

Stratton Open Space Management Plan
Community Workshop
October 20, 2105

Verbatim Individual Comments by Issue Category

Is there anything you'd like to make sure is considered as the Management Plan for Stratton Open Space is developed?

Dogs

- Concerned that with the South Reservoir open to dogs that it will become more and more of a dog park. I was really encouraged by the Humane Society, when they started to TRY to enforce the dogs-on-leash ordinance, but slowly people begin to start with dogs off leash.
- More receptacles for dog waste and more receptacles for bags. Who will remove the waste? Will City do that or Utilities?
- More dog bag disposal areas in the open space
- Allow dogs off leash if they are under voice control
- Leave the reservoir open for dogs to swim
- Off-leash dogs (multiple dogs per person); consistent enforcement?
- Poop bag dispensers
- Trash cans at entrances to Reservoir (Friends of Stratton would be interested in helping fund collection of trash)
- Dog waste
- Trash cans at the Reservoir
- Add dog waste bag dispenser at the Reservoir
- Dog waste containers near Reservoir?
- How can Friends Group support Utilities in keeping Reservoir open?
- Consider how to address groups of unsupervised dogs

Forest Health Management

- Fire mitigation around periphery of Stratton Open Space closest to homes bordering the Stratton Open Space
- From talking with ranger and forester, I know elm removal is important (but didn't seem to appear in the noxious plants review)

Signage

- Better signage – maps (you are here designations)
- Signage – clarify limited use trails
- Maps: “You are here” and an arrow pointing north
- Signage on trails similar to Red Rock
- Consider signage like at Red Rock Canyon
- Would be great to have more signage like the County park at Bear Creek – where the sign says “[Dogs] Must be on leash – report people that violate”.

Trail Management

- Use of mountain bikes on wet muddy trails. Maybe close Stratton Open Space when trails very muddy
- Find solution for “mud holes” – be it wood bridges or more gravel
- Erosion control
- Please re-route the Ladder trail that connects Chamberlain to the upper portion of the Mesa Chutes trail. Please re-route the trail that leaves the LaVeta trailhead (above the restroom). Both of these trails are very eroded, but are viable routes.
- I’m always wondering why there is barbed wire along the trail at the dam – very unsafe
- Trail use by bikes causes wear – what is evolution of trails over years, i.e. roots exposed, rocks, etc. (deepening of route)
- Locate trail standards (best practices) (sustainability) (sight distances-vegetation) and survey for substandard trails – upgrade
- Open trail from Stratton to Bear Creek?
- Park use restrictions following heavy rains/snow storms, etc. Suggest [you] close park til dry.
- Add trail above (?) high school

Vegetation Management

- Control weeds, especially on the face of the dam – possibly plant native plants - make it more attractive

Visitor Experience

- Keep it wild
- Better interface between mountain bikers/hikers/folks with dogs/horseback riders
- High schoolers smoking/lives(?) behind CMHS
- Safety between cyclists and hikers

- Special events in park and parking?
- Bicycles?
- How can Friends Group help influence good behavior in space i.e. best practice for asking people to pick up poop, pass politely on bikes, don't swim in reservoir, etc.?

Other

- PLEASE be sure to develop ADEQUATE FUNDING to IMPLEMENT the resulting management plan!
- Coordinate and prioritize eventual management plan needs with Friends groups (to help implement needs)
- We have been requesting and trying to donate two benches in the Reservoir for visitors to be able to rest and enjoy the view. This to commemorate my wife and son, my wife passed away last April just above the second/west reservoir. Regardless of funds being available, though generous donations, no progress has been made since May. It should not be this hard, the personal losses were hard enough. *(Personal contact information provided and forwarded to the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department staff.)*
- Culvert in Ridgeway Basin – directs water down onto Cheyenne Blvd., then onto residents' properties/houses in times of heavy rains. Tim Mitros [has] info of this culvert and water issues. (Put in by Park and Rec?)
- Vandalizing sign posts and opening closed trails – one gentleman in particular – off of Stratton Open Space for 1 year – what happens when he comes back?

Additional comments submitted via email following the October 20 community workshop

To whom it may concern,

I am an active user of Stratton Open Space with my dog who loves to swim. I know there is a great amount of discussion being had about whether or not dogs should be allowed to swim here. I believe that the open water area should still be used for dogs swimming and recreational use. In the springs, there are not many other places for dogs to go swim like this and it is a big enough swimming hole that each dog has their own space to do so. I do feel like some improvements could be made to have designated trails for each activity, such as dogs on a certain trail, horses on a certain trail, bikers and walkers/hikers on a certain trail. I think this would help trail users to feel as though they can still go and use the open space and trails for what they would like. Some people may not like dogs, so they won't encounter them on the hiking/biking trail and vice versa.

I think it is important to keep Stratton open space for dogs and dog lovers as my family has gotten a lot of use out of it and my dog LOVES it.

Thank you for your time.

Hi,

I was not able to attend the entire meeting last night and wanted to make sure I submitted the following to be considered during the Management Plan.

Overall, I think that time and resources should be put towards areas like signage, vegetation management, fire mitigation and trail management.

Here are some other thoughts:

Dogs - I have used the open space as long as it has existed as both a non-dog owner and dog owner. For the most part, people are very considerate. There have been times when a dog off-leash has been a bit too friendly or interrupted a run, hey they are just dogs. Also, as a dog owner it is true that most dogs are off-leash. I understand that this issue does come up and some dog owners that like to walk with their dogs leashed may end up feeling it's a conflict of interest. I think that we just all need to be considerate of others. Finally, there are people that pick up after their dogs and those that don't. As a frequent user, I just try to make sure I pick up more dog poop than my dogs leave. I just hope that as people see me with full bags of poop they will get the idea.

Parking - Can the empty lot that is along Ridgeway/Cheyenne Blvd be a parking lot? Does it follow the conservation easements? How about signage about other parking areas or encourage them to park along Cheyenne Blvd. That would mean parking in front of my home, but it's better than having them parking on the grass, like I have seen some do in the past.

For the next meeting, I would like the people running the meeting to make sure that no ideas get discussed that would not be allowed due to any rules, easements, etc. I remember the first meetings about the open space, a lot of time was spent discussing if the horses that pastured on the land would be allowed to stay. In the end, the city said they would not be allowed due to liability. I don't want to waste time again. My main concern is the issue of the dog swimming in the reservoir. This is such much loved aspect of the open space. If CSU does not want it to continued, due to water safety, then we should not spend time on the issue. If they are open to keeping going, then we can talk about what needs to be done to keep it open. Or we need to know the reasons they may close it in the future (i.e. water testing results, etc). I also think that spending time talking about dogs off leash is a waste of time. It is already an area that dogs must be on a leash, that does not change. Since that space has been opened to the public, most dogs are off-leash. Unfortunately, I don't think much can be done to change it now.

Dear Sarah:

This may not best be directed your way but you were the only one to offer contact information at the meeting last night. We left at 7:30 when the meeting appeared to be only half over.

I was impressed that the meager turn out of "concerned citizens" likely means that we trail users are pretty happy with our experiences in the Stratton Open Space. Thank you and all for your preparations which were significant.

My wife and I are also happy with our experiences which are nearly daily. We do have observations which I will state here.

Dogs were top of the list and of importance for us. I am one of those who pretty well scour the trail of dog poop each time we are on the property. I must have liked Easter egg hunts as a kid. It was said that someone/s went up and stuck white flags by each dropping to photo the terrible mess, I presume. Facts probably are that a week later the flags would all be in a different place as someone, like me, would have policed it up. I find that regular poop bags are only good for one deposit while market bags can gather a pound or so of dried droppings. The fresh wet numbers are heavy and provide more work for the most appreciated workers who empty those trash cans. Also the photo shown of tied-off bags “littering” the trail were likely left by those who cleaned up after their pet on the way up, with probable intention of picking it up on the return. I get those on my return since why not? So I see it as a problem that does not get too out of hand.

About the stated problem of dog droppings being a pollutant due to their makeup, I note with interest that our top ten dog park has a live stream running through it, while the Stratton has one little trickle. Let’s get real here.

I have been a Skyway resident for fifty years and hiked the Stratton some when it became available. My wife of fifty two years passed and six years ago I remarried to a major dog person and able hiker. I have learned a lot and notably that a dog on leash can be inclined to be aggressive since they feel trapped by the leash. My now six years of up-close experience has left me with not a single bad experience with an off-leash dog. I know that the official answer is for everyone to pile into the 21st St. dog park – if you can find a parking spot. It is not a very satisfying place for a hiker, as most of us are at Stratton. Dogs need to run and many of us like to hike, therein lies the problem. On the highway the problem drivers get collared while in the dog world the good and bad get the same penalty. Tough problem.

Trail comments finally. I know that the improvements of the Ridge Trail and La Veta trail head were engineered by a bicyclist/motorcyclist fellow and these trails have my admiration as being correctly done. Undoubtedly this was costly. By my observation the ongoing management policy is to do nothing until a grand plan can be afforded. Water waits for no one and with each rainy season the problems grow. If I can’t afford a new roof I do not stop patching leaks. Given the simple knowledge that water runs downhill and collects in holes, it is not too difficult to find places where water can be directed off trail and holes can be drained to avoid “braiding.” I was told by a fellow, that I believed knew what he was saying, that as a citizen I do not have the right to start working on these trails on my own. How about a grand plan built around volunteers? A once a year work party would be inadequate. I fully support bicyclists using these trails and a good bicycle trail is a perfect walking trail. I would suggest we identify, through local bike clubs, those who have been educated in trail building by a national mountain bike organization. I know the training exists since my daughter, from Taos Ski Valley, has taken the training. She and her husband have created miles of sustainable bike trails on North Side at Taos Ski Valley.

Social trails help disperse the trail users and, strangely, do not seem to have added significantly to the problem areas. Some or many of these paths date to when horses were the users of the Stratton and some of these are cut deeply. Likely closing these and allowing them to become natural erosion channels is a best plan.

Many, if not most of the timbers that were years ago put across the paths were not thoughtfully placed. They interrupted the flow of water but did not direct water off the trail. They also created a problem for bicyclist who had to find a way around. This showcases the need for skilled guidance in any work done.

The toilet at the La Veta trail head is a bit of a disgrace. So much money spent on a facility that is locked a good half the year and the half when it is most needed. Probably it will just remain a monument to good intentions.

Hi Sarah,

Foremost, thank you for hosting the Stratton Open Space community meeting earlier this week. It is wonderful to see this area receiving attention and, hopefully, greater oversight and maintenance efforts in the future.

Next, after reflecting on the meeting for the past few days, I wanted to reach out in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the issues, goals and related constraints. Plus, I wanted to offer/reiterate some additional thoughts. In that context, please consider the following.

1. Is the Stratton Open Space "conservation easement document" readily available for public review? If so, please let me know how to gain access. I'd like to read it in an attempt to gain a better understanding of what conditions were called out when the property ownership was transferred.
2. Has the City ever been involved with or performed a "compliance assessment" or similar effort which compares current Stratton Open Space conditions and/or activities to the requirements set forth in the "conservation easement document" (or any other relevant document such as ordinances, other easements, agreements, etc.)? If so, can the public (me) access a copy of any such assessment(s)? If so, please let me know how to gain access. Just trying to shortcut the process necessary to identify any current or potentially non-compliant issues.
3. I find it intriguing that CSU (and/or the City) has apparently made a decision to allow an "open gate dog park" within City limits (the lower reservoir is in City limits, correct?) allowing off leash dogs. Has any CSU or City effort been made to determine whether this decision was valid and proper within a) CSU's authority or b) any authority granted to CSU by the City or c) the context of the City's ordinances? In other words, how does CSU's operating decision affecting a publicly accessible reservoir mesh with the City's dog leash rule (for example, even though the land is owned by CSU, doesn't the City own CSU and therefore impose an obligation upon CSU to honor the City's dog leash rule)?
4. If an individual was harmed by an off leash dog within the "reservoir dog park", does the City and/or CSU have adequate defense against claims for damages stemming from decisions to maintain/allow an informal dog park? What if the harm occurred immediately outside of one of the open gates to the "reservoir dog park", either on CSU property or on Stratton Open Space? Does the City and/or CSU believe that a) the "reservoir dog park" and/or b) the open-gate policy at the "reservoir dog park" are well-advised conditions? Does the City and/or CSU believe that the "spillover" effect on Stratton Open Space from having an off leash, open gate dog park in its midst is insignificant?
5. Has the City and/or CSU considered whether the "reservoir dog park" and its open-gate policy represents an "attractive nuisance"? With the many nearby schools and surrounding neighborhoods, it seems reasonably foreseeable that minors could be tempted by the water and either a) injured by an off leash dog as allowed by the City and/or CSU or b) suffer harm or death by an ill-advised decision to enter the water.

6. I have personally been confronted by literally countless dogs off leash in Stratton Open Space, mostly friendly ones. However, one time I genuinely feared for my safety due to the aggressive, threatening behavior by an absolutely ferocious, off-leash 100 pound dog. I have also witnessed an elderly woman who was knocked down by an overly friendly, off-leash dog. Once knocked down, she seemed to be panic-stricken and literally could not get back to her feet without assistance and significant reassurance. She assured me that she would never return to the Open Space. I am reminded of these risks every time I venture back into the area and witness roughly 25% compliance with the leash ordinance, never knowing whether one of the off-leash dogs might come unglued or cause accidental harm and, simultaneously, I keep wondering why leash enforcement efforts seem to be so non-existent or ineffective. Until the "leash culture" (as well as poop scooping) at this area changes, freedom for many to enjoy this absolutely beautiful area is significantly impacted. Given the above, I'm compelled to suggest a prolonged, consistent and consequential dog leash enforcement effort (or, alternatively, turn the entire Stratton Open Space into an off leash area so everyone will know what to expect - however - this could easily create more problems than it would solve).

Please accept the above as constructive, well-intended input toward a thoughtfully generated, viable management plan for Stratton Open Space.

I look forward to your reply and feel free to call and discuss if that's easier than replying by email. Rest assured, I offer the above in the utmost cooperative spirit and wish you and your colleagues the best of luck as you balance the competing goals, conflicting views, constraints, etc. going forward and please let me know if I can help.

Thank you.