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To: Focus Group Participants

From: Amanda Jeter, Studio Campo

CC: David Deitemeyer, Colorado Springs PCRS

Date: February 1, 2024

Re: Fishers Canyon Open Space Master and
Management Plan Focus Group Engagement Summary

Thank You!

Thank you for your participation in the recent focus groups that occurred Dec. 13-15, 2023, as part of the Fishers Canyon Open Space Master and Management Plan engagement process. Your time and input are much appreciated by the Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Staff and the consultant team. A summary of the discussion themes and participant organizations follows. Additional comments, questions or names of additional contacts to be included in future updates can be directed to the project email at: FishersCanyonMP@coloradosprings.gov

What is Fishers Canyon Open Space?

Fishers Canyon Open Space (342-acres) is located in the city's southwest foothills, borders Cheyenne Mountain State Park to the south, the Broadmoor Bluffs neighborhood to the east and the Pike National Forest to the west.

The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department will begin the public process in early 2024 to advance the Fishers Canyon Open Space Master and Management Plan with anticipated public access by 2025. This planning effort will include a community engagement process that looks at the future open space enhancement and management of the property over the next 15 to 20 years.

Currently there are no designated trails or official public access to Fishers Canyon Open Space. Until such a time that a trail system, trailhead, and management plan is established, the property will remain closed to the public.

The project website can be found at this link:
www.coloradosprings.gov/fisherscanyon

Why Focus Groups?

The planning team invited stakeholders who represented a broad spectrum of perspectives and interest to understand opportunities, constraints and big ideas for the Fishers Canyon Open Space property. Previous open space master plans have utilized a stakeholder action committee. As Fishers Canyon Open Space is currently not open to the public, extensive outreach and focus group conversations are providing stakeholder input for this process to ensure a diversity of neighbors, regional voices and agencies are involved. Please see the following pages for a full list of participant groups.

The focus groups are intended to identify hot topics, hear from varied perspectives and help plan for future meetings. The benefits of focus groups are the opportunity for participants to have conversations together on important topics impacting Fishers Canyon Open Space and identify gaps of information for additional investigation and ground truthing.

How Will Information Be Used?

Convened at the beginning of the process, before public meetings, the focus group findings will help prioritize inventory and analysis methods. We heard of many resources and concurrent efforts that would impact the content and recommendations of the master and management plan. Additionally, the meetings help inform stakeholders of the process and provide a foundation of understanding of the project scope, schedule and future engagement opportunities.

Who Attended?

Over sixty participants attended the meeting from thirty-three organizations. Participants represented the following list of organizations:

- Aiken Audubon
- AtkinsRealis Traffic Engineers
- Broadmoor Resort Community HOA
- Cheyenne Mountain Propagation Antenna Farm
- Cheyenne Mountain Space Force Station
- Cheyenne Mountain State Park
- City of Colorado Springs Forestry Staff
- City of Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Staff
- City of Colorado Springs Public Works Staff
- City of Colorado Springs Therapeutic Recreation Staff
- City of Colorado Springs Trails, Open Space and Parks (TOPS)
- City of Colorado Springs, Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Park Board
- Colorado College
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife

- Colorado Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Colorado Springs Fire Department
- Colorado Springs Utilities
- Deerfield Hills Community Center
- El Paso County Parks
- Equestrian Advocacy
- Fort Carson
- Friends of Cheyenne Mountain State Park
- Independence Center
- Local Historian
- Meadows Park Community Center
- Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates
- Mountain Metropolitan Transit
- Pikes Peak Outdoor Recreation Alliance
- Spires HOA
- Star Ranch HOA
- Studio Campo Landscape Architecture and Planning
- Trails and Open Space Coalition (TOSC)
- US Forest Service

Additional outreach is ongoing to the following organizations who could not participate in the December meetings. *Please pass on contacts to other agencies not listed that may be interested in the Fishers Canyon Open Space Master Plan.*

- Air Force Wildland Fire
- Black Packers
- Broadmoor Hotel / Cloud Camp
- Catamount Institute
- Cheyenne Mountain Neighborhood Association
- Cheyenne Mountain School District
- Cheyenne Mountain Zoo
- Colorado College
- COSMBA
- Country Broadmoor HOA-Warren Management
- Fort Carson School District
- GenWild
- Harrison School District
- Highland Terrace HOA
- Latino Outdoors
- Mountain Oaks HOA
- Pikes Peak Community College Environmental Studies
- Pikes Peak Library District
- Rowcal HOA Management Group
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Forest Services – Pikes Peak Ranger District

What Did We Hear?

Participants prioritized, with three dots each, their top topics for discussion. Table 1 reveals that for many participants ecosystem health and resilience and sustainable recreation access are top concerns. While topics overlap in some instances, this does provide an overview of top-of-mind items the master plan process should address.

#	Theme	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Totals
1	Ecosystem Health & Resilience (e.g., ecosystem services, fire mitigation, habitat corridors, etc.)	3	8	6	9	26
2	Recreation Opportunities & Needs		5	4	5	14
3	Sustainable Recreation Access (e.g., visitation management)	5	6		5	16
4	Parking & Accessibility	3		3	3	9
5	Sustainable Trail System & Appropriate Long-Term Maintenance/Resources		5		2	7
6	Inclusivity & Access		4		2	6
7	Stormwater Detention	4			1	5
8	Local & Regional Connectivity	3			2	5
9	Cultural Resources & History			3	2	5
10	Habitat Conservation				4	4
11	Open Space Values				3	3
12	Partnership Opportunities				3	3
13	Indigenous Presence			1		1

The next section provides more detail on each of the discussion topics' opportunities and constraints as identified by focus group participants. These discussion points will help inform additional analysis and potential plan alternative elements.

Not all discussion points may be synthesized in the master plan and/or recommendations. Further site suitability analysis, agency partner discussions, community engagement meetings and available budget will impact the final plan.

1 **Ecosystem Health & Resilience (e.g., ecosystem services, fire mitigation, habitat corridors, etc.)**

a. Concerns & Opportunities Discussion Points:

- i. Concern about wildfire risk and impacts to insurance costs of neighboring landowners including HOAs, military and telecommunication businesses.
- ii. Activity on open space could raise risk of human-started fire.
 1. Counterpoint: More visitation increases visibility of fire, quick reporting of fires/smoke and improves access for first responders.
- iii. Recently completed mitigation of 90-acres on Fishers Canyon Open Space has helped lower neighboring residential insurance premiums.
- iv. Because Fishers was not open to public at the time of mitigation, the team had a unique opportunity to wholistically treat the property.
- v. The City is working in conjunction with Colorado Springs Fire Department, Fort Carson, Cheyenne Mountain State Park, US Forest Service, Cheyenne Mountain Space Force Station and other groups to coordinate fire mitigation efforts and resources.
- vi. City working on grants with Conservation Corps to do additional treatment at Fishers.
- vii. Treatment will be ongoing and require partnerships, funding and communication with community. 2D funding is helping.
- viii. Opportunity to partner on fire mitigation standards, access, timetables, funding, equipment and monitoring with neighboring agencies.
- ix. Colorado State Forest Service Wildfire Ready is good resource to community: <https://csfs.colostate.edu/live-wildfire-ready/>
- x. Also, good resource USDA Us Forest Service Document "Confronting the Wildfire Crisis" <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Wildfire-Crisis-Implementation-Plan.pdf> This effort aims to increase the pace and scale of tools for forest health treatments being completed across the West. There are 21 priority treatment areas across the west.
- xi. Invasive species management / controlled burns should be discussed as future potential management plan. Currently not allowed in City property.
- xii. Communications around prescribed burns at Fort Carson & Cheyenne Mountain Space Force Station (not currently allowed in COS). Consider reintroduction of prescribed burning and/or education on this tactic to increase environmental health and reduce severity of future wildfires. Look at wildfire mitigation techniques that support or mimic the wildfire regime that historically supported more ecological biodiversity.

- xiii. Fire mitigation has ecological tradeoffs for individual species but overall benefits.
- xiv. Cheyenne Mountain area has been sprayed in previous years with BtK *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki* treatment for budworm on trees.
- xv. Habitat conservation / species of concern: Raptors (Peregrine), Mexican Spotted Owl, Monarch Butterfly will be listed soon, Tricolor Bat and Pinyon Jay will both be listed in the next (3-4) years, listings are hurdles for spraying.
- xvi. Bridge knowledge gaps for public on the ecosystem and its management through interpretative signage.
- xvii. Seasonal closures / hours of operation may be necessary to protect habitat.
- xviii. Opportunity to partner on a landscape scale toward ecosystem health for the regional open space, beyond agency borders.
- xix. Continuous monitoring is important to see how species are thriving or declining.
- xx. Invasive weed management needed at Fishers.

2 Habitat Conservation & Management

- a. Concerns & Opportunities Discussion Points:
 - i. Wildlife / human interaction and conflicts (e.g., mountain lions, mountain bikers, dogs, deer are all users).
 - ii. Site is heavily used by wildlife, consider no dogs or dogs on leash in management plan.
 - iii. Bucks in rut need a buffer in fall from public.
 - iv. Conserve and enhance dedicated habitat corridors.
 - v. Minimize disruption to existing wildlife.
 - vi. Canyon has hidden frontages that provide unique nature / wild land immersion.
 - vii. Look at biological and cultural resources and give them significant weight in evaluating appropriate areas for recreation.
 - viii. Ongoing stewardship of the space: citizen science, bio blitzes, monitoring, and conservation.
 - ix. Historic range of variability: we are far from the native range of health for these forests in terms of understory, tree density, forest health, and invasive species pressure.
 - x. Continued fuel mitigation work and forest health management is needed.
 - xi. Limited fragmentation as best use for wildlife and migration corridors.
 - xii. Sustainable trail development and limited footprint.

- xiii. Critical habitat and species of concern don't stay in one place, important to think of Fishers as part of regional, landscape-scale conservation effort.
- xiv. Pinyon Jays a species of concern for Fort Carson. They cross 115 from Fort Carson, mostly along Turkey Creek.
- xv. Peregrine falcons are also on Fort Carson's radar.
- xvi. Tricolor Bat is also species of concern that is moving into conifer habitat.
- xvii. Adaptive management and monitoring are key to habitat conservation and natural resource management. The plan should anticipate and follow adaptive management best practices. The plan needs to be able to adapt to the needs of the community and the needs of the natural resources that are dynamic and present.
- b. Open Space Values
 - i. Concerns & Opportunities Discussion Points:
 - 1. Generational stewardship for human and nonhuman inhabitants

3 Recreation Opportunities & Needs

- a. Potential recreation needs:
 - i. Opportunity to preserve a unique wilderness experience close to the City.
 - ii. Opportunity to create a new designated trail system.
 - iii. Equestrian access feasibility (adequate horse trailer access and parking, impacts of horses on wildlife areas).
 - iv. Equestrian, bike and trail connections to state parks and national forests are challenging due to different agencies' permissions of those types of uses.
 - v. Equestrians and bike trail up at the top of mountain would be unique opportunities.
 - vi. Bike access—could be a technical terrain that fills a gap and would be regionally popular with mountain bikers. The Chamberlain connection is citywide and will transverse a network of open spaces, possible training grounds for high school competitive teams (5,000 students in circuit) and Olympic Training Center.
 - vii. Property could fill a gap in citywide gap in arduous activities (strenuous trail difficulty for hiking, mountain biking, etc.).
 - viii. Dog walking loops (helps maintain security and local access, different lengths of trails).
 - ix. Youth-oriented trails and signage (e.g., summer camp field trips and wilderness opportunities for kids).
 - x. Rock Climbing and bouldering (only one other bouldering location in park system according to participant).

- xi. Restrooms / Pit Toilets should be considered.
- xii. Accessible trails and parking access.
- xiii. Opportunity for interpretative Site to learn about the ecology of the site and its stewardship.

4 Sustainable Recreation Access

- a. Concerns & Opportunities Discussion Points:
 - i. Concern for unsanctioned use:
 - 1. Consideration of locked or restricted hour access.
 - 2. Measures to dissuade illegal camping.
 - ii. Boundaries between some adjacent landowners and Fishers Canyon Open Space are not clear. Military boundary is clear with fence line and will require appropriate buffer to future trail and recreation access for security. Adjacent HOA may build fence between properties.
 - iii. Cheyenne Mountain Space Force Station manages crossing of NORAD Road (no crossings currently allowed, no stop signs or traffic control can be added due to security concerns to manage crossing).
 - iv. Proper signage needed to control access and use. City does have strong standards and guidelines for recreational signage.
 - v. Agencies are still seeing illegal trails being constructed, education and more enforcement resources necessary to manage sustainable trail use.
 - vi. Commercial activities are restricted on Fishers Canyon Open Space as set forth by the TOPS Ordinance.
 - vii. Capacity of the site is not huge (350 acres), need to right size amenities.
 - viii. Limit enhancement of site in line with site carrying capacity and ecological constraints.
 - ix. Input that not allowing dogs in certain areas of other open space has allowed more wildlife to flourish.

5 Sustainable Trail System & Appropriate Long-Term Maintenance/Resources

- a. Concerns & Opportunities Discussion Points:
 - i. City has a limited budget, master plan will balance what is desirable with what is possible, maintenance funding is challenging.
 - ii. Ranger and maintenance staffing experiences limited resources. City may need to consider additional staffing resources to strive for industry standard for open space maintenance.
 - iii. Partnerships with military, HOA's and community organizations, commercial property owners, and regional open spaces will strengthen resiliency.

- iv. Preservation of open space and wilderness supports military adjacent uses and security.
- v. Education, engineering, and enforcement—make the rules clear, design to reinforce the rules and to alleviate pressure points, enforce the rules.

6 Parking & Accessibility

- a. Concerns & Opportunities Discussion Points:
 - i. Concern about Traffic Impacts. Access to site is through the Spires HOA: desire is for minimal impact, parking far from private residences.
 - ii. Wellfleet does not get plowed by the City and could be a traffic safety issue.
 - iii. Speed bumps/humps not practical for traffic calming in neighborhood due to impacts to fire service and snow plowing. Other considerations could be possible with collaboration with City traffic and engineering.
 - iv. Include accessible sections of trails as the City owns (2) track chairs that would expand access.
 - v. Consider sensory trails and programming.
 - vi. Consider lower barrier trails for larger community access at base of open space.
 - vii. Include inclusive signage and way finding (e.g. Braille, Spanish language).
 - viii. Adaptive recreation in lower reaches of site.

7 Inclusivity & Access

- a. Concerns & Opportunities Discussion Points:
 - i. Wellfleet is only legal access from public ROW, not on main arterial.
 - ii. Metro looking at alternative modes of transportation for access, e.g. shuttle to Colorado Springs open spaces in future.
 - iii. Communications to public so they know the open space exists and what it offers using everyday language and compelling graphics.
 - iv. Keep public informed on what is happening on the site.
 - v. Accessibility is a priority for several participants.

8 Stormwater Detention

- a. Discussion points on ownership and maintenance of:
 - i. Debris flow basins (owned and maintained by Spires HOA currently).
 - ii. Drainage channel (9' deep) that runs down through HOA and into Fort Carson.
 - iii. CSU water tank and questions on management during high precipitation events.

9 Local & Regional Connectivity

- a. Concerns & Opportunities Discussion Points:
 - i. Connectivity to regional trails
 - ii. Concern about making Fishers Canyon Open Space a destination, view as part of a network.
 - iii. Open space trail connections—to Cheyenne Mountain Park, to Fort Carson and other open spaces pending agency partnership agreements.
 - 1. Pros: if the system is connected, there is more dispersion of parking and traffic impacts to network of open spaces, grant money from military to preserve open space and military buffer.

10 Cultural Resources & History

- b. Concerns & Opportunities Discussion Points:
 - i. Preservation of historic resources:
 - 1. Joshua Fisher homestead & Eisenmenger cabin.
 - 2. Spencer Penrose development of site (historic reservoir and pipes) landing gear from plane crash.
 - 3. Blackmer Trail and guest experiences for the Broadmoor (believed to have passed through the site) .
 - 4. Series of four trails that circumnavigated Cheyenne Mountain.
 - ii. Names are really important and making sure the legacy is right for the property.

11 Indigenous Presence

- a. Concerns & Opportunities Discussion Points:
 - i. Southern Ute & indigenous presence and use (e.g. indigenous led naming)
 - ii. Indigenous stewardship—strike balance of how the land is managed and generational use and care for the site, original stewards.
 - iii. Archeological survey for every open space is important research from tribal consultation perspective.
 - iv. Indigenous-led histories and context statements.
 - 1. Standard part of park planning process.
 - 2. Tribal statements can be more generalized, not always specific to a property as defined by contemporary land management agencies.
 - 3. Reflects present indigenous stewardship, not speaking about indigenous presence in the past.
 - 4. Tribal consultation as an ongoing process.

12 Partnership Opportunities

b. Concerns & Opportunities Discussion Points:

- v. Continued communication and collaboration on fire mitigation. Fishers is part of a larger effort of wildfire mitigation involving the City of Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services, CS Fire Department, the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Cheyenne Mountain Space Force Station, Fort Carson, Cheyenne Mountain State Park, Pike National Forest/US Forest Service and over 143 COS HOAs among others.
- vi. Consistent messaging to community and constant communication among agencies.
- vii. Partnering to make sure species of concern monitoring is active between open spaces.
- viii. Fire mitigation mapping happening at regional scale that could provide input to plan and future management.
- ix. Pike Peak Regional Recreation Organization finalizing GIS-based recreation mapping that may be available toward end of Fishers process.
- x. Strong group of nonprofits and organizations in place – lean on those well positioned to help achieve Fishers’ goals.
- xi. Community education on wildfire mitigation in their own yards could be opportunity, in the vein of partnering to manage the land in a larger, landscape-scale context.
- xii. Potential partnerships or shared efforts with Fort Carson environmental division.
- xiii. Establishing a friends group for Fishers.
- xiv. Pikes Peak Outdoor Recreation Alliance Initiative is 2 years into efforts and looking at regional and conservation planning across the Pikes Peak Region. Could help identify other areas in the region that are great places for certain types of activities that could lighten the expectation on Fishers to meet all needs. Mapping ongoing, potentially able to share later in 2024/2025.
<https://ppora.org/uncategorized/news-release-oppi-gives-update-on-progress>

What are Next Steps?

The planning team is following up with stakeholders who could not attend the focus group meetings. Planners are using the input from the focus group to work on constraint and opportunity mapping and research that will inform recommended conservation, management and recreation options. The information will be synthesized and presented at a public meeting in the spring of 2024. We will send notices to you of the next engagement event and please help us spread the word to your constituents.