathway between Kalispell and Whitefish because the highway was built we did not have a plan in place.
23. Kelly O'Brien, a Foys to Blacktail Trails Board member and an attorney, said thank you to the County and Parks and Recreation Board for all of the work. She shares support for the plan. Trails are happening and groups around the Valley will happen and move forward. Having a plan is important to help move forward. Understanding the liability and financial impact is important, but it is also important to move forward.

Comments concluded at 9:08AM. (There were a total of 23 comments – 2 against and 21 in favor of the plan.)

President Woll stated that he appreciates the job the group has done. The plan still needs some internal tweaking. He agrees with a lot of the statements and appreciates the work.

Sam Harworth supports the plan. It is a good economic driver for the community. The plan is just a vision to move forward.

Jim Buechle stated that it sounds like everyone is interested in building and moving forward, but no one has said how trails will be funded and maintained. We need that information before we can move forward with a good document.

Clyde Fisher agrees with Jim. The concern is maintenance. Flathead County hasn't got any money for construction and maintenance. He would hate to see it on the tax roll. There needs to be something in writing that proves someone will maintain the trails besides Gordie and his crew.

Jessica Treweek has concerns, echoing what Heidi Roedel said. Less than 1% of the County has taken a survey (716) and support the plan. What about the rest of the County? She is not comfortable moving this forward. There is a need for 3, 5 and 10 year plans that breaks down how it will pay for itself. You don't get taxed income on a path. She disagrees with it the way it is right now.

The next step is to get together with other County department representatives in order to be sure if it fits with their ideas in moving forward in the future. Jed invited Amy Dexter, the Finance Administrator, to hear the overview regarding finances.

Jim Buechle moved to table a decision regarding the Trails Plan Update until the Board is able to get some answers.

Jessica Treweek seconded the motion.

Samuel Harworth opposed the motion.

There being no discussion, and the majority in favor – the motion was carried.

Diane Medler asked about the process for moving forward. How does the PATHS2 committee continue? President Woll responded that internal discussion needs to occur and then the discussion will be available to the public at the following Board meeting.

Orrin Webber wants to know the specific questions and what pages of the document are in question.

The process for public comment was reviewed – a survey was hosted by Survey Monkey and two public meetings were held. Monthly meetings were noticed in the Daily Interlake. The plan update was posted on the County website and publicized to newspapers.

The vote will be whether or not to have an update. A trails plan exists. Will the group have an opportunity to discuss issues and concerns? President Woll stated that as soon as the internal group reached consensus, a report will be made at the Board meeting.

◦ **Establish/Reappoint PATHS2 Advisory Committee**

It has previously been brought up whether or not the Board has the legal right to establish committees. President Woll requested that this topic be tabled until he has more information from the County attorney.

Jim Buechle moved to table the topic of Establish/Reappoint PATHS2 Advisory Committee, pending input from the County attorney.

Jessica Treweek seconded the motion.

Discussion was had when Sam asked what it would take to move the topic forward. President Woll responded that the County attorney needs to look at the legality of formation of any and all committees. There being no further discussion, and all in favor – the motion was carried.

◦ **Foys to Blacktail Trails - MOU and Insurance**

County Attorney Caitlin Overland added one paragraph to the MOU – first page, labeled Referral to Flathead County- to reflect referral to the Parks Board prior to projects being undertaken. The FTBT Board approved the changes in December.

Jim Buechle moved to send the approved document to the County Commission for their review and signature.

Samuel Harworth seconded the motion.

There being no discussion, and all in favor – the motion was carried.

Weed Department Report

A long term employee passed away unexpectedly a couple months ago. He was once the caretaker at Herron Park, was well respected, and a fantastic employee. In full disclosure, President Woll authorized the family to use the Foys Community Center for the memorial service, free of charge. The heat was turned on for the service. The Department is looking to replace him with a current employee and Human Resources gave the go-ahead effective today.

◦ **County Noxious Weed List – Request to Add Musk Thistle**

Correspondence was received from Deena & John Shotzberger of Libby, requesting that Musk Thistle be added to the County Noxious Weed List. The Shotzberger's included historical and biological information about the weed and its spread in the County.

Jed stated that mainly beekeepers have opposition to additions to the County weed list if the weeds are pollinators to bees. We still get to choose the level of management of weeds on the public rights-of-way that the County maintains.

Clyde Fisher moved to add Musk Thistle to the County Noxious Weeds list.

Jim Buechle seconded the motion.

There being no discussion, and all in favor – the motion was carried.

Gordie reported that discussion is being held at the State level about ventenata, a weed similar to cheatgrass but more invasive. It is being pressed forward to add to the State Noxious Weeds list. Gordie has declined a

request to control this weed on Lost Trail Ranch for because it's not on noxious weed list. He is not aware if it has been identified elsewhere in the Valley.

Other Business

Jed reported that although the Board approved an 80K donation from cash-in-lieu to School District 5 for athletic equipment, it has been determined by finance and legal that cash-in-lieu money cannot be used for this purpose. The Recreation Department has been so fortunate to be able to use school facilities for years for virtually nothing and this is a way of giving back.

The cash-in-lieu balance was once up to approximately 300K, and thereafter 70K went to Foys to Blacktail Trails. The Commissioners augmented this with 1.5 million in a capital improvement account for construction of a County gymnasium; however, this amount was loaned to the Kalispell Industrial Center for their construction.

Jed asked the Board for their support in cutting approximately 40K out of operational budget – maybe for temporary summer help and equipment, and ask for 40K of new funding from the Commissioners. This is about many users and their athletic experience. It will cost more to come in and add basketball backboards after construction. The lack of financial assistance almost damages our long-term relationships with the schools. The Department has enjoyed free rent for a long time and it's time to pay up and help out.

The Recreation Department had experienced the largest amount of kids using programs in our history. Six teams, with 10 players each was added this year. Amanda Davey stated that as an example, Lil Dribblers basketball increased by 6 teams, 10 players each team. She would run the numbers for more specific information. If someone steps forward with a desire to build a large building we can work with them to build it.

The internal meeting regarding trail costs will include the Roads; Planning & Zoning; Finance; a Commissioner; legal; Jed; and 2 Board members – Sam & Jessica. Jed will set it up.

Matters of the Board

Gordie reported that there appears to be some encroachment at two of the Many Lakes parks, as reported by Randy Sundberg. The Department will need to survey property lines at these parks and determine if it is necessary to install boundary fencing.

Adjourn

Clyde Fisher moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:00AM.

Jessica Treweek seconded the motion.


There being no discussion and all in favor – the motion was carried.

The time and place of the next meeting is **Monday, March 4, 2019** at 8:30AM in the conference room at 311 FFA Drive, Kalispell, Montana.

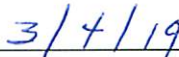
Documents Submitted to the Board

- Trails Plan Update Draft 12.20.18
- Trails Plan Draft Update support letters to date
- MOU between Foys to Blacktail Trails and Flathead County
- Correspondence dated 1.15.19 from Deena & John Shotzberger regarding musk thistle

Approved:



Pete Woll, Board President



Date