

Daily Record Article
Hogbacks Open Space Area

User groups ready to blaze some trails

By Carie Canterbury

canterburyc@canoncitydailyrecord.com

Posted: 08/01/2014 08:19:11 PM MDT



This is a skyline view of the Skyline Hogbacks as they looked after being damaged by motorized vehicles. Vegetation was replaced by tire tracks, leaving the loose sediment an easy target for frequent and strong Colorado wind erosion, as well as stormwater issues. (*Skyline Hogbacks Preservation Committee / Special to the Daily Record*)

After years of planning and collaboration, the Hogbacks Restoration project soon will be underway.

In recent months, Cañon City has been awarded two significant grants to get the project off the ground. Between a National Fish and Wildlife Federation grant (partially funded by the Bureau of Land Management), a Great Outdoors Colorado Mini Grant, matching funds and contributions from other individuals and groups, more than \$250,000 has been garnered for the project that is expected to begin this fall and be completed by the first part of 2015.

The Hogbacks Open Space Park follows a north-south running hogback, covering about 500 acres.



A photo of the skyline view of the Skyline Hogbacks taken in July. (*Monica McGowan / Special to the Daily Record*)

"When we started looking at (the National Fish and Wildlife Federation grant), it was a really good fit for the hogbacks and what the city is trying to accomplish out there," said Kalem Lenard, outdoor recreation planner for the BLM.

Lenard was instrumental in advising on project scope and management and developing a budget.

"Here at the BLM, we are really committed to trying to work with the local community and address their needs," said Kyle Sullivan, public information specialist for the BLM Royal Gorge Field Office. "I think (this project) is evidence of that."

Garnering the grants was a collaborative effort, said Monica McGowan, director of the Hogbacks Preservation Society. Kristyn Econome, assistant director of the Lower Arkansas Mountain Bicycling Association, penned the two detailed grant applications.

McGowan said a small group of concerned citizens first met in 1998, and user groups have been meeting since 2008, when the hogbacks were closed to all uses before it officially became designated as an open space. The groups began meeting formally in the fall of 2013 when they decided to go after some funding to get the project up and running.

The user groups include LAMBA, Cañon City School District, Garden Park Paleontology Society, the local chapter of the Audubon Society, Rocky Mountain Back Country Association, neighborhood representatives of Fifth Street, Cañon City Geology Club, Skyline Hogback Preservation Society and Cañonland Walkers & Hikers.

"Having all the unified pieces of the user groups is important," McGowan said. "It is amazing to see it all pull together and see a proactive community that is coming together to make sure this is done."

Econome said one of the goals to be met through the grants is to improve management on 5.5 miles of existing trails. Six miles of user-created trails and other social paths will be closed off.

"This is going to actually designate trails for people to go on so they will know where they are supposed to be and where they are not supposed to be," Econome said.

There will be 2.5 miles of new trail constructed, which includes the core trail. It will not be motorized, but it will be wide enough for wheelchair access, for families to ride bikes together and for City of Cañon City crews to access culverts. The area will be reseeded, barriers will be installed to define trails, and closed trails will be recontoured to restore ecological function.

The GOCO Mini Grant specifically will fund the construction of a 2.2-mile long bench-cut trail, improving the hogbacks' main trailhead access point at the bottom of Skyline Drive including kiosks with a trail map and information on the area's geology and paleontology, and reseeding and contouring.

The Mile High Youth Corps is expected to begin working on the new trail this fall. Through the Healthy Lands Initiative submission, the local BLM field office is focusing on watershed improvements and landscape restoration.

Econome said the proposed Core Trail in the Hogbacks area will utilize culverts and inlets to accommodate the water drainage of the Hogbacks area and will help conserve geological and paleontological artifacts located in the Hogbacks.

Rex Brady, parks director for the Cañon City Parks Department, also has been a key player in the process. He said the grants are a long time in coming, but the community, the user groups and the stakeholders have come together to make it happen. He said he hopes the project will be a catalyst in creating a demand for even more trails.

"Our user groups have come together and have been a fantastic help in grant writing," Brady said. "We've got some money to spend and trails to blaze."

McGowan and Econome said the grants would not have been possible without the Hogbacks Master Plan that was adopted by the Cañon City Council in 2012 and the anonymous donation of \$50,000 to purchase a piece of property that bisects the north and south sections of the hogbacks.