

Big Springs Egress FAQ

Q. Why is an emergency egress road needed for Big Springs?

A. The two existing roads servicing Big Springs, Peakview Drive and Big Springs Drive, both run west to Highway 119. Were these routes to be blocked by wildfire, Big Springs residents would have no escape route out of the subdivision, nor would fire fighters and other emergency personnel. Emergency personnel would also have no way in to fight the fire or aid residents.

Q. Why was the subdivision approved without emergency egress in place?

A. That couldn't happen today, but in 1965 there were no requirements for multiple exit routes.

Q. What is being proposed, and who is behind it?

A. The Town of Nederland, in partnership with the Nederland Fire Protection District has proposed two emergency use only roads that would connect Big Springs with Magnolia Road. One would begin at the Town water tank at the end of Wildewood Lane, and roughly follow an existing single-track trail south for .39 miles to Magnolia Rd. The other would begin at the sharp bend on Doe Trail and follow a former 4wd road up the draw, eventually connecting to an unused utility line easement that leads to Magnolia Road. (total length .72 miles).

Q. Why are two routes being proposed?

A. Multiple egress routes increase the options available in an emergency situation, for example, one might be used as ingress for firefighters while residents evacuate via the other.

Q. How wide would these roads be?

A. The egress roads will be built to Boulder County standards for mountain driveways: 12' wide with 2' clearance on each side. The Doe Trail road will require a 2' ditch along one side for erosion control, and some areas will have a wider disturbance area due to necessary cut and fill work. (The drainage ditch will satisfy the clearance requirement on one side, so it will not add to the width of the disturbance area). Additional clearing will be required for pull-outs every 500 feet.

Q. A seasonal brook runs down the Doe Trail drainage, won't this destroy the wetland environment?

A. The road may need to cross the drainage one time, but will otherwise seek to avoid the wetland area.

Q. What about the old-growth douglas fir and spruce trees that Boulder County expressed concern about?

A. Every effort will be made to avoid these trees; it is not anticipated that any will need to be removed for this project.

Q. With all of these environmental concerns, shouldn't an ecological assessment be conducted?

A. The proposed Doe Trail route would cross both Boulder County Parks and Open Space and National Forest lands. Both the County and the Forest Service have utilized botanists and wildlife biologists in their analyses, and the Forest service also is doing an archeological analysis.

Q. We all know that fire runs uphill; wouldn't it be foolish to run an egress road up the Doe Trail drainage? Didn't the Nederland Fire Protection District Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) say as much?

A. According to the authors of the CWPP (The AnchorPoint Group), a fire starting in the drainage (from, say, wind-blown embers) is more likely to run up the adjacent hillside than up the moister drainage. The Doe Trail Time Until Fire Arrival (TUFA) analysis that AnchorPoint conducted for this project shows that the bottom of the drainage is the safest place in the area to be in a fire. Evidence from the Cold Springs fire supports this.

Q. These are among my favorite trails; will I still be able to hike or bike them?

A. These routes will continue to be open for hiking and biking.

Q. How will motor vehicles be kept off these roads after they are built?

A. Some means of discouraging this forbidden usage will be installed at both ends of these roads. The Town's application to the Forest Service suggested break-away bollards, but other means may ultimately be agreed upon. Locked gates are not an option, lest no one with a key be present when access is needed in an emergency.

Q. Why not create an escape route over the top of Barker Dam?

A. We live in a different world since 9/11. Since locked gates are not an option, routing egress over the dam would expose the dam to unauthorized access. Additional concerns include the need for blasting near the dam, a very high cost of constructing a connector road to it with no known source of funding, and probable long processes to seek approval from the Department of Homeland Security and the City of Boulder (owner of the dam).

Q. People are saying that the proposed Doe Trail route isn't needed, that there are better and easier routes for an egress road. Why not be satisfied with the proposed Wildewood route or rehabilitate the former road from the intersection of Peakview Drive and Big Springs Drive which is still shown as Alpine Road on some maps?

A. We recommend a reading of the Town's Special Use Application to the Forest Service and the TUFA analysis (both available on the Town website) for a better understanding of the issues involved here. In brief:

- The proposed Doe Trail route offers the safest escape route for Big Springs residents and emergency personnel in the greatest number of foreseeable wildfire emergency situations. It minimizes environmental disturbance by following a former 4wd road which can be widened and improved with erosion control measures.
- The further to the east an egress road lies, the greater its value. A fire impacting Big Springs is more likely to originate within the subdivision (such as the July 25th house fire on Pinecliff Trail) or right outside it than from far away. In such a situation, time for evacuation may be fleeting. In the case of the July 25th fire, had the wind blown the fire southward, Alpine Road or Wildewood routes would likely have been soon blocked, leaving Doe Trail as an only escape option for those to the east.

- The proposed Doe Trail route, due to its location and length, would offer firefighters additional tools to stop or slow a fire approaching from the east. Note that firefighters were close to bulldozing in this route (and more) as a firebreak during the Cold Springs Fire; had any of the spot fires that occurred south of Middle Boulder Creek in the canyon taken hold, we would now be looking at a fait accompli, instead of discussing how we can build an escape route in an ecologically sensitive manner.

Q. I have some constructive ideas for this project that I would like to share; who can I contact?

A. Call the Nederland Town Hall at 303-258-3266.