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Polecat reserve stalled to complete analysis

Foothills recreationists anticipating trekking through the new Polecat Gulch Reserve may have to wait a bit longer because Ada County is requiring Boise to conduct an extensive hillside analysis before it can build two gravel parking lots.

Boise wants to start building new public trails at Polecat Reserve now that President Bush has signed off on a federal/state land swap, which added 360 acres to 310 acres the city owns. The 670-acre reserve, between the end of Collister Drive and Cartwright Road, is part of Boise's foothills conservation effort using the \$10 million Foothills levy approved in 2001.

The city filed an application with Ada County to build the trailheads off Cartwright Road. The trailheads will not have any structures. Because portions of the proposed site exceed 15 percent hillslope, the county's foothills ordinance requires the analysis. It must include soil, hydrology and geology reports prepared by licensed engineers. The added expense could be a deal breaker for the city.

"We just received notice of this last week," David Gordon, Ridge to Rivers trail system coordinator, said during a public hearing Thursday night. "This came as a huge surprise to us," Several planning commissioners agreed the requirement seemed a little excessive for two small unpaved parking lots — one lot has six spaces, the other 12 — but said the ordinance must be followed.

Planning commissioner Steve Edgar asked county staff how to get a waiver "to make this work and get it built." County planner Steve Malone explained the planning commission does not have the power to waive an ordinance requirement; only the county commission has that power, and the city must file an appeal to request the waiver. The planning commission voted to recommend approval of the city's application and encouraged the county commissioners to waive the ordinance.

To offer story ideas or comments, contact reporter Cynthia Sewell at cmsewell@idahostatesman.com or 377-6428.