

CHAPTER 1

Plan Overview



Introduction

As the population of Eagle County has grown over the last twenty years, so has the demand for walking and bicycle trails for transportation or recreation. This regional trails plan was created to specifically describe the vision for an Eagle Valley Regional Trails System that will connect the communities of the Eagle River and Gore Creek Valleys.

The primary focus of this Plan is the creation of a paved arterial “core” trail, the Eagle Valley Trail, that will span the county from Vail Pass at the east end to Glenwood Canyon at the west end. The Plan also depicts a major “spur” trail traveling from Dowd Junction to the town of Red Cliff, through Minturn. Additionally, links to other existing or planned public trails, paved and unpaved, are included in the Plan information. Shared use of roads by bicycles, pedestrians and motor vehicles is also an important part of the total system.

Together, these components will create a network of non-motorized transportation routes and recreation opportunities throughout Eagle County.

Geographic Scope of the Plan

The Eagle Valley Regional Trails Plan pertains to the portion of Eagle County that coincides with the watershed boundaries of the Eagle River and part of the Colorado River valley. The specific focus of this Plan is the Interstate 70 and Highway 24 corridors.

The Roaring Fork River and Fryingpan River watershed area of Eagle County is not included in this plan. That portion of Eagle County is addressed in separate Eagle County or Town of Basalt planning documents specific to the Roaring Fork Valley side of Eagle County.

The following map depicts that area that is specifically addressed by this plan, the valleys of the Eagle River and Gore Creek, but the mission to create a safe and enjoyable trails network applies to the whole of Eagle County.

Core Trail Location Map here

Goals of the Eagle Valley Regional Trails Plan



This plan is intended to:

1. Promote **COOPERATIVE PARTNERSHIPS** for trail planning, funding, design, construction and maintenance between local governments, organizations, businesses and citizens.
2. Provide **ALIGNMENT AND DESIGN DETAILS** for a valley-wide, shared use, non-motorized off-road trail system that is safe and enjoyable.
3. Promote **IMPROVEMENT OF LOCAL ROADWAYS** and revision of standards to accommodate certain types of non-motorized uses. This plan promotes both the creation of a valley-wide trail system and the improvement of local roads with wider shoulders, bike lanes or bike routes to improve safety overall.
4. Provide information on **TRAIL SEGMENT CONSTRUCTION COSTS** for capital improvement budgeting and annual work programs. This baseline information is formatted for periodic updating, every three years recommended.
5. Provide a **PRIORITIZED LIST OF CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS** which can be periodically evaluated and updated as necessary.
6. Provide recommendations and **GUIDANCE FOR LAND USE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW** by local governments and supports the goals of existing land use plans regarding provision of trail facilities.
7. Provide documentation that can be referenced and presented while **FUNDRAISING** from private sources and grant agencies.
8. Serve as a **PUBLIC INFORMATION AND SUPPORT BUILDING TOOL** for efforts by ECO Trails, the towns and Eagle County.

Types of Trails

For the purpose of this plan, the word “trail” is used to refer to both paved and unpaved routes, and the exact type differentiated as necessary in the text. Path is commonly used to describe paved bike trails (e.g. bike paths) but for consistency in this plan, only the word “trail” is used.

The regional trail system is planned to be a three season system, with some sections remaining usable throughout the year. Types of trail in the system include:

Off-Road Shared Use Trail - typically a paved trail from which motor vehicles are prohibited and is shared by bicycles, pedestrians, joggers, equestrians, in-line skaters and other non-motorized users. Where such trail or path is part of a highway right-of-way, it is separated from the roadway and from motor-vehicle traffic, by an open space, grade separation, or barrier. A 2000 report issued by the Colorado Department of Transportation documents that paved off street bike paths are preferred over roadways for recreation or commuting by bicycle.



Unpaved Trails - In Eagle County, hiking trails on U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management public lands are the most common form of this trail type. Most common use is for recreation. Some jurisdictions in Eagle County have constructed unpaved nature walks or pathways along waterways which are typically narrow and meandering and not open to bicycle use. Trail links to, and into, the backcountry are shown on the trail plan maps and additional backcountry detail is available on other maps prepared by Eagle County and ECO Trails. *Some sections of the core trail route may remain unpaved until demand warrants the expense but*



at eight to ten feet, the planned core trail and the major spurs will be much wider than the typical unpaved three to four foot wide hiking or nature trail.

Shared Roadways - most roads in Eagle County are open to both motor vehicle and bicycle or pedestrian travel. In some locations, signed bike lanes or bike routes (see Chapter 4 for definitions) exist but generally travel is relegated to the shoulder of the road which is not specifically designed or striped to accommodate non-motorized users. Sidewalks are also parts of a shared roadway system but are typically for pedestrian traffic only. Users of shared roadways include all types - commuters, fitness trainers and for casual recreation.



Types of Trail Users

The following types of users will be considered during the planning, design and management of the Eagle Valley Regional Trail system: Pedestrians, joggers or runners, equestrians, in-line skaters, cross country skiers, hikers, fishermen, boaters and bicyclists. These user types can be grouped into four distinct categories based on the type of use, why they choose that type of use and where they prefer to do it:

The “**Recreational**” trail or shared-road user primarily includes walking or cycling children and families or adults out for social or exercise reasons. Recreational users are generally local residents but may include tourists from outside of the area that want to enjoy some exercise and exploration. In general, recreational users prefer separated trails and low volume streets. Children account for a large percentage of users in neighborhoods and on routes to schools, recreation areas and some commercial centers. Typically, a large percentage of children under 16 ride or own a bike.

The “**Trainer**” category defines cyclists training for competition who generally prefer to travel faster and longer distances than the recreational cyclist. Trainers tend to prefer roads over shared-use trails separated from roads because of allowable higher speeds, fewer intersections that require the road traffic to stop, and conflicts with other paths users. Once in motion, trainers like to keep up their momentum. The Trainer category also applies to runners, joggers and in-line skaters. Those users have influenced shared-use trail design in the last ten years to include adjacent soft-surface running paths or increased width to accommodate in-line skating patterns.



The “**Commuter**” or “**Utility**” user walks or bikes to work or school on a trail or road. This category is usually local residents and they prefer the most direct routes with the least stops and delays. Low volume streets or trails are ideal but a high volume street may be part of their route because of being more direct. Utility trips include trips to the store, library, bank, etc. The perceived benefits of bike and pedestrian commuting include financial savings, improving health and environmental stewardship.

The “**Equestrian**” trail user warrants specific mention because they have different needs or preferences than the other user types. Equestrians generally prefer not to mix with vehicular traffic, especially avoiding busy roads. Horses and bicycles, or horses and pedestrians with pets are sometimes not compatible. Paved trails are generally not designed for use by horses and not preferred by riders. Surface maintenance issues may also arise if the trail is swept on an infrequent basis. Opportunities do exist within the proposed system to construct bridle paths alongside the core trail but located at a safe, compatible distance. The planning maps identify trail sections where a bridle path or horse trailer parking can likely be accommodated. The use and enjoyment of horses is a large part of the region’s history and present day lifestyles and this plan advocates accommodating that use where compatible with more common types of users listed above.

Implementation of the Regional Trails Plan

Implementation of this plan will require close coordination among local, state and federal government agencies and private interests.

There are essentially two methods through which the public trails system will be developed:

1. **Initiated by Local Government** on private land with public use easements or on public land, including road rights-of-way. Local government includes towns, Eagle County, metropolitan districts and the multi-jurisdictional ECO Trails program of the Eagle County Regional Transportation Authority. ECO Trails acts as the general coordinating agency to facilitate communications between all involved parties regarding trail issues, but will also be available for specific project tasks such as design coordination, grant applications, construction management, etc. Trail construction will be managed as applicable by towns, county or ECO Trails.
2. **Initiated by Private Land Development**, either voluntarily or as part of an approved development. The specific requirement for trails shall be determined by the local jurisdiction based on the criteria in their land use regulations and typically linked to the scale of the development and its associated impacts. Either a trail easement or trail easement and construction may be required.

Existing trail connections to public lands should be identified on development plans and jurisdictions are encouraged to require retention or replacement of the existing access trails. Creation of new access to adjacent public lands is also encouraged where none exists, provided it is compatible with the character of the public land. Paved surfacing is not recommended for this type of trail.

This Plan identifies potential trail routes but options are not restricted to what is shown on the planning maps. If other opportunities present themselves or obstacles prevent implementation, the route is flexible. The core trail and spur trail alignments depicted within this Plan are conceptual until constructed.

If a trail alignment is shown on the following route maps as traveling through a property, the trail should be included as part of the overall development plan. The development plan should also show how the trail, sidewalk and shared road circulation system internal to the property will link to the overall trails system.

Areas Outside of the Core Trail Corridor:

If a developing area is not addressed by this plan (i.e. tributary side valleys), the specific local government land use plan for that area should be consulted for guidance. If no specific guidance exists, trail construction and/or easements should be required if trail sections exist in that area to which connections can eventually be made and/or a new trail connection is warranted by the scale of the development project.

As stated in the design standards in Chapter 4, spur trails should be at least eight feet wide and the minimum recommended trail easement at least 20 feet wide unless exceptionally wide road rights-of-ways can accommodate a portion of the trail corridor without future road widening threatening the trail.

Relationship to other Land Use Management Plans

Existing land use and trail plans for local governments in the Eagle Valley were consulted as part of this plan preparation, including the Eagle County Trail Plan 1993, Town of Vail Comprehensive Open Lands Plan 1994, Minturn Parks and Recreation Master Plan 1992 and Town of Avon Recreation Master Plan 1992.

This plan is intended to supplement the specific *trail component* of the existing plans, particularly to clarify the location of the core trail route, for the purpose of coordinating local efforts. If a conflict is found to exist between any of the above referenced documents and this plan, this plan does not necessarily supercede the previous trail plans. The underlying jurisdiction will need to evaluate and render the necessary decisions. The language in the adopting resolution by each town and the county should be reviewed for further guidance in these decisions.

Amendment of the Regional Trails Plan

Trail alignments may be subject to change for a variety of reasons such as establishing more effective connections, protection of natural resources, elimination of conflicts, better land use buffering or siting, or because of difficulties in construction or acquisition. As a policy document, this Plan must be open to amendment in order to remain viable and accommodate changing conditions.

Minor amendments, such as altering an alignment in order to improve it's usability or mitigate a land use issue, will be reviewed and acted upon through the standard development review process or through administrative review that can be thoroughly documented and defended as meeting the following criteria:

1. There is justification for the proposed change
2. The proposed change conforms with the goals of the Trails Plan
3. The proposed change would be compatible with existing and planned surrounding land uses.

Review of the plan should take place **every seven years**, or more frequently if necessary (e.g. revise the maps to show significant alignment changes or construction accomplishments, etc.). Major revisions should be processed through the same type of inter-governmental agreement process as this original version.

Recommended Related Studies

Backcountry Trails: The effort to document and plan new routes to and from the public lands in Eagle County, referred to commonly as the "backcountry", should be continued and gradually integrated with this plan through updated mapping. As the population grows, there will more use demand on existing backcountry trails and increased pressure for new trails to be created. The term "frontcountry trail" which appears in this plan refers to trails that may be located on undeveloped or lightly developed private land between the densely populated urban area and the public lands.

Tributary Valley Trails: This current planning effort is very specific to the main valley of the Eagle River. However, all tributary valleys and the Colorado River valley should be included in future trails planning efforts given the aggressive rate of development and population growth in those valleys which include:

- Lake Creek Valley
- Brush Creek Valley
- Gypsum Creek Valley
- Colorado River Valley, including Dotsero, Burns, McCoy and Bond

A recommended project is the mapping of all existing trail sections and easements in these areas (and currently there are few). This project should be undertaken in the next two years (by 2003).

For the short term, the process outlined in the previous Plan Implementation section should be followed for making trail decisions or recommendations for land development in the tributary valleys.

Trail Plan Process

The Eagle Valley Regional Trail Plan process began in January 2000 and was initiated by a request made by the Eagle Valley Trails Committee to the ECO Trails staff.

The Eagle Valley Trails Committee, created in 1996 as part of the passage of the ½ percent transportation sales tax served as primary steering committee for the creation of this plan. The Committee membership represents bicycling, pedestrian, equestrian and family interests. The Committee works with the staff and board of the Eagle County Regional Transportation Authority, known as ECO, to accomplish it's mission to develop, promote and cooperatively maintain a scenic and safe urban and backcountry multi-use, non-motorized trail system throughout Eagle County.

County and town government staff contributed specific information and guidance on feasible and preferred routes. Public meetings were held at the outset of the process with elected officials from each of the partners in the planning effort which included the towns of Gypsum, Eagle, Avon, Minturn, Red Cliff, and Eagle County. Representatives from state and federal government agencies provided valuable input as well. The local engineering firm was hired to create planning maps and prepare cost estimates of each segment.

Final map work was performed by the Eagle County Geographic Information Systems (GIS) department. A complete list of participants is included in the Plan Appendix B.

After a series of final public worksessions and hearings with each of the partner jurisdictions, the collective adoption of the Plan through Intergovernmental Agreement in 2001.

Funding the Trails System Construction

Paying for the creation of the trail system will require a combination of funding sources and methods since no existing single source can fully pay for the estimated cost to complete the system. It will require partnerships, creativity and aggressive fundraising.

Sources of funding include:

Local Governments:

- 10% of the revenues from the local mass transportation sales tax, as authorized by Eagle County voters, managed by Eagle County Regional Transportation Authority (ECO) and available to the towns and county for trail projects
- Matching funds from the towns and county towards building trails sections within their jurisdictions
- Matching funds from other local governmental entities such as metropolitan districts

Grants, including:

- Colorado State Trail Program Grants
- Great Outdoor Colorado grants from lottery proceeds
- Colorado Department of Transportation “Enhancement” grants
- Federal cost sharing grants (i.e. through Forest Service or BLM)
- Private local, state or national foundations such as the Vail Valley, Gates or Taylor Foundations

Contributions from citizens, businesses or corporations of cash, labor or supplies.

Incidental projects such as development, highway projects, utility projects or improvement districts may also help facilitate construction of some sections of the trail.

Other potential funding methods that have been or can be explored further include:

- Voter approval for bonding for the final sections of the trail. The possibility of selling bonds to raise funds for construction was explored in 2000. Study determined that annual revenues did not generate enough income to pay off a 20 year debt, if bonding for entire cost of the trail system. The final decision was to remain with a “pay-as-you-go” approach and revisit bonding at a later date.
- Dedicate annual lottery entitlements received from the state by the towns and county to fund local trail projects
- Adopting development impact fees for trail construction (sometimes combined with parks and recreation or open space fees) within each jurisdiction
- Minor fees such as trail use fees or bicycle registration fees
- “Sale” of trail items such as benches or landscaping in return for a plaque on that item
- Sales of trail program items (t-shirts)
- Non-profit group events that name the trail project as the funding recipient and trail race sponsorship.