

Climbing Management Guide

Jefferson County Open Space

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document and subsequent site specific climbing management recommendations were developed in collaboration with representatives from the Access Fund, American Alpine Club, American Mountain Guides Association, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado Mountain Club and the Jefferson County Open Space Climbing Committee. Members of the Jefferson County Open Space Climbing Committee include, Colleen Gadd, Frank Kunze, Jim Lile, Frank Marics, Ted Mische, Bryan Posthumus and Drew Sprafke.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, Jefferson County Open Space (JCOS) has acquired several historic climbing areas including Cathedral Spires, The Dome, Clear Creek Canyon, Mt. Lindo and North Table Mountain. This document was created to recognize rock climbing as a valid recreational use of Open Space and to provide guidelines for climbing management on all existing and future Open Space lands. From the guidelines and management actions set forth, site-specific climbing management plans will be created as a component of individual Park Management Plans*.

This document serves to provide guidelines to climbers and a spectrum of management options ranging from minimal management actions to more restrictive actions. The intent is to apply the least restrictive management action in order to maintain the climbing environment. Potential conflicts may occur as JCOS strives to protect natural resources while providing recreation opportunities. As a result, JCOS is obligated to err on the side of conservation, with protection of wildlife species and habitat a priority. JCOS supports Leave No Trace principles for all recreation activities and will manage uses to uphold those principles.

Current estimates of Americans participating in rock climbing and mountaineering for recreation range from 500,000 to over one million people in the United States alone. Since the early 1980s the popularity of this sport has expanded significantly. The quality, diversity and concentration of rock climbing resources along Colorado's Front Range has made this area one of the primary climbing destinations in North America. A large concentration of climbing enthusiasts live in this area and thousands more travel here annually. Headquartered along the Front Range are many of the largest and most influential organizations including the American Alpine Club (Golden), the Access Fund (Boulder), the American Mountain Guides Association (Boulder), the Colorado Mountain Club (Golden), and the Rocky Mountain Field Institute (Colorado Springs).

The dramatic cliff faces of Jefferson County Open Space have attracted recreational rock and ice climbers for many years with the first recorded rock climbs occurring in the late 1930s. Areas such as Cathedral Spires (Cynical Pinnacle), Mount Lindo (Lover's Leap), Clear Creek Canyon, and North Table Mountain (Golden Cliffs) are well known among climbers for their diverse, high quality climbing.

**Park Management Plans are available by calling the JCOS main office at 303-271-5925.*

II. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The intent of climber guidelines and potential management actions is to ensure that climbing is done in a manner that is consistent with Open Space's responsibility to protect park resources. In general, there is one overall management value with regard to this balance; protecting sensitive resources is of higher priority than accommodating public use. The following are specific management objectives:

1. Develop management strategies in conjunction with the public and assure that JCOS works with the climbing community to limit potential adverse effects of rock climbing activities.

JCOS has developed an inventory system that will be used to create site-specific management plans for all climbing areas. Inventories consist of photo plots, data sheets and checklists. Monitoring of initial base information will be important when applying guidelines and actions. JCOS staff and climber representatives will work together to make recommendations to the Park Management Planning Teams to formulate site-specific climbing management plans for each park that has climbing resources. These climbing management plans will be developed to:

- A) Minimize adverse effects on wildlife populations and habitat
- B) Minimize vegetation loss and control erosion associated with access and trail use
- C) Manage the use of fixed-protection so as not to adversely affect the quality of the rock resource, the safety of the climbing community, the recreational experience of future climbers, or the enjoyment of the non-climbing visitor
- D) Address alterations required for safety

2. Provide education on low impact climbing.

Educational programs such as Leave No Trace and stressing low-impact behaviors have the potential to reduce the overall impacts of any recreational use. The key is to enhance the users' understanding of impacts associated with a particular recreational activity and to encourage practices that minimize impacts. Issues of sanitation in areas with no facilities, noise, personal behavior, etc. will be addressed. It is desired that responsible climbing behaviors are exhibited and passed on to newer climbers. Interpretive signs, web-site information, brochures, ranger patrols and volunteers will be included in this effort.

III. MANAGED CLIMBING AREAS

Currently, the following five areas receive the most significant use by both sport and traditional climbers. Other climbing and bouldering areas exist throughout the system, however, are not currently used to an extent that require active management.

1. **Clear Creek Canyon Park** This area is comprised of numerous relatively short cliffs of difficult-to-protect gneiss and schist. The quality and quantity of climbing opportunities have made Clear Creek a popular area for the establishment of sport routes. Approximately 300 climbs have been established and identified as of 2005 on over twelve different rock formations. Additionally, two and sometimes three ice climbs form in winter and are frequently crowded. Small, but numerous pullouts on US6 provide parking and access to the river, as well as to the crags.
2. **Mt. Lindo Park** Lovers' Leap is a prominent rock formation, located near the mouth of Turkey Creek Canyon, which boasts some of the longer climbs in Jefferson County as well as a winter ice-climbing route. This feature has long been utilized for climbing classes and practice outings. Mt. Lindo may be seasonally closed for raptor protection (nesting). No formal access is established but access is usually achieved by parking on the US 285 (right-of-way) and then bushwhacking to the cliff.
3. **Cathedral Spires Park** *Currently, there is no legal public access to either Cathedral Spires or the Dome.* Cathedral Spires Park, including the Dome, is surrounded by private property and access to the park may only be gained by seeking permission from private landowners. Jefferson County Open Space is pursuing opportunities to establish legal public access to the park as per the Cathedral Spires Park Management Plan.

This area (the South Platte Valley) is one of Colorado's destination climbing areas comprised of numerous fine-grained, granite domes and crags spread out over a vast area. The feature formation is the scenically dramatic Cathedral Spires (Cynical Pinnacle), which is partially on private property and is a climbing resource of national significance. The Cathedral Spires area and the Dome are both managed with seasonal closures for protection of peregrine falcons

4. **Windy Saddle Park** Located west of Lariat Loop Road in Golden above Windy Saddle, Crashed Car Crag is a small crag that is frequented by climbers for top-rope climbing. Access and parking are not contested issues as this area is within Windy Saddle Park.
5. **North Table Mountain Park** The popular climbing areas are located on the southwest portion of the mesa. The Access Fund owns and maintains much of the climbing with adjacent opportunities on Jeffco Open Space as identified in the park management plan. Climbing is prohibited in the north area of the park, which is designated as a Sensitive area.

IV. CLOSURES

Park Management Plans are created for all Jefferson County Open Space parks. Within the park management plan, visions are created that define overall use, natural, cultural and historical assets and management actions. Areas of parks may be designated as Parkland, Natural or Sensitive Management Units. Parklands are generally areas that receive heavy use, and require more infrastructure. Natural Areas are managed to maintain a natural setting while accommodating recreational use and Sensitive areas allow restricted access due to a number of natural, cultural, historical issues, which may need additional protection in order to maintain their integrity. In areas that have been identified as Sensitive, permanent closures to recreational activities exist to protect specific species, bio-diversity or the integrity of habitat or wildlife resources. In other areas, seasonal closures may exist for temporal concerns related to wildlife needs. The following are areas that have such closures.

Cathedral Spires Park – A seasonal closure may be implemented for protection of Peregrine Falcon nesting sites. Typically, the closure runs from March 1, through July 31 annually. (See Cathedral Spires Park Management Plan)

North Table Mountain Park - The North Table Mountain Park Management Plan designates a section of the north cliffs as a Sensitive management area. This area includes several cliff-nesting sites and a fragile lichen rock garden (recommendation from Colorado Natural Heritage Program). The dense shrubland habitat also provides significant protective cover for other species, particularly mule deer.

White Ranch Park – The White Ranch Park Management Plan designates the Ralston Buttes section of the park as a Sensitive area, limiting public use. Approximately 700 acres contains a sensitive plant community, as ranked by the Natural Heritage Global Ranking (Type 2- rare and susceptible to becoming endangered). Additionally, the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) ranked this area #1 of the top 5 areas within the Black Hawk District warranting protection.

V. CLIMBING IMPACTS AND ISSUES

The following are JCOS guidelines for climbers and potential management actions. The goal is to apply the least restrictive action to adequately mitigate identified impacts.

Rock climbing, along with other recreational activities, can pose environmental concerns including alterations to the natural environment, trail proliferation, human waste issues and natural resource impacts. To address these and other concerns in the context of park management plans, guidelines and potential management actions have been created for use in developing site-specific climbing management plans. This spectrum will be used to mitigate impacts to resources and address visitor safety and visitor experience issues. Based on the inventory and assessment process, the most appropriate action will be implemented to deal with a specific impact.

Climbing Management Guidelines & Actions

A. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Discussion:

Impacts from climbing activity involve wildlife responses to human presence. Raptors, or birds of prey, are particularly vulnerable because of their low tolerance for human disturbance and their dependence upon the cliff/rock habitat. Furthermore, certain rock dependant species such as peregrine falcons and golden eagles are protected under federal law. In response, closing sites to recreation on a seasonal basis has been a frequently utilized management tool along the Front Range and throughout Jefferson County. Primary resources of concern include Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species, nesting habitat, and integrity of the rock face and vegetation.

Guidelines for Climbers:

- Chipping, gluing, trundling and altering of vegetation are prohibited
- Regulation 5.84.31: It shall be unlawful to alter, damage, destroy, remove, or in any other way vandalize wildlife habitat features on Open Space lands including but not limited to animal dens, burrows, dwellings or nests.
- Regulation 5.84.36: It shall be unlawful for any person on any Open Space lands to harass, chase, harm, capture, kill, maim, or possess any wildlife including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish.

Potential Management Actions:

- Seasonal or permanent closures may be implemented based on resource protection needs.
- Active monitoring and ongoing avian inventory will be used to modify or re-classify closed areas, which may allow for extirpated species to return to historically used habitat or climbing to resume in less desirable, or unused habitat.
- Concentrated educational efforts by volunteers and other staff may be implemented to heighten awareness of environmental concerns.

B. ACCESS

Discussion:

Climbing poses the consideration of providing legal access, parking and assessing the need for other visitor facilities. Formal trail corridors, easements and access routes must be addressed in each PMP. In some cases, climbers access routes on Open Space by crossing private property, as in the case at Cathedral Spires and the Dome. At other areas, climbers typically park on the road right-of-way and utilize social trails for access. In some cases, access to climbing routes may pose safety concerns.

Guidelines for Climbers:

- Education and information will be made available to the climbing community regarding legal access to climbing sites on Open Space
- Parking areas will be identified in the park management plan and climbers should use designated legal parking areas
- Climbers should use designated climbing accesses

Potential Management Actions

- Unauthorized structures or improvements placed on Open Space to facilitate access may be removed
- Tyrolean traverses are prohibited unless approved in the site specific climbing management plan

C. TRAIL MANAGEMENT

Discussion:

Access to the base of many climbs often necessitates hiking up steep grades that are highly susceptible to erosion. At most of Open Space's climbing areas no developed trails to climbing routes exist. As a result, climbers often unknowingly take multiple paths to access the same climbs. Braided trails result and accelerate the erosive process. Similarly, along the base of cliffs, where the traffic is concentrated, or at very popular crags, social trails can develop and further affect the resource.

Active trail management may be necessary to control erosion and the loss of vegetation. Resource inventories will guide trail design and management to protect any special plant communities threatened or endangered plants or any species that may be adversely affected by the use of the access trails.

One of the more severe impacts of ice climbing occur when crampon-clad climbers down-climb steep social trails causing significant disruption to the soil furthering erosion.

Guidelines for Climbers:

- Climbers should use one main access trail
- Developed access to climbing sites may not meet typical industry standards used for multi-use trails
- Signage may be used to inform the public that access is to climbing areas and not a standard multi-use trail

Potential Management Actions:

- Site hardening at base of cliffs may be implemented in impacted areas
- Foot traffic control structures including fences and elevated trails may be used to lessen damage
- Construction of developed trails may be necessary to eliminate multiple and braided social trail systems
- Education and signage may be implemented to manage unwanted traffic patterns
- Creation of, or improvements to access trails is prohibited
- Closures may be necessary for revegetation and restoration efforts

D. PET MANAGEMENT

Discussion:

Pets at climbing areas are a management concern. Impacts of unmanaged pets include vegetation disturbance and accumulation of urine and feces. Aggression toward wildlife and toward other climbers and/or their pets occurs. Unmanaged pets can distract or obstruct climbers causing safety concerns as well. Pets are allowed to accompany climbers, however, management of these pets will be important.

Guidelines for Climbers:

- Leave No Trace principles encourage pet owners to leave pets at home
- Pets may be tied to a fixed object but should not be left unattended
- Regulation 5.84.20: It shall be unlawful for any person to permit any pet under his custody, control, or ownership to be off leash and not under physical control on any Open Space lands. "Leash" means a strap, cord or chain and shall not exceed ten (10) feet in length
- Regulation 5.84.41: It shall be unlawful for any person to fail to pick up and dispose of pet excrement deposited by any pet under their custody, control, or ownership in a waste receptacle

Potential Management Actions:

- Education/outreach and patrol will be implemented to address pet problems
- In some cases pets may be prohibited

E. FIXED PROTECTION

Discussion:

Fixed protection (i.e. bolting) is a permanent, man-made alteration of the natural resource and may be of concern if there are safety issues, negative impacts to resources or impacts to non-climber experience. Considering the current relatively minor impact of alteration due to fixed protection and the prevalence of bolting in modern sport climbing, fixed protection will be allowed except where specifically prohibited in site-specific climbing management plans.

Guidelines for Climbers:

- Fixed protection will be kept to a minimum without compromising safety, and non-altering (clean) protection will be encouraged
- Use of camouflage protection will be encouraged
- Durable materials will be used of sufficient length, size (greater than or equal to 3/8 inch) and shape to be generally accepted by the climbing community and to ensure installations that will not require premature replacement, nor encourage the placement of “back-up” protection

Potential Management Actions:

- Essential on-going monitoring of rock climbing resources to address environmental impacts
- Inventory/monitor fixed anchors
- Climbing closure if necessary to protect integrity of resources and/or safety of visitors
- Establishment of an oversight committee to address new route proposals and consider a permitting process
- For the protection of resources, climber safety, the recreational experience of future climbers and the enjoyment of the non-climbing visitor, the use of expansion bolts may be prohibited in some areas or removal of bolts may be necessary if other options are not sufficient to address issues

F. ICE FARMING

Discussion:

Additional environmental and legal concerns stem from the practice of ice “farming”. In recent years, activist ice climbers have occasionally “farmed” ice in various places along the Front Range by diverting watercourses at the tops of cliffs in order to enhance the quality of ice climbs. Hoses, pipes and trenches have been installed to redirect water and aqueducts have been tapped (vandalized) in the hope of either increasing the amount of ice on existing climbs or to actually create new ice climbs. Regulations exist which prohibit the alteration of natural resources and installation of improvements, including hoses and pipes and as a result, ice farming on JCOS is prohibited.

APPENDIX A

LEAVE NO TRACE PRINCIPLES

Plan Ahead and Prepare

- Choose the right climb - pick a climb that is appropriate for you and your group
- Educate yourself - always educate yourself about climbing specific rules and regulations at the site you wish to climb
- Develop skill and take responsibility - plan routes and climbing trips that match your ability and be prepared for emergencies

Travel on Durable Surfaces

- Avoid creating new impacts when descending from a climb
- Concentrate use in popular areas - use existing trails, established staging areas and other developed sites
- Walk or scramble off routes - avoid creating new impacts when retreating from a climb
- Consider if an area is durable before developing any climbing potential

Dispose Of Waste Properly

- Use developed sites (restrooms) for human waste disposal or pack out your waste
- Carry plastic bags to pack out "micro-garbage" like wrappers, cigarettes or climbing tape

Leave What You Find

- Leave natural features undisturbed - avoid chipping holds, drilling pockets or gluing holds onto the rock
- Preserve the past - do not disturb historic or archeological sites
- Avoid spreading non-native plants and animals - clean your gear after each backcountry outing

Respect Wildlife

- Avoid sensitive times and habitats - observe agency closures
- Observe wildlife in the vertical habitat from a distance - pay attention to clues that animals are stressed and respond by retreating from a climb if necessary
- Never feed animals
- Leave your pet at home

Be Considerate Of Other Visitors

Keep a low profile - wear natural colors, break into smaller groups if you are with a large party and limit your time at any single route

