

Open Space and Mountain Parks Responses to Questions Submitted on Comment Cards at the Jan. 15, 2019, Wonderland Lake Community Meeting

- **Why does it (*the Wonderland Lake area*) need to change at all? Why do you want to change it now? What is driving this change?**

Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) is currently developing four pilot Integrated Site Projects (ISPs) for specific OSMP locations including the Wonderland Lake area. The purpose of an ISP is to:

- Describe and prioritize on-the-ground actions to implement approved OSMP natural resource, agricultural, visitor and trail plans.
- Identify additional ways to improve visitor experiences and sustain important natural resources
- Address other open space values as outlined in the Boulder City Charter as well as operational needs such as ranger patrol, operational needs and maintenance issues.

The North Trail Study Area (NTSA) Plan, which included the Wonderland Lake area, was approved by City Council in 2016. The North TSA Plan is the result of OSMP's work with the community to create a vision for the 7,700 acres of OSMP-managed lands north of Linden Avenue and the Diagonal Highway. The purpose of the plan was to improve the quality of visitor experiences and increase the sustainability of trails and trailheads while conserving the area's natural, cultural and agricultural resources. The Wonderland Lake ISP was chosen to be addressed as a pilot ISP for several reasons: 1) OSMP's commitment to make progress on implementing the NTSA Plan, 2) In piloting a new process, OSMP wanted to vary the size and scale of areas involved in the pilot process with Wonderland Lake representing a smaller scale area, and 3) OSMP has had a long-standing need to update the Jr. Ranger facilities and Wonderland Lake trailhead which integrated well into the ISP.

- **What changes are being proposed? When will decisions be made?**

OSMP has set aside the preliminary alternatives that were designed and presented to the public in the fall of 2018. City Council will discuss the Wonderland Lake ISP during their February 19th Council meeting and staff will reengage with the community based on any input provided by Council as well as any input the Open Space Board of Trustees (OSBT) may provide at its April meeting. OSMP has made a commitment to the community that the future of any alternative management concepts for changes or improvements to services, programs and visitor infrastructure or facilities as part of this project will not occur until OSMP has robustly engaged the community and has incorporated feedback received. Community conversations are expected to continue throughout 2019. OSMP will not initiate or implement any associated changes or actions with this ISP in 2019. Regular maintenance, ranger patrol and traditional educational activities will continue.

- **How did the proposal get so far without consulting the people who live in the neighborhoods around the lake and in the vicinity?**

During the NTSA planning process in 2015-16, OSMP conducted extensive outreach with the community to encourage engagement in the planning process. Notifications

about the process and ways to participate were done through utility bill notices, trailhead signs, trail and trailhead on-site information tables, information tables at local coffee shops, news press releases and articles, email notifications, social media posts and website information. The NTSA planning process included the Wonderland Lake area.

Engagement for the Wonderland Lake ISP began in late October 2018, to discuss several sets of preliminary alternatives for the area. The public engagements conducted so far for this process are outlined below:

- Trail-side engagement on Oct. 27 to share initial preliminary alternatives for Wonderland Lake area
- Initial Public Meeting on Nov. 14 to share initial preliminary alternatives for the area
- Online questionnaire on ideas for Wonderland Lake open from Nov. 15 through Dec. 4
- School children engagement on Dec. 18
- Meeting on-site with local neighbor leaders on Dec. 19
- Community listening session on Jan. 15 to hear from community members

OSMP staff have clearly heard that the TSA-related and previous ISP engagement did not adequately reach people that live near Wonderland Lake and that a more robust community engagement process is needed to continue community discussions about the future of the Wonderland Lake area.

- **Can we keep the lake environment as natural as possible? Is it possible to just maintain the lake versus "upgrading" it with changes?**

Consistent with how Wonderland Lake is currently managed, the NTSA Plan included goals for maintaining the north, south, and western shorelines of the lake as protected wildlife habitat where the most sensitive habitat is located. Any changes to passive recreation and educational programming or infrastructure will only occur on the east side of the lake at the peninsula and dam. As OSMP reengages with the community later in 2019, staff is committed to partnering with the public to protect this wetland resource while assessing what changes are also aligned with providing opportunities for visitors to responsibly enjoy the area on east side of the lake.

- **How will proposed changes affect the wildlife?**

OSMP ecologists are an integral part of the process in the development of concepts for Wonderland Lake. Their involvement in the process is to evaluate and make recommendations on ways that any proposed changes considered for the Wonderland Lake area will be accomplished in ways that minimize impacts to the wildlife resources or if the opportunity arises improve habitat protection.

- **What changes could increase the diversity of wildlife? How do we make the lake more hospitable to birds and wildlife? For example, would an osprey nesting platform be successful?**

Improved protection of the north, south and west shorelines where the highest quality and most sensitive wildlife habitat is located is important. This could include improving educational information on signs indicating the importance of these areas for wildlife and

putting in place regulatory closures that coincide with the shoreline areas that are most important to wildlife. Restoring native vegetation, planting shrubs and other vegetation in areas where the shoreline has been eroded and degraded by concentrated social trails along the north, south and west shorelines can increase cover and nesting substrates, both of which may increase wildlife diversity.

Although Osprey can tolerate some level of human disturbance, the level of urban development and visitor use of the area around the lake may affect the preference of the site by Osprey for nesting. Regulatory closures along the north, south and west shorelines below the existing trail may make it possible that an Osprey pair may nest there. Their prey source is close by!

- **Can fishing continue without a negative impact on fish and birds?**

Wonderland Lake is routinely stocked with non-native sportfish by Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Fishing at Wonderland Lake has minimal impact on the fish populations in the lake. As for potential impacts to shorebirds and waterfowl, they are usually observed on the shorelines away from the dam, so if angling access continues from the dam, there should be enough space for anglers and birds/waterfowl to co-exist.

- **What are OSMP's educational goals for Wonderland Lake? What are the consequences of these occurring at Wonderland Lake?**

The department's education and outreach program vision is to engage the community through the land to inspire appreciation, connection and a legacy of stewardship. As an E Movement partner (*for more information please follow this [LINK](#)*), OSMP operates educational programming to inspire stewardship throughout the system and advance environmental literacy.

OSMP has provided education programs at Wonderland Lake for decades including working with partners to provide programs such as environmental education, bird watching and accessible hikes. For example, in 2018, OSMP provided 47 programs at Wonderland Lake reaching nearly 400 youth and families including outreach to Spanish-speaking community members and people experiencing disabilities.

The area along the dam is where most passive recreation activities take place and is where most youth education programming has focused over the years. Programming such as Walk to Connect and Wheel and Stroll occurs on the trail surrounding the lake. These programs are a part of OSMP's system-wide programming to provide education on the lakes, grasslands, forests, and mountain areas that make up the diverse ecosystems that OSMP manages.

Through the ISP community discussions, OSMP is interested in assessing what potential enhancements in educational programs, services, signs and visitor infrastructure appropriately fit Wonderland Lake and how the department can best carry out these programs responsibly. OSMP's interest lies in reviewing the existing programming we offer through community conversations to ensure it continues to be welcoming, relevant and accessible for all community members including school students, neighbors, people

experiencing disabilities, Spanish-speaking community members and the Boulder community at large.

- **How is the Boulder Reservoir and other reservoirs/lakes to the east, etc. being used by youth serving facilities/schools? Where are there links for outdoor education (Junior Rangers) regarding present sites in the County? What, if any, gaps would Wonderland Lake fill?**

As mentioned above, OSMP operates educational programming to inspire stewardship and advance environmental literacy throughout the OSMP system. City of Boulder Parks and Recreation, which manages Boulder Reservoir, offers outdoor education and recreational programming at Boulder Reservoir and other locations. Wonderland Lake is accessible and provides opportunities for students in the area to learn about and discover the natural environment and to develop a sense of place and stewardship ethic. OSMP also manages ponds and wetlands at the Sawhill Ponds east of town where educational programming occurs.

For over 50 years, OSMP facilities at the Wonderland Lake Trailhead have served as the operational base for OSMP's Junior Ranger program, an award-winning youth summer employment and service learning program. The program operates across the OSMP system to conserve habitat, maintain trails and support ranger services. The aging buildings required to house this program are in need of updating to create an appropriate work environment and OSMP would like to engage the community for how best to update these facilities to serve the Junior Ranger program and Boulder Community for the next 50 years.

- **Why Wonderland Lake? Its size does not present itself to increased usage and encroachment.**

The Wonderland Lake area has a long and rich history for supporting youth and other educational programming. OSMP carefully considers access and use in balance with the timing, levels and types of current education programming to meet community needs while being sensitive to the serenity of the area and needs of wildlife and their habitat.

- **Is there any legal authority or formal designation regarding the status of the Wonderland Lake Area as a wildlife sanctuary as indicated by signs?**

In the late 1980's the then Real Estate/Open Space Department identified the need to reduce the effects of undesignated (user-created) trails and other off-trail use along the shorelines of Wonderland Lake, especially the western and southern shorelines.

Management actions that were implemented included patrol by open space rangers, the construction of fencing, and signs encouraging people to stay on trails and leash their dogs. Some of the language developed for the signs included reference to Wonderland Lake area as a wildlife sanctuary. This word "sanctuary" was used to communicate the function, importance and value of the area, especially the lake and shoreline, as wildlife habitat. This language was thought to be an effective way of communicating the importance for people to avoid accessing the area behind the signs in simple and

hopefully easily understood language. At the time the signs were first placed in the area, the term “sanctuary” was not linked to any formal designation by the city or others. The combination of education, ranger patrol and infrastructure were supported by the community and evidence of undesignated trails from the Foothills Trail to the west and Wonderland Lake Park (playground and open grassy area) decreased and are no longer evident today.

Designations Related to Wonderland Lake

In 2005, the City Council accepted the OSMP [Visitor Master Plan \(VMP\)](#) which included the establishment of management designations across the OSMP land system. The plan identified four management designations which are described on pages 47-55 of the plan. They are

- Passive Recreation Area
- Natural Area
- Agricultural Area
- Habitat Conservation Area

The OSMP land west of Broadway, south of Lee Hill Road, and north of Linden Ave. falls within the Wonderland Passive Recreation Area, described on pages 24-25 of the VMP.

In 2002 and 2005, subsequent to the first placement of signs referencing a wildlife sanctuary at Wonderland Lake, City Council did formally amend the city code to declare the area within the city limits as a sanctuary for the refuge of protected birds. Section [6-1-33](#) of the Boulder Revised Code “Bird Protection Sanctuary Created” provides more information. The fundamental issues that drove consideration of this Council action were not associated with the management of Wonderland Lake.

In summary, starting in the late 1980’s the term “*wildlife sanctuary*” was used at Wonderland Lake as a communication tool along with other techniques to encourage visitor behaviors consistent with the protection of wildlife habitat in and around the north, west and south sides of the lake. After the signs were first installed, the City Council did designate the areas within the city as a sanctuary for wild birds; however, this action was not directly associated with or motivated by management issues at Wonderland Lake. While Wonderland Lake does have other formal city designations as a Passive Recreation Area, there is no formal designation of the area as a “wildlife sanctuary”.

- **What are the existing regulations that apply to Wonderland Lake?**
 - Swimming and Boating Prohibited. [Boulder Revised Code 8-3-17](#) and by City Manager Rule 8-3-3.T(93) that prohibits swimming, wading and all boating at Wonderland Lake.
 - Fishing is permitted from the dam and peninsula on the east side of the lake as indicated by signs. [Boulder Revised Code 8-8-5.](#)
 - Dogs are required to be on a handheld leash. [Boulder Revised Code 6-1-16.](#)

- The City of Boulder's stream, wetland and water body regulations described in the [Boulder Revised code Chapter 9-3-9](#) provide details on the city's approach to development in and around streams, wetlands and waterbodies to help preserve and protect those resources. Wonderland Lake is identified by the city as a wetland on its regulatory map (accessible at [this link](#)) and is regulated under this part of the code.

- **Why do we spend so much time/energy on prairie dogs?**

There are no prairie dogs in the Wonderland Lake ISP area. For more information visit <https://bouldercolorado.gov/osmp/prairie-dog-working-group>.