

Oxbow Park and Preserve Management Plan



***Approved by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
and Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board:
December 18, 2013
City Council Adoption: March 3, 2014***

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INTRODUCTION

This Plan establishes a framework for the sound stewardship of Oxbow Park and Preserve. Policies, management objectives and envisioned future improvements outlined within this Plan are based on existing baseline information gathered in advance of the property acquisition; public input, and commitments established within the conservation easement donated by the City to the La Plata Open Space Conservancy. Additional baseline data will be collected to allow revision to this Plan as necessary. The Plan provides a succinct overview of this background information and intended stewardship practices. Additionally, the Plan outlines how future potential improvements on the property will be evaluated and considered prior to implementation to ensure consistency with public expectations and conservation commitments. Revisions to this Plan and any associated policies and management objectives will require formal action by pertinent City Advisory Boards and the La Plata Open Space Conservancy (LPOSC).

DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

Located east of Animas View Drive along the banks of the Animas River, approximately 1.2 river miles upstream from the 33rd Street river put-in/take-out, Oxbow Park and Preserve is just over 44 acres. The property includes the 43.71 acre Cameron-Sterk property acquired with the assistance of Great Outdoors Colorado in 2012 and the 0.39 acre Sherman Parcel, also acquired in 2012. Oxbow has 2 distinct areas within the 44 acres—one being the Preserve, an area of approximately 38 acres that will remain predominantly undeveloped, in its existing natural state, with primary management objectives focused on conservation, habitat protection, and environmental education. The second area of approximately 6 acres has been reserved for future river access improvements, a section of the Animas River Trail, and for facilities to serve these uses. The map attached to this Plan shows the entire property with the approximate location of the 6 acre Reservation Development Area. Future site improvements envisioned and use of the Reservation Area are addressed later in this Plan.



BASELINE DOCUMENTATION

Baseline data has been collected on the property that includes environmental and mineral assessments, vegetation and photo baseline documentation; and habitat preservation values. This information, summarized below, is included in its entirety in the Baseline Documentation Report available through the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department and is posted on the City website at www.durangogov.org.

The Cameron-Sterk portion of Oxbow Park and Preserve is comprised of approximately 70 percent riparian shrubs, forest, and wetlands; 20 percent non-riparian shrubs, grasses and forbs; and 10 percent river. It lies at an elevation of approximately 6,550 feet. The property has over 4,000 linear feet of river frontage that include sand bar beaches as well as cut slope river banks that are slowly being incised by the meandering Animas River. This meandering also makes deposits on point bars. Riparian vegetation includes Narrow Leaf Cottonwood, Sandbar Willow, Rocky Mountain Juniper and a variety of grasses and forbs. The western part of the property is dominated by desert scrub, primarily Rabbit Brush. Native shrubs useful to wildlife include chokecherry, wild rose and golden currant. A historic oxbow on the property has been slowly filling in and provides pockets of intermittent wetlands. Much of the property experiences consistent spring flooding during high run-off years as only approximately 1 acre of the property lies outside the 100-year floodplain. Approximately 23 acres are located directly within the floodway.

Non-native and invasive species, particularly Russian olive, Siberian elm, thistles and other invasive grasses and forbs were prevalent at the time of property acquisition. Efforts to eliminate these invasive species were initiated immediately upon City acquisition.

Additional wildlife surveys and documentation will be undertaken on the property starting in 2014 to ensure future management appropriately adheres to the conservation easement and habitat preservation values.

CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Oxbow Park and Preserve includes the 43.71 acre Cameron-Sterk property which was acquired with the assistance of Great Outdoors Colorado. This acreage, located east of the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad (D&SNGRR) tracks, has been placed under conservation easement with La Plata Open Space Conservancy. The purpose of the conservation easement is to permanently protect the following values on the property:

- 1) River floodplain and natural open space for viewshed, habitat and recreation;
- 2) Natural habitat for wildlife including summer and winter range, winter concentration area, winter forage area, and/or overall range for a variety of species of game and non-game wildlife; and
- 3) Low-impact recreational opportunities for the community; and educational opportunities for ecological sustainability.

The conservation easement recognizes and allows certain development to occur within a Development Reservation Area as described more specifically in the recorded conservation easement. The easement is available for review from the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department and is also posted on the City website.



MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The City of Durango will manage and develop Oxbow Park and Preserve in a manner that will:

- Maintain all conservation commitments associated with the recorded conservation easement
- Improve the natural condition of the property by eliminating invasive and noxious weeds and plant species, and initiate restoration projects to occur that will enhance the ecological values of the property
- Provide ongoing care, stewardship, law enforcement, and patrol of the property consistent with City parks and open space areas
- Maintain a natural surface single loop trail corridor near the perimeter of the property. An analysis of all existing trails on the property shall be conducted by the City in conjunction with LPOSC after completion of the wildlife baseline survey to determine the most appropriate final alignment of the permanent trail corridor
- Provide improvements within the Reserved Development Area to provide river access, associated amenities, and an extension of the Animas River Trail
- Minimize disturbance and impacts to environmentally sensitive areas
- Ensure all new development strictly adheres to pertinent local, state, and federal development and environment regulations and requirements

INTERIM MANAGEMENT POLICIES

Interim management policies have been established for Oxbow Park and Preserve in recognition that certain management activities cannot occur until the property is annexed and permanent site improvements have been completed. These policies shall remain in effect only as long as necessary in order to ensure protection of the property's resource values, and to minimize impacts to the adjacent property owners during this interim period.

The following policies shall be in effect during this interim period:

1. The 38-acre preserve area within Oxbow Park and Preserve will initially be closed to the public December 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014. In the interim, the City will endeavor to collect wildlife information including existing literature pertaining to best management practices for habitat preservation. Site specific wildlife data will also be collected by volunteers to establish baseline information. The City will determine future adjustments to the closure dates and boundary based upon the information obtained and input from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and the Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board.
2. Commercial use of Oxbow is not permitted until site specific access improvements have been completed to accommodate such use. Site development planning is scheduled to occur in 2014.
3. There shall be no motor vehicle parking available at Oxbow Park until site improvements have been completed to accommodate such use. Scheduling of site improvements will occur only after completion of site development planning.
4. The La Plata County Sheriff shall provide law enforcement until the property is annexed into the City. Following annexation, the Durango Police Department will provide law enforcement. Annexation of the property is scheduled to occur prior to the 2014 river use season.
5. Oxbow Park and Preserve is located within the Animas Mosquito Control District and the willows on the property have historically been mowed to provide access to standing water for treatment of the mosquito larvae. Mowing on the property will be limited to the existing natural surface trail corridor and mosquito abatement will be performed by Animas Mosquito Control District in accordance with best management practices. Any proposed changes in protocol will require written City approval and review and approval by LPOSC in advance of proposed activities occurring.

LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT POLICIES

1. Management activities shall be consistent with this adopted Plan and recorded conservation easement. Proposed activities deemed inconsistent with the Management Plan shall be circulated to the appropriate City Departments and Advisory Boards for review and comment prior to any action being taken. Proposed activities on acreage under conservation easement shall also be reviewed by La Plata Open Space Conservancy (LPOSC).

2. Proposed changes to the Management Plan shall be circulated to the appropriate City Departments and Advisory Boards for review and comment prior to any action being taken. Changes proposed for acreage under conservation easement shall also be reviewed by La Plata Open Space Conservancy.
3. Areas located outside the Development Reservation Area shall be maintained in a natural state with public recreational use limited to trail-oriented and passive activities such as viewing wildlife consistent with the requirements of this Plan and the recorded conservation easement.
4. All commercial use will require a separate river access permit issued by the Parks and Recreation Department with appropriate limitations on use dependent upon the carrying capacity of the property as determined by the City. Permitted Commercial River Outfitters for Oxbow Park are required to work with the City to ensure all users of the Nature Paddling Trail adhere to the guidelines of use on this section of river in Durango.
5. All public uses and activities on the property shall be subject to all City rules and regulations. To ensure a pleasurable experience and to protect Oxbow Park and Preserve, be courteous of other park users and neighbors.

The following uses/activities shall be specifically prohibited on the property:

- Overnight Camping
 - Camp fires
 - Hunting or discharge of firearms/weapons
 - Organized and special events except by permit
 - Dogs off leash
 - Injury to or molestation of birds, game or wildlife
 - Smoking, use of alcohol or drugs
 - Unauthorized construction of trails, berms, jumps, or other recreational structures
 - Destruction or removal of soils, rocks, natural vegetation or other materials except for purposes of property maintenance and improvements consistent with this Plan
 - Other resource disturbing activities such as construction of forts, tree houses, seating areas, lean-tos and other man-made structures
 - Excessive noise
6. Park hours, including the river access, are consistent with other City parks. Park and river access hours may be revised administratively as necessary. Park Permits are required for after-hours activities and organized groups.
 7. The section of river between Oxbow Park and Preserve downstream to the 33rd Street River Access is designated as a Nature Paddling Trail. River users taking access from Oxbow Park shall: (a) respect nature and leave no trace; (b) engage in quiet use of the river; (c) respect private property including no trespassing both upstream and downstream of the Park; (d) all river craft should be propelled in this section with a paddle, swim flippers or swim hand paddles; and (e) all river users should wear an approved Personal Flotation Device (PFD).

8. There shall be adequate and effective law enforcement at Oxbow Park and Preserve by City Park staff and Durango Police. City staff will routinely patrol the property particularly during high use times to ensure a quality river experience. At its discretion, Park staff may elect from time to time to temporarily close the entire property, or selected areas of the property, when it is deemed necessary for the protection of the property's natural resource values, the general public, and/or for rejuvenation of specific resources including wildlife habitat and vegetation. This may also include during river run off events that result in property flooding.
9. Property assessments may be taken from time to time to determine the specific location, type, and quantities of unique plant and animal habitat/species, and unique natural or archeological features in advance of any stewardship activities consistent with this Management Plan.
10. La Plata Open Space Conservancy shall provide annual monitoring reports referring to the natural assets and conservation values listed in the conservation easement to assist the City with stewardship efforts.
11. Environmental education and research projects may be conducted on the property with advance approval by the City.
12. The City will develop a proactive monitoring plan with associated metrics.

FUTURE PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

Future site improvements will be limited to public access amenities, signage, and extension of the Animas River Trail. All improvements must be consistent with the recorded conservation easement and commitments made to Great Outdoors Colorado, and will be considered and approved by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, the Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board, pertinent City Departments, and the La Plata Open Space Conservancy prior to construction activities occurring.

The future site improvements at Oxbow Park and Preserve, previously referred to as the Cameron-Sterk property, were discussed by the community during the development of the adopted 2012 Durango Animas River Corridor Management Plan. The design of park and river access improvements at Oxbow Park is scheduled to be initiated by the City in 2014. The exact location of amenities, signage, access drives and parking will be determined during the development of the site plan which will be a public process. Annexation of the acreage located east of the tracks will occur in advance of any site development occurring.

Envisioned improvements include:

- 1) An extension of the hard-surface Animas River Trail along the westerly edge of the property, with an eventual extension further north of the property;
- 2) a river put-in/take-out for non-motorized crafts in the southwestern corner of the property in the vicinity of the beach;

- 3) shade structure(s) and restroom;
- 4) parking area and associated amenities;
- 5) natural-surface trail;
- 6) Interpretive/educational, informational and way-finding signage; and
- 7) Park benches along the trails.

RESERVED DEVELOPMENT AREA

Other than the natural-surface trail that meanders around the Preserve area, benches and interpretive signage, only the Development Reservation Area may be further developed. The attached map shows an approximation of where allowable improvements may be located in the future. Final design and engineering will be required to determine specific locations within this building envelope. The recorded conservation easement specifies the Reserved Development Area as up to 6 acres. Future improvements on the property will be restricted to this building envelope on the southwest section of the property and also includes an area generally paralleling the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad tracks on the northwestern boundary of the property to accommodate the future extension of the Animas River Trail. Since the building envelope and trail corridor remain part of the conservation easement, proposed improvements will be reviewed and approved by LPOSC. The addition of the 0.39 acre Sherman parcel west of the tracks provides opportunity to locate some site improvements closer to Animas View Drive, and away from the floodplain and existing vegetation near the river.



STEWARDSHIP ACTIVITIES

Routine Maintenance: Routine maintenance will be based on regular inspection and need by the Parks and Recreation Department. Typical ongoing maintenance shall include weed and noxious species mitigation, trash removal, vandalism repair, trail repair and improvements, and other facility repair or maintenance as needed.

Flora and Fauna Protection and Enhancements: Based on the finding of existing or future property assessments, monitoring reports, routine inspection by the City, and other research efforts undertaken, protection and enhancement efforts consistent with this Management Plan may be undertaken to improve the ecological and biological diversity and health of the property.

Planning for River Channel Movement: The natural meanders of the river are expected to move over time. The property boundaries, site improvements and natural features may be gradually or episodically affected. This process will be considered in design and management to provide the maximum protection and sustainability of the conservation values of this property and neighboring properties.

AMENDMENT/UPDATE

This Management Plan may be amended from time to time as necessary. Any proposed Plan amendment or update will be undertaken in consultation with the Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, pertinent City Departments, and the La Plata Open Space Conservancy.

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City of Durango Oxbow Park and Preserve

