



OPEN SPACE



Carson City Parks, Recreation & Open Space Department

Report to the Board of Supervisors from the Open Space Advisory Committee

January – December 2020

Dear Mayor Bagwell and Board of Supervisors,

As required by Section 13.06.090 of the Carson City Municipal Code, it is our honor to present to you the following report of the activities conducted by the Open Space Division in 2020. The information provided is arranged into the following categories:

- History of Open Space
- Land Acquisitions
- Land Management
- Grant Funding
- Capital Improvement Projects
- Activities and Events

2020 was truly a year unlike any other. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we quickly learned how important access to parks, trails and open spaces would be for the public as we navigated these unprecedented times. Perhaps we will look back on 2020 with a renewed appreciation for the stunning natural beauty that surrounds us in Nevada and the Eastern Sierra. Mother Nature has been a familiar presence that has remained with us through these unfamiliar times. Whether an early morning stroll in the foothills, a lunch-time walk on an urban pathway, a spring-time float trip on the Carson River, or an epic mountain bike ride through the Carson Range and into the Tahoe Basin, the trails and open space areas just outside our front door have led many of us to places of refuge and solace. Regionally, our trails, trailheads, parks, open space properties and other public lands have experienced unprecedented numbers of visitors this year. Carson City, in partnership with other public, private, and non-profit organizations, has been diligently working to create new trails and trailheads, and to maintain our favorite familiar ones.



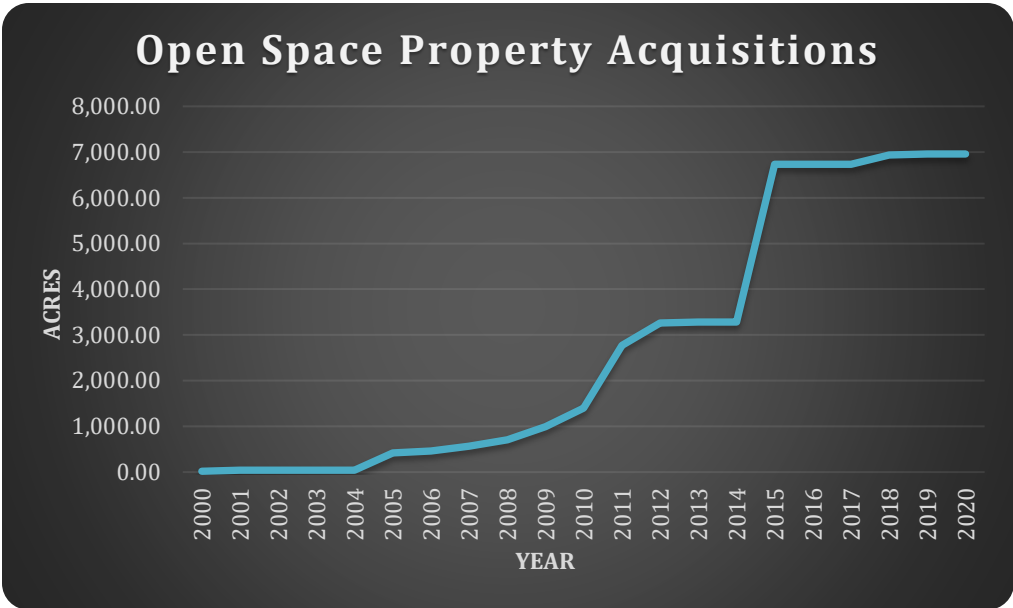
We welcomed new staff in 2020 to assist in the management of 6,958 acres of open space throughout Carson City. A small but mighty team, the Open Space Division is comprised of Lyndsey Boyer, who was promoted

from Senior Natural Resource Specialist to the role of Open Space Manager in May 2020. Gregg Berggren continued his role as the Trails Coordinator, and Jared Whitaker continued as our Open Space Maintenance Coordinator. Bill Beck returned to our team as our Open Space Seasonal Maintenance Worker, while Chris Ford worked the summer as our Recreation AmeriCorps Intern.

History of Open Space

The Open Space Division was created in 1996 with the passing of the Question 18 - Quality of Life Initiative. Carson City residents at the time voted to increase sales tax ¼ of 1 percent to fund the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks, open space, trails, and recreation facilities. The first Open Space property, Moffat

Open Space was acquired in 2000. The most recent acquisition was completed in 2019 to purchase 20-acres in the Highway-50 west corridor. The Open Space Division manages 6,958-acres of floodplain, agricultural land and scenic viewsheds in Carson City. Additionally, staff are responsible for managing or assisting with the management of nearly 70 miles of shared use pathways and single-track trails throughout Carson City. The Open Space Division acquires property



through a variety of means, including fee-title acquisition and donation. Additionally, nearly 50% of Open Space acreage was acquired in 2015 from the BLM via a federal land exchange called the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009. This includes the Prison Hill Recreation Area, Silver Saddle Ranch and the Ambrose Carson River Natural Area.

The Open Space Program in Carson City is incredibly unique in our region and unlike any other program in Nevada. No other county has been able to pass the same type of ballot initiative focused on land preservation through a very modest sales tax increase. By utilizing this funding and leveraging it further using grants, Carson City has been able to purchase and preserve unique and critical lands throughout Carson City, including the majority of the Carson River corridor. Keeping the Carson River corridor in an undeveloped natural state with a protected floodplain protects Carson City from catastrophic and costly damage during a flood event. Carson City has also been able to preserve the historic legacy of ranching in Eagle Valley by purchasing Silver Saddle Ranch and Old Buzzy’s Ranch – one of the few remnants of agriculture remaining in Carson City. Lastly, by focusing on our viewsheds and trail connectivity Carson City has been able to preserve the scenic quality of our foothills while also creating a legacy and reputation for incredible trail systems and recreation opportunities in our Open Space areas. Carson City is truly lucky that voters 25 years ago had the foresight in mind to protect this beautiful landscape!

Land Acquisitions

As of December 2020, approximately 6,958 acres of land have been protected or obtained through purchases, donations, or transfers using the Quality of Life/Question 18 funds at a cost of \$11,006,277. Grants or other supplemental funding have provided \$8,856,757 for a total of cost of \$19,863,034!

Land Management

Despite the challenges that 2020 brought to our Department and staff, management and maintenance activities remained our highest priority. With the significant increase in use of our parks, trails and open space, staff had to adapt to new challenges to continue to provide quality recreational experiences to our residents. To support this increased use, staff increased informational signage throughout our facilities by installing wayfinding trail signage, trailhead kiosks and interpretive signage. All new signage was designed using the Department's newly developed Signage Master Plan. The new signage aims to connect a site to its visitors, identify, direct, and interpret features and improve knowledge and safety. Signs also identify the location as a Carson City site, which evokes images of Carson's rich history, well-maintained facilities, and a reputation for excellent outdoor recreation. We hope with this subtle change we will continue towards our goal of improving the aesthetics and information on our Open Space properties and continue educating Carson City residents about the public land and recreation opportunities in their backyards that have been funded by them!



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Despite new challenges, staff also remained busy throughout the year completing our more routine natural resource management and maintenance tasks, including everything from noxious weed abatement in the spring, to fuel reduction and restoration activities in the fall. Staff worked to create and maintain fuel breaks at the wildland urban interface where Open Space meets private property to mitigate future fire risk as well as increased safety for adjacent property owners. Staff continued to implement the Open Space Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program, utilizing a variety of methods of controlling nuisance and noxious weeds including herbicide treatments, manual removal, and re-seeding/re-vegetation with desirable species to discourage weed infestations. Reseeding was also completed in a small burned area at Moffat Open Space, as well as in several decommissioned areas in the Prison Hill OHV Area. Silver Saddle Ranch also remains a property with a lot of management activities, including: weed abatement, beaver activity management on the Mexican Ditch, and vegetation management such as working to clear the travel corridor along roads and trails, tree pruning and removal. Highlights from a few notable management projects are outlined below.

Carson River Clean-up

Open Space staff held the 3rd annual Carson River Clean-up in July this year, walking the Carson River from East Silver Saddle Ranch to Ambrose Carson River Natural Area, picking up trash and mapping noxious weeds along the way. This year staff found that while the overall volume of trash has reduced through our efforts in the past few years, there was still plenty of trash to clean-up, including 8 tires that were removed from the river! Staff plan to



continue this tradition every year as it is a great way to monitor the health of the river while stewarding it. Staff also had plenty of wildlife sightings, including several ospreys, black capped night herons, and snowy egrets.

Carson City Sheep Project

Fuels management on acquired lands, as well as natural parks and the wildland-urban interface, continues to be a top priority for the Open Space Division. 2020 was the 14th consecutive year that Carson City utilized targeted sheep grazing to reduce fine fuel on the landscape. This project was initially created following the devastation from the 2004 Waterfall Fire.



2020 was an exciting year for the sheep program! Staff worked with consultants to update the Carson City Integrated Grazing Management Plan for Fuels Management. This was a multi-agency effort and included input from all stakeholders involved in the project and was finalized just before grazing season. Notable changes to the program also included grazing two separate bands of sheep, one comprised of ewes only to graze the lands north of Carson – specifically Lakeview, Vice Canyon and behind WNC, and a second band comprised of lambs and ewes that focus in the usual project area – Greenhouse Garden Center, C-Hill and Kings Canyon. Coordinating two bands of sheep allowed for more effective grazing across the nearly 2,000-acres of project area as we have been able to target cheatgrass during its prime palatability, resulting in more effective fuel reduction. Additionally, this year was the first year that the project grazed on Washoe Tribal land, which is an important piece of property for fuel reduction as there has been several wildfires in this area in the past. Additionally, the U.S. Forest Service received permission to graze Borda Meadow, which has not been included in the project previously and has begun accumulating fine fuels in the Kings Canyon area. Both additions provide greater continuity between grazed areas, increasing Carson City’s overall resilience to devastating wildfire.

Trail Use in 2020

Throughout this past year people in very large numbers discovered the many benefits of trails as COVID-19 limited many of the other activities that people normally enjoy. The trails that exist just outside our front door provided individuals and families with exercise, refuge, comfort, and solace. Many took to trails for the first time. While the “COVID-19 spike” will eventually soften, the general trends in trail use are expected to continue.



In 2020, our Department acquired a few bike/pedestrian counters and the data collected reflects the growing trends in trail use. The Waterfall Trail averaged about 172 people/day, which extrapolates to over 63,000 people/year. Numbers on our three new Carson River Trails very quickly grew to well over 100 people/day on each trail, with expected annual usage to exceed 40,000 for each trail.



It is good to see more people out using trails to enjoy our public lands. Hopefully this will help to develop appreciation that will translate into a desire to protect and preserve these special places. Along with increased usage, however, we are also beginning to see occasional conflict between the various user groups which include hikers, runners, bicycles, horses, wheelchairs, those with dogs, wildlife viewers, families with children and strollers, and more. Most often people are simply not aware of current trail etiquette and practices between user groups and so throughout the coming year we will be addressing user conflict through messaging and education. For example, all new trailhead signs will display the yellow Trail Courtesy diagram and include various “*Share the Trail*” messages. One of those messages is the slogan “*Go Slow and Say Hello*” which we will be promoting on all signage and in future trail etiquette videos.

Dedication of Bob’s Trail

Our Department, along with Muscle Powered, was very fortunate and honored to be able to dedicate Bob’s Trail to Mayor Bob Crowell prior to his passing. Mayor Bob was a strong advocate for Carson City trails and Open Space, which he boasted about at every opportunity. The trail connects Ash Canyon Road with the new Eagle View Open Space and provides spectacular views of Carson City and the lands Mayor Bob was so proud of.



Prison Hill Recreation Area, 5th Street Trails

In August, the Great Basin Institute conducted training for a trail crew at our 5th Street Loop Trails. Their crew completed the connection of our Sagebrush Loop trail with the new Prison Hill East trail, at no cost to our

Department. Also, staff placed four interpretive panels on the 5th Street Trails. We placed one panel for each loop – Sagebrush, Bitterbrush and Rabbitbrush, and a fourth panel was placed at the Ranch Overlook which highlights the 5,000 acres of Carson City Parks and Open Space that may be viewed from this location. These improvements in addition to the trailhead enhancements were funded by the Recreational Trails Program and

the new trailhead has become very popular as it provides access to a number of new trails. On weekends, staff routinely observe as many as 24 cars in the parking lot!



Waterfall Trail Improvements

In 2020 staff completed several improvements to the Waterfall Trail to improve safety and sustainability. Improvements included: general maintenance on several segments of the trail, decommissioning social trails, removal of graffiti, widening of the trail at the top near the waterfall for increased safety and improvements along the creek including signage replacement and fence repair. Additional improvements at the trailhead will be completed in the summer of 2021, utilizing funding from the Federal Lands Access Program grant, in partnership with Carson City Public Works which will increase parking capacity up to 25 vehicles, including trailer parking for OHV’s and equestrian users, and also includes the addition of a single vault toilet. These improvements will greatly improve user experience in this area and accommodate the significantly increased use observed at this site over the past several years.

Grant Funding

In addition to the Quality of Life Initiative funds that the Open Space Division receives, grant funds are also sought and leveraged wherever possible. Currently, the Open Space Division manages or is an identified partner on 13 individual grants, totaling nearly \$8.2 million in funds that help Carson City manage the 6,958 acres of Open Space, or complete large improvement projects to trails and trailheads for the benefit of all Carson City residents.

Project Name / Area	Grantor	Grant Award	Period	Quality of Life-Open Space contribution (cash or in-kind)
Carson River Canyon Rifle Range Fire Restoration				
	Community Foundation of Western Nevada, Dream Tags Foundation	\$10,000	12/31/2020	\$20,967.75 (cash)
Carson River Trail System, Phase 2 – Ranch Connections				
	Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act	\$1,843,685	6/30/2022	\$50,000 (cash)
Hamm Property Acquisition				
	Land and Water Conservation Fund	\$250,000	12/31/2021	\$250,000 (cash)
Kings Canyon Road (Dirt Road)				
	Nevada Off-Highway Vehicle Commission (NOHVC)	\$18,000 (sub-grant from USFS to Open Space)	12/31/2021	\$0
	Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	\$142,500	12/31/2021	\$0
Kings Canyon / Waterfall Trailhead				
	Federal Land Access Program (grant award to Public Works)	\$5.3 million (to Public Works)	12/31/2023	\$35,350 (cash) \$33,275 (cash)
Mexican Dam Ditch Intake Structure Improvement (Mexican Ditch Bridge)				
	Carson Water Subconservancy District	\$25,000	6/30/2020	\$27,500
Noxious Weed Abatement				
	Carson Water Subconservancy District (annual funding)	\$15,000	6/30/2020	\$0
Prison Hill Recreation Area, 5th Street Trailhead				
	Recreational Trails Program (RTP) / Nevada State Parks and Federal Highways Administration	\$200,000	9/1/2020	\$51,141 (20% match – cash and in-kind)
Prison Hill Recreation Area, Motorized Area				
Phase 2	1) Nevada Off-Highway Vehicle Commission (NOHVC)	1) \$100,000	12/31/2020	\$34,640 (cash and in-kind; \$19,381 for UTV and trailer purchase)
	2) Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	2) \$100,000		
Phase 3	3) Nevada Off-Highway Vehicle Commission (NOHVC)	3) \$100,000	12/31/2022	\$0
	4) Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	4) \$150,000		

Capital Improvement Projects

Bee City USA

In celebration of the 2018 Bee City USA #76 designation in Carson City, and capitalizing on the momentum and success from the 2019 Chamber of Commerce Leadership class, the 2020 Leadership Class completed a project to further improve the habitat and trail surrounding the Bee Hotel at the Foothill Trail and Greenhouse Project. The recent class planted 25 bee-friendly trees to augment the pollinator garden and the bee-hotel that was placed by the 2019 Chamber Leadership Class. They also made improvements to the Serenity Stroll and added metal artwork along the trail with words of encouragement as part of the “wellness trail” theme and proximity to the Cancer Center. Open Space helped the Leadership Class with their 2020 project by installing a new kiosk sign. We hope that with the combination of the unique projects in this area this site can become a central location for education opportunities, public engagement in pollinator conservation issues and solutions, as well as to learn more about food production.



Carson River Trail System, Phase II – Ranch Connections

The Open Space Program was awarded a \$1.8 million-dollar grant through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) in 2016. The grant funds supported the construction of several multi-use pathways on the Prison Hill Recreation Area, Mexican Ditch Trail, Silver Saddle Ranch, and the Old Buzzy’s Ranch. On October 30th, 2020, our Department hosted the grand opening and ribbon cutting for this new trail system.



The project included three new segments of family-friendly trails totaling three miles:

- Prison Hill Trail East connects the 5th Street trailhead with Silver Saddle Ranch
- Mexican Ditch Extension completes a missing segment of the Mexican Ditch Trail through Silver Saddle Ranch
- Buzzy's Ranch Trail connects Carson River Park with Riverview Park

Together, these three segments of trail enhance connectivity with other trails in Carson City, enable endless possibilities for loops, and make it possible to walk or ride a bicycle or horse along five miles of the Carson River from Morgan Mill to Mexican Dam. A few small items remain to be completed in 2021, including the addition of interpretive panels at several locations.



Mexican Dam – Mexican Ditch Inlet Safe Passage

In early 2019, Carson City Open Space was awarded a grant from CWSD for a proposed project that will make modifications to the inlet to allow safe passage around the Mexican Dam for hikers, mountain bikers, runners and equestrians, and will enable portage of small watercraft. This project was supported by both Douglas County Community Services and the Carson Valley Trails Committee because it will extend float trip opportunities into Carson Valley and improve options for trail connectivity between the two counties. This project is also an important component in future connectivity for a loop trail around Prison Hill and for extension of the Aquatic Trail into Carson Valley. Construction on this project began in the fall of 2019 and was completed in 2020.



Silver Saddle Ranch

Two major capital improvement projects were completed at Silver Saddle Ranch in early 2020. A new furnace was installed in the Red House, allowing for more efficient and reliable heating during winter months. Additionally, after completing monitoring for asbestos and lead paint, the demolition of the 'White House' was also completed in early 2020. The removal of the White House allowed for construction of the new Mexican Ditch Extension trail segment to pass through this area.

Trail Projects

Other trail projects are being planned for the Carson City area, including the Capital to Tahoe Trail and the Lincoln Bypass Trail which will link Carson City trail systems with trails in Tahoe; Centennial to Washoe Lake State Park; and a connection from Clear Creek to Kings Canyon. Also, working in cooperation with Western Nevada College (WNC) and Muscle Powered, Carson City will assume responsibility for the maintenance of trails behind WNC. This will increase west side trail connectivity and allow for signage placement and inclusion of these trails in our Carson City

trail system. Also, working with Muscle Powered, volunteers widened 150 ft of trail south of the Mexican Dam to facilitate construction of a takeout area for small watercraft. This is a part of the Carson River Aquatic Trail Project.

Activities and Events

Of the many challenges presented by a global pandemic, activities and events were the most challenging to sustain. Our Department had been working over the past few years to create and build a robust interpretive program and these programs had become immensely popular by March of 2020 when shutdowns began, and event restrictions were put in place. However, throughout the year our Department developed creative solutions



to still be able to provide programming that ensured the safety of participants. Early in the year, we focused on development of virtual programming. Staff created a series of videos to engage with our users remotely on a variety of topics such as trail etiquette and social distancing, noxious weeds, foot patrol with our Park Rangers and wildlife awareness. Also, because some of our most popular areas, such as the Waterfall Trail were seeing record numbers of use, we also created videos to highlight lesser used trails and areas in order to introduce users to new areas to recreate in. We also created programs that highlighted on-going projects and programs – like updates from the Prison Hill OHV area or an exploration of our new Carson River Trails system. We even created PSAs and education about

how to properly handle pet waste on trails. The photo to the left shows our “Poop Fairies” who helped with this particular topic!

Since we could not hold an in-person event for National Trails Day in 2020, staff were able to put together a video with Muscle Powered and the late Mayor Crowell highlighting the importance of our trails in Carson City and featuring the newly acquired Eagle View Open Space in Ash Canyon. Staff were also able to dedicate ‘Bob’s Trail’ to Mayor Crowell that day, something that was incredibly meaningful to both Mayor Bob and staff.

Volunteer Activities and Events

The Open Space Division proudly recognizes volunteer efforts provided by individuals and organizations, and also acknowledges and appreciates any and all who help to clean and maintain our precious lands. Throughout 2020, despite impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Open Space Program received an estimated value of **\$72,066.40** from volunteers. At minimum, volunteers spent **2,649.5** hours on our lands, at a value of \$27.20/hour (the latest dollar value available, according to www.independentsector.org).



Numerous organizations volunteered their time in 2020. Their efforts were mainly focused on trail construction and maintenance, trash clean-up, and river stewardship. Some of these organizations, and other volunteer efforts are highlighted on the next page.

Event/Organization	Date	Location	Quantified Impact	# People	Total Hours	Monetary Value
Canyon Clean-Up for MLK Day	1/20/2020	East Silver Saddle Ranch - Canyons	3.5 tons or 7,080 lbs. of trash removed	52	156	\$4,243.20
Cottonwood Wrapping	2/22/2020	Empire Ranch Trail	32 Cottonwood trees wrapped	13	26	\$707.20
Click-Bond Adopt-A-Trail	4/18/2020	Empire Ranch Trail		4	6	\$163.20
Click-Bond Adopt-A-Trail	6/6/2020	Empire Ranch Trail		2	4	\$108.80
June Weedy Wednesday	6/17/2020	Buzzy's Ranch	10 bags of bull thistle removed	6	9	\$244.80
Matt Gaskell Eagle Scout Project	6/27/2020	Prison Hill		26	117	\$3,182.40
July Mutt Mitt Volunteers	July 2020		29 bundles of bags placed into stations	6	17.5	\$476.00
Kiwanis Adopt-A-Trail	8/11/2020	Carson River Park		12	12	\$326.40
Click-Bond Adopt-A-Trail	8/15/2020	Empire Ranch Trail		7	7	\$190.40
August Mutt Mitt Volunteers	August 2020		44 bundles of bags placed into stations	7	18.5	\$503.20
National Public Lands Day	9/26/2020	Freeway Multi-use Path (Airport Rd. to Lompa Ln.)		3	4.5	\$122.40
September Mutt Mitt Volunteers	September 2020			7	23.5	\$639.20
River Wrangles Workday: Streambank Stabilization and Planting	10/10/20	Mexican Ditch Trail from Silver Saddle Ranch to the Mexican Dam	Planted 100 Cottonwood trees and seeded with a native blend	15	30	\$816.00
Michael Service Eagle Scout Project C-Hill	10/24/20	C-Hill		26	104	\$2,828.80
Geocaching Trash Event: Cache-In-Trash-Out	10/24/20	Lone Mountain Trail	26 bags of trash, 142 lbs.	15	30	\$816.00
October Mutt Mitt Volunteers	October 2020			7	25.5	\$693.60
Prison Hill Clean-Up with FOPH	11/7/2020	Prison Hill OHV Area	Filled a 6-yard dumpster about 3/4 full	21	63	\$1,713.60
November Mutt Mitt Volunteers	November 2020			10	23.5	\$639.20
Muscle Powered	2020	Trail planning, construction, and maintenance	MANY miles of trail -- Amazing!	50	1972.5	\$53,652.00
TOTALS	-	-	-	289	2,649.5	\$72,066.40



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