

ERBM Spring Ballfield Preparation

February 24, 2022



Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide information on how ERBM manages the transition from winter to spring with respect to ballfield preparation and usage.

Background and Discussion

ERBM maintains three ballfields including Paintbrush Park Softball Field, Paintbrush Park Baseball Field, and 6th Street Park field. They are known as skinned infield diamonds which consist of a conditioned mix of dirt and clay and natural turf outfields. These fields are in high demand throughout the warmer months and coaches are eager to begin practice and play as early as possible. Due to Meeker's cold weather climate, snow and ice remain on the fields longer than many other towns' fields in different locations around the state. Requests to have ERBM Parks Maintenance Division remove snow from fields is common as early as February. Additionally, coaches have frequently offered to remove the snow themselves.

ERBM's Mission is to create year-round, recreational, cultural, and outdoor experiences. We have a strong desire to provide premier facilities, experiences and service to our users. However, weather and appropriate maintenance procedures must impact our decisions and methods.

Winter to Spring Industry Best Practices

Snow buildup on ballfields during the winter is helpful in promoting health and growth of natural turf grass in the outfields as well as proper conditioning of the infield mixture. Premature removal of snow from these types of fields can cause stunting of turf growth, displace expensive infield mix, damage field crown/drainage features, and can affect playability of the infield during the warm weather season (dryness and hardness of the infield). The constant freezing and thawing of the fields promotes negative drainage impacts from snow accumulation in displacement areas. In addition, moving heavy equipment such as plows and snow blowers onto the fields can cause ruts on turf and infield surfaces, break irrigation lines, and promote general unevenness. Maintenance and Recreation professionals from communities with similar climates in Craig, Steamboat Springs, Mountain Recreation in Eagle, Aspen, Glenwood Springs, and Edwards, concur with ERBM's method of allowing natural melt to occur rather than manually removing snow and consistently hold the line of prohibiting this practice in their communities.

ERBM attempted the removal of snow from both Paintbrush fields one year which proved to be a significantly inefficient use of staff time. Irrigation line breaks and ruts that were caused in the outfield and infield took most of the season to repair.

In discussions with counterpart agencies across the state, ERBM has compiled consistent negative testimonials of attempts to manually remove snow from natural turf fields. Mountain Recreation in Eagle removed snow from an infield one year and left snow in the outfield. After one day of use, snow melted from the outfield and seeped onto the infield causing an ice field. Play had to be restricted for more than a month afterward and the field had decreased playability for the remainder of the season. They no longer allow manual snow removal. Aspen removed snow from two of their fields one year and reported breaks in irrigation lines and ruts in both infields and outfields as well as diminished playability of the fields during the season. They also no longer allow manual snow removal. Many other similar stories were heard from other entities.

Paintbrush Fields versus 6th St.

Although ERBM desires to open ballfields as soon as possible each spring, it is our aim to provide competition quality facilities at Paintbrush Park and therefore must allow for snow to melt naturally without manual removal of snow at this location. Once all snow is melted and the field is dry, we will begin preparation of the infields and outfield turf areas for use as early as possible. However, due to the non-competitive nature of the 6th St. Park Field, ERBM staff will review the feasibility of snow removal at this location based on the time of year, usage demand, and field conditions. ERBM will continue to prohibit any snow removal by any outside groups to perform these tasks, as the potential for damage and negative impacts to all users of these valuable public areas is just too great.