



Flagstaff Biking Organization
PO Box 23851
Flagstaff, AZ 86002
trails@flagstaffbiking.org

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Robert Wallace, Open Space Specialist
City of Flagstaff Parks, Recreation and Open Space
211 West Aspen
Flagstaff, AZ 86001
Submitted electronically

Dear Mr. Wallace,

Thank you for opportunity to comment on the Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan Draft, (GOMTP). We are generally supportive of the plan as laid out in the Draft and are pleased that the City has taken the initiative to manage trails-based recreation on Observatory Mesa.

Background

Flagstaff Biking Organization (FBO) is a group of cyclists who came together to “promote bicycling as a safe and attractive means of transportation and recreation in Northern Arizona.” Our initial project was to put on a Bike to Work Week for our community in May 2002. Building on the success we started to expand our efforts to keep people informed of cycling related issues and galvanize support for better and safer facilities, trails, and trail access. We have a successful and ongoing 21+ year relationship with the Coconino National Forest, Coconino County and the City of Flagstaff, including being a co-signer of the Flagstaff Trails Initiative’s Flagstaff Regional Trails Strategy. Please see <http://www.flagstaffbiking.org> for more information on our organization. Many of our supporters recreate in the Observatory Mesa area. Our supporters will be directly affected by the results of the analysis and its subsequent decision. Please consider our comments as generally representative of our substantial supporter base’s interests.

FBO Stakeholder Status

As mentioned above in the “Background” section of this letter, FBO has a substantial history of partnership with local governments and agencies on trails projects. To elaborate, we funded and co-managed, with Coconino County Parks and Recreation, the construction of the Fort Tuthill Bike Park. We have funded, co-managed and enlisted volunteers for several substantial projects with the Coconino

National Forest including the relatively recent realignments of the Heart and Little Elden Trails, the reconstruction of Little Bear and Little Elden post-Schultz Fire, and currently we are working with the Flagstaff Ranger District on the implementation of the Mount Elden Dry Lake Hills Recreation Project. We were the initiating organization and steward of the construction of the Flagstaff Loop Trail in partnership with the City of Flagstaff, Coconino County and the Coconino National Forest, a section of which is included within the GOMTP footprint. In fact, the agreement that supported the Flagstaff Loop Trail was the predecessor to the Flagstaff Trails Initiative and the Flagstaff Regional Trails Strategy. We are a frequent partner with the Arizona Trails Association on Arizona National Scenic Trail projects and a Steward for Passage 33B, the Dry Lake Hills, of the AZNST. These are representative projects of the scores of other efforts in which we have participated over the past two decades. In summary, we are one of the most engaged and successful non-governmental organizations regarding trails in the Flagstaff area.

That understood, we were dismayed and saddened to find that we were not included in the extensive list of potential stakeholders for the GOMTP Draft on page 41.

Regardless of this assumed oversight, **we stand ready to offer our extensive experience as a trails stakeholder in this process.** Our contact information is above should you desire any specific input on this project.

The Plan Needs More Focus on Trail User Experience

The plan is mostly devoid of any acknowledgement of the users for which it is meant to provide recreational experiences. There is a brief discussion of some fundamental concepts like loops and viewsheds, but no attention is paid to tread design, features and challenges or different user types' experiences on the trails. (There is one exception, adaptive mountain biking, which is repeatedly addressed. More on that later.)

We understand the requirement and necessity to analyze wildlife, environmental, archaeological and other resource impacts and mitigations. This Draft does an exceptional job on this front. However, without strong design parameters in place to provide for a high quality of user enjoyment on the trails themselves, the plan will suffer failures upon implementation. Examples of this can range from ongoing unauthorized trail construction to trail-user conflicts to arguments on volunteer events about which rock to remove and which to keep.

We highly recommend starting with the [International Mountain Bicycling Association's Guidelines for a Quality Trail Experience](#). There are other sources for this sort of information for other user groups, and we recommend consulting with equestrian, hiking and trail running organizations to try to get some best-practices for those experiences.

Balance Values in the Plan

There is a subtext to the content of the Draft that has us concerned. As we have pointed out, there is a preponderance of concern for environmental, wildlife and cultural concern, and a large amount of

attention paid to adaptive mountain biking and not enough focus on other trail users' experiences.

Number of times that a word occurs in the Draft:

Adaptive MTB	12
Hiking	5
Horseback riding (equestrian occurred 0 times)	3
Cycling (not adaptive)	2
Biking (not adaptive)	1
Advanced mountain bikers (to obliterate a user constructed trail, in context)	1
Trail running	1
Cross-country skiing	1
Snowshoeing	1

While we are extremely supportive of these other values, the lopsided nature of the document concerns us. Please balance the various values of the recreating public in the final Plan.

Directional mountain bike trails

Given the proximity to town and the elevation available, Observatory Mesa is a prime location for several mountain bike focused directional trails. Communities all over the world are developing trail systems specifically to address this need, and Flagstaff should as well. Ideally these would be on Section 17 and descend into Thorpe Park affording close proximity to town and the ability to climb the FUTS to do multiple runs. If it is not possible to gain Lowell Observatory's permission for this, other locations should be scoped. These trails should afford a range of opportunities for different skill levels and incorporate jumps, berms and constructed features. There is already an expressed demand on Observatory Mesa for this type of trail, although it is slated for obliteration in the Draft. These types of trails are vital to engaging kids in mountain biking, a healthy outdoor activity, as well as being a fun recreational amenity for all riders.

E-bikes

Given the fact that, per Arizona Revised Statutes, e-bikes are currently legal on the FUTS and Flagstaff Loop Trail on Observatory Mesa, and the cross-jurisdictional nature of the proposed trail system that will be permitted by the U.S. Forest Service that currently prohibits e-bikes from using non-motorized trails, it would be prudent to analyze the appropriateness of e-bicycles on the system to eliminate confusion and conflict with their use. Here is some information and definitions on e-bicycles:

[Arizona Revised Statutes on e-bikes](#)
[E-bike Classifications and information](#)

Regional Trail Network Connectivity

Although it falls outside the scope of this plan, it will be important to make efforts to tie this trail system in with outlying communities and other trail systems as opportunities arise. Trails to Baderville and Bellemont would help to provide non-motorized recreational and transportation opportunities and better tie our communities together. This concept was first introduced by the Flagstaff Loop Trail planning effort, and we would like to see it preserved.

We look forward to working with City staff on the details of this planning, and eventually helping to generate volunteers and perhaps funding to support its implementation, if that is appropriate.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the Board of Flagstaff Biking Organization

Anthony Quintile and Joe Hazel