

2021

CLEAR CREEK

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Mid-Summer Report
July 26, 2021

INTRODUCTION

This Report is intended to provide a brief mid-summer update and summary of the City's efforts related to management of the Clear Creek corridor for the 2021 summer tourism season, generally recognized as Memorial Day through Labor Day.

During the initial months of 2021, the City Manager's Office organized a group of community stakeholders to review Clear Creek management practices. This group—comprised of representatives from the City of Golden, civic organizations, Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, community leaders, recreation industry, and Golden residents—met and identified 17 specific strategies that the City should consider in 2021 to address ongoing concerns related to the use both in and adjacent to this precious community resource. Background on this effort was documented in several reports, which can be found at GuidingGolden.com.

RECAP OF FIRST HALF OF THE 2021 SUMMER SEASON

Not surprisingly, the 2021 summer tourism season has turned out to be one of the busiest in recent memory. Observations from long-time City officials and community members report activity levels to be greater than any time in recent memory. It is commonly acknowledged that pent-up travel demand on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing popularity of tourism in Colorado and Golden, and household access to federal stimulus dollars, have all contributed to a significant rebound in travel and outdoor activity this summer. Locally, early summer weather has been ideal for outdoor activity, particularly the use and enjoyment of Clear Creek and the adjacent corridor.

Specific data would support these assertions. Sales tax revenues in Golden from the most recent month reported (May 2021) are up 31.3% in comparison to the same month in 2020. Compared to May of 2019, a pre-pandemic comparison, sales tax revenues are up 11.6%. Even more locally, sales tax in the downtown area which includes Clear Creek is up 33.8% over last year.¹

From a weather perspective, in the 56 days between Memorial Day (May 31) and July 25th, a total of 43 days (77%) have had a high temperature of 85 degrees or more, with many of those falling on weekends. During this same period, 20 days (36%) saw highs of 95 degrees or more, and 5 days have reached at least 100 degrees.²

¹ May 2021 City of Golden Monthly Sales Tax Report

² Data as reported from the metro area's official weather observation site at Denver International Airport.

From a Clear Creek activity perspective, tubing and tube rentals began in earnest during the weekend of June 19/20 and have been strong for the past six weekends. The City's Department Directors have met weekly since early June to review weekend activity and to consider adjustments to management strategy.

The remaining parts of this report will highlight actions taken on the specific strategies previously identified as well as noting areas for potential future consideration.

SAFETY AND WATER MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1: IMPLEMENT WATER SAFETY FLAG SYSTEM

Following the identification of this strategy by the Clear Creek Management Working Group, the Police Chief and Fire Chief met and recommended conditions at which certain safety warnings will be displayed. These determinations were made after considering 1) the Clear Creek Working Group's discussion; 2) previous experience in performing swift water rescues; and 3) consistency with Jefferson County Sheriff's Office safety measures, which govern in unincorporated areas of Clear Creek just west of Golden city limits.

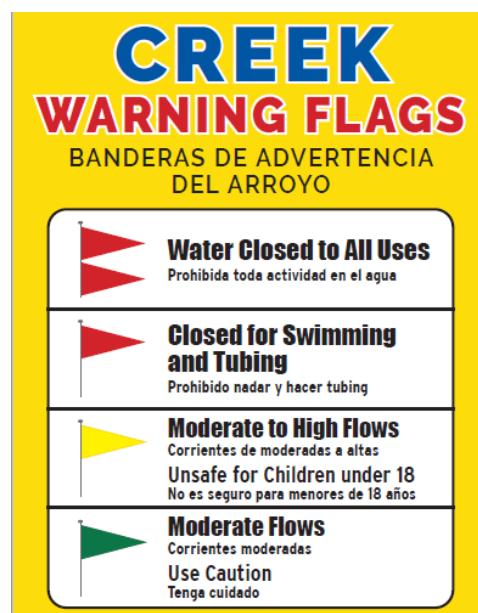
A flag warning system, detailed at right, was established in early June based upon the recommendations of the Golden Police Chief and Golden Fire Chief. Large flags and the warning system signs are displayed at the following locations: Ford Street bridge, Washington Avenue bridge, Billy Drew Bridge (Illinois St), Pedestrian Bridge at 6th Avenue, and the creek beach area.

Flags are displayed based on flow conditions as follows:

0-299 CFS	Green
300-899 CFS	Yellow
900+ CFS	Red

Double Red (Complete Closure to all Users) is based on unsafe conditions as a result of flow, debris, water temperature, contaminants, and other emergency and public safety factors at the discretion of the Chief of Police.

Clear Creek operated under **Level Red** until June 23rd, at which time flows dropped consistently below 900 CFS. **Level Yellow** was in place from June 23rd to July 13th. Since July 13th, the creek has been under a **Level Green** warning.



Clear Creek Warning Flag System Sign

As a practical matter, the warning flag system is not changed from Red to Yellow, for example, at the first flow dip below 900 CFS. Instead, the flow rate must consistently be below 900 CFS for the level to move from Red to Yellow. Since the CFS flow in the creek typically ebbs and flows on a daily basis, especially early in the season, when the change is made from Red to Yellow, the *actual* flow rate is likely to be fluctuating somewhere between 700 CFS and 900 CFS throughout the day.

To better understand the effect that this warning system has on the safety of Clear Creek users and swift water rescue operations, the Golden Fire Department has begun tracking creek conditions at the time rescue operations take place. This data will continue to be collected moving forward.

Through July 25th, the Golden Fire Department performed 5 water rescues within the Golden city limits this summer season and an additional 5 rescues west of the City in Clear Creek canyon (i.e. unincorporated Jefferson County).

Details of the rescues performed in Golden city limits are as follows:

Date	Time of Day	Location	CFS	Comment
June 5	11:38 am	Near ball fields	700	Adult flipped tube and reported missing. Later found walking creek path.
June 5	2:08 pm	Near Dam on Clear Creek	670	Child in water; reported went over dam. Child found safe.
June 20	4:59 pm	Near Gold Apartments	549	Adult reported stuck on river after leaving shoreline. Person self rescued & GFD was cleared.
June 22	12:41 pm	Near RV Park	504	Adult flipped inner tube and stranded on shore; made verbal contact with Park Rngr; GFD assisted extrication with ropes.
July 9	12:04 pm	Near Vanover park	305	GFD made contact with tubers on land and escorted them for medical evaluation. No injuries.

Golden Fire Department data through July 25, 2021



Flag system installed at Washington Avenue bridge

City staff will continue to monitor, review, and report rescue data during the course of the 2021 summer season to determine if additional changes are necessary to the flag warning system.

Beginning with the week of July 26th, City staff will begin collecting data during busier weekend times in an effort to measure the extent to which tubers wear personal flotation device (PFD) safety equipment.

Lastly, during the week of July 12th, it was determined that additional signage regarding the warning system could benefit creek users. Additional signs were ordered and will be installed in additional strategic locations.

STRATEGY 2: Implementation of Video Monitoring System

The buildout of the Video Monitoring system is currently underway. Cameras have been installed at Washington Avenue bridge, Billy Drew Pedestrian Bridge and other locations. The system is not ready for activation yet. It is anticipated that this will likely be properly tested and in place with a use policy approved prior to the 2022 season.



Camera system at Billy Drew bridge.

STRATEGY 3: Private Shuttle for Tubers

Adventure West will be utilizing a private shuttle for a small fee to transport tubers from the Vanover Park area back upstream near the new Peaks to Plains trailhead parking area west of U.S. 6. The current understanding is that this service will initiate with the opening of the parking area sometime in August.

CLEAR CREEK TRAIL MANAGEMENT

STRATEGY 4: Encourage tubers to utilize North Side Trail

Tubers generally, although not exclusively, have utilized the northside Clear Creek trail to navigate back upstream. Signs were installed in mid-July encouraging tubers to utilize the underpass at Washington Avenue in order to minimize the at-grade crossing, which has had the impact of causing traffic congestion. Additionally, the City staff are evaluating whether crossing guards could effectively assist tubers at Ford/Water and Washington Street crossings.



Temporary directional signage at Washington Ave bridge

STRATEGY 5: Bicycle Dismount Zone

This strategy has not been implemented at this point due to negative community feedback received via GuidingGolden.com and other avenues. This strategy should be revisited for the future as additional e-bike rentals in the corridor have caused congestion on the north side Clear Creek trail.

STRATEGY 6: Improve Pedestrian Crossing at Vanover Park & Ford Street

A painted crosswalk was installed in early June at the Ford Street crossing at Water Street. A centerline pedestrian crossing sign has also been installed at this location. It has been observed that tubers are actively crossing in the crosswalk at this location.



PARKING & TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Temporary centerline crosswalk sign.

STRATEGY 7: Improve Directional Signage to Public Parking

Electronic message boards have been utilized to direct traffic to parking areas on the east end of the 10th Street corridor during busy weekends. Permanent directional signage will be considered as part of a broader wayfinding sign effort. Directions to free parking options have been included on the Clear Creek Information website.

STRATEGY 8: Increase Parking Enforcement

Parking enforcement officers have been out enforcing parking restrictions throughout the summer. Currently, the City is down one Parking Enforcement Officer and is actively recruiting for this position.

STRATEGY 9: Control Access to 9th Street Neighborhood

Barricades with signage stating "Road Closed—Residents Only" as well as electronic message boards in the 10th Street corridor have been utilized to alert drivers to stay out of the 9th Street residential neighborhood on weekends. These closures typically begin at 1 p.m. on Saturdays (after the Farmer's Market ends) and remain in place through Sunday evening. Additionally, the City has contracted with security vendors to provide a presence at the entrances to the 9th Street neighborhood during high activity times, such as the Independence Day weekend.

COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING

STRATEGY 10: Signage with Visuals and in Multiple Languages

Creek safety signage has been posted in both English and Spanish. Additional signage going forward will be posted in multiple languages.



Example of multi-language sign currently in use.

STRATEGY 11: Add trail connection Signs for Regional Users

Permanent signs regarding regional trail connections will be installed as part of a larger wayfinding sign package. Temporary signs are currently being crafted and will be in place prior to the opening of the Peaks to Plains trail, currently scheduled for late August.

STRATEGY 12: Add “Share the Trail” Signage

Permanent “Share the Trail” signs will be installed as part of a larger planned wayfinding sign package.

STRATEGY 13: Develop Online Creek Informational Portal

A central Clear Creek informational portal has been established and is accessible at visitgolden.com/creek-info.

Information regarding creek safety, tube rentals, water conditions, parking, and rules can be found at this location. Local businesses and equipment rental businesses can link to this website, which is updated regularly with current information.



Creek Information website at www.visitgolden.com/creek-info

STRATEGY 14: Refresh “Golden Rule” Campaign

After further consideration, a larger wayfinding sign effort is being planned for installation prior to next season. Permanent signage under strategies 10, 11, 12 and 14 will be incorporated as part of this effort. The City of Golden will work with Jefferson County Open Space to further coordinate regional trail messages.

BEHAVIORAL RULE & ENFORCEMENT

STRATEGY 15: Introduce 3-Prong Creek Engagement Structure

A complete compliment of regular Golden Police patrol, eight (8) Park Rangers, and four (4) Clear Creek Ambassadors have been deployed to provide engagement and enforcement activity in the Clear Creek corridor.

Park Rangers were retained in May and early June and regularly patrol the corridor in busy weekends. Park Rangers are deployed seven days per week between 9:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Park Rangers have begun using environmentally friendly e-bikes to more efficiently and effectively patrol the corridor and are able to more quickly respond to concerns.

The following summarizes enforcement activity, both contacts and citations, to date:

Park Ranger Contacts Made in the Clear Creek Corridor	
Smoking	203
Dogs off Leash Law	243
Alcohol	441
Water Rescue	51
Grills/BBQ/Fires	78
All other Park Rules	534
TOTAL Contacts	1,550

Golden Police Department data through July 25, 2021

Citations Issued in Clear Creek Corridor	
Parking	207
Other	40
TOTAL Citations	247

Golden Police Department data through July 25, 2021.

Beginning with the weekend of June 24/25, the City was able to deploy Clear Creek Ambassadors on weekends. Current hours for Ambassadors are Fridays (10:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.), Saturdays (9 a.m. – 6 p.m.), and Sundays (10:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.).

Generally, Ambassadors are stationed in the area of the Billy Drew Bridge and the beach area. This program has been well-received and the Ambassadors have been providing information regarding alcohol rules, Creekside setup/staging of grills and tents, and receiving feedback from Creek corridor users. In addition, the Ambassadors have worked with the Visitor's Center to provide Golden Tickets to redeem at downtown businesses. They provide information on trailheads and hiking opportunities.

One of the main goals of the Ambassador program is to proactively prevent park rule violations prior to Park Ranger involvement. Positive feedback has been received from local residents.

Lastly, related to enforcement, the Golden Fire Department has assigned an inspector to work Wednesday through Saturday in part to assist with parking citations within their area of authority, namely fire lane and hydrant violations.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANGEMENT

STRATEGY 16: Increase Trash Collection

Currently, trash is collected twice daily on weekends. While generally this frequency may be sufficient, it has been noted that during extremely busy times, such as the Independence Day weekend, trash receptacles were overwhelmed. It was also noted that a significant culprit to overwhelming trash receptables are large carry-out pizza boxes. We will explore alternatives that may alleviate this problem in the future.

Additionally, it has been noted that current restroom capacity can also be overwhelmed, causing cleanliness issues. The City of Golden is currently working with the Visitor's Center on identifying a contracted cleaning service that can provide more frequent cleaning.

STRATEGY 17: Add/Adjust Fencing to Protect Sensitive Areas

Fencing adjustments along the creek were completed prior to June. Staff has noted that, at times, the volume of tubers is so great that lines tend to form at access points to get into the water. This has occasionally caused some users to attempt to enter the creek at non-designated access points. Staff will continue to monitor this for possible future adjustments.

ITEMS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

1. Bicycle dismount zone on north side of Clear Creek should be reconsidered, especially as electronic bicycle rentals become more prevalent and the Peaks to Plains trail opens to regional traffic.
2. Utilization of Conservation Trust Fund dollars for maintenance and cleanup of Clear Creek. This could assist the City in more regular trash collection and cleanup efforts.
3. Implementation and utilization of a Tube Rental fee to fund current and additional Clear Creek management strategies.
4. Assess Creek rescue data and review whether CFS levels associated with the warning system require an adjustment in future years.
5. Assess whether additional parking regulations or parking fees for on-street parking within the 10th Street corridor would ease parking concerns.

City management will continue to regularly meet and assess current conditions in the corridor throughout the balance of the 2021 season. A final report with data will be issued after the conclusion of the summer season after Labor Day.