

# FISHERS PEAK STATE PARK

## PUBLIC & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT REPORT

For meetings occurring in October and November 2021

### PURPOSE:

This document recaps the process and key input themes from the Draft Concept phase of the Fishers Peak State Park Master Plan conducted in October and November 2021 by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the consultant team. The purpose of outreach during this phase in the planning process is:

- Project Team provides tours (virtual and in-person) of Fishers Peak
- Stakeholders and public understand decision-making criteria, landscape, and geographical features of FPSP relevant to key Master Plan concepts
- Project Team presents design concepts/preferred alternatives for discussion
- Stakeholders and public provide feedback on concepts to inform future decision-making

### PROCESS OVERVIEW:

During the months of October and November 2021, the Fishers Peak State Park Master Plan project team engaged over 200 stakeholders and members of the community to present draft concepts for the park, including an analysis on park feature alternatives including:

- Main Park Entrance
- Developed Camping
- Trailheads
- Visitor Center Location
- Back Country Camping
- Recreational Use
- Habitat Preservation

Members of the project Work Groups and Interest Groups, as identified previously in the planning process, were invited to participate in day-long on-site tours to tour specific locations and discuss concepts. For Work Group and Interest Group members unable to attend in person, the project team held a virtual presentation of concepts on November 9, 2021. An open house open to community members and the public was held on November 18, 2021 at the Community Center in Trinidad, with over 100 community members in attendance. The presentations and materials across these engagement opportunities were the same and can be found on the Fishers Peak State Park Master Plan website under [Public Meeting Materials](#), including a virtual recording of the presentation.

The presentations included information on the following topics related to Fishers Peak:

- **Opportunities and Challenges:** An overview of stakeholder input received to-date that have informed the evaluation criteria and alternatives development process.
- **Framework Concept Map:** The Framework Concept Map depicts the location and layout of all current proposed recreational features for Fishers Peak State Park. This includes over 70-miles

of trails (multi-use, directional, equestrian, etc.), programmed camping areas, backcountry camping areas, trailhead locations, visitor center location, and the park entrance. It also shows habitat and wildlife protection areas, trail closure areas, and seasonal access areas.

- **Park Features Map**: The Park Features Map is a compendium of park features that were discovered as fieldwork was being completed for possible trail corridors. Site features include views, rock outcrops, and other interesting vegetative features. This map helped identify possible points of interest that could be connected with the trail corridor planning.
- **Park Feature Alternatives Maps**: This set of maps depicts locations within the park that were considered for the Main Park Entrance, Developed Camping, Trailheads, Visitor Center, and Back Country Camping. A high-level Benefits and Drawbacks chart provides information as to why certain locations for park amenities were preferable over others.
- **Slope and Aspect Maps**: The Slope and Aspect Maps provide a “heatmap” for both the grade and direction of existing slopes at the park. These maps helped plan sustainable trail corridors.
- **Habitat Sensitivity Map**: This map shows an overlay of sensitive environmental resources in the park. The most sensitive resources (e.g., riparian habitat, raptor nests, elk calving areas) are shown in darker shades of purple, while the least sensitive areas are shown in lighter shades. This illustration helps focus park planning to develop park infrastructure in areas with lower overall sensitivity while emphasizing habitat conservation in areas with higher sensitivity.
- **Park Scale Map**: This map shows two existing state parks that people may be familiar with – Cheyenne Mountain and Staunton – superimposed on top of Fishers Peak State Park at the same scale. This illustrates the vast difference in the sheer size of the park, as well as the scale of infrastructure and trails in comparison to the entire park property.

### ***Meeting Attendance***

#### **October 21, 2021: Work Group Participants**

- City of Trinidad
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
- Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO)
- Las Animas County
- The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
- Trust for Public Land (TPL)

#### **October 26-27, 2021: Interest Group Participants**

- Arkansas River Watershed Collaborative
- Bridledale Undevelopment Corporation
- Colorado Department of Transportation
- City of Raton
- City of Trinidad Office of Economic Development
- Colorado Dept. of Public Safety - Div. of Fire Prevention and Control
- Colorado Mountain Club
- Colorado Natural Heritage Program
- Colorado State Forest Service
- CPW Southeast Region Sportspersons Roundtable
- CPW State Trails Committee (GOCO Rep)
- Defenders of Wildlife
- GreenLatino
- History Colorado
- Kit Carson Riding Club
- Latino Outdoors

- National Park Service
- Overland Mountain Bike Association
- Phil Long Toyota
- Purgatoire Watershed Partnership
- Raton Gas Transmission
- Rocky Mountain Back Country Horseman's Association
- Santa Fe Trail Association
- Southern Colorado Trail Builders
- The Nature Conservancy
- COHVCO
- Trinidad Carnegie Library
- Trinidad Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
- Trinidad Trails Alliance
- Trust for Public Land

**November 9, 2021: Virtual Meeting Participants**

- Boulder Area Trails Coalition
- City of Trinidad
- Colorado Department of Transportation
- Colorado Natural Heritage Program
- Department of Natural Resources
- Great Outdoors Colorado
- Indigenous Roots
- Rocky Mountain Back Country Horseman's Association
- Rocky Mountain Field Institute
- Trinidad State College
- Trust for Public Land
- Yale University

**November 18, 2021: Public Meeting**

- Over 100 community members

**KEY THEMES**

The following themes and questions were captured across all groups. The themes are broken down into park feature alternatives as general overarching concepts, and specific input from group members or the public are called out below each theme. For all of the presentations, participants were sent a link to a follow-up survey that asked the following questions to gather feedback in addition to in-person and virtual conversations:

- What did you like most about the concepts presented during the tours?
- Are there any red flags or is there anything the project team missed?
- What concepts are your main priorities as we look towards implementation?
- What additional questions do you have for the project team?

| GENERAL INPUT                       |  |
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| <b>Appreciation for being heard</b> | Many participants noted to project team members that they felt heard and understood during the planning process and saw their input incorporated into the park concepts. |

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| <p><b>Excitement about the concepts</b></p>   | <p>Most participants left the meetings excited about the concepts the planning team developed. Many saw themselves using the Park for various recreation activities, including but not limited to, mountain biking, hiking, hunting, and equestrian use. Participants were pleased to hear CPW anticipates between 75 and 100 miles of trail, and some of those trails are single-use and others are multi-use. Participants were excited by the skills courses (mountain biking and equestrian), as well as the trail connection from the northern part of the Park to the southern corner. Participants noted an appreciation for and focus on both providing diverse and robust recreational opportunities where appropriate as well as preserving blocks of natural habitat.</p> |
| <p><b>Data-Driven Decision-Making</b></p>   | <p>The maps presented by the planning team were a useful tool to better understand the constraints and opportunities of the landscape. Data-driven decision-making, both from site analysis data and data collected through the public engagement process, enabled the team to create a robust and responsive plan to public interests. Participants noted their appreciation for the clarity the maps provide.</p>  |
| <p><b>Interest in further discussion and information around seasonal closures</b></p> | <p>Participants were interested in learning more about the different seasonal closure options and the data that would be used to make decisions related to trail closures, in particular the north/south trail corridor. Questions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How will seasonal closures be managed related to habitat and hunting?</li> <li>● How do closures impact recreation (e.g. equestrian, biking, etc.)?</li> <li>● What are the broad options to be considered for seasonal closures?</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Master and Management Plans</b></p>   | <p>Participants asked questions about differentiating between the Master and Management Plans for the Park. Many outstanding questions, such as allowing dogs on the park; seasonal closure options; or interpretive programming offerings, are ultimately management decisions. The Master Plan seeks to provide as much</p>  |

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|  | <p>guidance and parameters as possible, but some of these outstanding questions will be determined in subsequent Management Plan(s).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Interest Group</b> members indicated an interest to clearly delineate which guidance would occur in the Master Plan and the Management Plan(s) as to provide a better understanding of decision-making and timelines.</li> </ul> |
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| MAIN PARK ENTRANCE                         |   |
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| <b>Interest in decision-making process</b> | <p>In general, participants were supportive of the proposal to have the park entrance located at Exit 11. There were questions about why that selection was made and how that would impact uses of the Exit 8 facilities as well as Exit 6 and 2.</p> |

| DEVELOPED CAMPING         |  |
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| <b>Location selection</b> | <p>On-site participants toured several locations proposed for developed camping and commented positively on the accessibility for vehicles as well as the natural surroundings. Participants noted the minimal highway noise and access to trail systems as benefits to the preferred campsites.</p>                                       |
| <b>Amenities</b>          | <p>Participants indicated a variety of preferences for amenities, including running water, ability to connect to power, size of campsites to accommodate larger vehicles, among other things. For developed campsites, there is a trend towards more amenities to accommodate all users, especially compared to backcountry campsites.</p> |
| <b>Number of sites</b>    | <p>Participants during the on-site tours sought to ensure enough camping spots were available to accommodate interest. With 75-100 camping spots in the developed camping areas, this will likely accommodate demand based on current visitation projections.</p>  |

| TRAILHEADS                                      |   |
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| <b>Connection to New Mexico</b>                 | There was ongoing interest in a connection between Fishers Peak and Sugarite State Park in New Mexico. Across all meetings, participants expressed excitement in the concept of a trail connection from the north to south ends of the Park. Many noted the importance of avoiding seasonal closures for this area to allow year-long access for equestrians, hikers, and mountain bikers to connect between the two Parks. |
| <b>Trail connection to the City of Trinidad</b> | Several members of the public have raised questions about a potential connection between the City of Trinidad and Fishers Peak State Park, outside of the planned route along the Santa Fe Trail.   |

| VISITOR CENTER LOCATION |  |
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| <b>Location</b>         | On-site participants were appreciative of the location selected for the visitors center for multiple reasons, including the view from the location directly to the peak, low noise pollution from the highway, accessibility along the main park road, proximity to accessible trails, and proximity to campground sites. Participants recognized the Visitor Center location might be the farthest point many visitors will go. |
| <b>Trail Access</b>     | Participants highlighted the importance of accessible trails located near the Visitor Center where families, individuals of varying abilities, elders, and others could enjoy the Park to its fullest.   |

| BACKCOUNTRY CAMPING |   |
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| <b>Amenities</b>    | Participants asked questions about the amenities for backcountry campsites, including the use of bear boxes and water access. Many of these decisions are still being |

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|                                    | considered and may fall under the purview of the park's Management Plan.   |
| <b>Overlooking developed areas</b> | Work Group members noted potential disappointment related to the proximity of one backcountry campsite to a more developed camping location. |

| <b>RECREATIONAL USE</b><br>In addition to the key concepts and alternatives presented by the team, some specific recreation representatives provided input and feedback to improve the Park concepts for their specific user groups. |  |
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| <b>Equestrian</b>  | Interest in as few trail closures as possible. Consider the amount of trails equestrian users will be able to access and whether there is opportunity to allow additional access along other trail corridors in the Park. Desire for enough trail mileage to make an overnight stay worth a trip. Interest in access as soon as possible for equestrian users. Desire for adequate parking and water access. |
| <b>Mountain Biking</b>   | Considerations for Mountain Biking from the top of the Raton Pass to the Park Entrance (though the landscape makes this kind of ride challenging). Consider additional trail options for single-use mountain biking. General excitement about the skills course and downhill mountain bike trails.   |
| <b>Hunting</b>   | Interest in more information on types and number of hunters. Desire to maintain a backcountry feel means hunters should not have motorized access. May not be necessary to implement closures for hunting due to proximity of the trail corridor to hunting areas (more information needed on harvests).   |
| <b>Motorized Access</b>  | There was a desire and interest for motorized access and a potential OHV course in the northern portion of the Park as part of the Master Plan.  |
| <b>Large Events</b>  | Consider how the space can accommodate larger events (races, Ranger talks, etc.).  |

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| <b>Dogs</b> | Interest in bringing dogs to the Park, even if only on designated trails. |
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| <b>HABITAT CONSERVATION</b> |
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| <b>Excitement to Maintain Habitat</b> | Participants expressed appreciation for the team’s emphasis on providing as many recreational opportunities as possible while maintaining important habitat for wildlife. Participants understood the need to keep trails away from large sections of the property and encouraged the project team to provide interpretation and information for the public on why these decisions were made. |
| <b>Wildlife Corridors</b>             | Some participants asked to hear more about how wildlife corridors were considered as part of the planning process. Project team members highlighted the importance of wildlife connectivity to State Wildlife Areas as well as across I-25.   |

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| <b>STAKEHOLDERS</b>  |
| Participants noted an appreciation for stakeholder engagement and encouraged the planning team to continue outreach to fill in important gaps in the outreach process. |

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| <b>Tribal Engagement</b> | Interest Group members highlighted the importance of tribal engagement prior to the finalization of the Master Plan. In particular, participants were interested in understanding the sanctity of the Peak and surrounding areas as well as the most appropriate way to communicate the tribal history of the Park. Subsequent to the meetings held in the fall, the planning team hosted on-site and virtual site tours with four tribes with strong historical ties to the Park. |
| <b>Accessibility</b>     | Access and inclusion for all abilities, ages, and races was an important theme discussed by interest group members and the public. Trails and public spaces built for families, accessible to elders, and accessible using   |



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|                                      | wheelchairs were an important consideration and participants encouraged the team to ensure these spaces are inclusive to provide an engaging experience in nature.   |
| <b>Spanish Language</b>              | In addition to accessibility, participants highlighted the importance of language access for Spanish speakers, encouraging the Park Management team to consider signage and other communications in both English and Spanish.  |
| <b>Maintain historical integrity</b> | The history of the Park is important to many groups and users. Participants commended the team for ongoing studies to better understand the history of the park and encouraged the inclusion of all facets of the history (indigenous, grazing, etc.) into the interpretation and education offerings. |

**NEXT STEPS:**

As part of the Master Plan, the project team will use this input to make any appropriate changes to the concept framework as well as in identifying a phasing and implementation plan for the Park. When asked about priorities, participants indicated a few key priorities they would like to see implemented in the coming years:

- Trail to the Peak
- Additional trails and connectivity
- Visitor Center
- Additional recreational uses: Mountain Biking, Equestrian
- Campgrounds
- Equestrian facilities

The planning team will engage stakeholders at the beginning of 2022 to discuss prioritization, funding, and a schematic design for the Park.