



Designation of Trails for Mountain Biking or Shared Use – A Process for Consideration

The Trails Committee

October 12, 2020

Introduction

Trails and trail use were the #1 most commented on topic during the Genesee Recreation Sites & Trails Master Plan process, conducted from 2017-2019. Many spoke about the value of the trail system for the community and the desire to improve it. There was also considerable discussion, with passion on both sides, regarding the creation of new trails or designation of existing trails as “multi-use”. This was construed as permitting mountain bicycling (biking) on some trails in addition to the existing use of hiking. Since there have been no proposals for equestrian or motorized use on the trails, the term “shared use” is more appropriate and is used in this paper.

The controversy surrounding shared use of trails has existed across public lands and open space areas with trails virtually since the emergence of “fat tire” mountain bikes in the early to mid-1980’s. On one hand there are mountain biking advocates who see:

- A vigorous, exciting activity that promotes health and can be enjoyed by families across generations
- An economic stimulator due to the investment required for equipment, clothing, and gear
- A community lifestyle improvement potentially increasing the attractiveness and value of real estate

On the other hand, hikers and other trail users generally cite concerns about:

- Hiker safety due to the speed and silence of bikes suddenly approaching
- Environmental impacts due to soil loss on trails not designed for bikes and bypassing of drainage features as well as potential impacts on wildlife
- Raucous behavior of cyclists disturbing the tranquility

As seen in the community input to the master planning process, the same general views are held by residents of Genesee. In the end of the master planning process the Facilities Committee, which guided the process, and the Board of Directors decided on

a set of additional trails for potential development but deferred a decision about designation for shared or bicycle use on the new or existing trails. This is addressed in two places in the final plan:

- Page 44. *“While the existing trail system is hiking only, many community conversations included a desire for multi-use or mountain bike trails. The current master plan identifies proposed trails only and does not suggest a use other than for hiking.”*
- Page 49. *“The possible benefits of multi-use/mountain bicycle trails ... is a topic that requires further discussion within the community.”*

The intent of this paper is to define a process for consideration of designation of new or existing trails in the Genesee trail system for shared use or single use by mountain bikes. It also provides information about options for managing shared use trails found in parks and open space systems near Genesee and thoughts about single versus shared use trails.

Process for Consideration of Shared Use of Genesee Trails

Based on the level of controversy surrounding mountain biking on trails which arose during the master planning process and continues to this day, the following process for consideration of bicycle use on Genesee’s trails is recommended:

1. A proposal is made to the Open Space Manager (OSM) or Trails Committee (the committee) for a trail or set of trails to be designated for shared use or mountain bike use only. The proposal may come from members of the community, the Board of Directors, or the committee.
2. Proposed new trails are checked against the priorities established in the Recreation Facilities & Trails Master Plan. If the proposal is consistent with the master plan, considering any new information that has developed, ...
3. The committee considers the level of planning, design, or construction expertise needed to carry out the proposal. There are two categories:
 - The proposal is deemed to be within the capability of the trail stewards, Open Space crew, or other community volunteer efforts to accomplish. In this case, the committee schedules it for further analysis within the established priorities for trail projects. Examples may include designation of an existing trail for shared use, or a new trail through relatively gentle terrain without high incidence of rock or steep terrain.
 - The proposal is a new trail or requires significant modification of an existing trail through steep, rocky, or otherwise difficult terrain, and is deemed to require:
 - contract design services to develop sufficient facts and data to further inform decisions, and/or

- contract construction services to build all or part of the subject trail
4. In the first case in item 3 above, the committee analyzes suitability for intended uses and construction requirements. It then documents results and other facts (see #7 below) about the proposal in a report to the Open Space Manager. In the second case, the committee prepares a preliminary budget proposal for design services to analyze and document suitability for intended uses, construction requirements, and costs, along with other facts (see #7) about the proposal.
 5. The OSM reviews the information from steps 2-4 and recommends either moving the proposal forward or returning it for further consideration by the committee. If the recommendation is to move forward ...
 6. The Board of Directors is informed of the proposal and the intended process going forward. With Board concurrence ...
 7. The Trails Committee conducts appropriate sensing to understand current community viewpoints. The proposal will be described in sufficient detail to obtain specific, informed responses. Information may include, but not be limited to specific location and terminus points, relationship to adjacent trails and the overall trail system, length, primary intended user group, difficulty level, potential environmental effects, projected costs, and potential management strategies.
 8. Based on the feedback from the community and an assessment of fitness within the trail system and environment, the committee makes a recommendation to the Open Space Manager for his/her review. With OSM concurrence, the committee finalizes the analysis and develops any needed budget proposals.
 9. The recommendation package is forwarded to the Finance Committee (if a budget proposal is needed) and then to the Board of Directors for final decision.

Shared Use Trail Management in Nearby Parks and Open Space

It is important to understand that shared use of trails occurs in many parks, open space areas, and National Forests near Genesee. The trail management strategies used vary according to levels of use, the characteristics of the terrain, amount of trail mileage available, and capability for enforcement. An inventory of seven nearby areas was done to look at how they manage bicycle and hiking use trails. The methods used from most to least prevalent are:

1. **Trail specific designations.** Designated trails for shared use and designated trails for hiking only (used in 4 out of 7 areas). This approach allows hikers a choice to use trails with or without the potential to encounter bicycles.
2. **Specifying trail direction only for mountain bikes.** This may be on an alternating day basis or permanent (used in 3 out of 7 parks). This is primarily used for technical downhill-type trails with fast descents and potential visibility issues.
3. **Specifying trail use on alternating days** (used in 2 out of 7 parks). For example, Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays are designated for mountain-biking, and

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays are foot traffic only. This enables both hikers and cyclists to enjoy the trail without potential for encounters with the other user group, but both groups get to experience the trail.

A couple of studies/outreach have been done by Jefferson County Open Space (JCOS) (linked below) with the general takeaways listed here. At White Ranch Park, Middle Longhorn Trail was designated as one way and mountain bike only. After a one-year pilot program compliance with these designations was 98%. 80% of people surveyed were satisfied or in favor of the designation. At Apex Park, JCOS is trying to adjust the shared use strategy to increase trail safety. Two main strategies they are looking at are different uses for even/odd days and designating trail direction. Another proposed option, with obviously a higher price tag, is creating additional trails to separate user groups and spread out the density of trail users.

<https://www.jeffco.us/3817/Designated-Use>
<https://www.jeffco.us/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=1093>

Area Details:

Genesee Park (Denver Mountain Parks): Some trails are designated as shared use and some are designated as hiker-only

Apex Park (JCOS): Some trails have designated travel directions depending on even/odd days for bikes only

Centennial Cone Park (JCOS): on weekends, only bikes are allowed on even days and only hikers/horses are allowed on odd days

Matthew Winters Park (JCOS): there is 1 segment of trail that splits into 2 (1 for bikes, 1 for hikers) near the northern parking lot; there is 1 designated bike only trail that also has a designated direction

White Ranch Park (JCOS): there is 1 trail that is bike only and directional

William F. Hayden Park on Green Mountain (City of Lakewood): all trails are multi-use but during Covid times they did have "rolling closures" of parking lots to handle crowds

Lair of the Bear (JCOS): some trails are designated as shared use and some are designated as hiker-only

[Trail Solutions \(2004\)](#)

Trail Solutions, written in 2004 by the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA), is regarded as a top reference for sustainable trail building. It is used by land management agencies, trail volunteer groups, and recreation service providers as a guide for determining policy and designing trails suitable for mountain bikes. The question of separate use (single use) trails to eliminate conflict between user groups versus shared use is always a consideration for land managers.

Trail Solutions offers six reasons shared use trails may be desirable:

1. Shared use trails best accommodate the needs of the most users.
2. Sharing trails helps to build a broad-based trail community that supports trail system management.
3. Shared trails are the most cost effective for the managing entity.
4. Shared trails create and empower responsible, experienced users.
5. Shared use trails take better advantage of the available space.
6. Shared trails require fewer trail miles and therefore have less impact.

Trail Solutions also lists six reasons why single-use trails may be preferred over shared-use trails.

1. Crowded trails: If the trails are crowded, single-use trails can help reduce use and potential for conflicts.
2. Crowded trailheads: If the trailheads are crowded, different access points for different user groups can help relieve congestion at trailheads.
3. High-speed Trails: High-speed trails are specially designed, possibly with a designated direction, to provide users with an opportunity to race-train
4. Challenge Parks: As none of the existing trails in Genesee are a designated and designed mountain bike skills area, this does not apply to the Genesee trail system.
5. Nature Trails: These single-use trails offer hikers or birdwatchers a quiet, peaceful experience in seclusion.
6. Extraordinary Mountain Biking Trails: These types of trails, sometimes referred to as flow trails, are specifically designed to be narrow and undulating with banked turns, giving the rider a sense of exhilaration.