

North Star Nature Preserve 2025 Management Plan Update

WORKING GROUP MEETING AGENDA

April 9, 2025 | 11am - 3pm | City Council Chambers

MEETING PURPOSE: Discuss goals for the 2025 North Star Management Plan Update and provide opportunity for the group to share their vision for North Star. Share Visitor Use Management Framework concepts and definitions, and utilize the framework to provide in-depth feedback to the planning team regarding key issues and opportunities.

MEETING AGENDA:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Working Group Scope
- Input To-Date
- Review Visitor Use Management Framework
- North Star Visioning Activity / Desired Conditions
- Indicators
- Invitation for Public Survey Review
- Next Steps

ATTENDEES:

- **OST Staff:** Carly O'Connell (Senior Planner/Landscape Architect), Gary Tennenbaum (OST Director), Rick Norman (Ranger Supervisor), Jessie Young (Planning and Outreach Manager)
- **Consultants:** Melissa Bade, Steve Lawson
- **Working Group Members:** Andre Wille, Bud Tymczyszyn, Evan Cree, Eliza Voss, Frank Arenella, Graeme Means, Janet Urquhart, Jim Kravitz, John Spiess, Jordan Curet, Kendra Head, Kurtis Tesch, Lange Adams, Morgan Boyles, Sallie Bernard, Shelly Braudis, Tina Person
- **Not in Attendance:** Joshua Cullen, CDOT; Tom Cardamone, WBI

Welcome and Introductions:

Jessie Young, Pitkin County OST, opened the meeting with a brief welcome and thanked participants for attending. Consultants Steve Lawson, DJ&A, and Melissa Bade, CDR Associates, introduced themselves to the Working Group. The group agreed to the following discussion guidelines to ensure efficient meeting conversations:

- Silent cell phones
- Listen to understand
- Critique ideas, not people
- Respect each others' thinking and value their contributions (even if you disagree)
- Allow every voice to be heard (raise name tents as to not speak over one another)
- Ask "what's possible?" not "what's wrong"? (And keep asking!)
- State your point of view with a supportive rationale
- Stay focused on the topic at hand

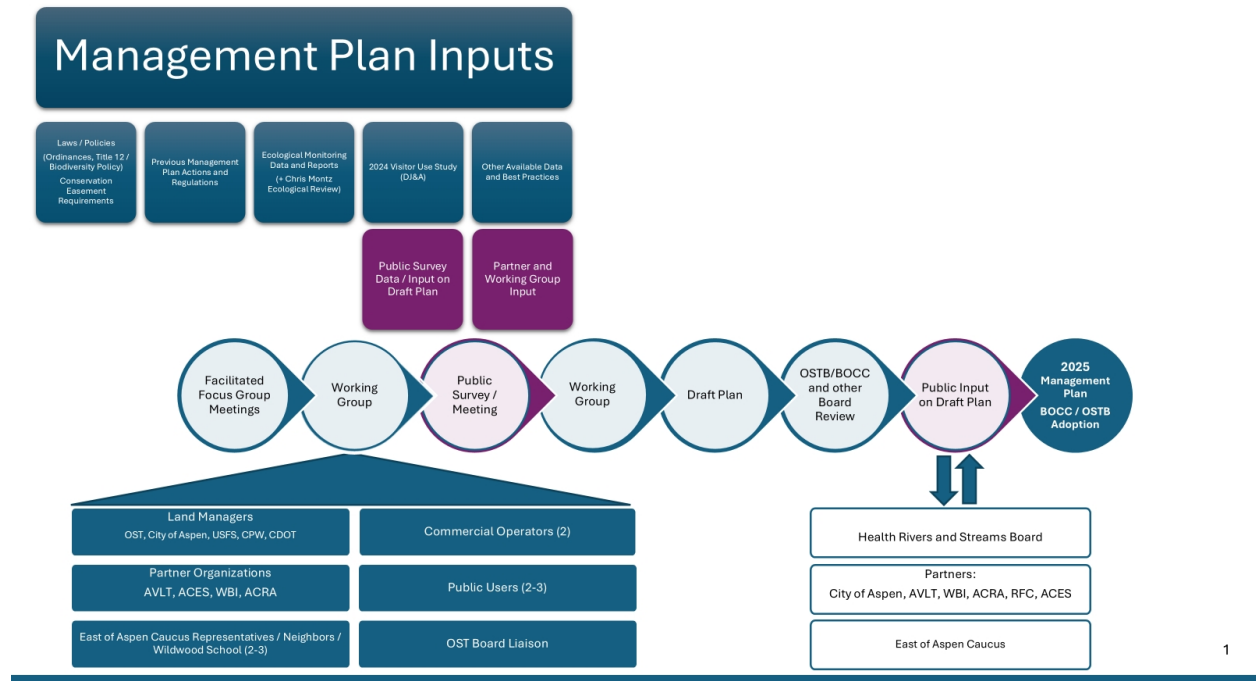
Melissa led the group through an initial introduction activity where the group looked at photos provided by their co-group members and discussed the importance of North Star. Key takeaways from this introduction activity included:

- **Wildlife & Ecological Integrity**
 - Moose were identified as key species on the site.
 - Emphasis on riparian habitat, wetlands, and maximum biodiversity.
 - Beavers were highlighted as natural stewards, helping to create and maintain vital wetland ecosystems.
 - North Star is seen as a refuge for all wildlife, from large to small.
- **Tranquility, Peace, & Nature Connection**
 - Repeated emphasis on tranquility, peaceful experiences, and the serenity of the site.
 - Described as a place for unwinding, immersion in nature, and multi-generational enjoyment.
 - Importance of maintaining quiet times of year and recreational opportunities that occur during times when wildlife is less active (e.g., Nordic skiing).
- **Human-Nature Coexistence**
 - Focus on coexistence between humans and nature.
 - North Star as a place to model harmonious interaction between different recreation users as well as recreation users and wildlife.
 - Importance of having efforts to rewild parts of North Star while still providing opportunities for low-impact recreation.
- **Mental & Emotional Wellbeing ("Blue Health")**
 - Access to water is seen as important not only for ecology, but also for mental health and wellness.
 - Lack of nearby public water spaces makes North Star uniquely valuable.
 - Concept of “blue health” highlighted: connection to water improves emotional wellbeing.
- **Education, Inspiration, & Stewardship**
 - Vision to inspire love and care for the land through experience.
 - The transformation that occurs pre and post river float as a metaphor for increased awareness and stewardship.
 - North Star sits in a unique area and serves as a “welcome to Aspen” sign for visitors.
- **Long-Term Vision & Management Challenges**
 - North Star is a complex property with many stakeholders.
 - Recognition of changing environmental conditions (e.g., less water, climate pressures).
 - Focus on developing a resilient, adaptive plan that manages for wildlife, public use, and community needs.
 - Recognition of homeowners' concerns and community impacts along the river.
- **Community Engagement & Institutional Commitment**
 - Deep community passion and participation noted as inspiring and an important foundation for this management plan update.
 - Acknowledgment that education, enforcement, and collaboration are critical to the site’s future success.

Working Group Scope

Jessie reviewed the North Star Nature Preserve Management Plan update process, timeline, and expectations of the working group. Jessie noted the importance of multiple inputs to the management plan update, and provided a description of how these inputs will all work together. For the first time at the preserve, the Visitor Use Management Study provides a scientific foundation for understanding visitor use at the preserve, which accompanies over 25 years of data collection about natural resources and wildlife. The Working Group will work with both the VUM study and natural resource information to

provide inputs that will be incorporated into the final report.



The following were listed as important goals of the Working Group meetings:

- The group is tasked with bringing diverse, local perspectives to the management planning process.
- This group will be asked to review data and reports, discuss and provide feedback to help inform management actions.
- The group will convene in person two times in 2025. Additional subgroup meetings will be added if needed.
- Group members should be able to represent the broader interests and perspectives of the group they are representing and provide a two-way line of communication between their "interest group" and the Working Group.

Input To-Date

Melissa reviewed input received to-date through the Community Webinar in January and subsequent focus group meetings with land managers, operators, and neighbors. Input themes include:

- Managing Traffic/Parking, Use, and User Behavior
- Commercial Operator Presence
- Importance of Wildlife, Managing Wildlife-Human Conflicts
- Data-Oriented Decision-Making
- Continued Partner and Public Collaboration
- Future-Orientation

The working group added context, including highlighting the importance of wildlife on the site and emphasis on restoration. Ultimately, the working group members noted the importance of optimizing both recreational and natural resource values, including habitat quality, at North Star for future generations.

The working group also highlighted educational programming as a core purpose the site was preserved. At present, group size limitations impact some potential educational programming on the site, and this is something to consider for future management.

Desired Conditions

Steve provided a primer on visitor use management, reviewed the pre-meeting handout ([link](#)), and discussed the definitions of desired conditions and indicators, emphasizing the importance of ecological, experiential, and managerial / operational goals in desired conditions.

Visitor Use Management: A process to identify, implement, and adapt strategies and actions to balance opportunities for recreational use in an area with protecting ecological conditions and the quality and character of visitors' experiences there.

Desired conditions are a foundational component of applying an indicator-based, adaptive visitor use management framework. They are followed by indicators, thresholds, monitoring, and management.

Based on these definitions, the working group broke into small groups to reflect on the pre-meeting prompts and discuss desired conditions for the site. Following small groups, the full working group discussed key themes, highlighted below:

- **Tranquility**
 - Importance of user behavior and etiquette in fostering a **tranquil** environment.
 - **Tranquility** integral to opportunities for people to experience connection with and respect for nature and for harmony between recreational use and wildlife protection.
- **Access to Water**
 - A place where people of all ability levels, from novice to expert, can access the water for enjoyment and nature appreciation.
 - Safety / floatability of the river while also supporting beaver dams and other natural debris/process that occur within the river's channel.
- **Appropriate Visitor Use Levels**
 - Levels of recreation are in balance with infrastructure for access, in harmony with natural systems, and in support of a tranquil setting in which to experience the river environment.
- **Desired Ecological Conditions**
 - Preservation of a **healthy riparian corridor, biological diversity, and connectivity** for wildlife is paramount.
 - Protecting **natural resource** conditions and promoting recreational access that is aligned with conservation goals.
- **Education & Behavior Change**
 - Public behavior is linked to understanding the "**why**" behind regulations (e.g., quiet zones, dusk-to-dawn closures).
 - **Education** is seen as a **conduit for conservation**, especially for youth and new users.
 - Messaging should aim to create **empathy**, inspire users to ask: "How can I get this where I live?" and advocate for protection.
- **Beach Use & Habitat Protection**

- Ensure designated human-use beach remains while continuing to maintain others as **wildlife habitat**.
- Obeying **signage** and **voluntary closures** are viewed as effective tools.
- **Beavers, Ecosystem Services & Coexistence**
 - **Beavers** are key to habitat creation (wetlands, biodiversity, water storage).
 - There's a need to **balance beaver activity with floatability** and recreation.
 - Suggestions to set **thresholds** that allow both to coexist.

Additional Information Provided by the Group:

- Avoid returning to COVID-era use levels; those created **dysfunction** and **overwhelmed** infrastructure, especially at Wildwood.
- Recognized need for **organized river use** and “friction” mechanisms (like parking limits or regulations) to control high use.
- Targeting **future-proofed management** with a 20-year outlook, informed by data and visitor behavior trends.
- Sandy beaches are **ecologically sensitive** (e.g., nesting birds) and need continued protection.
- Learn from other communities managing similar challenges.
- 80–90% of the time, **desired conditions are being met**.
- Focus should be on **identifying and managing pinch points**.
- Management must account for **changing baselines, species interactions, and ecosystem services** like water retention and fire breaks.

As a next step, the planning team will take this information and draft desired conditions for the working group to discuss.

Indicators

As a final activity, working group members considered indicators to serve as the basis to assess the health of ecological conditions as well as to assess the quality and character of visitors’ experiences. Indicators suggested by the working group included:

Visitor Experience:

1. Crowding & Congestion (Noted by 3 Sticky Notes)

- High use at **peak times** and **overcrowding at entry/exit points** (e.g., put-in/take-out areas) are key concerns.
- Indicators like "**visitor use per hour/day**" and **volume of use** signal a need to monitor and manage crowd density.

2. Noise & Tranquility (Noted by 1 Sticky Note)

- **Noise levels** are a direct indicator of the loss or maintenance of tranquility.
- Desire to protect the **peaceful, quiet character** of North Star that supports both human experience and wildlife wellbeing.

3. Human Pressure & Behavior (Noted by 2 Sticky Notes)

- Evaluation of **visitor compliance** with etiquette or rules (e.g., respecting zones, behaving appropriately) is crucial.
- Monitoring **number and type of ranger interactions per day** (e.g., enforcement vs. education) reflects both use intensity and ranger workload.
- Presence of disruptive behavior.

4. Quality of Experience & Emotional Impact (Noted by 4 Sticky Notes)

- Indicators include whether visitors experience **peace, a sense of connection to nature, or a mindset shift** during their visit.
- Positive transformation from **pre- to post-experience** is seen as a sign of success (e.g., “did visitors experience a sense of peace and connection?”).

5. Viewscape & Visual Quality (Noted by 2 Sticky Notes)

- “People/viewscape” was noted as an indicator—suggesting that **visual congestion or presence of others** can affect perceived quality.
- Protecting natural aesthetics remains important for visitor satisfaction.

Ecological:

1. Riparian and Wetland Health (Noted by 7 Sticky Notes)

- Strong emphasis on the **health and quality of riparian zones** and edges.
- Importance of **wetland functioning**, particularly in relation to **water storage, fire resilience, and habitat connectivity**.

2. Species Diversity & Wildlife Monitoring (Noted by 4 Sticky Notes)

- **Species diversity** is a core ecological value to track.
- Importance of **ongoing monitoring of plant and animal populations**
- Detailed tracking includes the presence of animal presence (**bird calls, nesting sites, and wildlife camera data**).

3. Human Pressure on Ecosystems (Noted by 4 Sticky Notes)

- Several notes refer to “**human pressure**” and its impact on ecological conditions.
- This includes **ecological-recreational interfaces** like nesting birds being affected by recreation (e.g., floating, beach use).

4. Beavers and Habitat Engineering (Noted by 6 Sticky Notes)

- **Beaver activity and stable populations** is noted as both an indicator and a contributor to ecological health.
- Measuring **presence of beaver dams** and broader influence on wetland creation.

5. Environmental Conditions & System Capacity (Noted by 1 Sticky Note)

- River **flow levels and water quality** as indicators of system health and capacity to support use.

6. Shorebird Nesting & Sensitive Habitat (Noted by 2 Sticky Notes)

- **Nesting shorebirds** are a specific ecological focal point.

- Indicates the need to **monitor sensitive nesting sites** and create buffers or seasonal protections.

Survey and Wrap Up

The meeting wrapped up quickly, with an ask for group members to let the planning team know if they would like to be part of a public survey review committee and share if they have any additional insights or ideas as it relates to today's discussion. The team will send out a poll for the next working group meeting.

ACTION: Working Group members let Jessie or Melissa know if they would like to review the public survey before distribution. Share any additional insights around desired conditions or indicators with the planning team.

Appendix A: Transcribed Desired Conditions Flip Charts

Group 1

- **Habitat**
 - As refuge, no further development
 - Baseline always changing
 - Biological diversity
 - Being able to float = “pristine”
 - Tranquil, quiet → healthy riparian corridor
- **Behavior & Experience**
 - Respect other experiences
 - “How can I get this where I live?”
 - Advocate for protection
 - Recreation as conduit for conservation
 - Includes educational component (students, users, etc.)

Group 2

- **Ecological Values & Ecosystem Services**
 - Who is habitat for? Species interaction
 - Passageway – wildlife
 - Water storage, fire break
- **Beavers**
 - Establishment of thriving beaver habitat → then broader habitat
 - How does this impact rec/floating
 - What thresholds can exist together
 - Previously river delta, not as much now
- **User Experience & Safety**
 - (Safety) of users
 - “Floatability”
 - Consider adaptability of humans
 - Try not to breach dams
 - Beavers & paddlers
- **Learning from Others**
 - Learn from other communities

Group 3

- Definitions of nature have evolved
 - Connectivity for wildlife
- **Sandy Beaches**
 - Need protection
 - Consider additional human beaches, then keep rest as habitat
- **Public Messaging & Regulations**
 - Messaging what’s off limits & why
 - Beach areas can thrive without disturbance from recreational users
 - (Beach use – don’t land on beach)
 - Obey signage, understand rationale → quiet zones
 - Dusk to dawn regulation
 - Wildlife is impacted, most active
 - When people understand “why” → more likely to alter behavior
 - Voluntary (heron nest comes back)

Group 4

- **"Safety"**
 - Tranquil, quieter, smoother water
 - Consistent ranger presence
 - Perception of safety
 - Lower barrier to entry to inexperienced users (mild risk)
 - Highlighting ongoing collaboration
- **"Total Use"**
 - Don't want to return to COVID-era use levels
Total use has high impact → operational dysfunction @ Wildwood
 - Planning for the future – 20 yrs
 - Accessibility of N.S. (North Star)
- **Management Strategies**
 - Introduce “friction” to help manage total use
Address bad parking experiences
 - Be prepared
 - Want Wildwood to function
 - Organized use on river → don't want waterfall effect
- **Additional Notes**
 - What is optimal target for landscape – from wildlife perspective
 - Trash, noise, partying – 100% no issues → what's the tolerance level?
 - Address future high numbers
 - 80–90% of the time we are meeting “desired conditions”
 - ID pinch points & mgmt strategies

Appendix B: Indicator Sticky Notes

Visitor Experience

- "Overcrowding at entry points – High levels of congestion at put-in & take-out"
- "# of visitor use per hour / per day"
- "Human pressure"
- "At what point from ranger team do they see conflict, quality experience, etc."
- "On our board, how many were outside norms?"
- "Negative # of ranger interactions / day – Visitor experience"
- "Changes in attitude / mindset after put-in to take-out"
- "People / viewscape"
- "Visitor overcrowding, volume, respect of rules"
- "Use at peak times"
- "Noise level"
- "Visitor experience – Time density? Reach of the group? Sound? Respect of daily uses"
- "Did visitors experience a sense of peace and connection to natural values?"
- "What is the number of ranger interactions related to education vs. enforcement – usage experience"

Ecological Values

- "System limitations for floating due to water level – Local constraints outside of preserve"
- "Human pressure"
- "#1 measured river health, currently/in order to maintain health"
- "Riparian health"
- "Health of ecosystem conditions – Tracked daily, etc."
- "# – Ecological metrics based on flow/turbidity, H2O quality"
- "Nesting shore birds – Ecological + recreation interface"
- "Beaver dams – presence"
- "Water quality – Riparian habitat protection"
- "Plants & animals – Health, quantity, habitat diversity"
- "Ecological monitoring – Documenting species through time: beaver activity, nesting birds, wildlife tracks (moose, bear, etc.), aquatic insects, fish, water temperature, algae presence, willows + cottonwoods, beaver habitat, bird calls, nesting sites, scat, wildlife cams, songbirds, mussels, turtles, frogs, soil microbes, etc."
- "Species diversity"
- "Riparian edge and quality"
- "Environmental health – Water & riparian + nesting bird habitat"