



P. O. Box 5021, 59403-5021

Planning Department

November 21, 2006

Mr. John Juras
Great Falls Bicycle Club
220 Woodland Estates
Great Falls, MT 59404

RE: Mountain Bike Trail Construction on City-owned Property

Dear John:

It has been brought to my attention that members of the Great Falls Bicycle Club, and individuals known by the club, have been constructing mountain bike trails on city-owned property located along the south shore of the Missouri River, near Cochrane Dam. As our contact person with the Club, your help is requested to disseminate the following response and information.

First, I'd like to address the trail construction activities. This response is based on careful discussion and consideration by the Great Falls Trails Working Group and is provided on behalf of the City of Great Falls and its trail partners. Although some Club members or individuals may have thought approvals had been given, trail construction on City-owned property still requires design and plan approval and project oversight by the Trails Working Group or a City representative. None of those steps were taken. The City is ultimately accountable for all such activities, whether authorized or not. Regarding the construction of any additional mountain bike trails on the 300 acres of land owned by the City, the current position is that no additional trails will be considered until at least other issues have been addressed, as presented in the remainder of this letter. Otherwise, immediate and appropriate action will be taken to address any violations.

Secondly, the City proposes to address this issue in the long term by preparing a management plan for the 300 acres. This may possibly be done in concert with the development of a "Natural Areas Program" currently under consideration by the City. As you know, the City purchased the acreage in 1996 to preclude private development, protect the native landscape, create a conservation easement and provide bike and pedestrian access between the urban trail and Cochrane Dam. This latter purpose was to satisfy a condition in the Missouri-Madison Project No. 2188 FERC license. A combination of double track roads and single track motorcycle and/or game trails traversed the property. The area was closed at that time to motorized traffic and the public has used existing trails in the area ever since.

Other than minor trail grooming, trail maintenance and weed control, very little other management has occurred on the property. However, with increased public use and obviously with increased interest for other public uses and facilities, it is apparent a management plan is now needed. The plan will help to identify, determine the compatibility of, and formally recognize possible alternative land uses and activities for the property. Whether expert level mountain bike trails will become part of the plan is an example of the many questions and issues that will need to be discussed and addressed in such a plan.

During the development of the management plan, there will be ample opportunity for public input and comment, including the GFBC. If the final plan provides for expert level bike trails, we will welcome alignment proposals from the Club, similar to the proposal you have already provided.

The Trails Working Group would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the Club for its work in helping Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to develop mountain bike trails on the north shore of the Missouri River, including the High Plains Trail, and to upgrade existing trails on the south shore, near Crooked Falls. This is a prime example of the type of activity and cooperation encouraged and supported by the partners on the Trails Working Group.

Again, we request your assistance to help stop, for the time being, any further unauthorized trail construction in the vicinity of the Cochrane reservoir, or on any lands owned or managed by our trail partners. Thank you in advance for your assistance and cooperation.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Benjamin M. Rangel, Chairman
Great Falls Trails Working Group

Cc: Dona Stebbins, Mayor, City of Great Falls
John Lawton, City Manager, City of Great Falls
Jim Sullivan, Director, Parks & Recreation Department, City of Great Falls
Matt Marcinek, Giant Springs State Park Manager, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Roger Semler, Region 4 Parks Manager, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Doug Wicks, President, Recreational Trails, Inc.
Jane Weber, Director, Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center, Lewis & Clark National Forest