

Notice of Proposed Action

Basalt to Gypsum Motorized Singletrack Trail

**Aspen, Sopris, Eagle, and Holy Cross Ranger Districts
White River National Forest
Eagle County, Colorado**

Comments Welcome

The White River National Forest welcomes your comments on its proposal to improve motorized recreation opportunities in the vicinity of National Forest System Road (NFSR) 514, aka: Red Table Road. Your comments will help us complete an environmental assessment (EA). The assessment will be used to determine whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact. Instructions for submitting comments are described on the last page.

This NOPA also is requesting your comments under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (NHPA). Consultation under the NHPA seeks to consider the views about an undertaking and its effects on historic properties for the agency official to consider in decision making (36 CFR 800).

Background

The 2011 Travel Management Record of Decision allows motorcycles on 43 miles of single-track trail within the White River National Forest. In response to the Record of Decision, local individuals and organizations, including Rocky Mountain Sport Riders (RMSR) and the Colorado Backcountry Trail Riders Association (CBTRA), met with White River staff to discuss possible updates for motorized single-track opportunities. Conversations with White River National Forest employees at a public meeting held July 23rd, 2011 generated the possibility of the forest providing a link from the established routes near Basalt to the established routes near Gypsum. A grant proposal to the State of Colorado OHV Grant Program was submitted in 2011 and awarded to the White River in 2012. The grant will fund reconstruction of existing authorized routes, parking area construction, trail and wetland restoration, signing, patrol and education, and staff time for the analysis of additional miles of motorcycle routes. A collaborative planning effort to move the proposed action forward has been ongoing for the last three years. Partners and stakeholders include: Eagle County government, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Stay the Trail Colorado, Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers (RFOV), RMSR, and CBTRA.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this proposal is to update and create new motorized recreation opportunities, address user created routes, and improve wetland conditions in the vicinity of Red Table

Mountain.

The purpose is driven by the need for:

- Improved and maintained trails
- A connector route between authorized motorized routes on the Sopris and Eagle Ranger Districts
- A sustainable motorized trail system with low gradients that allow for drainage and a variety of skill levels
- Protecting wetland resources
- Rehabilitating user-created routes

Why Here?

The proposed motorized trails provide a connection between existing motorized routes. The “Green Gate” connection route is entirely within the 3.31 Management Area, prescribing “Back-Country Recreation, Year Round Motorized”. Collaborating with CBTRA, RMSR and Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the White River National Forest secured a grant to update motorized opportunities in the project area.

Why Now?

The Colorado State Off-Highway Vehicle Grant that is funding most of the work on the Basalt to Gypsum Motorized Singletrack Project, will expire in 2015. The implementation of the parking area, wetland restoration, trail rehabilitation, and much of the trail reconstruction, will occur in 2014. Trail reroutes will occur in 2014 and the summer of 2015.

Proposed Action

The action proposed by the Forest Service to meet the purpose and need consists of four elements:

- 1) Construct an approximately 80' x 100' parking area, near the beginning of the Red Table Road, NFSR 514 on the north side of County Road 10 near Cottonwood Pass;
- 2) Reconstruct approximately 10 miles of motorized trail at the “Green Gate Trail,” and the Milepost 1 Trail, and reroute approximately 1.5 miles of trail on the current “Green Gate” alignment, to create a more sustainable trail system;
- 3) Restore a wetland impacted by the existing parking area at the junction of NFSR 514 and County Road 10 and;
- 4) Rehabilitate and closure of approximately 20 miles of user created motorized trail.

The existing parking area near the Forest Service sign kiosk at the beginning of Red Table Road is located in a wetland. A new parking area, approximately 8,000 square feet in size is proposed to be constructed a few hundred feet north, just above the junction of County Road 10 and NFSR 514. The proposed parking area will accommodate 10 vehicles with trailers. An access trail from the new parking area will allow OHV users to cross County Road 10 in a single location, to access NFSR 514.

The 8 mile long “Green Gate Trail”, and the 2 mile long “Milepost 1 Trail” are proposed to be included in the White River National Forest’s Travel Plan. Both trails contain segments

of user created, and Special Use Permit trails. The Green Gate Trail will connect the existing Lone Pine motorized trails on the Sopris Ranger District with motorized routes on the Eagle Ranger District and on Bureau of Land Management Lands. The Green Gate Trail begins near milepost 2 on NFSR 514, continuing northeast, above Sawmill Gulch, and connecting with NFSR 430.1B, just below Timber Basin. The addition of the Milepost 1 Trail to the travel plan will create two motorized ingress/egress points on Red Table Road creating loop opportunities, and options for varying skill levels. This will allow travel management flexibility. The Milepost 1 Trail begins at the Red Table Ditch head gate, and terminates near milepost 1 on NFSR 514.

A wetland, which has been impacted by the existing parking area, located near the kiosk at the beginning of NFSR 514, will be restored. The existing parking area will be closed, soils will be de-compacted and amended, and the site will be planted with native species, to mimic reference conditions found just a few feet downstream. The sign kiosk that is currently in the wetland will be relocated.

Lastly, approximately 20 miles of mostly user created motorized and non-motorized trails, not currently recognized as authorized system trails in the travel plan, will be closed and rehabilitated. Trails currently not on the White River Travel Plan, including 1913.1, N1913W.1K, 1913W.1D, 1913W.1E, 1913W.1C, 1913.2, N203.1, N204.1, 464W.3, 464W.2N, N265.1, will be rehabilitated and managed as closed to mechanized and motorized uses. Woody debris, scarification, seeding, and signage will help prevent mechanized and motorized incursions and will promote the return to natural conditions. Trail closures will be monitored periodically.

If approved in a Final Decision Notice, the proposed schedule for implementation would be to construct the parking area in approximately two weeks during the 2014 field season. The wetland restoration will also occur over a two week period in 2014. The trail reconstruction will occur throughout the field season in 2014 and 2015. The reroutes will occur in late 2014, and the summer of 2015, over two, two-week periods.

Management Direction

The proposed action aligns with goals, objectives, and strategies from the 2002 White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). Specifically; this action responds directly to the following goals and objectives outlined in the Forest Plan (page 1-15):

Goal 2 Multiple Benefits to People, Objective 2a. Improve the capability of national forests and grasslands, to provide diverse, high quality outdoor recreation opportunities.

Goal 4 Effective Public Service, Objective 4a. Improve the safety and economy of Forest Service roads, trails, facilities, and operations and provide greater security for the public and employees.

Goal 5 Public Collaboration, Objective 5a. Work cooperatively with individuals and organizations, local, state, tribal, and federal governments to promote ecological, economic, and social health and sustainability across landscapes.

This action also helps to move the project area towards desired conditions of the Forest Plan such as providing “a variety of motorized recreation opportunities,” (page 3-33) in Management Area 3.31, Year-Round Backcountry Motorized. The project will be designed to conform to Forest Plan standards and guidelines and all other laws, regulations and policies.

Nature of Decision to be Made

For this project, the responsible official is the Forest Supervisor. Given the purpose and need, the responsible official will review the environmental analysis of the proposed action, other alternatives, and any public comments in order to make the following decisions:

- Should we construct a new parking area and where?
- Should we reconstruct 10 miles of trail?
- Should we restore a wetland?
- Should we rehabilitate 20 miles of user created motorized trail?

Public Involvement

The project was first listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in July of 2013 and updates are provided quarterly. Open Houses are tentatively planned at the Eagle County Building, 20 Eagle County Road in El Jebel, CO on April 8, 2014, from 4:30-6:30 PM, and at the Eagle Library, 600 Broadway St., Eagle, CO on April 9, 2014, from 5-7 PM. Further information about this project can be found on our website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fs-usda-pop.php/?project=41619>

Alternatives to the Proposed Action

No Action

The EA may document consideration of a no-action alternative through the effects analysis by contrasting the impacts of the proposed action and any alternative(s) with the current condition and expected future condition if the proposed action were not implemented (36 CFR 220.7(b)(2)(ii). Under the No Action Alternative, the parking area would not be constructed, the wetland would not be restored, 10 additional miles of trail would not be included in the White River Travel Plan and 20 miles of user created routes would not be rehabilitated.

Other Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

Alternatives, including adding additional trails 1913.1, 1913W.1A, 1913.2, N203.1, N204.1, N514W.1, 464W.3, and 464W.2N, in the White River Travel Plan, were considered, but

eliminated from detailed study. Field verification and review by forest specialists determined that the routes had significant resource issues and did not meet purpose and need.

Effects and Issues to Consider

The environmental assessment will address the effects of the proposed action and alternatives to the following: wildlife, aquatic species, botany, cultural resources, soils, water quality, watershed health, noxious weeds, recreation, and grazing. The assessment will be issue-driven and contain detail commensurate to the degree to which a resource may be affected.

Issues are unresolved cause and effect relationships that arise as a result of the proposed action. Initially, the Forest Service has identified the following issues to be considered and analyzed:

Aquatic Species, Water Quality, Watershed Health:

Botany: Where sagebrush is disturbed and to lesser extent where widely spaced pinyon and juniper and widely spaced oakbrush are impacted through trail construction associated with this project, Harrington's penstemon may be negatively impacted.

Cultural Resources: Trail construction that involves ground disturbance has the potential to adversely affect cultural resources.

Grazing: Range fence crossings on motorized trails can result in gates left open, affecting livestock distribution and rotation system.

Noxious Weeds: Motorized trails within weed infested areas can lead to increased spread potential of invasive species. Equipment and gravel used in parking lot or trail construction can introduce new invasive species

Recreation: The addition of motorized routes creates potential for unmanaged recreation, and more user created routes.

Soils: Trail construction and compaction from motorized (and non-motorized) traffic has the potential to impact soil productivity through loss of soil organic matter and impaired hydrologic function.

Wildlife: Trail improvements and creation of trails will impact habitat effectiveness due to disturbance and displace wintering big game. Some sensitive wildlife may also be impacted.

Aquatic species: Trail construction, location, and season of use may impact aquatic species. There is potential for disease transmission from moving recreation equipment from watershed to watershed.

Water Quality: Poor trail routing and/or drainage can negatively affect water quality from sediment delivery or mechanized equip fluids.

Watershed: Poor trail location in riparian and/or drainage can impact watershed health and may influence disease transmission.

Other issues raised in response to this notice of proposed action will be considered and addressed in the environmental analysis. Some issues may be addressed through modification of the proposed action, development of a new alternative, or mitigation measures.

Comment Process

The proposed project is an activity implementing a land management plan and subject to the objection process described in 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. The Forest Service is combining scoping with the legal notice and opportunity to comment, as described in §218.24. The public is encouraged to provide specific written comments on this proposal, including supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider. Specific written comments are within the scope of and have a direct relationship to the proposed action.

Written comments will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the *Glenwood Springs Post Independent*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted via mail, fax, electronically, or in person (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to: Scott Fitzwilliams, c/o Jon Thompson, Natural Resource Specialist, 620 Main St. Carbondale, CO 81623-0309, 970 963-2266. Electronic comments including attachments can be submitted to <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=41619>.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments will have eligibility to file an objection under §218.8. For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments must either sign the comment or verify identity upon request. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements in §218.25(a)(3). Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

If the agency determines there are no significant impacts, that finding along with the EA and a draft decision notice will be published for a 45-day objection period. If no specific written comments are received during the designated opportunity for comment, the project will not be subject to objection. If the EA concludes there is potential for significant impacts, then an environmental impact statement will need to be prepared.

This Notice of Proposed Action also is requesting your comments under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (NHPA). Consultation under the NHPA seeks to consider the views about an undertaking and its effects on historic properties for the agency official to consider in decision making (36 CFR 800).

Additional information regarding this action can be obtained from: Jon Thompson, Natural Resource Specialist, 620 Main St. Carbondale, CO 81623-0309, 970 963-2266.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

