

Trails Master Plan/Community Trails Network
Implementation Update & Group Progress
12/21/06

Background:

- Town Council voted unanimously to direct Town Personnel to complete a plan to implement the Trails Master Plan and Community Trails Network proposal, per the framework provided by the Memorandum from Councilmember Romance to Fred Carpenter, dated September 30, 2006.
- Town Personnel were directed to present to Council within 60 days as to the status of the plan development

Within the past 60 days:

- Leon Keddington called together a group of individuals on Thursday, November 9, to form a Parks and Recreation and/or Trails Task Force. The group present voted to focus solely on Trails, therefore was determined to be called the Trails Task Force. Individuals present included both Town Personnel, Town Council members and various community members.
- Robb Beery from the Fire Department volunteered his mapping talents and resources to map all roads, Forest Service roads & trails, unmarked trails, trailheads, trail access points and power lines on a Town map, which shows very detailed information on Payson (subdivisions, individual lot #'s, etc.) for trail location purposes.
- The second meeting of the Trails Task Force was held at the Payson Library on Thursday, November 30 to decide on group priorities and tasks. Town Personnel were present again, including LaRon Garrett, Robb Beery, Nelson Beck, Jerry Owen and Mary McMullen. Andy Romance from the Town Council was also present. The Forest Service contact, Walt Thole, was invited but unable to attend. The group decided to split the Town up into quadrants and have members assess the areas by walking/riding/driving to access current trail/road presences were correct, along with conditions that may encourage/hinder further trail development in specific areas. The map Robb Beery generated was used for data.
- Between the second and third meetings, it was decided by the Mayor and Town Staff that the original Trails Task Force group needed to be defined into two separate, but collaborating groups: the Town Trails Group, made up of Town Personnel, and the Trails Task Force, made up of other community members, special interest groups and the Forest Service. The deadline for presentation on certain deliverables by January 4 applies only to the Town Personnel, while Trails Task Force members are involved to assist Town Personnel in coordination, prioritization and implementation of the Trails Master Plan.
- Both groups met again on Wednesday, December 13 to discuss data collected after completion of the Payson quadrant assessments. The focus was to compare with old map with the current view of Town and identify what still exists, what are alternatives when needed, what trails may be possible and what may not be anymore due to Town development and conditions. After current data and feedback were collected and drawn on the map, areas were prioritized depending

upon various factors and community interest/use. Where appropriate, alternative trails were identified as being better choices than those originally proposed in Robb's map.

Walt Thole from the Forest Service attended and demonstrated intent in actively participating in the Trails Task Force process. He reported that between the time of the Trails Master Plan completion in 1998 to present, the Forest Service has been picking away at development of certain trails included in the Master Plan, such as Goat Camp Ruins, the Houston Mesa Loop and the Event Center trails. These projects have been done in collaboration with the Gila County Trails Association, temporary part-time Forest Service employees and youth service groups. He also provided useful information to the group on expected timelines regarding use of Federal lands (firebreak), which will involve Federal Government environmental assessments. These assessments can take anywhere from 6 months to years, depending upon the environmental impact of the trails. In addition, environmental assessments would be required on portions of the firebreak that would be used as part of the Trails system, even though the area has already been cleared. Robb Beery suggested that at 2-3 miles out of Town lies an already connected network of Forest Service roads/trails. This aligns with the original Trails Master Plan Regional Trails Map, which shows all trails within a 3-mile radius of Payson. This could be a very feasible alternative to use when portions of the firebreak do not look like good trail areas, or a concurrent trail opportunity to include in the planning process. Walt Thole also mentioned that the Forest Service is working on designation of OHV use to only specific numbered Forest Service roads by 2009, and this could potentially have implications to the peripheral roads & trails included in the Community Trails Network.

Dan Basinski from the Gila County Trails Alliance also attended the meeting. Dan was involved in the development of the original 1998 Trails Master Plan and is currently working with the Forest Service to improve or clear a few trailheads/accesses outside of Town, with the assistance of the Gila County Trails Alliance members. These trailheads and access points are all included in the original Trails Master Plan Regional Trails Map.

Currently:

- To summarize priorities set jointly by the Town Trails Group and Trails Task Force to begin immediate implementation of the original Trails Master Plan with additions from the Community Trails Network by Andy Romance:
 - Refining of the Trails map of Payson to include a 2-3 mile perimeter outside of Town, along with specific areas where alternative trail routes were discussed. These connecting roads/trails that currently exist that could form part of the "wheel" perimeter in conjunction with the fire break. This is basically a melding of the original Trails Master Plan Regional Trails Map with Andy Romance's Community Trails Network proposal – Staff Lead - Rob Beery/Fire Department.

- Continuation of working towards obtaining dedicated public easements on various private and Town properties that currently have or could have trail access, but no current legal route. Initial area of focus - Staff Lead – LaRon Garrett/Engineering Department.
- Incorporation of the Community Trails Network proposed trail specifications for new Town roads – Staff Lead – LaRon Garrett/Engineering Department.
- Discussion and planning of future land exchanges in Town with the Forest Service and private entities that would enable crucial parts of the inner trails structure to connect one part of Town to another. Specific areas of focus – Staff Lead – LaRon Garrett/Engineering and Jerry Owen/Community Development.
- Identification of which trails should be non-motorized, allowing for public feedback and input, and present to the Forest Service for joint planning purposes. Consider “sacrifice areas” where motorized activities are allowed – Lead – Trails Task Force.
- Protection and development of Goat Camp Ruins, in collaboration with the Rim Country Chapter of the Arizona Archaeological Society – Staff Lead – Mary McMullen/Parks & Recreation Department.
- Marking specific trail access points with signs already purchased (from when Trails Master Plan was completed in 1998), once it is identified where the signs can legally be placed – Staff Lead – Nelson Beck/Parks & Recreation Department.
- Implementation through the Town capital improvement budget process the financial means with which to enable significant development of the Trails Master Plan and Community Trails Network to occur beginning in 2007/08 – Lead – Town Staff.
- Solicitation of assistance and support from the Payson Town Council regarding contacting the appropriate Federal authorities/representation, if appropriate, to facilitate the environmental assessment process on fire breaks and other Federal properties – Lead - Town Staff & Trails Task Force.

These priorities generally fit into the original suggested steps for Town of Payson Trails Master Plan Implementation Matrix, but contain more specific, current data.

Per the CDR on Community Trails Network approved by Town Council on 11/2/2006, a 90-day Community Trails Network Implementation Plan will be presented to Town Council in February 2007.