



## Responses to South Table Mountain Park Public Comments

### Community Engagement

We truly appreciate the community's support in our ongoing efforts to balance our conservation efforts with providing healthy and sustainable nature-based experiences at South Table Mountain Park, and the importance of minimizing habitat fragmentation and protecting wildlife habitat.

### Natural Resources

- Closing Trails at the Quarry - Water sources in the arid Front Range are critical areas for a wide variety of wildlife and plant species. Water sources provide breeding areas, food sources, and respite from the heat for a multitude of wildlife species from frogs to songbirds. Plant diversity is often highest in these wetter areas as well. The quarry is one of the only areas with standing water on South Table Mountain, a habitat suitable for breeding amphibians. Removing the trails from this area protect foraging and dispersing individuals during critical life stages.
- Habitat Fragmentation - Designating trails creates consistency and predictability of human movement in the park which can reduce stress to a variety of wildlife species to human presence. Reducing trail density and creating large swaths of land with no trails provide safe refuge for wildlife away from humans for breeding, feeding, and rearing young. Trails also act as dispersal vectors for invasive weed species. Weeds spread along these corridors via our shoes, tires, and pets. Limiting spread through high-quality areas by limiting trails cutting across them helps keep weeds manageable.
- Raptor Closure – Following the Golden and Bald Eagle Protection Act as well as the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Jeffco Open Space (JCOS) is legally responsible for protecting nests on our property. Annual monitoring of the South Table Mt. Park raptor nest over the past 20 years has shown an increase of reports of people walking or riding bicycles above the nest during the nesting period. The general population growth and increase visitation to South Table Mt. Park warrants additional protections for these nesting raptors during the nesting season. Seasonal closures are a common and successful wildlife protection management tool and are utilized to balance visitor access to areas while still protecting wildlife.



## **Trails**

- We appreciate the feedback from the community that we have responded to their requests for more loop opportunities within the trail system, while respecting the need to manage private property issues.
- JCOS has designed a trail system of approximately 15 miles designed to be sustainable and protective of our natural resources, while providing healthy nature-based experiences for our visitors. JCOS has incorporated the formalization of existing undesignated trails where they are sustainable in design and in line with our agency's mission to protect sensitive natural resources.

## **Access and Trailheads**

- Pleasant View Park at Camp George West is the sole trailhead serving visitors to South Table Mt. Park at this point.
- JCOS continues to evaluate access and trailhead solutions at other locations and will return to the public for engagement when viable options are available.

## **Visitor Information and Management**

### Signs and Regulations

- Posting maps and park regulations at major access points improved our ability to communicate essential regulations such as our raptor nest protection closure and the leash law. With proper posting, rangers are better able to enforce these critical regulations through written warnings and tickets, protecting natural resources and improving safety for pets and people.
- JCOS continues to evaluate visitor management strategies such as muddy trail closures, stay on trail policy, directional use, and designated trails on a park by park and trail by trail basis. The seasonal raptor nest closure of Lava Loop Trail is an example of this.

### Covid and Trail Closures

- Follow the recommendations across the JCOS park system – It's challenging to maintain social distancing of six feet on singletrack trails. Be prepared. Wear a mask and cover your face when passing other visitors on the trail. If you choose to step off the trail to allow another visitor to pass, look before you step.



- Trails will be closed sequentially as new trails open, which corresponds with timing habitat restoration efforts when they are most effective and beneficially impactful to wildlife.

#### Private Property

- South Table Mountain is a mosaic of private and public lands. Many visitors who come to the park do not realize that they are trespassing onto private property. We believe we have a responsibility to inform visitors when they are leaving public lands with appropriate signage. Also, we will be adding signs and fencing on JCOS land in areas that may lead to private land and connect to sensitive areas and where UTs would adversely impact natural resources.

#### Park Planning Process

- JCOS conducts ongoing management activities across the park system as need arises and capacity allows. Recent work at South Table Mountain addressed trail damage and erosion issues and was timed in preparation for the raptor closure and stay on trail designation of Lava Loop.
- We are grateful for the public engagement over the past few years related to the trail system at South Table Mountain Park, which has included the Community Trail Proposal Process in 2018, from which, we have incorporated 70% of the proposed trail segments in the final system.
- All of the undesignated trails were evaluated for potential incorporation based on habitat considerations, legality, sustainability of design, and redundancy. Whenever possible, JCOS incorporated the undesignated trails into the system, adding 2.8 miles to the final plan.