

DCR Middlesex Fells Reservation - Resource Management Plan

Recreation Workshop – March 2, 2011

Notes from Public Comment Session

- Concern regarding trail damage and alteration from mountain bikes.
- There is an opportunity to examine rocky soils and see the different impact of mountain bikes from that of boots. I would recommend a recreational impact study to evaluate the impacts on resources.
- There is a party missing – plants and animals in the Fells. It is very important to have a reservation and to take the Fells plants, animals, etc. into consideration. We need to cooperate with them.
- It is important to understand having trails as shared-use opportunities will build community. There is a lot in common between the goals of different uses. Regarding science, there have not been studies in the Fells, but this process is creating a study, peer reviewing.
- I want to thank Michele for making the point of the desire for an off-leash site at Sheepfold. I have been disheartened by people not cleaning up after their pets, bringing lots of dogs in. But being able to take dogs on trails is important to me.
- I found a new species in an area of the Fells – I'm a naturalist, I take a lot of time to explore a small area – why can't that be included? It is very hard to do this on the trails. I am not against mountain biking, but I want to invite bikers to invite to come with me too.
- Do you have recommendations for what to do about professional dog walkers, incidents with dog bites, dog encounters?
 - If a person doesn't want to meet a dog, the dog shouldn't meet the person. I'm on the same page with you there. Regarding multiple dogs, the professional dog walker scenario is not my experience, but we might need a program, policy that sets a limit on the number of dogs you can bring.
- To the invitation to take a slow walk, I would like to say we do that. Dog owners appreciate the beauty of nature in the Fells. I recognize the issue this winter with dogs – I'm not sure why this is happening, but we need to address it. The Fells is an urban park and is set aside for recreation.
- Watching the video this evening I was very sad I did not learn to ride a bike. Many of the nicest encounters I have had have been with bikers. I have a story of a student mountain biker – he tried to drum up interest in helping to care for the parkland.
 - What the story shows is sport can be a gateway to learning and respecting land.
- I live in walking distance of the Fells – use mountain bikes, walk, bird watch, snow-shoe. Shared use of this resource does not necessarily mean on the same trails. Shared use of individual trails need to be considered carefully.
- I am disturbed by the debate of whether the Fells is parkland vs. reservation. The Fells should be distinguished from urban parks such as the Rose Kennedy Greenway. I like to think that not all trails

should serve all uses. We need studies – the Friends of the Fells have a great study from several years ago. I think something has gone on behind the scenes, and the public is not aware. We need to go forward and allow people to look at this all more closely.

- There have been no backroom dealings and arrangements at DCR. Paul Jahnige is a well respected part of DCR.
- From a skier's perspective – generally like carriage roads, roads around the reservoir when they are unplowed – the less winding trails, and those that are not so steep. Skiers were missed on one of the surveys conducted in the off-season. Regarding whether this is an urban park – my mother used to take the trolley to get here. I would prioritize recreation above all others in the Fells.
- I go to the Fells because I have a dog, and in the process I have learned so much more about the natural resources. I have seen so many things I would not have noticed. If I weren't going for my dog, I wouldn't be as aware or care as much. Uses are not mutually exclusive – they are all important.
- I am a user – I ski, bike, run. I liked Michele's perspective of dog and owners' behavior, responsible use. Tom told me in other parks there is a different relationship between user groups and the friends groups – it doesn't exist here, and I'm not sure why. I don't understand why we get negativity from the Friends, but I want to look at other models.
- I use the Fells for variety – all uses are valid, it's too bad there are not more resources available to use. When I come to the Fells, I am primarily looking for quieter exercise – I wouldn't want all trails open to mountain bikes. Compromise is wanted regarding trail use.
- I live in Melrose – I am a mountain biker – no more studies are needed. Hiking and biking have similar impacts. Reservation vs. urban park makes no difference – it's for everyone. There should be fair use for all. Up to now it has been unfair for mountain bikers. In every other park they care about the environment, build and maintain trails – nothing inconsistent with preserving the environment.
- I am frustrated – I moved from West Roxbury to Malden – I go cross-country skiing in the Fells, and I have complaints about dog droppings. Can't nudge dogs off the path – they're not on leashes, and dogs jump on me. It is wrong. The Fells is not a latrine. I have to lift up a ski to avoid dog mess. I have seen little effort by dog owners – I got drool in my hair. We need help with this.
- I have never been to the Fells. I am president of a dog owners group. My apologies for the poop problem – responsible owners clean-up others. Professional dog walkers I would like to defend. A professional screens dogs and has insurance. Aggressive dogs should not be off-leash. They should be under voice control, should not jump, etc. Rules should be followed and enforced. At Callahan we have brochures, website, etc. We have shared trails – it can be a beautiful place if cooperative (Callahan is a model) – harmony with nature.
- New England Orienteering Club – orienteering is a map and compass sport. We have families with dogs, children. These are registered, permitted events. Have no issue with mountain bikes, dogs – if there is damage – as long as no damage to trails it is ok. Dogs should be the same/follow rules. No issue if you see us – this is a viable use. We are taking care of the woods. We hope to see you out there.
- I am a mountain biker, runner, dog owner, naturalist, bird watcher. People like to put other people in "camps." A lot of us fit in many categories. I feel like people are angry at me and that makes me

uncomfortable. We have similar interests. We should find a way to co-exist. Let's make a plan to share the Fells.

- For 40 years I have hiked, biked, and skied in the Fells. Another group is the Girl Scouts – troops hike through the Fells, go to caves. I took them to Panther Cave – so excited. I led nature walks as a scout leader on Winchester trails. Children in Winchester schools have been through the Fells – took classes – studied field biology and certified vernal pools. Bikes, dogs are fine, but children are better than anything.

Comment Cards Received

- Erosion of trails happens a lot more from bikes or faster moving wheeled vehicles than foot traffic – moderate. That's obvious!
- I would suggest really segregated areas for mountain biking and not try to mingle bikers and hikers and dog walkers. I think it is hard for bikers to stick to designated trails. It's hard for bikers to keep on certain trails when the networks are overlapping and some are restricted, but not upheld. A fast moving bike with its wheels spinning, spewing dirt and gravel is a disconcerting neighbor for quiet hikers and families with young children.
- Mountain biking concerns/threats to safety and natural environment:
 - Biking on/in muddy trails causing deep ruts and damaging trail.
 - Bikers have physically altered trails by digging up and displacing soil to create banks on trails and/or "jumping ramps." These actions seriously damage the natural environment and change the "thread"/shape of trails for walkers and hikers.
- Regarding measuring impact: There may be opportunities to invite users to document (photograph and map) areas of impact/defacing of nature (participatory project design).

Notes from Small Group Discussions

Group Facilitator: Doug Thompson

General Themes or Key Points

- Surcease from the stresses of daily life.
- People are not one dimensional.
- Conflict is driven by a few people; Polarization
- Culture of non-compliance only part of story; culture of cooperation.
- Rules we can follow.
- Some problems are more vexing in theory than practice.

Views on Question 1: What do you feel are the most important recreational user experiences that you would like to have, including the types of terrain or views or other experiences that you would prefer to be able to enjoy?

- Peace and quiet
- Hiking
- Biking
- Dogs – off leash
- Full range

Views on Question 2: How do you think that the principles that should guide DCR and the consideration of recreational user experiences should be applied on the ground in the Fells? Before talking about specific trails or locations, please suggest what you think is important in general.

- Rules we can follow
- Analyze the existing conditions: keep what works
- Some dedicated use; some multiuse although allocation varies within group
- Code of right of way
- Understand existing condition
- Code of etiquette
- Enlist help of user groups
- No sentiment to exclude
- Most flagrant rule violations outside this process

Group Facilitator: Bryan Hamlin

Views on Question 1

- Explore nature in a safe place with a dog – large area/protected.
- Social aspect with dog – not in danger of ticket/enforcement. Not wanting to break regulation.
- A place to walk a dog, sketch, discover new uses – rules/norms are needed and the area is large enough for all. Users should be educated – etiquette.
- Multiple uses – sailing, orienteering. Full range of activities, well maintained trails important. Flow of the rise important for mountain biking.
- Quiet enjoyment – all uses should be protective of resources. Need to know the impacts. Must protect the resource as a foundation for long-term use/conservation. Not everything is necessarily compatible.
- The natural ecosystem so close to Boston is exceptional – 900 species of plants, 300 are rare – need balance and compromise.

- Fells represents process of nature over many years. To be able to hear the wood cocks – variety of birds.
- Ability to be able to ride a bike on trails.
- Exploring, enjoying nature. Bike is main venue. Need to share the resource – either multiple use trails or separated uses. One user group should not displace another.

Views on Question 2

- Related to use, split the Fells into separate areas for biking/hiking/dog walking.
- Balance people's interests. Solutions driven by various user groups' needs.
- Create a culture where user groups can work together - complementary.
- Notes the members of each user group who do not recognize the rules or etiquette. Bring rules into alignment with norms.
- DCR lacks capability for enforcement, so user groups need to help with self-enforcement of the users who ignore the rules/etiquette.
- Preservation of resources comes first – then coordinated/compatible uses can be plan on that foundation.
- Large area – Fells is such a large resource. That dividing to uses to different sites could work. Avoid watershed protection area.
- Suggests volunteer organized cleanups – as a way to get groups working together.
- Trail maintenance can be organized as a cooperative effort between Friends of the Fells and NEMBA.
- With privilege comes responsibility.

Group Facilitator: Loraine Della Porta

General Themes or Key Points

- Education
- Signs
- Rules – clarity
- Trail watch program
- Soft enforcement – partiers, cruisers, enforcement
- Not always shared use – user experience
- Enforcement inadequate
- Worst rule-breakers not in the room tonight.
- Joint clean-ups (between user groups)

Views on Question 1

- Mountain bike terrain, mixed use, exercise, lead hikes, on trails, protect resource/like diversity, not extreme. Close to home/close to Metro Boston.
- Friends of Fells – naturalist – dog off-leash/go when not busy – morning hours off-leash?
- Unrestricted mountain bike access. But ski, run – single track. Prefer speed on double track.
- Dog – 99% cooperative – walking, hiking. Love various terrains. Feel terrible – illegal no dogs. Wish reservoir was open. Snow shoe, cross country ski with dog.
- Dog owner – respect bike owners, hike, appreciate snow shoes, vernal pools, views, terrain changes, snow melt. Appreciate sheepfold.
- Mountain bike – love the diversity of trails. Everyone should use as they like only – chased by dog – follow rules. Coexist, respect.
- Oasis within city – many resources, very rich, natural, what can you do – like people with different ideas – fantastic. Mountain bike and exhilarated. Not interested in speeding bikes and visitors from Ireland in awe – let's share.
- Pick up trash.
- With dog and without dog hiking. Open to mountain biking. Kayak Spot Pond, appreciate views of Boston.
- Mountain biking, cross-country skiing. Variety of trails. No interaction on various trails, Skyline.
- Mountain bike, snow shoe, dog walker. Live in Boston. Fells offers opportunity to walk dog.

Views on Question 2

- Off-leash, responsible behavior
- Little money for enforcement. Public needs to buy into rules.
- Self-policing is needed. Posting of rules.
- Public buy-in. How are policies developed/implemented by DCR?
- Self-policing. How are the rules enforced?
- Majority of users not involved in RMP process. Message needs to get to the majority of park users, via regulations.
- Trail maintenance important. Stronger sustainable trails are important to protect reservation.
- Self-policing.
- Rules at other parks. Fells has own rules outside of system. Apply DCR rules to the park.

Group Facilitator: Marshall Wallace

Views on Question 1

- Keep it as nature preserve
- Running
- Mountain biking and sharing trails
- Birding
- Would like to nominate as “patch reserve”
- Shared use and regulations that support
- Observing pristine snow, tossing snow balls
- Being away from “stuff”
- Not feeling like doing something wrong
- Walking and enjoying peace and quiet
- To avoid being disrupted by bikers on trails where they are restricted or unapproved
- Concern about speed of bikes and potential for accidents
- Would appreciate more of a focus on etiquette
- Would like to see more trained dogs and responsible owners
- People taking time to slow down
- Wished everyone was as committed as the people in the workshop, attending the workshop

Views on Question 2

- Principle of supporting enforcement of regulations
- Placement of clear signage – including emergency contact info, etc.
- Stakeholders can work with DCR to educate their communities – “get the word out” – emphasize benefits of cooperative use through education
- Leverage experience of dog owners groups who have operated elsewhere (Somerville Dog)
- Identify opportunities for mountain bikers to recreate legally, but not over all trail system
- Support respect for other users
- Support understanding of “whole” Fells Reservation, including off trail benefits – focus on having all inhabitant ability to utilize
- Recreational users can help collect baseline data to identify information to guide policies
- Replicate Blue Hills Trail Watch – acting as docents – could prevent fires, off-leash
- Anticipate emerging uses that might increase diversity of uses – “10 years from now, somebody will come up with something”
- Utilize clarity of written regulations to enhance etiquette and support enforcement – reasonable rules should be start

- Imagine riding through trails and hitting every tree?

Group Facilitator: Philip Keyes

Views on Question 1

- Experiences and nature study
- Struck by the comment that bikers were not welcome
- Hiking, nature watching
- Looking for natural landscape
- Down time – no cell
- Walk nearly every day – spirituality, changes in nature every day
- Stewardship activities, trail work
- Started in 60's, now has a dog. Dog socialization, dog "loves" to go to Fells. Dog stays healthy by trips to the Fells

Views on Question 2

- Emphasis on protection – too many activities can kill it
- Simplicity in trail system would be beneficial – reroute to protect sensitive resources
- DCR determine what limits will be imposed. DCR needs to enforce. No unleashed dogs on trails
- Historical perspective is important – multiple use when safe
- Emphasize that this is a shared resource and control your dog
- Trails plan was quite comprehensive and strong. With limited DCR funds and staff, it's difficult to manage
- If people don't have dogs, they don't like dogs. It's a form of discrimination. On the ground everything seems fine. Why the big deal?

What trail characteristics do you look for?

- Well-maintained, not eroded
- Trails that you don't have to focus on your footing
- Variations in terrain
- Well-marked, many Fells trails go nowhere
- Wide range of conditions – sometimes I want a challenge
- Variety of experiences

What solutions should we pursue?

- Huge population uses this park – as much education and signage as possible
- Guide expectations

- If you over regulate, no one will comply
- The people at these meetings need to help set the tone
- Signage, trail watch program, organize kids to help cleanup

Group Facilitator: Courtney Breese

General Themes or Key Points

- Consideration of natural resources, other user experiences when determining recreational/trail designations
- Can't enjoy it if we put a chain across it and aren't allowed to use it at all
- Rules are important – they must make sense and be clear and adequate in order for people to follow them. How to enforce them is a big question.

Views on Question 1

- Walking and hiking – feel there is too much emphasis on dogs. Sure others here are responsible dog owners – but that hasn't been my experience. Going to have to compromise. Takes away from experience to have dogs – need restricted off-leash areas.
- Walking. Like dogs – not poop. Biggest problem with bikers is narrow paths chewed up by bicycles – don't like this. Erosion caused by vehicles, not nature.
- Meditation, Tai Chi in Fells – restricted trails for bikers. Sheepfold good area for dogs off-leash. Against designation as a park – should be a reservation, natural resources should be protected. Extinction of some plants a concern.
- Skiing and hiking – don't want expansion of hiking trails to bikers – biking erosion worse than hiking. Sheepfold area – also an issue of cruising.
- Hike and cross-country ski with dogs – involved with issues of shared recreation. Find disgusting to find waste, trash. Sad that all dog owners lumped together, vilified, but it's not everyone.
- Point of owners, families wanting to recreate with pets. Irresponsibility of owners unacceptable. Have encountered good mountain bikers. Like shared recreation idea – don't like exclusivity.
- Orienteering training group – happy to be given the opportunity to use the Fells – want off-trail use, move between trails. Haven't had problems in past.
- Hiking – appreciate solitude, quiet, not seeing too many people, some dogs ok. Landscape design – know we have removed flora and fauna and happy to see chance in Fells for some to continue, regroup. Interested in minimizing expansion of mountain biking to hiking trails. Regarding dogs – know people are attached to pets, but as people we have a responsibility to maintain the reservation and we might need to minimize use to do that.

- Idea of a licensure for use – such as an online reading/exam, review of a brochure?
- Experiencing nature different for hiking and biking – opened some trails to mountain bikes with agreement – but enforcement is an issue.

Views on Question 2

- Pre-DCR was DEP, in changing the name the focus shifted. Can see use for places for dogs off-leash, biking. But as a reservation – against use for recreation at all in order to preserve.
- Too many trails in the Fells – leads to segmentation. Limit trails, specifically in certain designated areas. Need a mechanism for enforcement. Give tickets. They're given for cars – why not for other uses?
- Concept of too many trails – suggest making off-limits between trails, crossing between. Trail building covers new trails.
- Shared value of natural features – can't expand trails and protect.
- Can't put a chain across it to protect. And can't enjoy it without using it.
- Concern of people being discouraged to use the Fells
- Enforcement is a real problem – any decision/plan is useless without enforcement. If the rules don't make sense/are not adequate, people don't follow them.
- Need a reasonable system for all with adequate enforcement.

Group Facilitator: Heather Clish

Views on Question 1

- Orienteering – need open woods and variety of terrain, boulders, cliffs, etc. Water features and marshes, you like to have these features as well.
- Need to limit size of groups to preserve chance for solitude.
- Really like to ride single track and challenging terrain (steep, rocky, and rooty)
- I don't have a single most important – general walking while watching animals. Mountain biking is second activity, safe but exciting. Want all types of terrain.
- AMC local walks, and for that you need well marked trails.
- Primarily use for mountain biking; steep, challenging terrain. Would like more variety and training areas (boulders, etc.).
- I bike, walk, run and ski in the Fells. Live two blocks away! Seek social element and solitude. Want to continue option to have varied experiences.
- Go for nature and solitude. Dog walkers cause greatest disturbance when bringing groups of school children to the Fells. Some kids in every group get terrified by dogs. Mountain bikers are always courteous, but worry about impacts.

- I grew up in the Fells. I do it all, but presently look for solitude the most. I don't want to run into anyone, so seek avoiding other users (which usually I can do). Will hike 6 or 7 hours per outing.

Views on Question 2

- I think shared use, but with limited uses and limited areas. Only way it is going to work! Must consider limiting group size. Should be a permit and tracking system for group use.
- There is zero enforcement of any rules in the Fells. Most people know rules, but no money or staff to enforce anything.
- I am an abutter, night users are trashing the Fells, disturbing neighbors. Nobody cares and nobody enforces anything.
- I think a lot of people don't know the rules. Everyone wants enforcement, but there is not any.
- Everyone knows the rules, and most users break them in some way (e.g. using reservoir trails).
- I keep hearing, "why can't we all share the trails," but this is not totally realistic. I am a biker, and don't feel trails like skyline should be open for biking. Want a more detailed study of individual trails and areas by DCR, so proper areas are open and/or closed.
- I want to be able to go everywhere. Go out there to be respectful, but to get away from structure and rules. Signage can help encourage respect without rules.
- DCR needs all the user groups to help with enforcement, as we strive to accommodate shared use.
- Every trail cannot be a multi-use trail. Need to evaluate these trails for uses, not everyone can do everything.
- Concerns: Fells should be a shared use property with proper restrictions.

Next Step/Closing Comments

- Attendance tonight is a testament to the importance of the Fells to all. There is a feeling of "we can work this out" and that we need to be aware of not loving it to death, being aware of impact.
- I love the idea of group clean-ups, feeling of potential for collaboration. Groups try to educate their members – should also educate about other members, users.
- I see an opportunity to put heads together on planning and implementation – work together to figure this out.

- Everyone cares deeply – I am hoping out of the process to find common ground and cooperation. I am discouraged to see some finger pointing and generalizations still, but think we can bury rhetoric and work together.
- I'm worried because there are still so many that want to use the Fells, and the impact that will have. There are a lot of indicators that the Fells is reaching a tipping point, and I want us to be aware of that.