

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: October 17, 2016

AGENDA ITEM NUMBER: 3D

STAFF: Ann Bollinger, Open Space Administrator

REQUEST: **For Possible Action:** To review restrictions, discuss current policies, and provide direction for future policies regarding events at Silver Saddle Ranch.

GENERAL DISCUSSION:

After one year of ownership/management of Silver Saddle Ranch and with more reservation requests, staff thought it was a meaningful time to review current restrictions and policies regarding events at Silver Saddle Ranch. Additionally, in preparation of the next work plan and budget, staff is seeking direction on future policies and management. One of the challenges for the Open Space Division is how to manage events, especially with limited staff.

As required by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-Carson City Conservation Easement, a Management Plan was written for Silver Saddle Ranch (and adjacent areas). The Management Plan attempted to define “...*the use and occupancy of the Property, including agricultural operations, public day use and events. The Management Plan will consider the following factors in determining consistency with the conservation purpose and values for events: Size, duration, frequency, location and season of use.*” (BLM-Carson City Conservation Easement). Without much experience managing events and direct experience managing Silver Saddle Ranch, the consultant and staff had developed the best information as possible (see attached).

Since that time, staff has conducted assessments of the property, observed capacity levels, and have made changes accordingly. For example, referencing page 2-34 and the Historic Ranch Complex, the maximum event size should be determined on the type of event and mode of transportation. For the Escape from Prison Hill, the permitted number of participants decreased from 300 under BLM to 200 under Carson City due to parking calculations for passenger cars. The event is allowed to increase the number of participants if remote parking and shuttles are utilized. During the Carson River Cleanup, there were approximately 250 persons enjoying lunch under the cottonwood trees at the red house. It was a comfortable capacity. With that said, more than 200 participants had arrived by school bus. Parking capacity has not yet been determined for equestrian events. Also on page 2-34, the duration is identified as “Dawn to dusk.” Thus far, staff has kept the same hours of operation as BLM, 7am-5pm. An off-site caretaker is responsible for opening and closing the entrance gate each day.

The BLM-Carson City Conservation Easement clearly identifies the allowable and prohibited types of events. In 2016, there were seven events including one event with permitted overnight use and two cancellations. Additionally, there were monthly meetings held by the Friends of Silver Saddle Ranch (FOSSR). The FOSSR meetings are hosted in the red house and do not require any staff time. Below is a summary of the events from the past calendar year:

- April
 - Escape from Prison Hill half-marathon
 - Carson City Sheriff's Office – Mounted Unit Patrol Training (seven nights & eight days)
- May
 - Friends of Silver Saddle Ranch – Spring Open House
- July
 - Eagle Valley Dog Tracking Club
- August
 - Jazz and Beyond Music Festival
- September
 - Carson River Cleanup
- December
 - Friends of Silver Saddle Ranch – Christmas Open House

Currently, the department-wide policies include:

- Deposits and insurance are required for every event.
- Equipment “rental” is limited to the on-site availability. Extra equipment (i.e. tables and chairs) may be rented from an outside supplier.
- Event setup and cleanup is the responsibility of the renter.
- Reservation requests must be received a minimum of 30 working days in order to allow time for review, necessary permits, and other potential items.
- Reservations are not available on holidays or holiday weekends.

It is anticipated there will be more requests and more events in future years. In addition to the department-wide policies above, staff would like to inquire about the Committee's desire to limit availability (i.e. a maximum of three weekends per month may be reserved). Another more specific inquiry relates to the hours of use. If weddings and parties are allowed, how late should they be accommodated? Silver Saddle Ranch does not offer sufficient lighting, but it could be rented. Likewise, outside security could be required. However, a staff person will need to be available to check the cleanliness and security of the venue following the event.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: This item is for discussion. Action may be taken regarding restrictions, current policies, and direction for future policies regarding events at Silver Saddle Ranch.

2.3 Recreation Management

A Guiding Principal for Event Management:

Events should not be an unacceptable interruption to the recreational experience of the everyday visitor. The function should use areas and times that minimize the impact on others. The exception would be a few events a year that would be for the benefit of the entire community. The number of event participants should be based on the capacity of the area, resource protection and the visitor experience.

2.3.1 Conservation Easement Visitation

In a 2004 report, the BLM reported approximately 10,000 visitors a year at the Silver Saddle Ranch and Prison Hill Recreation Area. The majority of visitors to Silver Saddle Ranch and Prison Hill are local Carson City residents looking for a safe, scenic area to walk, hike, run, fish, swim, raft, horseback ride, picnic, and explore the historic ranch culture of western Nevada.



Photo 10. Escape from Prison Hill Half-Marathon Running Event

Silver Saddle Ranch has a history of organized events. The largest events draw between 100 and 200 people. The largest events in the past include equestrian trail trials and the annual Escape from Prison Hill half-marathon. The trail trials have included as many as 125 people with 70 trucks/trailers. Occasionally, these events negotiated parking on the pastures with the ranch

contractor and/or BLM ranch manager. The Escape from Prison Hill half-marathon has included as many as 190 runners in recent years. The special recreation permit allowed up to 300 persons including race participants, race support and spectators.

FOSSR has also provided a wide variety of interpretive programs and activities such as archaeology, geology, plant, bird, and wildlife identification tours, stargazing, hikes and snowshoe trips, weed identification, and bat conservation. FOSSR has also hosted a variety of activities such as National Public Lands Day celebration, open houses, breakfasts, work days, and nest box building, installation, monitoring and cleaning activities.

Additionally, the Sheriff's Office Mounted Police Unit has conducted training at Silver Saddle Ranch for the last several years. The event has included overnight camping, explosives and firearms. The group has expressed an interest to continue training opportunities.

Limited parking is one of the considerations determining the maximum event size. Larger community-wide events at Silver Saddle Ranch and Prison Hill may be considered by the City in the future.

The Ambrose CRNA attracts at least 1,100 school kids annually for organized environmental education activities. The area offers river access, trees, shade, wildlife, recreation and environmental education opportunities. Recreational uses occurring at the Ambrose CRNA include walking, horseback riding, bird watching and relaxing. The Ambrose CRNA is also utilized as a raft/canoe rest area. The majority of use at the site is day use by local residents.

The City should periodically assess the appropriate visitation thresholds that can be attained and optimally managed. There has not been a problem with exceeding the capacity to date, but many of the properties throughout the river corridor were private until recently. As the pathway system expands, increased use is anticipated.

2.3.2 Facilities

The facilities available at each of the Conservation Easement lands are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Conservation Easement Lands – Facilities

Property Name	Number of Trail Access Areas or Trailheads ^{1/}	Miles of Non-Motorized Trails ^{2/}	Miles of Motorized Trails ^{2/}	Parking Spaces	Number of Picnic Facilities ^{3/}	Number of Restroom Facilities	Comments
Ambrose Carson River Natural Area	5	1	0	50 cars or 25 vehicles with trailers	0	0	
Prison Hill Recreation Area							
Motorized Use Area	2	0	10	Needs assessment	0	0	Non-motorized use may occur on all trails in this area but there are no designated non-motorized trails.
Non-Motorized Use Area	5	25	0	Needs assessment	0	0	Includes two trailheads on the west side of Prison Hill, shared with non-Conservation Easement lands
Silver Saddle Ranch							
Agricultural Lands	0	0	0	0	0	0	Pasture and grazing operations
East Silver Saddle Ranch	2	1	OHV staging area leads to BLM roads and trails	20 cars in various locations	0	0	

Property Name	Number of Trail Access Areas or Trailheads ^{1/}	Miles of Non-Motorized Trails ^{2/}	Miles of Motorized Trails ^{2/}	Parking Spaces	Number of Picnic Facilities ^{3/}	Number of Restroom Facilities	Comments
Silver Saddle Ranch (continued)							
Historic Ranch Complex	2	4	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Entrance area: 6-8 cars; ▪ Midway parking area: 4 cars; ▪ Red House Complex: 50-60 cars; ▪ Arena: 75-100 cars 	One picnic area with tables	2 (vault toilets)	Cultural and historical sites; interpretive signs; trail signs
Mitigation Wetlands	0	0	0	0	0	0	Wetlands and wildlife habitat

^{1/} Trail Access Areas may provide parking but no other amenities. Trailheads provide parking and may provide restroom facilities.

^{2/} Approximate miles

^{3/} Only those areas with existing picnic facilities were noted in this table.

2.3.3 Interpretive Programs

The following actions are recommended for interpretive programs for the Conservation Easement lands.

- Develop an Interpretive Program for Silver Saddle Ranch in collaboration with other agencies, non-profits, volunteers and community organizations:
 - > The Interpretive Program should identify themes, appropriate stories, support materials, programs, etc.
 - > Use a mid-1900 family-operated ranch and the Carson River as the two main themes and tie together with the cultural, historic and environmental resources.
- Develop an Interpretive Program to introduce visitors to the natural environment and the historic resources:
 - > Kiosks should be designed to blend in with the surrounding area.
 - > An environmental education component should be developed based on an understanding of teaching curriculum requirements.
 - > Consider outdoor teacher and student workshops including field studies and overnight programs.
- Use existing materials and successful programs for environmental education such as:
 - > Carson Water Subconservancy District (CWSD), Carson River Coalition, Education Working Group.
 - > Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) Annual Snapshot Day for water quality monitoring.
 - > The trail and interpretive brochure developed for Ambrose CRNA by Carson High School.
 - > River Wranglers.
- Interpretive hikes may be led by the open space/park ranger and volunteers.
- Include the FOSSR in interpretive program planning.

2.3.4 Public Day Use and Events

Public day use and events will follow similar policies to those throughout Carson City. While most areas will be open to the public, two areas will remain closed, the mitigation wetlands and a three-quarter-mile long riparian corridor on Silver Saddle Ranch, for wildlife and habitat protection. The hours of operations are dawn to dusk except for Silver Saddle Ranch, which may allow overnight camping as part of an event.

In addition to the consideration of impacts to cultural or natural resources, the activity or event size is based on available facilities such as parking and restrooms as well as the potential for busing and staging at adjacent areas. Portable toilets can be reserved for larger events. The frequency of events is dependent on funding and staffing levels. For example, there may be fewer events from November 1 to April 15 – the approximate dates for seasonal employees.

The type of activities or events, size, duration (half-day vs. full-day), and frequency will have various impacts. Over the past few years, there have been less than five reservations per year. To-date, the infrequent schedule does not seem to impair or interfere with conservation purpose and values nor significantly interrupt the recreational experience of the everyday visitor. Additionally, there has been adequate opportunity for the Friends of Silver Saddle Ranch to host various outings and events. The following table provides examples of allowable events as described in the Conservation Easement and the Charrette.

Table 4. Conservation Easement Lands – Examples of Allowable Events

Events listed in the Conservation Easement	Events identified in the Charrette
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Private weddings and parties ▪ Music concerts ▪ Running events ▪ Environmental education ▪ Equestrian activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community garden ▪ Running/walking/hiking events ▪ Disc golf 1/ ▪ Senior Center outings ▪ Boy and girl scout events/outings ▪ 4H 2/ ▪ Public groups ▪ Elder hostel ▪ Weddings

^{1/} Disc golf was identified as a passive recreation use in the Charrette; however, it was identified as a prohibited activity in the subsequent Conservation Easement.

^{2/} Some 4H activities, such as shooting sports, will be prohibited due to the Conservation Easement restrictions and/or Carson City Municipal Codes (CCMC).

The following table provides a summary of the prohibited events as described in the Conservation Easement. The Charrette did not list prohibited events.

Table 5. Conservation Easement Lands – Examples of Prohibited Events

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hunting ▪ Overnight camping unless approved as part of an event ▪ Disc golf ▪ Paint ball games ▪ Hot air balloons ▪ Motorized events (other than OHV events at South Prison Hill) ▪ Fairs & carnivals ▪ Cars shows ▪ Rodeos

Table 6 is a summary of Public Day Use and Events on the Conservation Easement lands.

Table 6. Conservation Easement Lands – Public Day Use and Events

Property	Uses	Events	Maximum Event Size	Duration	Frequency	Season of Use	Subject to Fees and Reservations	Comments
Carson River Floodplain and Riparian Corridor	Mountain biking, boating, environmental education, equestrian, fishing, hiking, picnic, trail running, wildlife observation	Yes, see Table 3 and Table 4	200	Dawn to dusk	Dependent on City staffing levels	Year-round	Yes	
Ambrose Carson River Natural Area	Mountain biking, environmental education, equestrian, fishing, hiking, trail running, wildlife observation	Yes, see Table 3 and Table 4	200	Dawn to dusk	Dependent on City staffing levels	Year-round	Yes	Unpaved parking area for vehicles and buses
Prison Hill Recreation Area								
Motorized Use Area	Biking, equestrian, hiking, OHV, trail running	Yes, see Table 3 and Table 4	100	Dawn to dusk	Dependent on City staffing levels	Year-round. Notices may be posted in OHV areas during high fire danger and wet soil conditions	Yes	Motorized use restricted to existing roads and trails
Non-Motorized Use Area	Biking, equestrian, hiking, trail running	Yes, see Table 4 and Table 5	250 ^{1/}	Dawn to dusk	Dependent on City staffing levels	Year-round	Yes	

Property	Uses	Events	Maximum Event Size	Duration	Frequency	Season of Use	Subject to Fees and Reservations	Comments
Silver Saddle Ranch								
Agricultural Lands	Pasture and grazing operations	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	Year-round	Yes, contract	Closed to the public unless otherwise permitted.
East Silver Saddle Ranch	Biking, boating access, equestrian, fishing, hiking, OHV, trail running, wildlife observation	Yes, see Table 3 and Table 4	100	Dawn to dusk	Dependent on City staffing levels	Year-round. Notices may be posted in OHV areas during high fire danger and wet soil conditions	Yes	Motorized use restricted to existing roads and trails
Historic Ranch Complex	Biking, environmental education, equestrian, hiking, picnic, trail running	Yes, see Table 3 and Table 4	25 in the picnic area; 250 for events ^{1/}	Dawn to dusk; overnight camping may be approved as part of an event	Dependent on City staffing levels	Year-round. From Nov 1 – Apr 15, the picnic area is first come, first serve.	Yes	Groups less than 25 persons will need a reservation. Groups more than 25 persons will need a permit.
Mitigation Wetlands	Wetlands and wildlife habitat	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No	Closed to the public

^{1/}250 is the limit for the number of participants. In the past, the BLM permit for the Escape from Prison Hill half-marathon allowed 300 persons including race support and spectators.

2.3.5 Administrative Fees and Reservations

Fees

It is anticipated that current fees implemented by BLM will remain in effect for one year following the land transfer. After that period, fees will follow similar policies to those throughout the Carson City. Event fees may be waived for organizations that have entered into a joint use agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with Carson City. Fees will be reviewed and recommended for approval by the Open Space Advisory Committee and ultimately adopted through a Resolution by the Board of Supervisors.

Reservations

Current information regarding reservations, including facility rental, group use and special events, is available on Carson City's website www.carson.org/rentals. Each activity, event, and facility request will be individually considered. Requests should be submitted online and a minimum of 90 days in advance. If any requests are questionable as to the terms of the Conservation Easement, Carson City should forward the request to BLM for review and approval a minimum of 45 days in advance. The notice should describe all aspects of the proposed activity, including location, design, materials or equipment to be used, dates and duration, and any other relevant information regarding the proposed activity, in sufficient detail to permit BLM to make an informed judgment as to its consistency with the purpose and values of the Conservation Easement.

Due to the limitations and restrictions in the Conservation Easement, Carson City should create a Group Use and Special Use permit application for activities and events over 25 persons. An application is necessary so that additional permits, impacts to the environment, and departmental resources can be assessed. The permit application should include a checklist addressing possible environmental impacts, parking logistics, facilities, and other operations that may have an impact on the site or other visitors.

Reservations will not be approved for areas closed to the public. Approval of an activity or event will not give exclusive rights to a location or parking facility.

At Silver Saddle Ranch, the picnic area may be reserved for group use from April 16 – October 31. From November 1 – April 15, the picnic area is first come, first serve. Throughout other open space and parks in this management area, no approval is necessary for group use less than 25 persons.