

Update on Information Gathering/Trails Proposal for Box Elder Park

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On behalf of the Converse County Parks and Recreation Board, I would like to provide an update on the current status of the undertaking to assess the implementation of an improved trail system in the park.

We have received a sizeable amount of input from both the public meetings and through the website. As might be expected there were many desires and concerns expressed and the board has looked at those and has worked with the consultant, TPT Trails, LLC to collect and quantify the information. This information was used to provide direction to TPT Trails, LLC so that they could put together a proposal for improving public accessibility to the park. To date, of the nearly 100 comments received, the support outweighs opposition by about a 2 to 1 margin.

Much of the supporting input was directed at wanting to see some level of improved access for the general public to the park. The considerable majority of this input was to have maintained walking trails with access to scenic areas of the park as well as improvement of an existing, albeit rough, trail accessing Box Elder Creek at the south end of the park. There was also strong support for a dedicated parking area which would reduce motorized travel in the south end of the park by closing some existing unmaintained two track and ATV roads that have developed over the years. The other main desire was to see some public restroom facilities for users of the park.

As mentioned, there were also those who were against improved access to the park. Those respondents who had reservations about improvement expressed fears that purpose-built trails would degrade what they perceive as a wilderness, back-country feel of the property. They also fear trail development will result in an unwanted increase in visitation beyond current usage, which is mainly by local residents. Some questioned whether the cost of development can be justified, and that the nearby Duncan Ranch trail system should be sufficient without further expansion. Other fears include inappropriate commercialization of the resource and negative impacts to wildlife.

Since “doing nothing” doesn’t require any proposal the Parks and Recreation Board asked TPT Trails to provide a proposal for what they believe is possible given the terrain constraints and with the public wants and concerns taken into account. We won’t make a decision until we know what our options are with regard to improving access.

What we can say at this point is that the planning process began with a look at the entire 2088 acres contained within the park. Following an initial on-the-ground assessment and after the

results of the public input, the proposal was scaled down to include only a portion of the west side of the park. As it currently stands, the footprint of the proposed trail system would directly impact an estimated 300 acres, or about 15% of the park's total area. Part of this proposal involves some parts of trails connecting to the adjacent Duncan Ranch property that is administered by the Office of State Lands and Investments(OSLI).

We have provided OSLI with the proposal as it currently stands and are awaiting their response before moving ahead any further. If the OSLI finds the proposal agreeable then the Parks and Recreation Board will take the next steps in the project. If not then it will be back in the hands of TPT Trails to try and modify their original proposal to accommodate the new situation. We do not have a set date to hear from the OSLI but it is hoped that we will hear back from them sooner rather than later.

So as things now stand we are pretty much in a 'wait and see' stage. Once we know more regarding the current proposal we will again provide an update on the status of this endeavor.