History of The Bobcats Section of the Colorado Mountain Club, February 2019

The Bobcats Section was the brain-child of Denver Group Trip Leader Bob Collins. Bob was a prolific leader for the Rocky Mountain Over The Hill Gang (RMOTHG). In 2015, with Bob in the lead, several other trip leaders and a group of "mostly over-age 50" CMC members started to talk about doing more difficult trips than those offered by RMOTHG, which typically are Moderate B and below in difficulty. By the middle of 2015 they put their plan in motion: They would lead more difficult trips on weekdays other than Wednesday, which is the day on which RMOTHG’s trips are scheduled. The group in fact became known as RMOTHG-Other Day Trips. This group did Difficult B and C hikes and Difficult Snowshoe trips.

The trip leaders soon discovered they needed to coordinate their trip dates to ensure that trips would be spread out evenly over the course of each month. This led to a monthly compilation of un-activated trips, review and date adjustments as needed, then simultaneous activation and announcement of all trips at once. To support this effort, each trip leader was asked to place an asterisk at the end of the Trip Title first line, so trips could be searched for on the CMC Calendar and in CMC Trip Management. An e-mail list was started so we could communicate trip schedules with interested CMC members. A short weekly newsletter was developed to provide "push" information about the trips, including which previously announced trips still had roster spots available.

Over the first year of operation word spread about "difficult weekday trips" and the mailing list grew to about 200 people, many non-RMOTHG members. By August 2016 the decision was made to disaffiliate from RMOTHG because we by now had a completely different vision, membership, and operation. A new section would be formed that did not compete with RMOTHG on the basis of hike difficulty.

Application was made to The Denver Group Council in accordance with the Group’s Social Section Policy. In addition to purpose and membership, the application laid out governance structure, and promised that the section would operate in accordance with the CMC mission statement, the CMC constitution, and the Denver Group bylaws. The application was approved, and the group was officially recognized as the “Bobcats Section" on September 1, 2016.

The first step was to assemble a governing board. The following persons were chosen to serve: Robbie Monsma was to coordinate hikes and write a newsletter. Kevin Schaal was the secretary. Stephanie Wright was the social chair. Mark Wolf was the treasurer and leader manager. Bob was to chair the board. Soon thereafter, Vaune Pelletier was added to the board to take over Robbie’s trip coordinator duties so Robbie could concentrate on the newsletter.

The next six months were busy. We developed a mission statement, which is part of every Bobcat hike description. The Bobcat name and a logo were approved. (Contrary to rumor, the name was chosen to honor Bob Collins over his protestations, not chosen by him.) We developed leader qualifications. Decisions were made to not charge dues and to keep the Section "non-exclusive." Maintenance of the e-mail member list was transferred to State CMC staff. To become a Bobcat member, one need only to join the e-mail list and there were to be no age restrictions to membership. “Business” cards were printed to give to prospective members so they would understand our mission and know how to get on the mailing list. The
focus of the Bobcats would be hiking, and we would not be as socially-oriented as RMOTHG. We would try to maintain a ratio of one trip leader for every 25 members. Early on we discussed holding both an annual picnic and a Christmas party, but later decided on an annual picnic only. During this time, we held a snow travel clinic, and a start-up fund raiser.

Quite soon a few problems arose. Our leader qualifications were strict, and we found it difficult to find qualified candidates. Our fund raiser did not produce as much money as we had hoped but, other than the business cards, we realized there was no need for funds. Section-led skills clinics were frowned upon by Denver Group schools. Questions arose whether the newsletter should contain more than just hike schedules and photos, such as seasonal tips and social news. Board members could not agree among themselves about how much all-Section socializing they were willing to undertake. It came down to how much work we should put into section identity vs actually leading trips.

Once we had absorbed the preceding realities the board decided to focus on leading trips. We knew our scheduling system and our hike posting system worked well. We let go of the clinics and fund raising and social gatherings. So, what we have now is a self-sustaining board (no elections) that meets once a year and engages in occasional e-mail discussions, mostly regarding adding new leaders. We relaxed the requirements to become a leader so as to not exceed standard Denver Safety and Leadership Committee requirements. We do request that Bobcat trip leaders take AIARE or ATA, but we do not require it. This has greatly increased the leader candidate pool.

As far as social activities, we decided to have an annual summer Section picnic and a winter leader gathering only. We will not keep reserve funds on-hand with the CMC but charge an appropriate, cost-covering fee to attend these events. Collected fees and event expenses are run through our CMC account. We encourage post-hike socializing when possible. Instead of 12 hikes per year we now expect leaders to lead 8 to 10 hikes per year. There is no age requirement as far as leader candidates or membership is concerned. Although our mission statement says we lead mostly Difficult B and higher hikes and Difficult Snowshoes, we encourage our leaders to post any level hike or activity that interests them under the Bobcat banner.

At this writing we have about 665 members, 27 trip leaders, and are in the process of terming out two board members. One of our surprises (and delights) has been the interest of young CMC members who work from home or have self-set schedules. So it goes and it goes quite well!

Here is our mission statement, included in each newsletter and on all posted Bobcat hikes:

*This is a Bobcats trip. The Bobcats' mission is to ensure a variety of challenging CMC trips, especially “B Difficult” and “C” hikes and Difficult Snowshoes, for our mostly age-50+ constituents. We may sponsor other activities of interest to our members, everything from bike rides to camping. Although we have members, we don’t have dues or elections, and our trips are non-exclusive. We welcome all CMC members to sign up for any Bobcats trip regardless of age or Bobcats membership. To join our free mailing list, write Membership Services at office@cmc.org or call them at (303) 279-3080.*