

BLACK FOREST TRAILS ASSOCIATION NEWS

President's Corner

by John Wallace

Happy New Year fellow trail users. My name is John Wallace. I was elected president of our association at last October's membership meeting. I have been a member since buying a property in the SW corner of the trees on Falcon Drive in the fall of 2017. I was an at-large board member until 2022 and treasurer in 2023.

I grew up on Long Island, on 5-acre lot 23 miles from New York City, in an amazingly rural environment where we could not see the light of another house at night. I spent my younger days wandering in the woods, drinking from natural springs (without a purifier), and learning about the natural world. In my travels since, I have lived in upstate New York, Montana, Saudi Arabia, Colorado (San Luis Valley), Idaho, Washington, Wisconsin, England (Cambridge), Nebraska, Colorado (Colorado City), Oregon, and back to Colorado (Colorado Springs and Black Forest). The Rocky Mountain Front Range is my favorite climate and location in the country.

I have attended 5 different universities, with my first degree in soil science leading to two glorious summers camping out full time in three National Forests in SW Montana describing soils and erosion, in amazing, remote locations, randomly chosen by a computer in Washington D.C. After graduating, there were no soil science opportunities in wildland due to a federal hiring freeze. I moved over to agriculture, specializing in efficient irrigation water management for my M.S. degree. After a year growing wheat in Saudi Arabia, I spent three years with an irrigation and farm consulting company in the San Luis Valley and discovered the potato's fascinatingly complex biology and production systems. Back to school I went for a Ph.D. in horticulture and began my career as an agricultural research scientist and partner in a multi-state potato farming operation. I retired in 2015 and my email name and occasional nickname, Potatodoc, is my only remaining connection to the potato industry.

My present activities include remodeling a great 50-year-old house, occasional travel, and advancing the cause of interconnecting trails in the Black Forest and all of El Paso County. I am the friend/adopter of Black Forest Regional Park, a member of the EPC Parks Advisory Board, and now President of BFTA. Those roles have helped me become familiar with the personnel,

policies, and politics of our local parks, trails and open spaces. My objectives in this involvement include:

- Increasing the miles of trail rights of way (ROW) in the county
- Encouraging the actual building of trails on those rights of way (separate goals as described in another article)
- Developing connecting social trails where needed to connect with existing/proposed trails and open spaces.
- Increasing awareness of, and compliance with Leave No Trace principles of outdoor recreation.
- Working with civic and government partners to fund building out the proposed regional and secondary trails.
- Modernizing BFTA's computer records and systems for easier sharing and greater transparency among the board of directors
- Improving BFTA's digital engagement with young people and new residents in our community

I look forward to working with our new officers and board members and look forward to meeting lots of our members in person at future events.

Section 16 cleanup – Volunteers welcome

by Nancy Reinhardt Black Forest Trails Association board member at large

We are going to match our cleanup efforts with the Great American Cleanup again this year on April 27. We'll begin at 9 am. Bring gloves, water, and wear closed-toe shoes. Because Black Forest weather can be a bit unpredictable we will have a rain date one week later on May 4, also at 9 am.

We'll be doing the trail in section 16 and the roads outside (kids will stay inside and not do the roads). We will provide bags which we will put near the road when filled.

See you in the parking lot at 8510 Burgess Rd. For more information call or text 719-339-9319.

What is a PAB? and Black Forest Trails Update

by John Wallace, President, BFTA

The Parks Advisory Board (PAB) consists of nine citizen volunteers, one from each county commissioner district and two at-large. I have been a member for about a year and a half, and several former BFTA officers have held seats in the past. The board discusses plans, projects, and financial information with the Parks Department staff. In addition, the board reviews, and comments on developer proposals from a parks, trails, and open space perspective, within the limitations of the Parks Master Plan and County Land Use Plans. When a development proposal is adjacent to, or includes, a trail or park proposed by the Parks Master Plan we can make recommendations to the commissioners for how that should be handled by the developer. If a

project does not intersect parks or trails, a recommendation for cash fees for regional and/or urban parks, in lieu of land dedication, is made in accordance with an established schedule of fees per dwelling unit. Most often those recommended land dedications and/or fees are included in the development approval by the county commissioners. But as the name says, our role is only advisory. An important thing to note is land dedication only requires an easement for a proposed trail, leaving the actual building of a trail to the county. This process results in discontinuous stretches of easement interrupted by privately held sections along the proposed routes. In addition, there is no automatically allocated budget for building trails on the easements, and that usually only happens when the easements become continuous and grant funding is found for the construction.

The December PAB meeting had lots of good news for trails in Black Forest. Parks administration has been trying to get Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) funds to complete a shorter trail in the southwest corner of the Pinerias Open Space for two years and now they have secured it. The route, in the southwest corner, is not finalized but will NOT connect Pinerias to Sec 16 and will not cross any major road. It is not clear yet if it will be a loop or out and back ending on Shoup Rd east of Vollmer Rd. Rocky Mountain Field Institute for design and engineering, and a youth volunteer group for construction, have been lined up for completion in 2024.

In the opposite corner of the forest, the group developing Flying Horse North has submitted a Preliminary Plan for the 747 remaining undeveloped acres of the 1459-acre development. This land is north of Cathedral Pines/Black Forest Regional Park, running along Black Forest Road up to Hodgen Road. The proposal is for mixed density residential and commercial lots and includes 22.8% open space (10% is required) and a 25-foot-wide easement for the proposed Regional Trail connecting Black Forest Regional Park with the Fox Run Regional Trail along Hodgen Road. The PAB recommendation to the commissioners includes an easement for about 3 miles of the Fox Run Regional Trail along the northern boundary of the subject property and a recommendation for a meandering connecting trail rather than the linear layout shown on the preliminary plan. The Commissioners approved a Sketch Plan for the development on Nov. 16 which presumably includes the PAB recommendations. The Preliminary Plan is for 796 dwelling units with an average density of 2.66 units per 2.5 acres which will require rezoning from 2.5 acre residential to the mixed density P.U.D. The good part is that if this project goes forward through several more approval steps, the north-south connector trail would most likely be built by the developer as part of their landscaping and accessible to the public within a few years.

A third project came before the board in November for the Overlook At Homestead Preliminary Plan. This development plan is for 62 dwelling units on 350 acres immediately west of Homestead Ranch Regional Park. It would include a 25-foot easement (and probable building) of a segment of the proposed Palmer Divide Regional Trail which would connect the existing Homestead Ranch ridge trail to the Meadow Lake trail. The positive here is completion of a connecting trail; the negative is that sections of the trail will probably be paved sidewalks along internal roads because of the steep slopes in the area. The PAB recommended avoiding paved trails, if possible, for both scenic value and equestrian access. The parks staff liaison said that discussion will continue with the developer.

Trail Etiquette and Leave No Trace

by Gary Sherwood BFTA board member at large

If you have used any of the trails in the local area, I'm certain you've seen signs describing trail etiquette. These informational signs depict the hierarchy of yielding to fellow users. Mountain bikers are to yield to equestrians and hikers, hikers are to yield to equestrians and equestrians have the right of way to all other trail users. There will be instances where hikers or equestrians will yield to cyclists. It is still important for the mountain bike rider to slow down, leave appropriate space and acknowledge the courtesy.

Another aspect of trail etiquette concerns going uphill or downhill. As a rule the person going uphill should always have the right of way because once stopped trying to start uphill again can be a challenge. Downhill users have gravity on their side making it much easier to start again.

Mountain biking has exploded in popularity in recent years. There are basically two types of riders, those who just enjoy riding casually on the trails and those who enjoy fast speeds. My wife and I belong to the first group. There is nothing wrong with riding fast if you have a long enough line-of-sight to see what's ahead, that you are riding within your capabilities to slow down quickly when needed and that you are not sliding the rear tire aggressively in turns causing potential damage to the trail base.

Trail users walking their dogs should always keep their dogs under control even if they happen to be in a no-leash area. An out-of-control dog can spook a horse or cause a cyclist to swerve or fall, making it very dangerous for the horse rider, the cyclist and the dog. Dog walkers should always pick up and dispose of their dog's poop.

It is also important to have situational awareness as to others on the trail. Hikers wearing earbuds often cannot hear other users coming up from behind. I have a bell on my bike and often even ringing my bell repeatedly doesn't alert the hikers that I'm coming up to them from behind. Be aware of your surroundings.

For the sake of the trail base, it would be good if we all avoid hiking, biking, and riding our horses after a big rain or snowfall because the soft surface can be easily damaged. When dry again there can be ruts, holes and erosion caused by using the trail when wet and soft.

Incorporating some of the seven principles of the Leave No Trace program into the discussion. First, do not litter on the trail and remove any waste you may produce or encounter such as dog poop, trash, etc. Not only is trash unsightly but it can be dangerous to birds and other small animals. Stay on the trail, in other words, stay on the trail and do not make/take shortcuts. There was a lot of work involved in creating and maintaining the trails and by cutting the trail you not only disturb natural surfaces, but you change the original intent of the trail.

Being considerate of others involves being polite, yielding the right-of-way when necessary and just recognizing that **everyone** has the right to use the multi-use trails. A friendly greeting can go a long way in creating a healthy and cooperative relationship to others on the trail.



Homestead Ranch Regional Park

by Cimarron Hatch, Secretary, Black Forest Trails Association

Homestead Ranch Regional Park located at 16444 Gollihar Rd. in Peyton is well worth a visit to take in its tranquility and spectacular views. As the easternmost park in the Black Forest region, it offers a mix of landscapes where the Palmer Divide meets the High Prairie. Ridges and unique rock formations allow trails that start out steep but transform into grassland plateaus, with a total of over 5 miles to explore. Trail work is ongoing, and some areas have already been updated to offer a more gradual incline and erosion control.

One of the best views in the park can be found at the overlook along the Rattlesnake Trail where ponderosa pines frame Pikes Peak to the west and the Plains reach the distant Spanish Peaks to the south.

The 458-acre park was once the site of a ranch dating back to the 1870s, and a few reminders of the past use can be found, such as a windmill and water trough along the Homestead Ranch Trail. Equestrians frequenting the trails help to emphasize the heritage of the West. The wide-open spaces spur contemplation about what it must have been like to traverse this area in the past.

There is something for everyone to enjoy at this park. The pond at the base of the bluffs provides a peaceful place for a stroll without elevation gain. For the casual angler, fishing is allowed with a valid state license. Numerous species of birds take advantage of the water source, including red-winged blackbirds during the spring and summer months. Deer and other wildlife can often be seen throughout the park. The playground is a popular spot for families, along with the grass sports field and event pavilions.

Class 1 e-bikes on trails

by Gary Sherwood, BFTA at-large board member

The trails in Colorado often have significant elevation gains which many riders, including myself, find difficult to ride on a traditional mountain bike due to age and/or various medical issues. I was introduced to e-mountain bikes (e-MTB) by a friend that had some health issues which necessitated him needing the assistance of a small electric motor.

As I got more into riding e-MTBs, I became more aware of the resistance to allowing e-MTBs on natural surface trails. Currently, the city of Colorado Springs allows only Class 1 bikes on “improved trails”, which can be described as commuter trails that are often paved and designed for urban bikes, strollers, and walkers/runners more so than mountain bikes. Natural surface trails prohibit all e-MTBs.

There are some common misconceptions about e-MTBs that may be leading to the resistance to allowing them on natural surface trails. Class 1 e-MTBs are pedal-assist only, meaning they still require pedaling by the rider. If the rider stops pedaling, the assistance immediately stops. The electric assist also turns off when the rider exceeds 20 miles per hour (mph). Past 20 mph, you can still pedal the bike but with no assistance. My e-MTB weighing just under 50 pounds uses the same wheels, tires, brakes, handlebars, seat, etc. as an analog bike. There are some e-MTBs weighing as little as 34 pounds. The main propulsion of an e-MTB is still provided by the rider, with only up to 1 HP of assist. Overall, the extra weight of e-MTBs on natural surface trails will not make a significant difference to the wear and tear of the trail. Additionally, the electric assist on e-MTBs is almost silent. The most you may hear is a slight whirring sound which is often masked by the noise the tires make when traveling on dirt or gravel. Any rider, on any type of bike, could overtake a slower rider in a rude or dangerous way. It boils down to the rider, not the equipment. With Class 1 e-MTBs, since you must be pedaling the bike to have the electric assist engaged, the rear tire will never spin on its own and create damage to the trail surface. The electric assist does provide a degree of assistance, but you still must pedal on your own to provide much of the power. While some may consider e-MTBs too “easy” and that they don’t provide any cardiovascular or fitness benefits, studies have shown that riders who ride e-MTBs tend to ride more often and for longer distances than those on analog bikes.

I’m an older guy. I’ve had three knee replacements, three rotator cuff surgeries, and a 2-level surgical fusion in my cervical spine, along with other musculoskeletal surgeries. My cardio fitness level is also not what it used to be. But despite all that, I still enjoy going outdoors and enjoying the quietness and solitude of riding on the natural surface trails away from the hustle and bustle of the city. I hope that providing this information will be productive in reversing the ban of Class 1 e-MTBs on our local trails.

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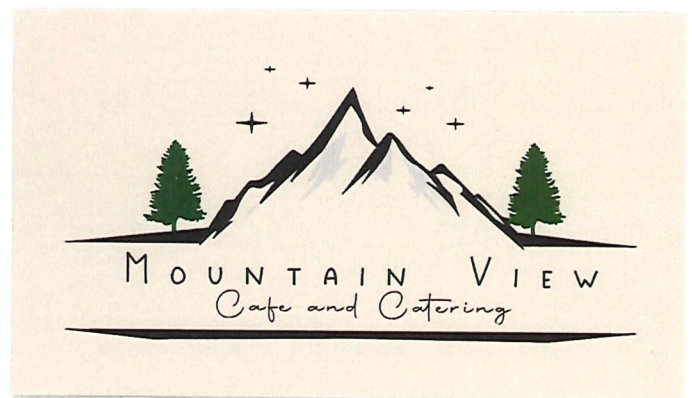
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Black Forest Trails Association

P.O. Box 88041

Colorado Springs CO 80908

BFTA Membership

By supporting BFTA with your annual membership, you help provide the funding and support for a whole range of issues that affect Black Forest trails and the lifestyle we all want to protect. The Black Forest Trails Association is a non-profit organization under IRS Code Section 501(c)(3). Donations are fully deductible to the extent permitted by tax law.

There are 4 tiers of BFTA membership (Dues are tax deductible):

- 1) Individual / family (\$15 per year),
- 2) Business / club (\$30 per year),
- 3) Donor (\$50 per year)
- 4) Lifetime (\$150 one time).

Membership runs from April 1 to March 31, so if you become a member or renew now, your membership will be good through March 31, 2023. We use DonorBox, which is easy and secure, to accept online payments, or you can print out an application and mail your payment via US Postal service — either option can be completed via our website at <https://www.blackforesttrails.org/membership.html>