

Susan E. Baird
Natural Resources Planner
Denver Parks and Recreation
201 West Colfax, Dept. 605
Denver, CO 80202



Re: Access Fund Comments on Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan

Dear Ms. Baird,

The Access Fund welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Master Plan for Denver Mountain Parks (DMP). Please consider these comments when planning for climbing access at the park and contact us anytime for assistance with information on established best climbing management polices used by state governments from around the country.

The Access Fund

The Access Fund is the only national advocacy organization whose mission keeps climbing areas open and conserves the climbing environment. A 501(c)3 non-profit supporting and representing over 1.6 million climbers nationwide in all forms of climbing—rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering, and bouldering—the Access Fund is the largest US climbing organization with over 15,000 members and affiliates. The Access Fund assists land agencies around the country with climbing management issues. In fact, the Access Fund has signed memoranda of understanding (MOU) with both the BLM¹ and USFS² relating to any climbing initiatives within their areas of management. Many of our members climb and live in the Denver area and have a direct interest in recreational access at Denver Mountain Parks.

The Access Fund promotes the responsible use and sound management of climbing resources by working in cooperation with climbers, other recreational users, public land managers and private land owners. We encourage an ethic of personal responsibility, self-regulation, strong conservation values and minimum impact practices among climbers. Working towards a future in which climbing and access to climbing resources are viewed as legitimate, valued, and positive uses of the land, the Access Fund advocates to federal, state and local legislators concerning public lands legislation; works closely with federal and state land managers and other interest groups in planning and implementing public lands management and policy; provides funding for conservation and resource management projects; develops, produces and distributes

¹ <http://accessfund.org/pdf/AF-BLM-MOUfinal.pdf>

² <http://accessfund.org/pdf/AF-03-MOU-USFS.pdf>

climber education materials and programs; and assists in the acquisition and management of climbing resources. For more information about the Access Fund, visit www.accessfund.org.

Scoping Comments

New Climbing Opportunities within Denver Mountain Parks

The Access Fund applauds Denver Mountain Parks for considering the development of new climbing and bouldering opportunities within Denver Mountain Parks and a Newton Park in particular (p. 115). Climbing is a legitimate and historical recreation use that should be permitted at all Mountain Parks and supports the primary purpose of the parks—to provide recreational opportunities to city residents.

The Access Fund and its affiliate the Denver Climbers Coalition are eager to assist Denver Mountain Park with the development of climbing opportunities at Newton Park and other parks within the Denver Mountain Parks system.

Climbing Access on Conservation/Wilderness Parks

The Access Fund is disappointed that the Master Plan continues the Park’s policy of discouraging climbing at Conservation/Wilderness Parks. The Access Fund recognizes that recreational access at DMPs must be balanced with proper management (which may include restrictions) to protect the integrity of the natural resources. However, it is important to note that, the closure of public land by federal or state land management agencies is an extreme measure, and should only be initiated through clear legal authority and documented scientific need. The Master Plan fails to provide justification for the assertion that recreational uses like climbing are incompatible with the restrictions limiting the development or sale of the Conservation/Wilderness Parks (p. 143-148). Nor does the Master Plan provide any evidence to justify the Plan’s suggestion that climbing may somehow harm sensitive rock faces (p. 148).

The Access Fund encourages Denver Mountain Park to consider allowing climbing at sites within Conservation/Wilderness Parks. Allowing climbing within the DMP is consistent with the primary purpose of the parks: to provide recreational opportunities to Denver residents.

Conclusion

We encourage the DMPs to strive to manage for the fact that the climbing in the Mountain Parks provides residents with unique recreations opportunities. It is the Access Fund’s experience that virtually all potential threats or actual impacts to natural and cultural resources associated with climbing and user-group conflict can be eliminated or reduced to acceptable levels through a

combination of education, cooperation with the climbing community, and site-specific prescriptions, including rerouting of trails or partial crag closures. The Access Fund's grant program regularly provides funding for management initiatives that raise awareness about climber responsibilities.

Examples of grants awarded include:

- Boise Climbers Alliance, Black Cliffs, ID – cliff nesting raptor signage & brochure.
- Colorado Division of Wildlife, Boulder Canyon, CO – cliff nesting raptor signage.
- Joshua Tree National Park, CA – vegetation surveys, and GPS location of climbing areas in relation to Threatened & Endangered species sites.
- North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, NC – peregrine falcon monitoring and outreach.

The Access Fund and the American climbing community have an exemplary record with regards to supporting natural resource protection. In general, climbers are strong supporters of open space and conservation, have a vested interest in environment, and understand the balance between conservation and access.

The Access Fund looks forward to further discussions of various lesser restrictive measures, including educational signage, trail work, and site-specific mitigation techniques and we are committed to working with Denver Mountain Parks to resolve any other issues raised in this letter.

Please do not hesitate to contact Jason Keith, Policy Director at (303) 325-5936 if you have any questions or comments.

Respectfully Yours,



Diana Vernazza
Access Director
The Access Fund

Cc: Justin Jaeger, Denver Climbers Coalition
Cameron Cross, NC3 (Northern Colorado Climbers Coalition)
Mayor John W. Hickenlooper
Members of the Denver City Council