

North Star Nature Preserve 2025 Management Plan Update

WORKING GROUP MEETING #2 NOTES

July 17, 2025 | 9am - 1pm

MEETING PURPOSE:

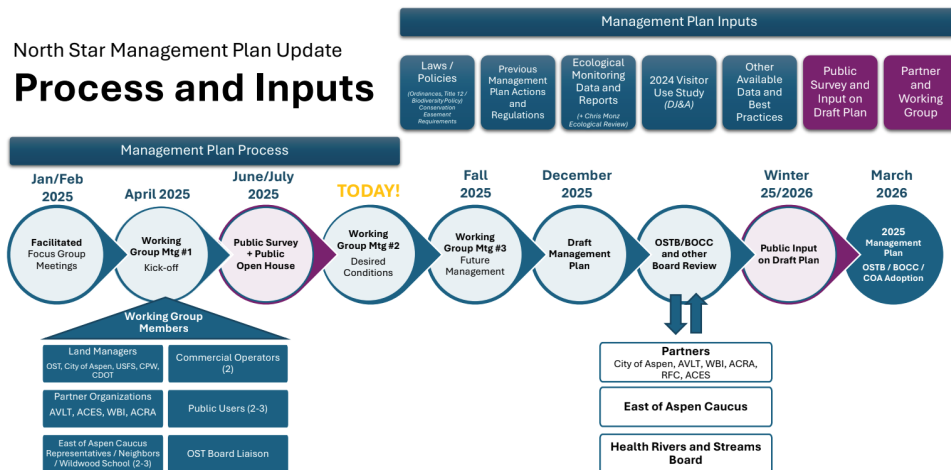
- Review conservation and ecological reports.
- Review management actions.
- Review and discuss public survey results.
- Discuss ecological values.
- Discuss desired conditions and provide initial ideas on future management actions to be included in management plan update.

MEETING AGENDA:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Ecological Context
- Status of Current Management Actions
- Review Survey Results and Open House Input
- Ecological Values Discussion
- Desired Conditions Discussion
- Next Steps

Welcome and Introductions:

Melissa Bade, CDR Associates, welcomed the group and reviewed the meeting agenda. Jessie Young, Pitkin County OST, highlighted an updated project schedule that reflects feedback from the first Working Group meeting and an additional opportunity for the Working Group to meet. The working group members introduced themselves (full attendance list included at the end of the notes) and expressed excitement to dive into the day's discussions.



Ecological Context:

As a direct outcome of the first Working Group meeting where group members indicated an interest in learning more about the ecology of the area, Liza Mitchell, Pitkin County OST, presented to the group on ecological components of the North Star Nature Preserve. The presentation (full slides included as an attachment) highlighted the following themes:

- Historical Context
- Ecological Data Standards
- Terrestrial Wildlife
- Beavers
- Birds
- Hydrology
- Vegetation / Habitat
- Conservation Values

Group members were provided a brief opportunity for questions after the presentation, with a fuller discussion on priorities planned for later in the meeting. Questions themes included:

- Providing more context around the purpose and ecological benefit of beavers and beaver dams
- Further clarifying what it means for the river to be well connected to its floodplain, including highlighting the importance of river movement
- Confirming the slides and information will be distributed after the meeting (OST will post meeting materials to the project website)

Management Context

Jessie Young, Pitkin County OST, provided a historical look at management of North Star. Highlights include:

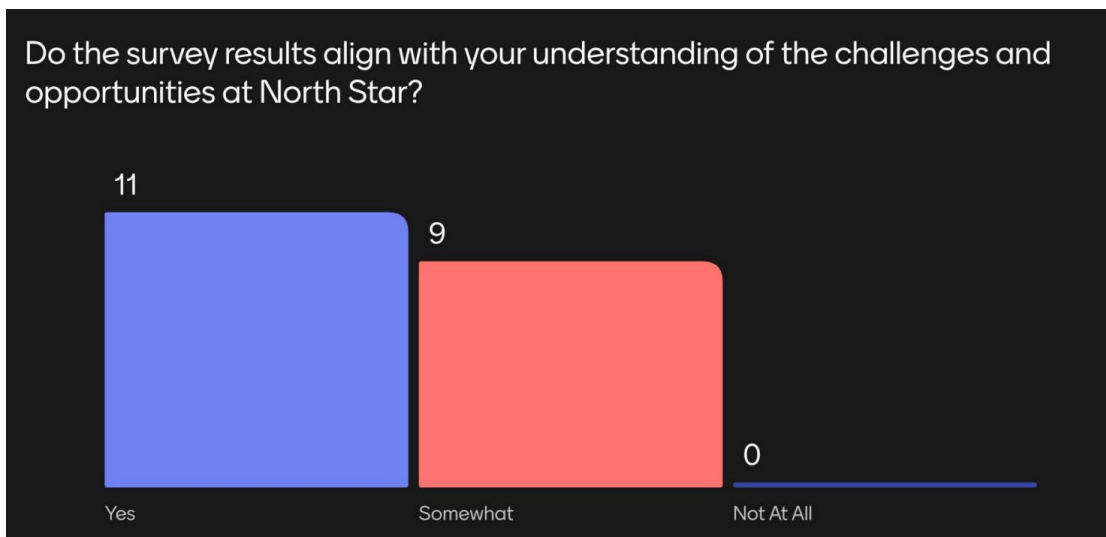
- The top challenges facing the Preserve have evolved over time as development and recreation pressures have changed (e.g., shift from tubing to paddle boarding).
- Key management tools employed include dog bans, audible music prohibition, parking enforcement, and commercial permit system.
- The 2015 plan addressed tubes, which were creating trespassing issues, and safety of Wildwood Lane through commercial permits to reduce single-occupancy vehicle traffic and establish parameters for uncontrolled commercial use.
- The 2020 plan addressed safety, litter, and overuse through education, enforcement, and engineering improvements.
- Since 2020, work with CDOT has occurred to formalize parking areas and address highway safety.

Public Survey Results:

Carly O'Connell, Pitkin County OST, provided an overview of the recent opt-in online public survey that was conducted in June and July, 2025. These survey results were also compared with the intercept survey conducted in June and July, 2024 at North Star. All survey results can be found in the slide packet included with these meeting notes. Key survey themes included:

- There was largely synergy between the two surveys and their results
- The most popular activities include: viewing scenery from Highway 82 (90%), floating the river (65%), walking/running on the East of Aspen Trail (65%), and wildlife viewing (52%)
- Across both surveys, the top reason for visiting the Preserve was the natural scenery
- Public users were more likely than commercial users to report feeling crowded at the put-in
- North Star Nature Preserve was acquired to manage the following open space values: natural, scenic, habitat, wildlife and recreation. Most online respondents believe these values meet their expectations
- The ecological values that North Star provides – wildlife habitat, biological diversity, hydrological function, healthy riparian areas – were the most important values
- Survey respondents provided input around potential management strategies such as commercial operators, personal use regulation, people per viewscape

Group members had an opportunity to reflect on the survey results through a series of Mentimeter questions and discussions. Full Mentimeter responses are included as an attachment to this document.



Question: What was the most surprising survey finding?

- Importance of wildlife as a priority on the site – survey responses didn't lean towards as much recreational use as expected
 - This indicates broader county-wide values that exist
- Perception of public use regulation and education as important until it directly impacts an individual's experience
- Some dislike for commercial operators but simultaneously recognition that they can be an effective management tool
 - Uncertainty over how the term "commercial" is understood by the public
 - Acknowledgement that a requirement to have a guide can support a level of resource protection

- “Equipment renters” could also be considered “commercial”
- Concern over “loving it to death”
- Disconnection between desires and what some experience at North Star
- Survey respondents might be looking for a scapegoat
- Us vs. them mentality - to some, “commercial” might equate to “tourist”
- Suggestion to consider how to manage high use days as the first low hanging fruit
- Importance to balance future use
- Survey was written with a bias towards learning more about paddling and recreation uses - don’t want to lose the wildlife and habitat thread
- Need to address vehicles / traffic that contribute to congestion

Question: What are the most crucial findings that require attention or action?

- Consider how to manage high-use days (holidays, summer weekends, etc.)
- Distribute ecological information more broadly to provide further education (reality vs. perception)
- Overcrowding with vehicles
- Further define “commercial” use vs “public” use and combat misinformation
- Consider visioning for “rewilding” North Star

Conservation / Ecological Values:

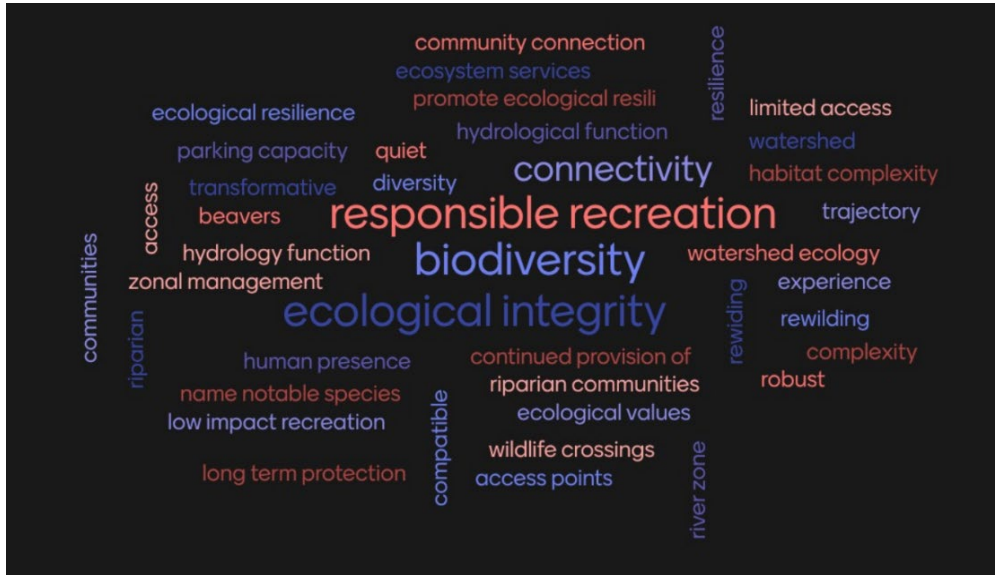
Given this information, the group reflected on Liza’s ecological values presentation and was prompted to identify *which ecological values stand out as most important for North Star?* The group had a robust discussion about the floodplain and river connectivity. Highlights from the discussion included:

- **Hydrology:** The group emphasized the importance of hydrology and instream flow to maintain a healthy landscape. The group was particularly interested in concepts to increase the river flow (and renegotiate the existing diversion) at certain points in the year to support the riparian habitat and find opportunities to ensure high water quality.
- **Biodiversity:** The group was interested in having further discussion about how to optimize biodiversity on the site and defining an ultimate goal. This included concepts such as “rewilding” and “reintroduction of species” to support the ecosystem.
- **Experience:** Continue to provide a serene, safe environment to aid in the experience people have at North Star. This can support further education of why places like North Star are an important part of the landscape and connect people to nature in a unique way.
- **Habitat and Species:** All species are important, but the group highlights a few to consider in future management practices: large ungulates (human-moose conflicts), pollinators, and beavers.
- Consider additional concepts such as working with private landowners and managing large debris along the river.

Desired Conditions Discussion:

As a final activity for the day, the group was provided a draft of the desired conditions statements for the site. Members were asked to reflect on the language and provide feedback via Mentimeter and group discussion.

Question: What are three words or phrases that stand out to you as most important to include in the desired conditions document?



- **Connectivity:** Connectivity has many meanings to people. Down and across the river, connectivity through the river, floodplain connectivity, connectivity of people to nature, and community connection.
- **Zonal Management:** Some ecological values are managed across the entire site, but general support for zonal management approach.
 - More education around zones without public access. For example:
 - 77% of the property is closed to public access
 - 5% of the property is the river corridor (in the water)
 - 50% of the Preserve has riparian habitat
 - Not every acre is equal in terms of biodiversity
 - Human presence is limited in areas (and could be limited in numbers on peak days)
- **Wetland/Riparian:** Consider defining or further highlighting wetland/riparian aspects of the relevant zones. Group members suggested considering more active river management to encourage greater wetland and riparian areas, including river “braiding” and expansion of habitat.
- **Water:** Group members further highlighted the desire to have more discussions around water diversion.
- **Indicator Species:** Within the management plan, the group recommended breaking down a list of “indicator species of biodiversity health.” (Consider beavers and how they allow for a “second snowpack.”)

The group was asked to what degree they supported the desired conditions, with a 0 being not at all and a 5 being completely. Most of the group indicated 5’s, but some indicated 3’s and 4’s.

ACTION: Project team members will distribute a post-meeting survey to gather official consensus of the group for the desired conditions and collect final input on desired condition changes. At this time, group members will also have an opportunity to provide input on future management actions.

Next Steps:

The group will meet again in the fall to discuss future management actions and the draft management plan. The public will also have the opportunity to review the draft management plan once more before finalization.

Attendance List:

Jim Kravitz, ACES	Tom Cardamone, WBI
Eliza Voss, ACRA	Morgan Boyles, Wildwood Road Association
Bud Tymczyszyn, AVL T	Tina Person, Wildwood School
John Spiess, COA	
Shelly Braudis, COA	<i>OST</i>
Evan Cree, Commercial Operator	Jessie Young, OST
Lange Adams, Commercial Operator	Liza Mitchell, OST
Andre Wille, McFarland Lane	Carly O’Connell, OST
Sallie Bernard, North Star Preserve HOA	Jami McMannes, OST
Wayne Ives, OSTB	
Frank Arenella, River User	<i>Consultants</i>
Andrea Tupy, Roaring Fork Conservancy	Steve Lawson, DJ&A
Kevin Warner, USFS	Melissa Bade, CDR

Attachments:

- Full Meeting Slides
- Mentimeter Results