

**OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
STAFF REPORT**

MEETING DATE: December 17, 2012

AGENDA ITEM NUMBER: 3A

STAFF: Juan F. Guzman, Open Space Manager

REQUEST: For possible action to recommend to the Board of Supervisors approval of an annual report regarding the activities of the Open Space Advisory Committee, as required by Section 13.06.090 of the Carson City Municipal Code.

GENERAL DISCUSSION:

Section 13.06.090 of the Carson City Municipal Code provides that the Committee shall provide an annual report of its activities to the Board of Supervisors. The information enclosed has been organized into four main categories: 1) Land management, 2) Activities with volunteers, 3) Preservation of land, and 4) Financial considerations. Staff suggests a letter format as follows:

Dear Mayor Crowell and Board of Supervisors,

As required by Section 13.06.090 of the Carson City Municipal Code, it is my honor to present to you the following report of the activities conducted by the Open Space Advisory Committee in 2012. The information provided is arranged into four categories: Land Management, Volunteers, Land Preservation, and Financial Information.

In preparation for the paradigm change from emphasis on acquisition to the intensive management of the lands acquired, we held a full day public workshop with the assistance of an outside facilitator. The day was well used. We developed a vision and mission statement and spent time discussing the concept of passive recreation which is one of the program's fundamental requirements. We also had a candid assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Open Space Program. The Committee anticipates presenting the vision and mission statements and a summary of the information to the Board of Supervisors for review and approval.

1) Land Management

The management of fuels on acquired lands is a top priority for the Open Space Program. With the assistance of the Nevada Division of Forestry, we implemented a fuel modification project reducing the vegetation density through timber cuts and mastication of brush at the Wilson acquisition located at the top of Ash Canyon Road. The cost of the project was paid through a cost share grant agreement with the Nevada Division of Forestry. Please refer to the photos in Exhibit A illustrating the before and after condition of the forest landscape.

We continue to use grant funds obtained through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act for fuels reduction within the Carson Range. In addition, our well-received fine fuels management program through the use of sheep continues along the wildland-urban interface. Last year was the seventh season of the project. That project receives the strong support and cooperation of the U.S.

Forest Service, the Nevada Division of Forestry, and the band of sheep owned and managed by Ted Borda and his family. Carson City residents, as well as other land managers, make a point of calling staff and checking out the sheep when the band arrives in town. Please refer to Exhibit B.

Staff was successful in completing the third annual monitoring of the 225-acre conservation easement at Horse Creek Ranch. We found no violations of the easement. Third party encroachments and trespassing incidents have subsided and vandalism at the property has been reduced. Monitoring of the easement is an annual activity in order to ascertain compliance with the terms of the transaction. It is our privilege to monitor the easement, and it is important to inform you that the stewardship account donated by the owner has a balance of \$47,875 to be used exclusively for this purpose. Please refer to the attached photograph (Exhibit C) illustrating areas monitored within the meadow area of Horse Creek Ranch protected by the easement.

It is with great excitement that the Committee informs the Board that the Secretary of the Interior has approved our grant request for \$252,700 for the construction of two non-motorized bridges at Eagle Valley Creek and related trail extensions. These crossings will link the existing Morgan Mill Road River Access Area and Empire Ranch Trail across lands donated by the Vidler Water Company into Riverview Park. After these two crossings are completed, over 9 miles of trails adjacent to the Carson River will be linked into a system. Information about this major accomplishment is provided in Exhibit D.

2) Activities with Volunteers

The Committee adopted a resolution thanking Mr. Dan Jacquet for his leadership and service to the Open Space Program since its inception.

Our members have been working with staff on an individual basis. For example, Ms. Preston arranged for a meeting with representatives from the American Motorcycle Association who were in town for a conference. Ms. Evans has conducted noxious weed education activities and field work to protect our riparian forest and native habitats. Ms. Inversin conducted walks in our parks and open spaces and held a "Trash Mob" at the east side of Silver Saddle Ranch and Carson River Park. Some photos of that activity are included as Exhibit E.

Kathie McGibbon, our youngest volunteer, organized a couple of cleanup activities along the right-of-way of Deer Run Road from the bridge south to Sedge Road. Kathie has in the past testified about one of her passions, which is protection of wild horses. Some pictures of her cleanup activity are attached as Exhibit F.

The Open Space Advisory Committee is very pleased to report that our activities and work have immensely benefited from the contribution and assistance of volunteers and groups. Dr. Rob Bauter and Mr. Dick Wipfli regularly assist our full-time Park Ranger by providing a presence within open space lands. Dick and Rob particularly enjoy their tours on Ash Canyon Road and Kings Canyon Road. They wear shirts identifying them as being volunteers through the Open Space Program and they offer water and assistance to hikers and visitors. They frequently stop and introduce themselves and point to the landscape while narrating to their listeners the ownership patterns, the effects of the Waterfall Fire such as erosion, and many other subjects pertinent to the Open Space Program. Paul and Jannine Schmidt have joined our volunteer roster. Jannine Schmidt assists with office administrative matters while Paul fills in for our ranger on his days off,

Wednesdays and Thursdays. Paul enjoys the work as a volunteer assistant ranger. He does not hesitate to get his hands dirty with picking up trash and maintaining signs, particularly at the Carson River Canyon 900-acre property. Paul's past experience as a park ranger with Nevada State Parks has been put to good use here in Carson City and we are very proud of his stewardship efforts on our lands.

One organization whose work was useful to the Open Space Program is the Friends of Silver Saddle Ranch. The Friends of Silver Saddle Ranch (FOSSR) have been very involved with management of lands along the Carson River, particularly the Silver Saddle Ranch. FOSSR was also responsible for initiating the charrette process that culminated in the cohesive vision for the management of the lands along the Carson River corridor. FOSSR also engaged the services of a private consultant in order to increase their capacity to assist us with the management of the Silver Saddle Ranch.

Muscle-Powered has been instrumental in the development of unpaved multi-purpose trails along the Carson Range. Within property owned by Carson City, Muscle-Powered developed a trail that is extremely popular with cyclists around Ash Canyon Road. The same trail continues into lands owned by the Masonic Lodge, State of Nevada, and the University Board of Regents (Western Nevada College). Our efforts to formalize and incorporate their assistance to maintain and patrol these trails as well as providing the labor for maintenance of such facilities was approved by the Board of Supervisors in the form of an agreement. In addition and with the assistance of the U.S. Forest Service Carson Ranger District, we have under the leadership of Muscle-Powered advanced the construction of a trail from Ash Canyon to Kings Canyon. After compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act in the form of an environmental assessment, Muscle-Powered began construction of this trail in portions of lands under the jurisdiction of Carson City. The Forest Service has incorporated this project into their work program and, with grant funding from the Recreation Trails Program, the Great Basin Institute was contracted to construct trail on the federal lands (Exhibit G). We will continue to work on the development of the trail in its entirety. Lumos and Associates have provided surveying, mapping, engineering, and flood regulation compliance for the proposed creek crossings.

An alternative trail route into the Waterfall site at Kings Canyon was begun in 2010 as Eagle Scout projects. The effort initiated in 2010 was completed as to the first leg from the trailhead at the end of the pavement on Kings Canyon Road to the Waterfall. The upper trail is presently 75% developed through the assistance of the Great Basin Institute. We anticipate completing the upper trail with the help of volunteers this summer. Please see the attached photograph of the scenic views from the Upper Waterfall Trail (Exhibit H).

3) Preservation of Lands

For a considerable amount of time, the Joost family and Carson City have cooperated towards the management and utilization of lands located west of Carson City. Within the last two years, the Public Works Department and the Open Space Division of the Parks and Recreation Department have joined forces in order to advance transactions that will be of mutual benefit for the parties involved. Carson City seeks to control and manage the access into Ash Canyon Road, as well as Ash Canyon Creek and surrounding drainage areas. An area immediately adjacent to the Wellington Crescent subdivision was sought by the Open Space Division in order to provide a linkage and access of trails from the existing V&T paved multi-purpose trail facility into the Ash Canyon environment. This transaction was sought by the Joost family in order to consolidate their ownership

of parcels. It is with a great sense of accomplishment that the Open Space Advisory Committee informs the Board of Supervisors that the transaction with the Joost family resulted in 20.25 acres of open space acquired below fair market value thanks to a generous donation by the Joost family. Equally important, the Public Works Department managed to secure access and land that facilitated the construction of drainage improvements that benefit the entire west side of Carson City from flooding and erosion potential that is caused by the Ash Canyon Creek drainage. The lands acquired serve other very important purposes. They establish the edge of the developed area of Carson City, secure access into the Ash Canyon drainage, provide for the conservation of watershed lands, provide habitat, and allow for recreation of our residents and visitors. Exhibit I illustrates the deer grazing on the property and its scenic value. The west side map (Exhibit J) illustrates the U.S. Forest Service/Carson City ownerships west of Highway 395.

As part of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, approximately 3,589 acres under the Bureau of Land Management are to be transferred to Carson City. The transfer requires compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, which in turn resulted in the execution of a programmatic agreement for the management of cultural resources. The Bureau of Land Management, the State Historic Preservation Office, the Washoe Tribe, and Carson City are signatories of the agreement. The programmatic agreement provides for the protocols to be followed to assure the proper stewardship of cultural resources by Carson City on the lands subject to a conservation easement and the Bently acquisition located at the Carson River Canyon. The lands subject to the conservation easement are illustrated in Exhibit K and include the Ambrose Carson River Natural Area, Prison Hill Recreation Area, and the Silver Saddle Ranch. Exhibit L illustrates some of the stamping mills located in the Carson River Canyon. In recognition of the Lands Bill work, Carson City received the Elmer H. Anderson Parks Excellence Project of the Year Award for 2012.

4) Financial Considerations

In specific, one of the functions of the Open Space Advisory Committee is to provide oversight over the administration and expenditures of funds from the Open Space Division of the Quality of Life special revenue fund established by Carson City Municipal Code Section 21.07. The Section states, "The Committee shall review and provide input and comment to the City Manager's proposed budget as it relates to Open Space matters and perform other duties as may be specifically assigned to it by the Board of Supervisors."

Due in part to the decrease in revenue generated by the sales tax and the state of the economy, the Board of Supervisors approved a resolution directing the Open Space Advisory Committee and staff to, for a period of two years, suspend the acquisition of lands and concentrate instead on the management of the properties acquired through the Open Space Program.

Deliberations on budget matters involved the participation of the City's Finance Director, City Manager, the Open Space Advisory Committee, and staff. The final budget recommendation presented to the Board of Supervisors was reviewed and recommended by the Committee. Internally, the Committee requested and has been receiving from the Parks and Recreation Department staff monthly reports as to the status of the different budget accounts that comprise the Open Space Program budget. The Committee finds that these reports are useful in providing a clear picture of the status of the program funding.

In addition and in accordance with the measures adopted by the Board of Supervisors in order to reduce expenditures, the Committee has agreed to a schedule of meetings once every other month in order to reduce administrative costs. The City code otherwise requires a monthly meeting.

The acquisition account has been almost depleted. Future acquisitions will be minimal at best in accordance with the Board of Supervisors' directive and involve, by necessity, very creative thinking. Our efforts will continue to be directed towards the management of lands and the annual operations budget will reflect the shift from acquisition into stewardship. Staff has recommended that the majority of the carry over monies be placed on in the management accounts. The use of volunteers for facilitating the management of our lands is extremely important.

The Committee has spent time discussing with the City Manager and the Finance Director the internal revenue charge. Staff, under the direction of the Committee, has successfully sought grants and provided outside funding sources for almost all transactions conducted since the beginning of the program.

It is our pleasure to inform the Board of Supervisors that as of December 2012, approximately 3,339 acres of land have been obtained through purchases, donations, or transfers with a Question 18 cost of \$10,065,802 and additional grants for \$8,157,317 for a total of \$18,223,119. We have managed to leverage 55% of our monies. The acquisitions and related information are presented in Exhibit M.

On behalf of our Committee and staff, thank you very much for the opportunity to present this report.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Move to recommend to the Board of Supervisors approval of an annual report regarding the activities of the Open Space Advisory Committee, as required by Section 13.06.090 of the Carson City Municipal Code.

Exhibit A

Upper Ash Canyon Open Space (Forest Legacy / Wilson Acquisition) Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project – May 2012

Before:



Exhibit A

Upper Ash Canyon Open Space (Forest Legacy / Wilson Acquisition)
Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project – May 2012

After:



Exhibit B

Fuels Reduction with Sheep

Visit and interview with PBS' America's Heartland series

Photos taken April 2012, television broadcast September 2012

