



South Table Mountain Park Proposed DOE Land Exchange and 2020 – 2023 Action Plan Public Comment Report

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report provides a summary of the Jefferson County Open Space (JCOS) community engagement effort for the proposed Department of Energy (DOE) Land Exchange and 2020 – 2023 Action Plan for South Table Mountain Park. The comments and questions JCOS received from the community were divided into themes based on the appropriate park plan component and categorized accordingly in the sections below. The comments and questions noted in italics summarize the feedback received. The Answers & Actions sections provide responses from JCOS Staff.

SUMMARY

As part of the Access and Trailheads Park Component planning effort for South Table Mountain Park, JCOS hosted a live virtual community meeting on April 8th to discuss a proposed land exchange with DOE and potential improvements to access points at Golden Hills Road and Rimrock Drive.

More than 100 community members attended the live meeting, and over 300 people viewed the recording of the meeting that was posted online. The meeting initiated a public comment period that ran from April 8th through May 12th. Since the community meeting, JCOS received 93 comments from 85 people.

The themes of comments received included the proposed land exchange with DOE, the loss of park land at Pleasant View Community Park and increased development related to the land exchange. Specific to proposed access improvements on Rimrock Drive and Golden Hills Road, there were concerns about increased traffic, questions about the need for these improvements, and potential impacts to neighborhoods. There were also some general concerns and questions about visitor management.

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Proposed DOE/JCOS Land Exchange – Themes & Issues

- *Concern about losing parkland at Pleasant View Community Park and providing future amenities to a growing community*
- *Interest in plans for the 9.26-acre parcel proposed to be conveyed to DOE*
- *Rationale for considering this land exchange; benefits to Jefferson County*
- *Concern about setting a precedent and ‘giving away’ public parkland*
- *What are the benefits to the Pleasant View community?*
- *Suggestions and questions about main trailhead and access point locations*

Answers & Actions

South Table Mountain Park is in the unique position of being almost completely surrounded with development and has many points of desired access from Golden, Pleasant View, Applewood (in Prospect Recreation & Park District), Denver West and Lakewood. This positioning means that there is a need for dispersed access points to accommodate visitors coming from all directions, with very few adjacent locations that are available for parking. This situation causes visitors from outside of the immediate neighborhoods to park in areas that often cannot accommodate more than a few vehicles and impact adjacent neighbors. Therefore, JCOS has been evaluating access and main trailhead locations at South Table Mountain Park for several years, which has included ongoing community engagement.

Based on the very low number of existing designated parking spaces (35), along with the frequency of complaints received by the County and City of Golden from neighbors concerned about parking within the neighborhoods, it is clear that there is not enough designated parking currently available for the park.

When looking at alternative locations, such as on Quaker Street, we strive to minimize our impacts on neighborhood roads. For example, Quaker Street has residences with driveways that connect to both sides of the street (sometimes referred to as a loaded street) that visitors would need to pass to access the trailhead. When possible, we seek to locate our main trailheads along unloaded streets or roads.

To be clear, Jefferson County is not giving away open space. Any potential land exchange, use or acquisition must be net positive gain for JCOS. Due to available land constraints and

potential neighborhood impacts, there has never been a main, regional trailhead for South Table Mountain Park that other JCOS Parks feature. This proposed land exchange enables us to provide equitable access to the park and amenities such as central parking, restrooms and kiosks that are standard in our regional park system.

If approved, this land exchange would convey 166 acres on South Table Mountain currently owned by DOE to JCOS. JCOS holds a conservation easement on much of this property and the exchange would convey the remaining fee interest to further protect it as open space. In exchange, JCOS would convey 9.27 acres located on the northwest corner of Pleasant View Community Park to DOE. DOE is exploring a transfer with the State of Colorado (State), with the potential for a future clean and renewable energy center at the site.

In 2012, the Pleasant View Metro District (PVMD) adopted the Pleasant View Community Park Master Plan. This plan identifies a new access point from Research Road and a number of park amenities. Unfortunately, PVMD has indicated that they do not have the financial wherewithal to fund these improvements and does not anticipate having them in the future. Given this and the DOE Land Exchange proposal, JCOS is working with PVMD to update the Park Master Plan. Together, we hope to develop an implementable plan that addresses existing and future community needs and interests that ties in with, and takes advantage of, the adjacent renewable energy uses.

There are no definitive plans for the development of building/s or facilities that will be on the north-west corner of Pleasant View Community Park that will be exchanged in order to receive the land for the main trailhead. The State of Colorado will be overseeing any development in this area as part of the agreement. If the Land Exchange is approved, all of the parties (State, County and PVMD) will work together on a master plan to integrate renewable energy, park, trail and access improvements.

Golden Hills Road – Themes & Issues

- *Why are improvements being considered at Golden Hills Road?*
- *How will the improvements proposed at Golden Hills Road address the cars that are currently being parked along the road?*

Answers & Actions

JCOS is actively working with Jefferson County Transportation and Engineering and the City of Golden to help address parking challenges at South Table Mountain Park and across our park system due to the unprecedented visitation rates over the past year. The goal with the Golden Hills Road Improvement is to keep more cars off the narrow neighborhood streets and onto off street parking spots.

Golden Hills Road has long been an access point for South Table Mountain Park. The improvements proposed are to pave and stripe the area and extend the lot to include a total of up to approximately twenty spots. These improvements would address existing erosion issues at the dirt lot as well as move cars off the sides of the narrow residential street.

Some of this traffic may have been a result of visitors using online platforms to navigate to the park. With the development of the main regional trailhead at Denver West, JCOS will be working

with online providers to promote the trailhead for visitors coming from outside the immediate area of the park.

Rimrock Drive – Themes & Issues

- *Rationale for improvements if parking does not currently appear to be an issue on Rimrock Drive*
- *Wasn't this area taken out of consideration in previous trailhead development discussions?*
- *Option to keep access in current condition with parallel parking*
- *Use of parking areas of surrounding businesses*
- *What are the next steps for public engagement on the Rimrock Drive access point development?*

Answers & Actions

The proposed improvements at Rimrock Drive are to designate up to approximately thirty parking spots on or off street to support the development of the Shoshonite Trail, which will connect from Rimrock Drive up to the top of the mesa to the Dome Flow Trail. Once this trail is developed, Jefferson County anticipates additional visitors will be accessing the park from this area and parking improvements will proactively address this increase in activity.

At this time, there are no designated parking areas on the west side of the park. The public comment feedback has confirmed that park visitors from this area are unlikely to access the regional trailhead at Denver West. This access point will encourage area visitors to access the park from a designated entrance rather than from unauthorized trails along the park boundary. The proposed access point at Rimrock Drive is west of the residences to minimize traffic moving through the interior neighborhood streets.

Working in coordination with the City of Golden, JCOS is evaluating parking solutions that may either be on street or off street and designed in accordance with Golden's Complete Streets program. This parking project would also support sidewalk development to improve pedestrian and bike access to the park as there is a bus stop just west of this location on South Golden Road.

Parallel parking is one of the design alternatives being evaluated, as this stretch of the road can accommodate approximately thirty parallel parked cars. Additionally, the agencies are evaluating angled and pull in parking spaces to determine what type of parking design would be safest for park visitors and area residents, have the lowest transportation impacts, and keep park visitors away from interior neighborhood streets.

In addition to potential parking improvements at the Rimrock Drive access point, JCOS is also working with area businesses and organizations on cooperative parking agreements to take advantage of existing parking infrastructure in the area.

JCOS and the City of Golden will be cohosting a virtual community meeting on June 22nd at 6 PM to discuss design alternatives at the Rimrock Drive and Golden Hills Road locations. The

login information for this meeting will be posted on the South Table Mountain Park page at <https://www.jeffco.us/1430/South-Table-Mountain-Park>.

General Access and Trailhead Questions - Themes & Issues

- *How is trail capacity determined in relation to parking?*
- *What is the evaluation process to design these sites?*
- *What multimodal efforts are JCOS undertaking to promote access by foot, bicycles, and buses?*

Answers & Actions

South Table Mountain Park is most similar to North Table Mountain Park in geographic positioning, physical features, and park features, such as trail density. Excluding parking agreements, North Table Mountain Park currently has 130 designated parking spaces in comparison to South Table Mountain's 35 parking spots. The proposed trailhead development and improvements to the access points at Golden Hills Road and Rimrock Drive will bring South Table Mountain Park to a similar total number of spaces to meet visitation demands.

JCOS has Trailhead Standards that guide the design and amenity considerations for the system's trailheads, including restrooms, kiosks, total parking spaces, oversized spaces, etc.

The access points are designed to provide safe and low impact parking areas to connect to designated trails to disperse visitation. Access points typically have fewer amenities, but usually include at minimum, an informational kiosk to share the rules, regulations, and updates specific to the park.

JCOS is evaluating our system holistically for ways to better improve multi-modal access to our parks. We look forward to sharing our ideas with the community in the coming months and years. Specific to South Table Mountain Park, we will be promoting the various RTD stops, such as on S. Golden Road (by the proposed Rimrock Drive access point) and Denver West Parkway (by the proposed main trailhead). Additionally, we are considering design options such as shuttle accessibility and bike racks for individuals who may take a road bike to the trailhead and then hike in the park.

This summer, JCOS is piloting a ride share option for visitors as another way to help address the parking conditions at our parks. If visitors use Lyft to go to the Camp George West Trailhead or Golden Hills access point for South Table Mountain Park, they can use an auto-applied discount code to offset \$2.50 per trip to and from these trailhead locations. The program is scheduled to launch on Monday, June 28th. In addition to South Table Mountain Park, the discount can be applied to riders with a pickup or drop off location at our two other selected trailheads – North Table Mountain Park West Trailhead and White Ranch Park East Trailhead. If you are visiting these three parks this summer, please consider this ride share opportunity to help cut down on parking issues. Information on this pilot program will be posted on the South Table Mountain Park webpage at <https://www.jeffco.us/1430/South-Table-Mountain-Park>.



Visitor Information & Management – Themes & Issues

- *I have witnessed visitor management issues (dogs off leash, litter, hiking in muddy conditions, etc.). How will this be better managed if more people start visiting the park due to the development of a large trailhead?*
- *Why are there no muddy closures at STM?*
- *How are you going to change visitor behavior to go to the new trailhead instead of parking in the neighborhoods?*

Answers & Actions

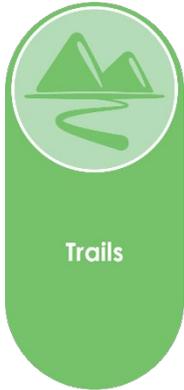
2020 Visitor Services Statistics for South Table Mountain Park include:

- 631 Hours of ranger patrol
- 69 Hours responding to medical, law enforcement, search and rescue and other requests for ranger service
- 370 Stewardship Education contacts
- 38 Verbal warnings
- 95 Unattended poop bags picked up
- Service Quaker access point three times each week
- Service Ancient Palms access point four times each week

It seems counter intuitive, but we always note better visitor behavior when there are more visitors in the parks. More eyes watching means better adherence to social norms such as staying on trail, staying out of closed areas, keeping pets leashed, and picking up pet waste. Trailheads also provide a better opportunity for us to communicate expectations with our visitors and set them up for success by providing restrooms, trashcans, posted regulations, maps, pet courtesy bags and more. Additionally, our ranger team relies on “see something, say something.” If you note visitors damaging resources or threatening other visitors with dangerous behavior such as letting their dog run at large, please call the Jeffco non-emergency number at 303-980-7300 and let us know what you are seeing in real time. It is the fastest and most effective way to get a Jeffco Ranger on scene to address the issue.

We know from experience that it is not enough to sign a park closed for mud. Many visitors ignore signs and just walk in anyway, making signed closures impossible to enforce without constant monitoring. Mud closures are most effective where we can physically gate and lock parking access. Given the porosity of the park, establishing and enforcing a comprehensive mud closure would not be possible. Therefore, we rely on public education about the importance of self-regulating behavior to recognize when conditions are not appropriate to be hiking on our trails and damaging our natural resources.

In regard to changing the behavior of visitors parking in the neighborhoods, we have noted that some of the neighborhood traffic that has been experienced in recent years may have been a result of visitors using online platforms to navigate to the park. With the development of the main regional trailhead at Denver West, JCOS will be working with online providers to promote the trailhead for visitors coming from outside the immediate area of the park.



Trail Development – Themes & Issues

- *Why would the trail connection along Pleasant View Community Park being converted from crusher fines to concrete?*
- *How would the new regional trail connections connect the community all the way to Golden?*
- *How does the proposed trail connection between Research Road and Nile Street impact Pleasant View's Master Plan?*
- *Why was a road developed on Old Quarry?*

Answers & Actions

Our regional trails are typically surfaced with concrete to support all types of year-round uses, including both recreators and commuters. While expensive to construct, concrete trails are easier to maintain over time, especially given their high use.

The proposed regional trail connection could tie into existing bicycle and pedestrian access routes (sidewalks and/or bike lanes) down Research Road to South Golden Road and from Denver West Parkway through the communities to the east and west. The potential connection based on proposed development between Research Road and Nile Street will provide more convenient access to the park for neighbors living to the west of Research Road.

Pleasant View Metro District's 2012 Master Plan notes a desire for the park to be accessible from Research Road, which this proposed land exchange will enable.

The top of South Table Mountain is a mosaic of private and public ownerships. Old Quarry Trail and the west part of Dome Flow Trail are designated access roads for Xcel to maintain their powerlines since JCOS acquired that section of the park. As part of the JCOS trail development efforts last year, these access roads were improved to avoid future resource damage from maintenance vehicles.



Natural Resources – Themes & Concerns

What, if any, wildlife impacts will there be when this regional trailhead and access point on Rimrock Drive are developed?

Answers & Actions

A parking lot created within the boundary or footprint of the park will remove a small amount of wildlife habitat. However, the location of the proposed parking lots are all directly adjacent to paved roads with vehicular traffic and are not considered core, high-quality, wildlife habitat. Removal of vegetation and the increased presence of cars and visitors in the parking lots and trailheads may shift wildlife away from the trailhead to other areas of the park.

The trail and trailhead design of South Table Mountain Park was created in a way that provides wildlife with areas away from visitors where they have space to forage, hunt and rear young. The proposed parking areas should have minimal negative impacts on wildlife.

As a visitor to South Table Mountain Park, it is important to minimize adverse wildlife impacts through the following key behaviors:

- Use and stay on authorized trails. Do not use unauthorized trails that have been closed and reclaimed. These unauthorized trails were removed to reduce habitat fragmentation and soil erosion that adversely effects water quality and plant communities that support wildlife.
- Keep pets leashed and pick up, carry out and dispose of pet waste. Off-leash dogs have enormous impacts, particularly on ground-nesting birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.
- Respect the Lava Loop trail seasonal raptor nest closure. This closure is in place to protect a golden eagle nest.
- Respect park hours. Using the park at night denies wildlife a much-needed break from human use.

Administration

- *Why were neighbors not notified ahead of the community meeting about the proposed land exchange and improvements to the access points?*
- *What was your outreach effort to encourage attendance at the community meeting?*
- *What are next steps? How can I stay involved?*

Answers & Actions

The purpose of the community meeting in April was to bring to the community's attention to the proposed land exchange with the Department of Energy and the potential improvements on Golden Hills Road and Rimrock Drive.

In order to reach out to as many of the community members as possible about our scheduled community meeting, JCOS notified all of the known community groups and stakeholders with over 470 email contacts, including community members that previously engaged during prior public comment periods. Almost 800 news flash subscribers of our website and nearly 7,000 subscribers to the *Panorama* newsletter were also alerted. Additionally, JCOS emailed more than 70 media/news outlets about the community meeting and shared this information on JCOS and Jeffco Colorado social media outlets, reaching more than 3,500 people on the JCOS Facebook page. We understand that we can't reach everyone with these efforts, we also rely on neighbors to pass on information by word of mouth to encourage more engagement and feedback about these proposals.

Based on this outreach effort, over 100 community members attended the April meeting. In an effort to reach as many community members as possible, we recorded the community meeting presentation and posted it online the following day. The recorded meeting had over 300 views. Additionally, there were more than 2,000 views of the South Table Mountain Park page during the public comment period that ran from April 8th through May 12th. The public comment period was provided to hear feedback and continue open dialogue about these proposals.

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