

Minutes of the Brushy Creek Trails Advisory Board Meeting
July 21, 2009

The meeting was called to order by President Pat Reed at 6:05 p.m. Board members in attendance were Pat Reed, Donna Christensen, Deb Lewis, Mike Tinkham, Beth Aswegan, Kelly Keller, Chad Kelchen, and Kevin Szcodronski. Absent were Ron Jacobson and Linda Jenny. Members of the public included Janet Thompson, Jay Anderson, Steve and Cindy Cink, Ken Egli, Tom Matt, Mike O'Brien, Mike and Lori Lang, Dave and Shirley Hays, Charles and Alecia Borer, Dave Davison, Sonja Bailey, Duffy Buttolph, Melinda Kelchen, Greg Van Fosson, Amber O'Neill, Erin Meehan, Bree Witt, Dr. David Haggard, Mark Edwards, and Bill Bird.

First on the agenda was introductions and then the minutes from the last meeting were approved, with Donna Christensen voting not to accept the minutes. Kevin S. gave an update on the ongoing budget crisis that we are facing. Parks took a \$1.25 million cut, which has meant leaving full-time staff vacancies open, and significantly reducing summer help. Fortunately, the state received federal grant funding to hire Americorps workers for the summer, but that may not be available for next year.

Natural Resource Commissioner Bill Bird asked to address the group. He explained that when the NRC took over the Trails Advisory Board member appointments that they were not very familiar with the board or equestrian issues. Bill has been working to educate them and says they strongly support the group and would like the TAB chairman to come before the NRC at least once a year to give them an update. Bill will be stepping down from his position this fall and relocating to South Dakota.

Pat Reed introduced Dr. David Haggard, who spoke on achieving organizational effectiveness with boards. He gave several tips on how board members should view their roles in order to function cohesively to accomplish goals.

Mark Edwards, of the DNR trails program, gave a presentation on trail selection and maintenance issues. The DNR has 640 miles of trail, 40% of which are available for equestrian use. Trails across the state are in the worst condition he has ever seen.

Chad Kelchen updated the group on how the budget crunch was affecting Brushy Creek. Despite a very rainy spring, camping numbers are up from last year. The excessive rain has caused some new problems on the trail system, such as hillside seeps and water channeling down the trail rather than across. He also explained our trail closure policy and how equestrian reservations are handled.

There has been much discussion on the need to create an all-weather rock trail access from the South Campground. Currently when trails are closed, some riders choose to ride

the road from the South Campground to the all-weather lake trail which includes about a mile of blacktop road with two dangerous hills. Park staff encourages camping in the North Equine Campground when trails are closed. Horses can legally ride the roads, but we do not encourage it. Everyone is in agreement that a trail is needed, but there is no easy solution. To go west would still require crossing the road. It was mentioned that maybe if the crossing were further down the road it may create a safer crossing, but we do not own the land west of the campground south of D-46, so a trail easement would be necessary. Another option would be somehow getting down under the bridge to the picnic area, riding along that flat section of road and hooking onto the trail system north of the picnic area. This section of trail is in the state preserve and permission from the preserves board would be needed to rock it. Once a suitable route is determined, finding the funding will be a major issue. It will cost approximately \$10,000/per mile. It was decided that a subcommittee should be formed to meet and discuss this issue further. For now, all possible alternatives will be presented and discussed at the fall meeting and the tour will include looking at these.

Members of the audience suggested some “share the road” signs may help motorists to realize there may be horses on the road shoulder and hopefully slow down.

The next issue to be discussed was wagon use. We will go ahead with the year long trial of letting the wagons use the blue, red and brown portions of the Southwest River Trails and the “yellow trail” and old road bed of the all-weather trail to get to the main park road. Wagon signs will be posted at the trail heads to alert other trail users of this special use. Jay Anderson and Steve Cink will come out with their wagons to determine if any pruning or widening needs to be done. For comparison, park staff handed out a summary of how other states handle wagon-use. In the few places that do allow trail use by wagons, the trails are at least 12 feet wide.

Mr. Lewis reminded the group that this fall there will be a place on the election ballot to raise Iowa sales tax by 1%. Supporting this legislation will give the DNR a much-needed dedicated source of funding for the future.

Bill Bird also wanted the group to consider supporting a “saddle tax” or “bridle fee” to help fund trail maintenance. Whether hikers or bikers would be included in this fee, is uncertain.

Donna posed the question of why no trails have been developed in the area directly southwest of the South Day Use Area. Park staff responded that the steep terrain did not lend itself to a trail. This is another item we will look at during the fall tour.

The fall meeting will be held October 20, 2009 with a 4 p.m. tour followed by a 6 p.m. meeting at the Prairie Resource Center.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05.

