



Alderfer/Three Sisters Park 2020 – 2023 Actions

Public Comment Report

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report provides a summary of the Jefferson County Open Space (JCOS) community engagement effort for the proposed 2020 – 2023 Action Plan for Alderfer/Three Sisters Park. The community comments/questions JCOS received are addressed by park component below with corresponding answers/actions in response by JCOS staff.

SUMMARY

JCOS hosted a live, virtual community meeting on April 14th to discuss proposed trailhead expansion, a parking management plan, and visitor management strategies at the park. A total of 65 people attended the virtual meeting, and 103 people have viewed the meeting recording. Following the meeting, 35 comments were received from the 30-day public comment period.

The themes of comments received were on the west trailhead expansion, and opposition to allowing on-street parking along Buffalo Park Road long-term, citing concerns with neighborhood impact, traffic, and safety. Visitor management and enforcement at the park, and natural resource degradation concerns were also captured.

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Visitor Information & Management – Themes & Issues

- *Desire for greater Ranger enforcement*
- *Interest in exploring a reservation system & park fees*
- *Understanding strategies to monitor visitor impact*

Answers & Actions

With 27 parks open 365 days/year, and an estimated 7 million visitors per year, the JCOS Ranger Team and volunteer force have an incredible task. We understand that enforcement is perceived to be lacking at the park. Alderfer/Three Sisters is the fifth most patrolled park in our 27-park system. Below is a summary of how much time was spent in 2020 to supplement reliance on park visitors to do the right thing, as well as robust signage.

2020 Visitor Services Statistics for Alderfer/Three Sisters Park include:

- 956 hours of patrol
- 142 hours responding to medical, law enforcement, search and rescues
- 3,091 Stewardship Education contacts
- 241 verbal warnings
- 145 unattended poop bags picked up

Due to the unprecedented increase in park visitors, we are seeking to add three more ranger positions in the 2022 to help us better serve the large influx of visitors across the JCOS system. Our volunteer park hosts and patrollers supplement this force by making many visitor stewardship and trail courtesy educational contacts.

Jeffco Open Space is a public regional park system. As such, we strive to serve local area residents, Jefferson County residents and visitors to the region in a way that is consistent with our mission - *Preserving open space and parkland, Protecting Park and Natural Resources, Providing healthy, nature-based experiences*. Increased visitation and associated impacts to the public lands we manage creates constant challenges. We address these challenges head-on by pursuing a broad range of strategies to manage visitors. One example of this, is being the first public land manager to use [Lot Spot](#), a parking availability app that visitors can use to determine real-time parking availability before they embark on their outdoor activity. We are also exploring many of the suggestions made herein including reservations (or ticketed timed entry), multi-

modal access (biking and walking), shuttles, and rideshares. We will be engaging the community on these topics in the coming months.

Strategies to determine visitor impact include monitoring plant communities and wildlife, as well as the visitor experience. If visitors stay on authorized trails, keep dogs leashed, pick up waste, avoid using trails when they are muddy, and adhere to park hours, the plant and animals that live in the wildland-urban interface generally do well, and many continue to thrive. On-going trail assessment, maintenance, signage and fencing to deter unauthorized trail proliferation are also strategies we employ.



Natural Resources – Themes & Issues

- *JCOS plant and wildlife monitoring and protection efforts*

Answers & Actions

JCOS continually monitors a host of plant and wildlife species at the park. This includes collecting data on the condition of native vegetation, forest stands, and distribution of invasive plant species at regular intervals. We also monitor rare plant communities, forest raptors, and other sensitive wildlife. Specifically, a forest songbird monitoring program has been established at the park this year. Data is captured and informs park planning. We are beginning to examine a comprehensive monitoring framework that will allow us to use data to assess the balance among trail density, visitation, and important natural resources.



Proposed West Trailhead Expansion – Themes & Issues

- *Determining the size of trailhead parking*
- *Design elements: oversized parking, surfacing, proximity to barn*

Actions & Answers

Forecasting an exact number of parking spaces for a place as popular and unique as Alderfer/Three Sisters, or any other park in our open space system, is not a perfect science. It is complex, and it must consider the immediate context of the park, topography, other access locations and natural resource impacts.

The proposed total increase in parking spaces is 20. This is the first significant increase in parking since the east and west trailheads were constructed in 1990, over 30 years ago.

	Existing	Proposed
Road Parking (Buffalo Park)	116*	46
East Trailhead	25	50
West Trailhead	49	114
Wilmot Satellite Parking	50	50
TOTAL	240	260

*Parking space count is approximate

Below is a comparison chart showing average parking spaces per acre and average trail density across our system. The trailhead parking capacity at Alderfer/Three Sisters is approximately 40% lower than the average in our system, while trail density is more than double the JCOS system average. This is an important consideration for the parking expansion project, given there are no plans to reduce trail density at the park. Such an endeavor would be difficult to implement and unpopular with visitors, especially those who enjoy the park frequently.

	JCOS System Park Average	Existing Alderfer/Three Sisters Park	Proposed Alderfer/Three Sisters Park
Trailhead Parking	0.10 parking spaces/acre	0.06 parking spaces/acre	0.14 parking spaces/acre
Trail Density	1 mile/139 acres	1 mile/70 acres	1 mile/70 acres

Trailhead parking surface considerations include stormwater management, water quality and dust control. Additionally, a central part of the trailhead design is to enhance the existing wet meadow, allowing water to flow more freely as it travels north into the park. County regulations require hardened surfaces (asphalt, asphalt millings, pavers, concrete, etc.) greater than 10,000 square feet to include measures to clean and detain the water before it leaves the property. Collecting this in one location at the source is the most effective way to keep these pollutants out of the water system. Second, it creates a detention area that slows the water down and allow it to seep back into ground water. In a large storm event, keeping water onsite helps mitigate flooding events downstream. Given that some people raised concerns about the use of asphalt, we will explore the suggestion to use permeable pavers and other options.

Acknowledging the needs of the varied visitor groups at Alderfer/Three Sisters is important as we do our best, as public land managers, to protect park resources. Oversized/equestrian parking spaces are part of the plan at both the west and east trailheads. They are available on a first come, first-served basis. The only reserved parking spaces are the spaces reserved for people with disabilities. Another option, for those equestrians comfortable with it, is to park at Wilmot Elementary and take the Wilmot Trail to the park. The JCOS Trails Team plans to improve that trail in the coming year.

Scenic views of the barn and meadow are an important focus on the design of the expanded trailhead. We hope to create an interface between the Alderfer barn and increased parking that is aesthetically pleasing by creating as large a buffer as possible and using a small gathering space as a transition.

Parking Management Plan – Themes & Issues

- *Buffalo Park Road parking hazardous for pedestrians and drivers*
- *No parking on Buffalo Park Road favored by neighbors and area residents*

Answers & Actions

Buffalo Park Road is a challenging situation for on-street parking. In 2020, Jefferson County Transportation & Engineering and Road & Bridge reduced parking on Buffalo Park Road by 60% by eliminating 70 roadside parking spaces (from 116 to 46 spaces). Jeffco Road & Bridge also performed road maintenance that deepened the roadside ditch, acting as a parking deterrent.

The roadside area where cars are currently parking near the east trailhead has been widened to legally accommodate approximately 46 cars. Once the proposed trailhead expansion work is

complete in 2023, the need for this parking will be assessed. During the construction of the expanded trailheads, the roadside parking will remain.

The Jeffco Sherriff's Office is responsible for addressing illegal parking violations including roadside parking in 'no parking' areas and where vehicle tires cross into the road travel lane by and over the white line that delineates it. Enforcement and reliance on citizens to contact law enforcement when you see hazardous parking violations is critical. Please see more information on roadside parking [here](#).