

FOCUS GROUP COMMENT SUMMARY

Following is a summary of the results of a series of two meetings held in three locations in May and June of 2000. The subject discussed was “What are the characteristics of a good road and trail system?”

Representatives were invited from the different user groups, environmental organizations, and local communities, including county executives.

FOCUS GROUP COMMENT SUMMARY

on

“What are the characteristics of a good road/trail system?”

General

>Planning/design:

Avoid—or be especially designed for—sensitive resource/habitat areas

Provide “exclusive use” opportunities for each user group (for optimum visitor experience) somewhere in BISO

Minimize multiple use of trails

Coordinate system with outside systems and land uses (but don't promote continuation of poor planning decisions on the part of others)

Link points of interest

Provide choices – destinations, time commitment, skill level/challenge

Provide emergency exit routes

Each road/trail needs to have a clear purpose

Trailheads could be many (dispersed) or few (concentrated) (i.e., different concepts) – “dispersed” offers more options and spreads potential benefits to nearby businesses; “concentrated” offers more efficiency in patrolling for security, safety, and maintenance...also contributes to higher impact in converging trail system, but could design accordingly

Roads and trails together could be thought of as one system getting visitors where they want to go

Provide scenic opportunities

System needs proper erosion control measures

System should not need heavy equipment for construction/maintenance

System should be science based—not just on public opinion

System should have specific capacity limits

System should be only what is maintainable

System should be buffered from streams

No additional motorized access to/near gorge rim to maintain remoteness between Burnt Mill and Blue Heron

Trailheads should be on NPS land and accessed by county roads

Where possible, trails should offer access to adjacent/nearby businesses

Need opportunities for families, i.e., low skill levels

Concentrations of visitors, e.g., Bandy Ck., results in high use/impact on surrounding trails/roads

Hiking-only trails also provide experiences for wildlife observation, photography, nature study

Road system needs to provide different experiences/choices

Roads need to be decent enough for typical personal auto travel, altho not necessarily paved

“Driving back roads” is a desired experience for some people, but they should be well-maintained

Road & trail system should be environmentally sound

System should be well-drained and easily maintained

Park should decide if shared trails are appropriate or not and either promote or discourage

Graveled treads are not good for hikers and bikers

Similar use areas should be connected to allow greater opportunities

Hunting is a safety issue...could restrict hunting to certain areas and/or restrict other uses during hunting season

Accesses should be coordinated with outside interests

All uses, except ATV riders, need some solitude and opportunity to hear only natural sounds

>Operations:

Maintenance is essential to prevent undesirable conditions

Don't close trails without adequate information (horses sometimes mis-blamed for impacts)

Deal with visitor interaction in literature and on trailhead signs

Big South Fork Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

Dispense information on sensitive areas where and when appropriate (could be seasonal, etc., not just something “permanent”)
Deal with user conflicts with policies and communication
Use proper erosion control
Need good signs from outside road net and good signs/directions to trailheads
Interpretation/education should be dynamic. It’s too static; quickly gets old looking; gets ignored. Should change when there’s something different/new to point out and if needed to redirect visitors.
System should be well-marked and mapped
Park should communicate regularly with all user groups on conditions, closures, scheduled maintenance, volunteer opportunities, etc.
Need safe/secure parking areas
Water quality considerations should be considered on all management actions
Mileage markers along trails would assist in SAR
Trails/roads should have KY/TN markers at state line for hunters...or have consistent regs for whole park
Trails should be clearly marked for allowable uses (less negative)
Skill levels should be clearly communicated in literature and at trailheads
Waste management for all uses is a concern

Hiking

>Planning/design: (D = desired; A = acceptable)

D – experience solitude/natural quiet/peace/calm
D – experience beauty/scenery/variety
D – witness creative efforts of others who created the trail experience, e.g., fine, subtle workmanship
D – narrow, wandering pathway providing some challenge to body/mind
D – features (rewards) along the way
D – No contact with ATVs. ATVs degrade experience beyond personal contact, e.g., spook wildlife away from corridor, trail tread problems
D – avoid blind curves on shared trails
A – some contact with mountain bikes, but in short segments: shared segments should not be “advanced” mtn. bike sections, which might promote speed, acrobatics, etc.
A – some contact with horses, but in short segments...tread and waste issues
more opportunities for walkers/strollers who aren’t serious hikers...more for handicapped
information available in various forms and places, e.g., visitor centers, trailheads, ...

>Operations:

Post trail user information and etiquette at trailheads

Mountain Biking

>Planning/design:

D – loops/connections/options
D – not overused/crowded
D – scenic; connections (spurs) to overlooks
D – hard-packed, smooth tread
D – single-track, < 3’ wide
D – medium grades
D – no deep sand
D – on shared trails: wider, no blind curves, not an “advanced” section, drainage and maintenance more important
D – more areas of park available
D – some availability from campgrounds
D – connection to Rugby
D – proximity to showers
D - variety of lengths and challenges
A – OK to share with hikers and horses, but only short distances
Old logging roads can be good (ride between ruts)

>Operations:

Well-marked/mapped
Limit group size
Fix problems quickly...Maintenance!
Users help with construction/maint.
Volunteers can patrol...provide info, first aid, etc.
Publicize/post trail etiquette

Horse Riding

>Planning/design:

D – single or double track (BISO should be about 50/50)
D – single track should be wide enough for passing without leaving trail tread
D – soft enough tread to prevent stone bruises and prevent slipping...“ideal” tread is “soft” (dirt) and level (no ruts), but hardening OK for heavy use and needed drainage
D – no sharing with ATVs
D – rest stops along trails
D – water needed along trails
D – design for efficient maintenance (6 foot dozer OK)
D – a “network” of destinations, experiences, and lengths
A – could share a trailhead with other user types but disperse
A – no real conflicts except with ATVs...ATV users can’t hear others and blind curves are potential accident sites
A – mountain bikers OK but can spook horses since bikes are quiet

>Operations:

Need good signs and maps with mileage
Maintenance is critical, especially on steeper sections
Maintenance for equestrians requires special methods
Need etiquette posted at trailheads
Need 10'-12' vertical clearance
ORVs

>Planning/design:

D – loops/connections out from and return to staging area
D – lengths should be 10-60 miles; dense loops OK—routes could be within 100' of one another
D – large staging area (gravel), preferably dedicated use because of impact on other users
D – variable width trails (cleared width):
32” – 36” motor bikes
50” – 60” ATVs
70” – 100” other, incl. 4WD
D – exit routes for emergencies
D – various challenge levels
A – staging area could be “primitive”
D – for better-class riding area, staging area should include camping, dumpster, portable toilets
D – most desirable would add potable water source, bath house, and shelter
D – no shared use with hikers
A – shared use with horses OK, but should be time-separated

>Operations:

routes should be marked/numbered, with maps
education/etiquette info at staging areas
maintenance is critical
speed limits on all trails; lower on shared trails
clearly inform all users of shared routes/sections through materials at visitor centers, signs at trailheads and trail intersections

Boating

>Planning/design:

- D – trails between river and parking areas need to be easily negotiable carrying a boat, e.g., tread material suitable for bare feet and not too steep
- D – natural view of river/bluffs/rim, e.g., no visible parking areas (screening OK), rim trails, overlooks (rim should have no-development buffer zone)
- D – no more river accesses
- D – feeling of remoteness
- D – primitive campsites (6-8 sites) in 1 or 2 locations below L'wood Ford needed along river to promote camping in acceptable places
- A – compatible with most non-motorized uses

>Operations:

- Maps/displays at parking areas of river classifications, warnings, descriptions
- Manage for high water quality