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STAFF REPORT

DATE: December 7, 2011
TO: Redmond Parks Commission
FROM: Chris Doty, PE, Director of Public Works
SUBJECT: Equestrian Use Evaluation in the Dry Canyon

Report in Brief: Contemplates equestrian use in the Dry Canyon park system.

Background: Per City of Redmond code section 5.314-1-J, horses are not permitted in any park except on a designated bridle path. This code section has been in place as far back as the 1980's. The City does not have a designated bridle path within any park facility, including the Dry Canyon. It is widely acknowledged that equestrian use has occurred intermittently within the north section of the Dry Canyon throughout the years. The City has on occasion received complaints regarding equestrian activity in the Dry Canyon – usually with regard to the presence of manure in/on the soft path areas. The prohibition of equestrian use within the Dry Canyon is noted within several kiosk trailhead areas – but not specifically posted via signage in any area.

A recent code enforcement complaint regarding equestrian use in the Dry Canyon has elevated the issue and a community discussion has ensued. At the November 8th City Council meeting, a group of equestrian enthusiasts petitioned the City Council to consider accommodation of equestrian use in the north Dry Canyon. The City Council subsequently referred the matter to the Redmond Parks Commission and requested an evaluation and recommendation regarding the potential for equestrian use – specifically with regard to safety of trail users and adequacy of infrastructure.

At the November 15th Parks Commission meeting, the Council's request for an evaluation and recommendation of equestrian use in the Dry Canyon was delivered to the Commission.

Discussion: Staff has distilled the decision points to the following items:

- A. Is equestrian use appropriate in the Dry Canyon?
- B. If yes, does equestrian use in the Dry Canyon require an exclusive trail or can it be accommodated with a multi-use trail designation of an existing trail (or combination)?
- C. What are the bounds of any proposed equestrian use?
- D. What other impacts could be expected with approved equestrian use?
- E. What are the costs associated with approved equestrian use?

Staff has conducted research and evaluated the following:

1. Existing conditions and site observations.
2. Multi-use trail potential (shared walking, biking, equestrian use).
3. Impact of equestrian use on the trail facilities and other site considerations.

Existing conditions and site observations:

Given the lack of signage and enforcement of the current ban on equestrian use in the Dry Canyon, the assumption has been made that the current level of equestrian activity in the Dry Canyon is representative of the amount of equestrian activity that will occur with approved use. According to various equestrian enthusiasts, the Dry Canyon's soft path trail system (North Trailhead to Black Butte Boulevard) has limited attraction and is/would be used primarily by those living in close proximity to the trailhead. The constrained length and trail condition, coupled with the urban proximity, does not provide a trail experience worthy of the effort to truck/trailer a horse to the site for the typical equestrian user.

With regard to the Dry Canyon's soft path network, the primary use is that of joggers and dog walkers. Based on observed use as well as tracks (and other sign) left in the soft path areas, both equestrian and mountain bike use is very low. The discussion of conflict between bike use and equestrian use appears to be a discussion between two low volume user groups in the soft path areas (primarily on the west side of the Canyon).

Multi-use trail potential:

If equestrian use were to be approved in the Dry Canyon, it is generally assumed that the use would be accommodated in the soft path areas which exist on both sides of the Canyon, but primarily on the west side. With this assumption in place, the issue centers on the viability of a shared, multi-use path designation versus the necessity of exclusive trails for individual uses.

Research regarding equestrian use accommodation and multi-use versus exclusive use was conducted. Internet research quickly produces numerous examples of various degrees of accommodation. Two noteworthy examples which summarize the degree of experience and accommodation include the City of Portland Parks and Recreation and the Parks and Trails Division of Greene County, Ohio.

City of Portland: The City of Portland offers equestrian accommodation in several parks such as the Springwater and Forest Park. The City has published trail design guidelines for a variety of single use and multi-use (shared) trails (<http://www.portlandonline.com/parks/index.cfm?a=250105&c=38306>). Although Portland's guidelines do provide several multi-use trail standards which accommodate (to various degrees) walking, biking, and equestrian use, they no longer implement shared biking and equestrian use on the same trail due to an injury incident (horse rider) which occurred several years ago involving a horse reaction to a fast moving mountain bike¹.

Greene County, Ohio: The Greene County Ohio Parks and Trails Department maintains an extensive portfolio of shared multi-use trails, the majority of which are paved. Per Chrisbell Bednar, Director, they have never encountered any safety problems associated with shared use. They attribute the lack of conflict to their "trail etiquette" efforts which seek to inform all trail users of the proper manner in which to use the trail and react to other users (http://www.co.greene.oh.us/parks/multi-use-trails.htm#trail_etiquette). The Department does receive complaints regarding manure – however the equestrian community does tend to police themselves and provide volunteer clean-up efforts when asked. Director Bednar did state that they maintain trails through urban areas which prohibit equestrian use by code, however she

¹ Per City of Portland Parks and Recreation, Astrid Dragoy, West Zone Manager.

indicated that she did not feel such restrictions were necessary. On paved trails, equestrian use is sometimes directed to maintain an offset (5 to 10 feet) from the pavement.

Impact of equestrian use on the trail facilities and other site considerations:

It is generally understood within the industry that equestrian use can damage trail facilities at a higher rate than bike and pedestrian use. Based on what appears to be an infrequent use pattern within the primarily level terrain of the Dry Canyon, staff perceives equestrian related soft path trail damage to be a low risk concern. The presence of manure on the trail is a concern as it can directly impact other trail users. Although the City does not receive many complaints regarding equestrian use in the Dry Canyon, the majority of complaints that have been forwarded over time have been associated with horse manure on the trail.

An additional impact associated with approved equestrian use in the Dry Canyon is the provision for horse trailer parking and safe loading/unloading areas. Prior equestrian use has utilized a widened road shoulder area north of the City's wastewater treatment plant which can accommodate several truck/trailer combinations. This space is a part of the wastewater treatment plant and North Trailhead complex and is outside of public street right-of-way. Additional space in this vicinity could be amended to provide additional or improved parking and access if necessary.

Decision Points and Staff Recommendation:

Upon conclusion of the site evaluation and noted research, staff has noted the following with regard to the aforementioned decision points:

A. Is equestrian use appropriate in the Dry Canyon?

The 1984 Redmond Canyon Plan (the City's long standing guiding document for Dry Canyon park development) references and incorporates the City's comprehensive plan in effect at the time. The plan states that: "A trail system for bicycle, pedestrian, and in some cases, equestrian use should be developed, and wherever possible, interconnect schools, parks, and open spaces within the urban area."² As previously stated, City Code does permit equestrian use within a park on a designated bridle path.

There appears to be no prior planning direction or code provision which suggests that equestrian use is not appropriate in the Dry Canyon.

B. If yes, does equestrian use in the Dry Canyon require an exclusive trail or can it be accommodated with a multi-use trail designation of an existing trail (or combination)?

In an ideal scenario, the preference for all users is that of an exclusive trail for a specific type of use – even between bikes and walkers. Exclusive trail use designation would be impractical and impactful throughout the entire length of the contemplated equestrian use area – although some parallel trail soft path areas do exist in the canyon where specific use designations could be established through trail marker signing.

² Redmond Canyon Plan (1984), Section VI-B-9 (Findings: Plan Policies).

There are examples of multi-use accommodation in various trail networks throughout the United States. Where multi-use designation is successfully employed, communication of trail etiquette as well as continued involvement of an equestrian user base is present.

C. What are the bounds of any proposed equestrian use?

The logical boundary for equestrian use is that area from the North Trailhead (wastewater treatment plant) to Black Butte Boulevard. The future active development of the North Canyon Master Plan may dictate movement of the southern boundary as necessary.

D. What other impacts could be expected with approved equestrian use?

The impact associated with equestrian use of the Dry Canyon is directly proportional to the amount of equestrian use that will occur. If the assumption is that the future use will resemble prior historic use, then it is logical that impact will be minimal and no more than what is observed today.

If the accommodation of equestrian use significantly increases beyond historical use (estimated between 10-20 horses per month), then it is likely that more restorative soft path trail maintenance will need to occur as well as creation of a more formal truck/trailer parking arrangement than what is currently available at the North Trailhead.

With additional equestrian use comes additional horse manure, and although trail etiquette will instruct riders to shovel or kick the manure out of the path area, it is likely that occasional removal of the manure will need to occur.

The issue of noxious weed exposure has been raised with regard to horse manure in the canyon; detailed research of the risk associated with noxious weeds has not been performed for the purpose of this evaluation.

As noted in other communities – as well as observed within our own community – use accommodation breeds ownership of a facility in a user base. The community discussion which has occurred regarding equestrian use in the Dry Canyon has brought forth many offers of assistance with regard to ongoing trail maintenance and mitigation of equestrian impact, as well as offers of ongoing assistance with equestrian education for trail users.

E. What are the costs associated with approved equestrian use?

At a minimum, a trail etiquette signing effort will need to take place informing trail users of proper etiquette associated with a multi-use trail – expanded to include equestrian use. The costs associated with trailhead etiquette signing as well as truck/trailer parking area signing will be approximately \$2,000 (8 signs at \$250/ea).

Additional costs and effort (staff and volunteer) will be required if exclusive trail designation is recommended for various trail segments to separate bike and equestrian use.

The above estimation assumes that equestrian use will remain low-volume within the Dry Canyon based on assertions from the equestrian community that the trail will primarily be utilized by those within close proximity and will not draw a large number of users who will truck/trailer horses to the facility.

Staff Recommendation:

If determined an appropriate use in the Dry Canyon by the Parks Commission and City Council, staff is of the opinion that equestrian use can be accommodated through:

1. Designation of all soft path trails as multi-use between the North Trailhead area and Black Butte Boulevard.
2. Requiring all equestrian use to maintain a 10-foot offset from the paved trail (unless crossing).
3. Designating the North Trailhead area as the sole point of entry for equestrian use.
4. Installation of multi-use etiquette trail signs at major points of entry within the equestrian area as well as general etiquette information availability on the City's website and other information outlets.
5. Development of an equestrian user base willing to monitor trail conditions and volunteer time to mitigate equestrian impact.

Staff is comfortable with the equestrian use based upon the assumption that, for reasons stated, use of the trail network will be relatively low volume. The above recommendation is tiered towards accommodating an existing use rather than developing a new use amenity within the system.

Additional considerations (which were discussed internally but not forwarded for recommendation) include the following:

1. Establishing equestrian use on a trial evaluation basis.
2. Allowing equestrian use by permit or authorization – as both a tool to meter use and ensure proper communication of etiquette.
3. Designating exclusive use provisions for specific trail segments (ie, some trail segments would be designated bike/ped only, equestrian only, etc).
 - a. Note: This could be accomplished through development of a user group involving all users (jogger, walker, bike, equestrian).

In summary, there has been a very substantial outpouring of support for equestrian use in the Dry Canyon from what appears to be a very organized equestrian community. This outreach and enthusiasm will undoubtedly – for an initial period – draw additional equestrian users to the Dry Canyon.

If approved, equestrian use impact and mitigation efforts will be monitored on an ongoing basis and reported back to the Parks Commission as necessary.

Chris Doty
Director of Public Works