

Outdoor Insights

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JEFFERSON COUNTY OPEN SPACE

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Annual Trails Assessment

How trails are evaluated for maintenance in Jeffco Open Space Parks

With well over 2 million visitors each year to Jeffco Open Space, taking care of existing parks and trails is our top priority. In order to do this job effectively and efficiently, the organization is implementing an annual trails assessment. This snapshot in time will help to develop work plans and priorities for trail maintenance, identify opportunities for volunteer stewardship projects by groups or as a special event, and communicate to visitors where maintenance will be occurring.

Trails within Jeffco Open Space have personality. They vary in surface type and difficulty rating and both contribute to the Annual Trails Assessment. The rating of a trail has an impact on the level of maintenance required. Within the more populated areas, trails may be gentle and paved and earn a difficulty rating of Least Difficult. A foothills natural surface trail may have grades that exceed 10% with a number of roots and rocks in the trail tread. This trail would be rated Most Difficult and the maintenance standard would be different from the urban hard surface trail. For more information

on ratings within Jeffco Open Space, see the *Trail Difficulty Ratings* edition of **Outdoor Insights**.

The Annual Trails Assessment creates a snapshot of Jeffco Open Space trails, with each park being mapped according to the assessment standards and difficulty ratings. Maintenance inventory maps are updated from data collected by staff and volunteers. These maps help generate the annual plan for heavy maintenance projects and general workload for the coming year. Assessment maps are organized on a grid system to help identify locations where attention needs to occur and work needs to take place. Additionally, volunteer projects can be directed to areas in need of attention and are identified priorities on the inventory maps.

There are three categories for trail maintenance that are assigned according to specific trail difficulty designations and tolerances. These categories are **GOOD**, **FAIR** and **PRIORITY**. Examples of trails and their conditions are illustrated below.

GOOD (Green)

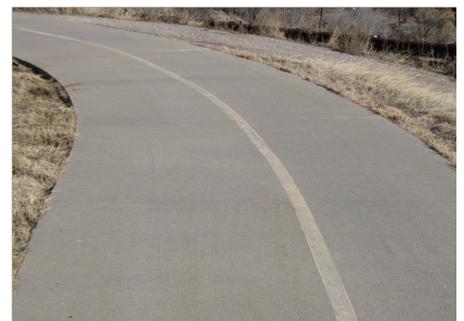
Trail is in good condition and is expected to remain in good condition with regularly scheduled routine maintenance. The trail does not negatively impact the surrounding area. Examples of three primary trail types assessed as **GOOD** are shown below.



Natural Surface



Crusher Fines Surface



Concrete Surface

FAIR (Yellow)

Trail is in fair condition. Regularly scheduled routine maintenance is temporarily effective in stabilizing the trail conditions and some degradation of the trail is expected. Corrective action will require a plan to address. Examples of trails in **FAIR** condition are shown below.



Natural Surface



Crusher Fines Surface



Concrete Surface

PRIORITY (Red)

Trail or section needs attention. Negative impacts to the natural resource and recreational experience are apparent. Trail closures are possible until work is completed to stabilize tread.



Natural Surface



Crusher Fines Surface



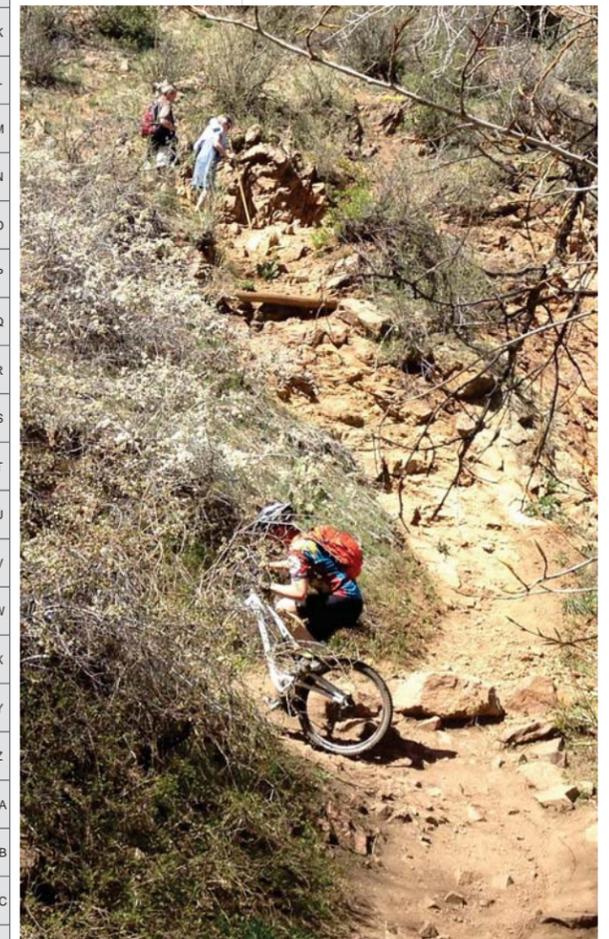
Concrete Surface

Using the illustrations above, the **PRIORITY** natural surface trail shown resulted from a collapsed culvert that sent water streaming down the trail with significant loss in material. Without attention, the tread would only degrade further and have additional impacts on silting, water quality and likely be exaggerated by trail users trying to avoid the ruts.

Within the **FAIR** category shown above, the crusher fines surface trail looks a little wet and muddy, similar to typical trails following a rain or snow event. In this case, the gravel material is not managing water effectively nor providing a more durable surface for trail users. In efforts to avoid the mud, users are beginning to widen the trail along the side. Although attention is not needed immediately, this situation does call for a remedy that will require staff or volunteer resources to plan and execute. The intention is for trails in the **FAIR** category to move toward the **GOOD** category as resources are allocated to this work.

The Annual Trails Assessment will allow Jeffco Open Space to create the work plan/priorities for our trails crews; identify opportunities for volunteer stewardship; and communicate to users where trails may be less than optimal.

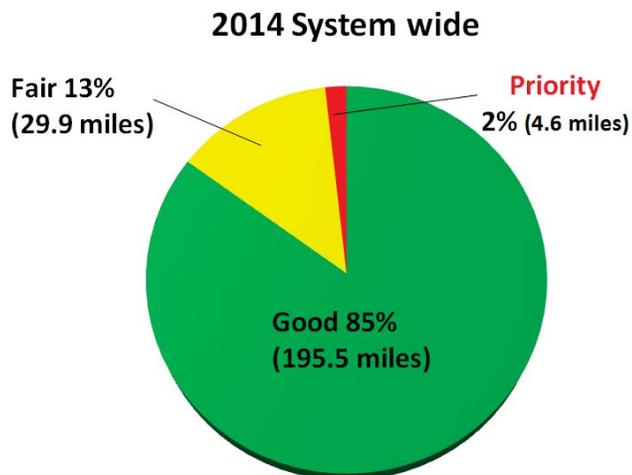
The example at right from Matthews/Winters Park indicates the status of the Park following the assessment. A small portion of the trail system has been identified as a Priority, and it is important for staff to take action immediately. Action might be to employ a group of volunteers under staff direction to remedy the condition as a one-time event or enlist the group to be involved on a continuing basis. In some circumstances, the need for structural support or re-routes may be the best option. Frequent visitors to Matthews/Winters Park may be familiar with the Cherry Gulch segment of Red Rocks Trail pictured far right. This challenging area appears on the Annual Trails Assessment map as a R-1 indicating it is a **PRIORITY** for trail maintenance.



Cherry Gulch area of Red Rocks Trail, Matthews/Winters Park currently assessed as **PRIORITY**

Annual Trails Assessment Maps like the one of Matthews/Winters Park, shown on the previous page, are generated for each Jeffco Open Space Park. The Annual Trails Assessment data will be helpful in accomplishing the goals of this management effort

1. Establish annual work plans and priorities for trails maintenance
2. Identify opportunities for Volunteer Stewardship
3. Communication to park and trail visitors about areas where maintenance activity may be underway



The Annual Trails Assessment of Jeffco Open Space Trails indicates the system to be mostly in good shape with only 2% categorized in **PRIORITY** condition. If you, your club or workplace would like to help with these trails in need, please contact the Jeffco Open Space Volunteer Services Team at 303-271-5922 or osvol@jeffco.us



A topical newsletter, Outdoor Insights provides information on Colorado's Jefferson County Open Space projects, programs and activities. For more information, contact Communications Manager Thea Rock, trock@jeffco.us or (303) 271-5902. Read past issues on a variety of topics at jeffco.us/parks.