



**HELENA OPEN LANDS MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY
January 12, 2021**



GENERAL MEMBERS

- Vacant
- Eric Sivers
- Karen Reese *excused*
- Brian Barnes
- Claudia Clifford

CITY OF HELENA STAFF

- Brad Langsather, Open Lands Manager
- Kristi Ponozzo, Director, P & R, Open Lands
- Jennifer Schade, Recorder

CITY-COUNTY PARKS BOARD

- David McGuire

HELENA CITIZENS COUNCIL

- T.J. Lehmann

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Helena Tourism Alliance Representative

- Andrea Opitz

PPLT Representative

- Nate Kopp

VIA ZOOM MEETING

Topic: HOLMAC Meeting

Time: January 12, 2021 05:30 PM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

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Call to Order

- ✚ The January 12, 2021 HOLMAC Meeting was called to order at 5:31 pm. A quorum was established. Welcome to our new member, David McGuire. He is the representative from the City-County Parks Board Meeting.

Welcome/Introductions/Visitors: Robert Rasmussen, DD Dowden, Sara Johnson, K Norane Appling-Freistadt, Joan Miles, Lisa Bay, Eric Grove, Gloria Tachell, Tony Jewitt, Ken Knudson, Gregg Wheeler, Shannon Heath, Jerry Wells.

Minutes Approval

Approval of December 2020 Minutes

- ✚ With no noted corrections to the December Brian moved to approve the December 2020 as presented. Eric seconded. Motion carried.

HOLMAC Action Items

New Business

E-Bike Discussion

- ✚ The first item of discussion is the use of eBikes on Helena Open Lands Trail System. This is in response to a memo that Parks Director, Kristi Ponozzo sent to the HOLMAC committee.
- ✚ In response to the updated [Recreation Chapter](#) to our Helena Open Lands Management Plan this past June, Kristi is asking for HOLMAC's assistance in exploring potential Helena Open Lands policy options regarding E-Bike use. She asks that HOLMAC assist in the beginning phases of this effort by providing potential alternatives to consider that the Parks Department would ultimately bring forward through a public process.
- ✚ Eric - the options are obvious – we allow everywhere, allow them nowhere or allow them somewhere in the middle. This will be a much larger discussion than HOLMAC. Kristi wants the discussion to start here. This will definitely need to be a discussion with the community at large. This will likely need to be included in the next large project discussion.

Members thoughts

- ✚ As part of today's meeting packet, Brian stated there is a copy of Missoula guidance and their policies regarding eBikes (Attachment "A"). Brian is in support of starting our policy template similar to Missoula. Once we begin the process, we can fine-tune it to meet our needs. Safety is a concern on our more narrow trails. Brian stated that if we opt to allow eBikes on our trail system, we should only look at our bigger, commuter trails.

TJ

- ✚ TJ began his discussion by providing "classifications" for eBikes.
- ✚ **Class 1:** eBikes that are pedal-assist only, equipped with a motor, with no throttle, and have a maximum assisted speed of 20 mph. **Class 2:** eBikes that also have a maximum speed of 20 mph,

but are throttle-assisted. **Class 3:** eBikes that are pedal-assist only, equipped with a motor, with no throttle, and a maximum assisted speed of 28 mph.

- ✚ At this time, there is no age restriction for eBikes use in Montana. He is unsure if helmets are a requirement of use.
- ✚ In the future, TJ doesn't see too many issues as it has not yet become mainstream; however, we must consider the potential of new use in our open lands.
- ✚ TJ is still doing more research. He reviewed the information provided by Missoula. He does feel it is a good idea to find a template to work off of because there is obviously several other communities who have gone over this option. TJ is still looking for a community that would be a closer match to Helena.

Claudia

- ✚ Claudia believes that eBikes have a place in our community. Our community has a lot of hills and eBikes provide a great opportunity for folks that need extra assistance. The bigger question is where are they appropriate/not appropriate?
- ✚ Claudia likes Missoula as a starting point. Missoula made an effort to really identify some wider paths in town and around town that could be used for both commuting and recreational purposes. They also looked at and considered what it is like to have eBikes on single-track trails and/or the steeper-hill trails.
- ✚ Our challenge will be to define what is best for **our** community because there is no doubt that eBikes are becoming popular here in Helena and there are some good uses for them.
- ✚ As far as the hills are concerned, we need to consider a couple of factors; much of open lands are designated as city parks. As such, city parks prohibit motorized uses. Therefore, Claudia believes it will be a huge change in policy to allow eBikes up in the hills. We also need to realize the fact that this issue does add to the pressure that we are already seeing in our South Hills. It will be a lot to add another use and Claudia is certain this will need to be a lengthy, thoughtful discussion. Perhaps we can identify those places where eBikes would be safe to go in an effort to accommodate those users.

David

- ✚ David stated that we need to be careful not to restrict those who want to use the trail system. There are those in the community who are not physically capable to ride a regular bike. An e-bike would be a great option for them.
- ✚ While he understands the safety considerations, perhaps we should look at potential hazards of eBikes compared to regular bikes. Regarding safety considerations, David believes we will need to look at data on injuries between bikes and pedestrians vs eBikes and pedestrians.
- ✚ This issue will take a lot of work and we will need to hear from a lot more people.

Eric S

- ✚ Eric believes we are having this conversation at an interesting inflection point. A lot of states define eBikes no different than bikes in their motor vehicle code. They want to encourage them as they

are an easy way to commute without a lot of restrictions. However, in the same states, a lot of land management agencies consider eBikes to be motorized vehicles. The federal agencies consider them motorized vehicles, however, two years ago, the Department of Interior Secretary issued an order stating that eBikes will be allowed anywhere an analog/regular pedal bikes is allowed subject to local discretion.

- ✚ The Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service seems to be on a similar track.
- ✚ The federal land managers seem to be on a trajectory more towards acceptance on non-motorized trails; however, Eric is sure how they classify them. All this will be something to keep in mind as the city does about a fair amount of federal land.
- ✚ With all that being said, Eric does see advantages to eBikes. A friend was able to go for a bike ride with his 80-year old father. That is pretty amazing. He added that he sees a Class 3 as more of a Motorcycle or Moped. A Class 1 eBike is very different. At this time, the city trails are designated as non-motorized trails. If we consider this use change, this will definitely need to be part of a broader discussion in the major projects discussion in the coming fall.
- ✚ Regardless of where the city ends up going, Eric believes the city retain the opportunity for eBikes to be used for administrative services (i.e., trail work, etc.) because they are really useful for moving around as opposed to driving a side-by-side.

Public Comment

Andrea O

- ✚ Andrea stated she did some research and has come to the conclusion that there needs to be a broader discussion. She would like to see more data. She also believes evaluating the different classes of eBikes is important. In the research Andrea has done, the peddle assist eBike with no throttle is very similar to a mountain bike. She doesn't have a lot of issues with the Class 1 eBike; however, the Class 3 e-Bike is different.
- ✚ In looking at some pilot programs around country (studies in Park City, Boise, Seattle, Scottsville AZ), there was a variety of issues they evaluated. Some of the studies included looking at hard surfaces, surfaces that were 5 feet more, multi-use trails, user conflicts, etc.
- ✚ Findings from a study done in Switzerland determined that, at the end of the day, user conflict and maintaining safety was more about enforcing proper behavior and not necessarily the equipment. Andrea stated this all goes back to education on proper trail etiquette and mass outreach on early education. Everyone needs to understand that our system is a multi-use trail system and we need to lay out in detail the expectations.
- ✚ Andrea would like to see further discussion and perhaps a pilot program on certain areas of the trail system before we begin the process of evaluating the classes of eBikes.

Sara and Tim Johnson

- ✚ Sara and Chip purchased Class 1 eBikes this spring. Having the eBikes enables them to ride up hills without having to get off of their bikes and walk. It disperses traffic from the trail head because the riders are able to get out of the way faster. eBikes don't ride any different or look any different than a standard mountain bike. Tim has found that the trail users (to include bike riders) are extremely

courteous. He and Sara have found no trail conflicts at all. As we get older, it is nice to have that extra kick to make it up the hill. Studies show that people get as good of a workout on an eBike as they would a regular bike.

- ✚ The IMBA (International Mountain Biking Association) has stated that on single tracks and as far as damages, eBikes cause no more issues than regular bikes. Tim added that eBikes are not noisy.
- ✚ Tim encouraged those who will be making the decisions on this issue to go out and ride an eBike. It is not that much different than a mountain bike – it just helps you get up the hill a little easier.
- ✚ Being able to ride their eBikes has opened up an amazing amount of trails use that we have here in Helena.

Meg Bishop

- ✚ Meg is concerned that we are talking about solutions before we have a good understanding of eBike use or some kind of survey from the community. It is good to discuss potential conflict.
- ✚ Good discussion to talk about potential conflict. In talking with others and using the trails often, Meg believes we have seen an exponential use of our trail system. The issue of multiple use should be a discussion before we talk about any type of planning or policy. We need to do a proper inventory and have proper discussion with the public.
- ✚ Our use is only going to increase and we need to have a broader discussion.

Tony J

- ✚ Tony stated this discussion is both encouraging and alarming. We have seen a greater use of our trail system and this increase use has led to more conflict. This has spawned dialogue from a lot of different user groups. How as a community do we manage our trail system, what are the priorities, how we conserve it for the future, and how it contributes to the community.
- ✚ Introducing another user group to our trails at a time when we have seen considerable growth, frankly would be a very short-sided decision at this time.
- ✚ We need to discuss how we are going to preserve the system.
- ✚ Tony believes the city should spend time on the development of other opportunities besides open spaces to allow eBikes. There are plenty of opportunities within the city for eBikes use and there is plenty of opportunities for inside and outside of the city for eBike use to include BLM and Forest Service property.
- ✚ We have made a decision as a community not to have motorized use on the trails. This would be a serious step in his view.

Eric G

- ✚ Eric agrees that when we open up this discussion, it needs to be larger community conversation. This would be a major project and should be treated that way.
- ✚ While it is very hard to differentiate between a mountain bike and a class 1 eBike, the challenge would be how we would enforce the use of the class 1 designation (if we limit to class 1).
- ✚ Eric added that we need to have careful thought on how we proceed with this issue.

Lisa Bay

- ✚ At this time, the forest service does not allow any motorized use on their lands. The city has an extensive interface with forest service on our open space system. Lisa believes the new administration coming in may reconsider the rules on the use of motorized vehicles on open space.
- ✚ Lisa stated that we need to consider that we have federal partners and we need to be consistent with them, especially with the forest service.

Meg B

- ✚ Meg stated that the HCC will be discussing this issue as well.
- ✚ City park lands should be comfortable and safe for all community users. Important to bring all users into the discussion.

K Norane

- ✚ Strong emphasis that there need to be more information from the community.
- ✚ Kay is concerned about the conservation quality of our open lands with all of the increased use. Adding another use needs to be entered into with a lot of discussion.
- ✚ Our trail system is non-motorized now and she believes our open lands should stay that way. Kay does embrace the idea of a survey in community. However, she does feel that adding another use (especially motorized) is a bad direction to go.

Andrea

- ✚ What is the urgency/timeline for the eBike decision?
- ✚ Eric S stated the timeline, as indicated on the memo to HOLMAC, is to present alternatives by March.
- ✚ Kristi added that March is not a hard and fast deadline. Please take whatever time is needed. The plan is that the information we get from HOLMAC will be the information shared with the public to begin the larger conversation. What are the things we want to take to the public? This could include (but not limited to):
 - A community survey
 - Opportunity for public meetings
 - Other options to consider

Meg

- ✚ At these public meetings, it is important for community members to understand issues before giving comments. Meg recommended that someone is available to present/discuss the use of eBikes to include concerns, issues, benefits, etc. Please make sure the public understands potential concerns of new use before they make their comments.

Eric G

- ✚ Several years ago, Eric was In Moab riding at the Horse Thieves Campground and this was the first time he came across trails that were posted with no eBike markers. Those were BLM administered lands. The apparent popularity of eBikes at that time was.
- ✚ As far as urgency in discussing this issue, Eric thinks we are a little late. We should address this before it becomes a problem. He has seen eBike use. The longer we put this off, the more people will use eBikes, and the harder the issue becomes. We should get this addressed as soon as we can.
- ✚ If you are hiking in the south hills, you cross from city managed open lands to forest service or BLM, and at this time, the forest service has a very clear policy of no eBikes on national forest lands.
- ✚ We need to address this as soon as we can.

Tony J

- ✚ Factual Information: In Moab itself, eBikes are welcome on all surfaced streets and street bike lanes, but they are prohibited in all public parks and city parks systems. The reason this is important is because Moab was the leading edge of mountain biking in this country. They have dealt with this issue. They have made some decisions that can help us.

Claudia

- ✚ Claudia would like to get more information from other places. She understands that both Boise and Boulder CO have dealt with this issue as well. They don't allow eBikes on hilly, single-track trails. She stated it is important to get more research from around the west.

Sara / Tim

- ✚ Sara and Tim have been cycling over 35 years together. It is tougher to do regular mountain biking. This is one of the reasons they made the decision to move to eBikes.
- ✚ She also stated that it is very hard to delineate between a regular mountain bike and Class 1 e-Bike. So where do we draw the line?
- ✚ We all need to remember that our trail system is a city park. It needs to be for ALL the citizens!
- ✚ She has concerns about rules that say who can and can't use our trail system or any city park.

Eric S

- ✚ Eric then asked Brad and Kristi if this discussion has been helpful in order to start putting something together to take to the public in an effort to begin that broader conversation.
- ✚ Brad – based on this evenings conversations, we have reached the point where everyone seems to want more information perhaps from other communities. Brad stated he will begin canvassing communities with similar trail systems to look at regulations they have in place on the use of eBikes. Hopefully this effort will assist HOLMAC in their final recommendations. This will give HOLMAC the information they need to advise the parks department as we take something out to larger public.
- ✚ Claudia – in follow up to Brads thoughts, as we look at these other communities can we look at key items such as:

- What is the environmental impact here?
- What did these communities look at in of the impact on wildlife, impact on the trail system itself when you add eBikes to single-track trails?
- What were the key considerations that they looked at in determining policy?
- Brad stated he will address all these questions with the other communities and will also ask about what has occurred since making their decision.

+ TJ encouraged Brad to look at population sizes that matches our trail system.

- Brad stated he will list the regulation and what type of trail system it applies to.
- When possible, Brad will make every effort to have a conversation with the land manager.

Brian

+ Brian also stated it would be interesting to learn if any of the communities have age limits with certain types of bikes.

+ Brad stated that Park City does have age classification.

+ Claudia recommended looking at Montana communities as well.

Reports from City / Subcommittees

1. Update from City Staff on the following:

Budget and budget process

- Brad Langsather, Open Lands Manager, presented.
- The RTP Grant application is due February 1, 2021. The application we will be submitting will be the continuation of ADA Trail from its current terminus point. The current approved ADA Trail is ½ mile in length. Our proposal will be to continue that trail all the way toward the western extent of Mount Helena City Park and bring it down to the closed portion of LeGrande Cannon Boulevard .
- Last night, the City Commission approved the Dry Gulch PSR DNRC Forest Health Grant to do work on Mount Ascension. This work is located adjacent to the Entertainment Trail. We will begin work on this project towards the end of this week. This grant was approximately \$35,000.
- RE: the Mount Helena North Face Project – the DNRC has almost completed the environmental review. We will hopefully see award of those grant funds possibly in February. The Mount Helena North Face grant is approximately \$100,000, if awarded. This grant will allow for the continuation of tree thinning and fuel reduction work on the North Face of Mount Helena (in addition to the work completed adjacent to the 1906 Trail).
- Nate and Brad will be meeting this week to construct this year's trail maintenance agreement with PPLT. We will be working on a number of projects; one of which will include the pilot trail project discussed at last month's meeting.
- We still have not yet had the RAC (Resource Advisory Committee) meeting to see where we scored for the addition of a restroom at the Old Shooting Range. The central RAC has met.

The meeting that was scheduled earlier in the year was cancelled because it wasn't properly advertised.

- We have obtained the granite for the Mount Helena ADA Trail. If winter conditions continue, we will most likely begin on-the-ground work.
- We brought our burning program to a complete halt due to the lack of snow, issues with high winds, and the fact that our crew has returned to college. We will be bringing on a worker (who has been our crew chief for a number of seasons). If weather conditions persist, we will begin this work once again.
- Regarding the budget process – requests are in. Brad was able to maintain status quo with his personnel requests.
- In regards to the work on Mount Ascension, Eric has noticed blue ribbons on trees. Are these smaller diameter trees coming out? Brad stated yes. We are having some problems in that area with the lower, smaller trees. Most of the needles are gone due to the continuous western spruce Budworm feedings outbreak. Our plan is to clean up the effects of the insects and work on the old mountain pine beetle accumulation.

Weed control activities

- None.

Upcoming forestry activities

- None.

2. Report from PPLT

- ✚ Everything is pretty quiet right now.
- ✚ As Brad stated, they will begin work on the maintenance contract for the coming year.
- ✚ Nate hopes to have more information next month. He hopes

Public Comment

✚ (above)

Future Agenda Items

Adjournment

With no further business, Brian moved to adjourn the January 12 HOLMAC meeting. TJ seconded. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 6:49 pm.

ADA NOTICE

The City of Helena is committed to providing access to persons with disabilities for its meetings, in compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Montana Human Rights Act. The City will not exclude persons with disabilities from participation at its meetings or otherwise deny them the City's services, programs, or activities.

Persons with disabilities requiring accommodations to participate in the city's meetings, services, programs, or activities should contact Sharon Haugen, Community Development Director, as soon as possible to allow sufficient time to arrange for the requested accommodation, at any of the following: Phone: (406) 447- 8490; TTY Relay Service 1-800-253-4091 or 711 Email: citycommunitydevelopment@helenamt.gov, Mailing address & physical location: 316 North Park, Avenue, Room 445, Helena, MT 59623.