

# Rio Grande Trail Management Plan

May 2015



Pitkin County Open Space and Trails  
Roaring Fork Transportation Authority

# Rio Grande Trail Management Plan

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The Roaring Gorge Management Plan was a collaborative effort between Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, the City of Aspen Parks, Trails and Open Space and the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority Trails departments.



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Roaring Fork Transportation Authority  
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## PITKIN COUNTY OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS BOARD of TRUSTEES MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of the Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Board of Trustees is to acquire, preserve, maintain and manage open space properties for multiple purposes including, but not limited to, recreational, wildlife, agricultural, scenic and access purposes; and to acquire, preserve, develop, maintain and manage trails for similar purposes.

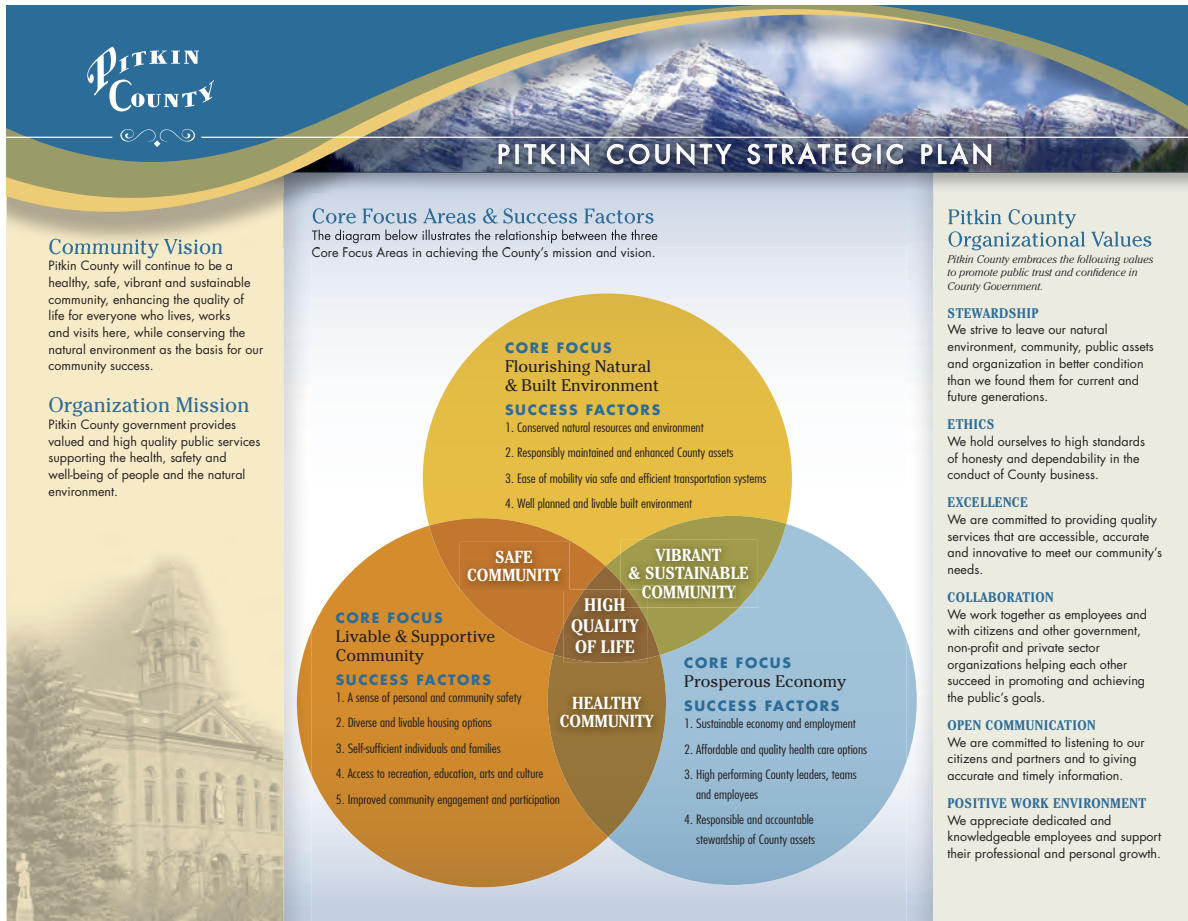
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The *Pitkin County Home Rule Charter* provision authorizing the Open Space and Trails Program defines trails as follows:

**“Trails” shall be defined as non-motorized access ways meeting one or more of the following criteria: preserving historic routes of ingress and egress to public lands and waterways; providing access to and from recreational or urban destinations; providing transportation or recreational opportunities throughout the Roaring Fork Watershed.”**



# PITKIN COUNTY HOME RULE CHARTER AND 2011 PITKIN COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN



The 2011 Pitkin County Strategic Plan identified three core Focus Areas: “Flourishing Natural and Built Environment”, “Livable and Supportive Community” and “Vibrant Sustainable Community”. The goal is for the three Focus Areas to work together to achieve the County’s Vision and Mission. Trails are included in various locations throughout the Strategic Plan:

## Flourishing Natural and Built Environment

**Success Factor 3: Ease of mobility and efficient transportation systems** Potential Actions identified with in this success factor include: Work with our regional partners to create a 10-year capital plan for multi-modal (cars, bikes, pedestrians, equestrians) transportation system improvements., Improve access and linkage of trails from residential areas, municipalities and neighboring counties, Develop County-wide transportation plan that includes, but is not limited to: roads, parking and trails, in collaboration with RFTA, municipalities and CDOT., Promote road safety initiatives through common sense public safety education, focused on bus crossings, street crossings, biking, trails, driving, etc.

## Livable and Supportive Community

**Success Factor 4: Access to recreation, education, arts and culture**

Potential Actions identified with in this success factor includes: Reduce barriers to participation for all citizens in the areas of transportation, recreation activities, special events and local programs; Work toward shared use of trails for bikes, equestrians, and walkers; Preserve access to summer and winter climbing routes; Protect access to rivers; Promote development of kayak park; Protect access to USFS and BLM lands; Improve road shoulders/bike lanes.

## Vibrant Sustainable Community

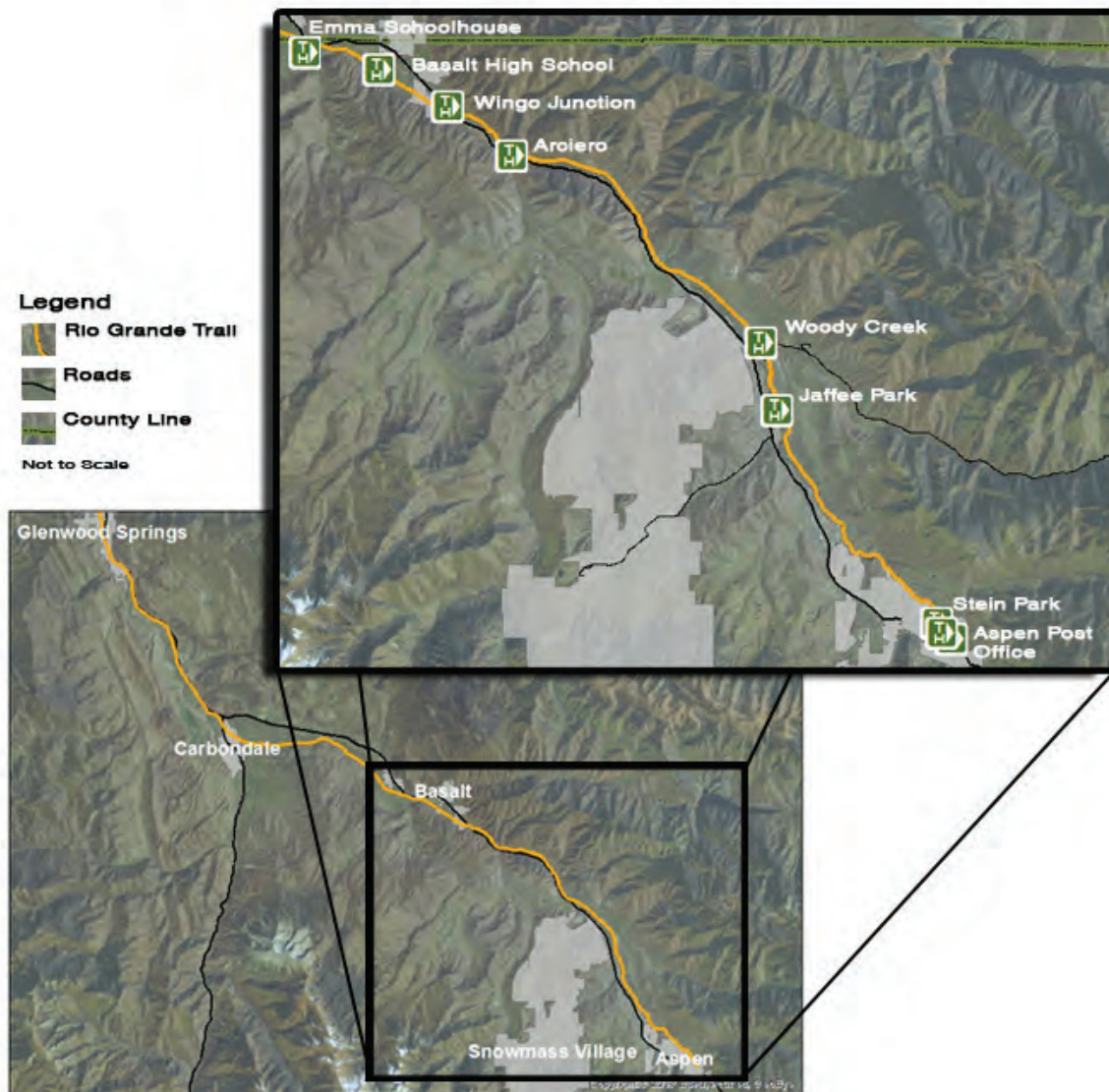
**Success Factor 1: Sustainable economy and employment**

One of the Potential Actions identified with in this success factor was: Encourage and coordinate with local and state-wide efforts to promote tourism, including on-going (fishing, trails, camping) and year-round events and heritage tourism.

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose

The Rio Grande Trail links Roaring Fork Valley communities starting in Glenwood Springs and continuing 42 miles to Aspen. The portion of trail governed by Pitkin County Open Space and Trails (OST) starts in Emma, at the county line, and ends at the Aspen Post Office. The Stein Park to Aspen Post Office stretch is jointly managed by OST and the City of Aspen (COA). The Rio Grande Trail is the most popular trail in the OST program and is a year-round resource for locals and tourists alike. The *Rio Grande Trail Management Plan* applies to the Rio Grande Trail corridor in Pitkin County, addressing existing conditions and providing guidance for future use.



Regional map of planning area.



A Denver & Rio Grande train crosses the Woody Creek trestle in 1951. Aspen Historical Society photo

## 1.2 History of the Rio Grande Trail

The Rio Grande Trail traces a 42-mile transportation corridor between Aspen and Glenwood Springs that has functioned as a key connector in the Roaring Fork Valley since the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad raced to lay tracks to Aspen more than a century ago.

The railroad's contribution to the Roaring Fork Valley's rich heritage, from Aspen's silver boom and rebirth as a ski resort to the valley's former agricultural prominence and even its settlement patterns, today offers a unique opportunity to meld the past with the present – to share the valley's history with users of what is now the Rio Grande Trail. As a summer and winter recreational amenity, as well as a key route for non-motorized commuting, the trail remains a vital connection between the communities of the Roaring Fork Valley that once looked to the D&RG and its eventual successor, the Southern Pacific, as an important link destinations and markets both near and far.

A rail line was established along the route in the late 1800s by the D&RG, which edged out the competing Colorado Midland in a race to serve the silver mines of Aspen. The first D&RG train pulled into Aspen in late 1887, three months before the Midland laid its final tracks into town. Aspenites turned out en masse to herald the inaugural train's arrival. It was estimated Aspen shipped off 400 tons of ore in the first 45 days following the D&RG's arrival.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Aspen and the Railroads*, W. Clark Whitehorn, for the Aspen Historical Society, January 1993





The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad in Woody Creek. Aspen Historical Society photo

The Colorado Midland made its way to Aspen via Hagerman Pass from Leadville and down the Fryingspan Valley to Basalt, where it turned toward Aspen and quickly crossed to the south side of the Roaring Fork River. There, it forged what is now the alignment of Highway 82 in the upper valley. The challenge of constructing a trestle over the Maroon Creek Gorge slowed the Midland's advance, though, giving the D&RG an edge in the great train race. The Denver and Rio Grande, hastily laying its Aspen Branch upvalley from Glenwood Springs, crossed to the north side of the river just above Basalt, on a trestle largely tucked out of view for users of the Rio Grande Trail as they cross over the span today. The D&RG pushed its track across Woody Creek on a trestle where a new bridge now supports the trail, and then into the narrow confines of the Roaring Fork Gorge before crossing the Roaring Fork once more en route to a rail yard at what is now Rio Grande Park.

From Aspen to Glenwood Springs, the D&RG's role in the region's economy and the mobility of the local populace at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was undeniable. A special round-trip rate to Denver in 1897 was \$8.<sup>2</sup> Closer to home, valley residents along the line packed the train for the annual Strawberry Day festival in Glenwood Springs. The train that ran from Aspen to Glenwood Springs on Saturday nights, allowing Aspenites to enjoy a soak in Glenwood's hot springs, was dubbed the "laundry train." The weekly excursions became events of "riotous, bawdy revelry."<sup>3</sup>

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2 *D.&R.G. Excursions*, The Aspen Tribune, Sept. 10, 1897

3 *Glenwood Springs: Spa in the Mountains*, Lena Urquhart, Taylor Publishing Co., 1970

Even after pavement and other motorized means of transport diminished use of the railroad, freight service to Aspen continued until 1968, when the branch was cut back to an iron ore loadout at Woody Creek.<sup>4</sup> The last significant operation on the branch ended in January 1991, when coal trains stopped loading at Carbondale.<sup>5</sup>

After pulling up the rails, the D&RG gifted ownership of the rail corridor above Woody Creek to Pitkin County in 1969, making way for the first stretch of the Rio Grande Trail. Southern Pacific, the D&RG's successor, sold the rest of the property containing the rail corridor to the Roaring Fork Railroad Holding Authority, in 1997, for \$8.3 million.<sup>6</sup> RFRHA, a consortium of local governments, intended to maintain the corridor for a trail and future commuter rail line. RFRHA was folded into the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority in 2001. Today, the Rio Grande Trail is managed by Pitkin County within its borders and by RFTA throughout the rest of the corridor.



Replacing ties and rails in 1967. Aspen Historical Society photo

Trail users in Pitkin County pass through an area rich with local history, from the old Wheatley Schoolhouse in Snowmass Canyon, built in 1911, and what is now Wheatley Open Space, abutting a pioneer family's cemetery, to former railroad spurs and stockyards where local ranchers and farmers loaded their cattle and potatoes onto boxcars for shipment.

In reverse, the valley's many Italian immigrants looked eagerly to the railroad's delivery of California grapes for winemaking. That wasn't all the railroad brought into the valley. With its Ski Train, the D&RG marketed itself to Aspen-bound skiers and other winter enthusiasts to bolster what had become a struggling branch line by the 1930s and '40s.<sup>7</sup>

At Emma, the brick store and warehouse where Charles H. Mather built a successful mercantile business and stately, brick Victorian home in the late 1880s still stand on what is now a Pitkin County open space property. Emma was, at one time, one of the valley's many rail stops. The train rumbled within a stone's throw of the historic Emma Schoolhouse, which also remains as a local landmark.

The D&RG's legacy is not only its namesake trail, but the story of the valley it helped shape. This management plan looks to the future of the Roaring Fork Trail within Pitkin County, while making space to explain its past to all who pass.

4 [www.drgw.net](http://www.drgw.net), Aspen Branch History

5 Ibid

6 Ibid

7 *Aspen and the Railroads*, W. Clark Whitehorn, for the Aspen Historical Society, January 1993

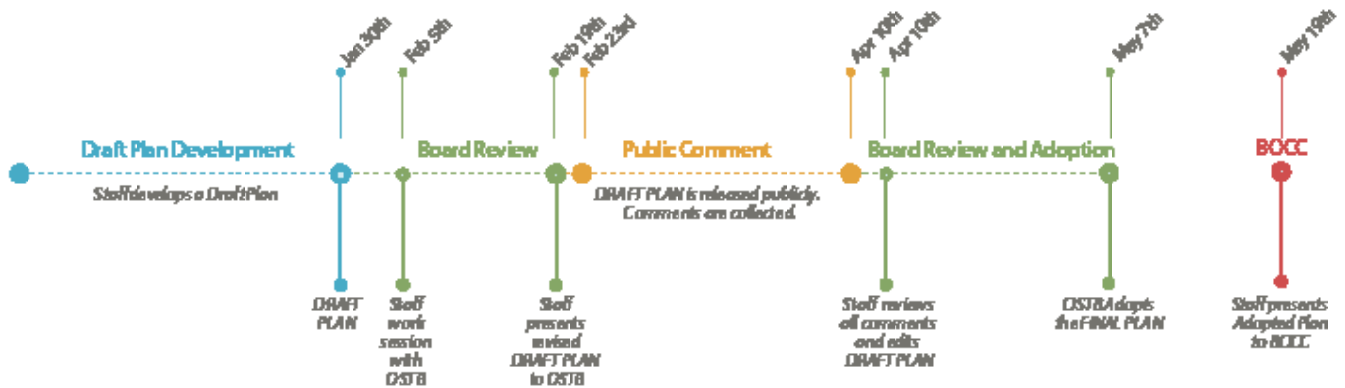
### 1.3 Process and Public Involvement

Portions of the Rio Grande Trail have been addressed in previous planning efforts. The *Rio Grande Trail Management Plan* acknowledges these plans, incorporates portions that still apply today and updates and develops actions items to guide future management decisions.

An outline of the public process and plan development is located in **Appendix A**. OST developed a draft plan based on existing conditions, public comment and partnering agencies' comments. Once the Open Space and Trails Board (OSTB) approved the draft plan, it was released for public comment for 7 weeks. Staff reviewed all comments received, and updated the draft plan for final adoption by the OSTB.

The adopted *Rio Grande Trail Management Plan* will be incorporated into the RFTA *Comprehensive Plan*, currently being updated.

Please refer to Appendix A for full Planning Process description.





# Existing Conditions

## 2.1 Properties, conservation covenant areas and recreation easements

The Rio Grande Trail exists in Pitkin County on property conserved through various means, including right-of-way easements, recreation easements and fee ownership of the corridor. The public trail history in the corridor began in 1969, when the railroad company transferred ownership of the upper reaches to Pitkin County. In 1997, a collaboration of public entities purchased the lower 32 miles of right-of-way and was charged with public transit planning in the corridor, including the completion of the Rio Grande Trail.



- **June 18th, 1969** – Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad Company transfers ownership of the railroad corridor property to Pitkin County, Woody creek to Aspen section, for public purposes and recreational uses.
- **June 30th, 1997** – The Roaring Fork Railroad Holding Authority (RFRHA) purchases the remainder (Glenwood Springs to Woody Creek) of the Aspen Branch of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad right-of-way from the Southern Pacific Transportation Company with funding support from Garfield County (\$500,000), Eagle County (\$100,000), Pitkin County (\$500,000), CDOT (\$3,000,000), and Great Outdoors Colorado (\$2,000,000). As per funding requirements, a conservation and trail easement is granted to AVLTL (CE over the entire property) and Pitkin County (trail easement within Pitkin County on the property). GOCO committed an initial installment of \$1,000,000 at the time of purchase and a second installment of \$1,000,000 upon completion and GOCO approval of the comprehensive plan.
- **July 14th, 1999** – Railroad corridor obtained in 1969 by Pitkin County is adopted into the Open Space & Trails department for development and management.
- **2000** – As per the conservation easement, a comprehensive plan is developed (the “Comprehensive Plan”) to guide the development and operation of the RFRHA property and is intended to be incorporated into the conservation easement. The GOCO board determined that the Comprehensive Plan was inconsistent with the guiding principles the GOCO grant received by the RFRHA and therefore disapproved the Comprehensive Plan. Upon the disapproval of the Comprehensive Plan the conservation easement granted to AVLTL was terminated and extinguished but the trail easement granted to Pitkin County was unaffected.
- **January 17th, 2001** – Formal agreement between RFRHA and GOCO is made regarding the extinguishment of the AVLTL easement (AVLTL interest in the property extinguished after this date), retention of the Pitkin County trail easement, and creation of conservation covenant areas held by GOCO but self-regulated by RFRHA in exchange for a \$500,000 reduction in the second grant installment.
- **December 2001** – RFRHA is dissolved and transfers ownership and management responsibilities to the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA).



## **Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) Easement (Pitkin County Line to Woody Creek Road)**

The Roaring Fork Railroad Holding Authority (RFRHA) purchased the Aspen Branch of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad right-of-way from the Southern Pacific Transportation Company on June 30, 1997. At the time of the purchase, a conservation and trail easement was granted over the property to the Aspen Valley Land Trust and Pitkin County as per the funding requirements from the various partners, including Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO). As per the conservation easement, a comprehensive plan was developed in 2000 (the “Comprehensive Plan”) to guide development and operation of the property and was intended to be incorporated into the conservation easement. The GOCO board determined that the *Comprehensive Plan* was inconsistent with the guiding principles of the GOCO grant received by RFRHA and therefore disapproved the Comprehensive Plan. Upon the disapproval, the conservation easement granted to AVLTT was terminated and extinguished, but the trail easement granted to Pitkin County was unaffected. Furthermore, the agreement to extinguish the conservation easement identified Conservation Covenant Areas, as described below, for the continued protection of the areas of the right-of-way with high conservation values. Shortly after this agreement was finalized, RFRHA was dissolved and the ownership and all responsibilities were transferred to the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA).

On June 30, 1998, RFRHA filed a petition to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to “rail-bank” the existing railroad right-of-way and requested a notice of interim trail use (NITU) so that the Rio Grande Trail could be developed without abandoning the rail line (STB Docket No. AB-547X). In doing this RFRHA acknowledged that use of the right-of-way is subject to possible future reconstruction and reactivation for rail service under the National Trails System Act, 16 U.S.C. 1247(d). The NITU was transferred to RFTA when RFRHA was dissolved.

The Rio Grande Trail is located almost entirely within the RFTA right-of-way easement (the “corridor”) from the Pitkin County Line to Woody Creek Road. The corridor ranges in width from 50 feet to 200 feet, with the majority of the corridor being 100 feet wide. Pitkin County holds an interim trail easement on the entire corridor. This easement is specified to be in place until such time as a mass transit rail line is placed within the corridor or December 31, 2020 (whichever is earlier), at which time a perpetual 20-foot recreation easement will be identified and granted.

Conservation Covenant Areas (CCA) were identified within the RFTA corridor and are managed with specific permitted and prohibited uses as per the agreement with RFTA and GOCO described above. GOCO is the holder of the covenants and is annually updated by RFTA. Compliance with the covenants associated with CCAs is ensured by a Covenant Enforcement Committee made up of members from partnering entities who meet annually to discuss the status of the CCAs and any enforcement issues. Any development and management in the CCAs must be in accordance with the agreement made between RFRHA and GOCO dated January 17, 2001 and recorded in the official land records of Pitkin County at recordation number 460521. The agreement specifically addresses the construction of buildings and structures, fences, new crossing and improvements, harvesting timber, mining, trail construction and maintenance, trash accumulation, etc. Altogether, 10 CCAs were established; 3 are located in Pitkin County.



**Conservation Area No. 7 – Milepost 21.97 to 24.88**

This section begins directly east of the Emma Road/Highway 82 intersection, continues toward Basalt High School between ranch properties and federal lands and ends just east of the Wingo pedestrian bridge over Highway 82.



**Conservation Area No. 8 – Milepost 25.26 to 27.83**

This section starts at the east side of the Wingo Subdivision and continues southeast to the end of the Dart Ranch on Lower River Road.



**Conservation Area No. 9 – Milepost 30.36 to 33.45**

This section begins near the crossing of Lower River Road, continues through the Woody Creek area until the end of the corridor at Woody Creek Road.

### **Pitkin County Fee-Owned Property (Woody Creek Road to Post Office)**

The Rio Grande Trail from Woody Creek Road to Aspen is located within a strip of land granted to Pitkin County by the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad Company in 1969. This fee-owned property ranges in width from 100 feet to 200 feet. The property was adopted as a Pitkin County Open Space and Trails asset by Resolution 99-112 of the Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners and is to be managed and improved in accordance with Section 13 of the Pitkin County Home Rule Charter. Prior to 1999, existing trails and open space were managed by the Public Works Department of Pitkin County.

### **Recreation Easements**

Three easements exist in which the Rio Grande Trail exists outside the corridor and the property owned by Pitkin County. Each of these areas have been documented and are covered by separate perpetual trail easements.

#### *Morrow - Wingo Junction Access Easement*

This is a 30-foot access easement existing between the Pitkin County Wingo Trailhead, located just east of the Wingo Junction Bridge, and the RFTA-owned corridor. The Rio Grande Trail exists within this easement. The easement is commemorated on the Morrow-Wingo Junction Ranch Subdivision/PUD Plat, recorded on April 25, 2006 at recordation number 523392.

#### *Flying W – Arciero Trail Easement*

This easement is described as a 20-foot pedestrian/bicycle trail easement located west of the Arciero Parking Area. The Rio Grande Trail travels within this easement in two separate locations as it leaves the RFTA corridor.

#### *Dart Trail Easement*

This 12-foot pedestrian easement is located on the Wheatley Open Space (former Dart property). The easement was obtained to eliminate the necessity of crossing Lower River Road twice if confined to the RFTA corridor.

### **Other Easements**

Several other easements exist within the RFTA corridor and the Pitkin County-owned property.

#### *Qwest Easement*

The Rio Grande right-of-way corridor contains a 10-foot-wide Qwest easement for the installation, maintenance and operation of an underground fiber optic cable that runs parallel to the Rio Grande Trail, from Glenwood to Aspen.

#### *Aspen Consolidated Sanitation District (ACSD)*

ACSD has a 10- to 20-foot-wide easement for the repair and maintenance of sanitation utility lines located within the property owned by Pitkin County, from Aspen to the Sanitation Plant in the Gorge.



## 2.2 Existing plans and policies encompassing the planning area

### **1994 Trails Design and Management Handbook**

The *Trails Design and Management Handbook* guides design consistency in the Open Space and Trails system. The guidelines cover: trails widths, surfaces, trailheads, bridges, retaining walls, fences, boardwalks and many other aspects of trail and open space design.

### **1996 Recreation Access Feasibility Study – Roaring Fork Railroad Holding Authority**

The *Recreation Access Feasibility Study* was commissioned to look at the potential of using the Rio Grande rail right of way as an active and passive recreational connection along the Roaring Fork Valley corridor. The study proposed trail alignment alternatives, appropriate sites for parking and public access. The goal was to propose a region-wide trail that would not preclude any future regional rail transit.

### **1999 Recreational Trails Plan - Roaring Fork Railroad Holding Authority**

The *Recreational Trails Plan* was developed as part of the 1999 RFRHA *Comprehensive Plan* to describe the goal of region-wide trail. The *Recreational Trails Plan* identified trail elements, design principles, phasing and a very detailed description of the “ultimate trail.” This plan laid the foundation for the Rio Grande Trail and much of the identified “ultimate trail” is the Rio Grande that exists today.

### **1999 Reading the Roaring Fork Landscape – Roaring Fork Railroad Holding Authority**

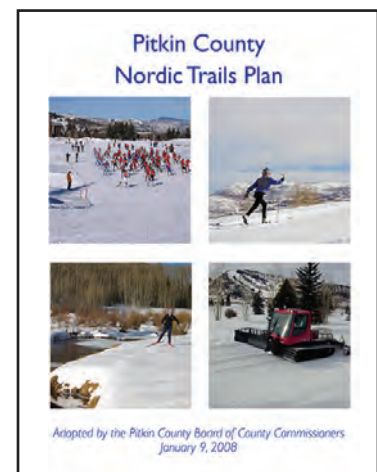
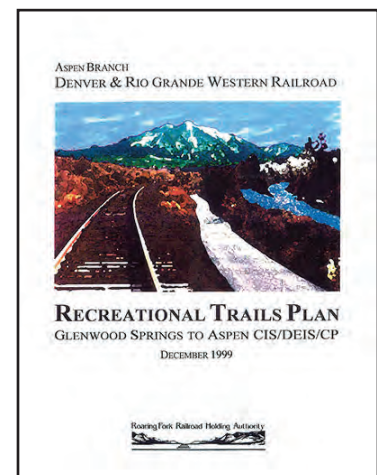
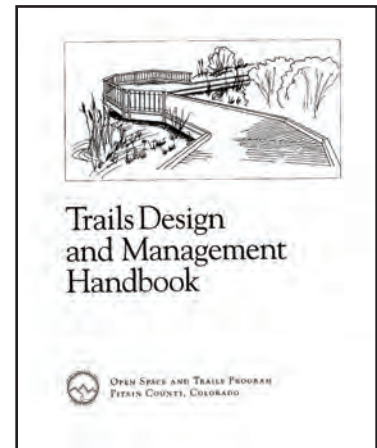
*Reading the Roaring Fork Landscape* was also a component in the 1999 RFRHA Comp Plan and is referenced by the *Recreation Trails Plan*. It presents ideas and themes for interpretation and environmental education focused in nodes along the Rio Grande corridor.

### **2005 Comprehensive Plan for the Aspen Branch of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad Corridor**

RFTA is currently working on an update to the 2005 Comprehensive Plan. The Comp Plan includes updates to the Recreation Trails Plan, Access Control Plan and Conservation Easement requirements, among other things.

### **2008 Pitkin County Nordic Trails Plan**

The *Nordic Plan* guides the vision and implementation of the Nordic system within Pitkin County. It calls for enhanced winter signage on the Rio Grande and the potential for moving the groomed track alignment to the soft surfaces. In Basalt, the *Nordic Plan* talks about linking the grooming on the Rio Grande to groomed trails at the Roaring Fork Club. In the Aspen area, it talks about grooming loops on the sage flats along the Rio Grande.



**2011 Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices (OPDMD) Management Plan**

The *OPDMD Management Plan* looks at the trails conditions in the Pitkin County system and designates them as either open, closed or restricted for OPDMD use. The Rio Grande is designated as “restricted,” meaning a device must be less than 32 inches wide, have a design speed of 20 mph or less, be electrically powered, and have a vehicle weight of 60 pounds or less (not including the weight of the rider), to be allowed on the trail.

**2012 Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Recreation Inventory and Analysis**

The Recreation Inventory and Analysis reviewed and mapped all of the county’s recreation assets, including easements, and outlined the goals and actions for the future. One resulting goal stated: “Continue efforts to define public access and parking areas for existing recreational assets and conduct planning efforts for future, public recreation needs.” And, it specifically called out the need for a Rio Grande Trail Management Plan, as well as looking at and improving the regional trail connections to and from the Rio Grande.

**2013 Roaring Fork Gorge Management Plan – Pitkin County Open Space and Trails**

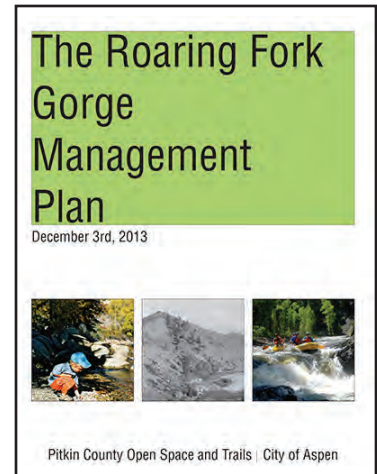
The *Roaring Fork Gorge Management Plan* covers the 4.2 miles of the Rio Grande Trail from W/J Hill to Stein Park, as well as 400 acres of open space properties along the trail segment. The Gorge Plan contains Action Items for the Rio Grande Trail’s management. In the summer of 2014, the first Action Item was completed with the construction of a dual-surface trail for 2 miles. Future Action Items include public comment on the last two unpaved miles of the Rio Grande Trail in the Gorge, discussion of a hard-surface connection into Aspen and the redesign of Jaffee and Stein parks.

**2013 Basalt Area Parks, Open Space, and Trails Master Plan**

The *Basalt Area Parks, Open Space, and Trails Master Plan* is a visionary document providing the future framework for recreational pursuits in Basalt. The plan places a high priority on improving the Basalt High School trailhead, a collaborative effort between the town, RFTA and OST. The plan also mentions the need for Nordic equipment storage in the Basalt High School area.

**2014 Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Signage Design Guidelines**

The 2014 *Signage Design Guideline* is an update to the *Trail Design and Management Handbook*. The *Update* covers materials, graphics, types, templates, installation and maintenance for signs on Pitkin County Open Space and Trails properties.



**Title 12 of the Pitkin County Code (last revised in 2001)**

All properties and trails managed by Pitkin County Open Space and Trails are subject to the regulations set forth in Title 12 of the Pitkin County Code. Individual properties are subject to additional terms set forth in their respective management plans.

**Pitkin County Master Plans**

***2013 West of Maroon Creek Plan***

The *West of Maroon Plan* guides the future development and planning of the entrance to Aspen, within Pitkin County. The plan supports the improvement of regional connections to and from the Rio Grande Trail. It also speaks to the preservation and enhancement of views from the Rio Grande, including evaluating the impacts new development has on the trail’s viewshed.

***2008 Emma Area Master Plan***

The *Emma Area Master Plan* guides the future of land use in the Emma Caucus area. The plan has a trails goal that talks about providing safe, non-motorized routes for bikes, pedestrians, skiers and equestrians. It also talks about creating safe regional connections to the Rio Grande Trail. In addition, the plan calls for maintaining current parking, enforcing illegal parking, and educating trail users on safety and courtesy.

***1991 Woody Creek Caucus Master Plan***

The *Woody Creek Caucus Master Plan* guides the future of land use in the Woody Creek Caucus area. The plan defines recreational uses, specifically trails, as extremely important and says that the community would like to preserve and enhance open space, trails and parks. The plan calls trails “linear parks” and refers to the desire for a “Roaring Fork Trail” on the railroad right of way.



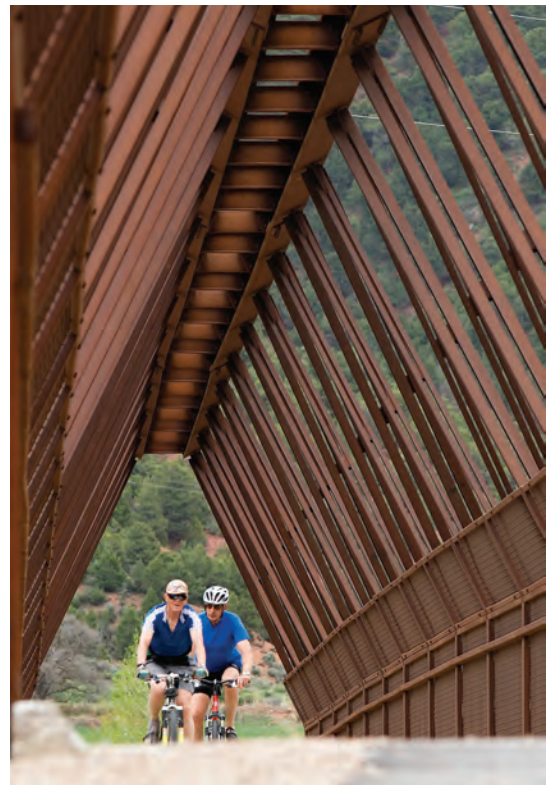


A skier and his dog enjoy the Rio Grande Trail. Jordan Curet photo/Aspen Daily News

## 2.3 Recreation

The Rio Grande Trail corridor is the most heavily used asset in the Open Space and Trails system. It spans 20 miles through the county and is used year-round. The Aspen-to-Woody Creek section sees the most visitors, with nice summer days getting between 600 and 800 users. Non-motorized uses are allowed, including walking, running, biking and horseback riding. The Rio Grande Trail is groomed in the winter and is one of the few multi-use and dog-friendly trails in the Nordic system. It is also the only groomed trail between Aspen and Basalt.

The Rio Grande Trail provides regional trail connections to the Hunter Creek Trail, Aspen-Mass Trail, Basalt-Old Snowmass Trail and many smaller neighborhood connections. It also provides Roaring Fork River fishing access in the upper and mid-valley areas. The Rio Grande Trail is not only a recreation corridor, but continues to grow in popularity as a commuter connection, especially during the summer months.



Bicyclists cross the Wingo Bridge.  
Paul Conrad photo/The Aspen Times





Deer cross the Rio Grande Trail in the Roaring Fork Gorge.

## 2.4 Vegetation and wildlife

The Rio Grande Trail corridor showcases many of the different habitats found throughout the upper Roaring Fork Valley. The trail follows the Roaring Fork River and travels through canyons and along alluvial terraces. The scenery is mostly pastoral with a backdrop of mountain slopes and high peaks. Wildlife congregates along riparian areas and from the trail, users can see a multitude of species that call the upper Roaring Fork Valley home. The vegetation and wildlife along the trail enrich the experience for the trail user and Pitkin County has conserved many properties adjacent to the trail to ensure this experience is protected.

### Vegetation

The main vegetation types along the Rio Grande Trail are listed below. Each type has different compositions of species and even though it looks relatively similar to the casual viewer, the vegetation communities are quite diverse and support a multitude of wildlife species.

#### Aquatic, Riparian and Wetland Habitat

With the Rio Grande Trail following the Roaring Fork River, riparian forests are one of the main vegetation types. Riparian forests include narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*), blue spruce (*Picea pungens*), and thinleaf alder (*Alnus incana ssp. tenuifolia*). Common understory species include a variety of shrubs including willows (*Salix sp.*), graminoids including sedges (*Carex sp.*, *Scirpus sp.*) rushes (*Juncus sp.*) and forbs such as cow parsnip (*Heracleum sphondylium*) and Richardson geranium (*Geranium richardsonii*).

Most riparian forests and shrublands are functional ecosystems, with high biodiversity, regeneration and soil stabilization. Riparian habitat can be threatened by off-trail public use for scenic or fishing access and there are many user-created river access trails emanating from the Rio Grande Trail. These trails should be monitored to assess the resource impact and to ensure they are sustainable so as not to cause erosion.

### Agricultural Grasslands

The majority of lands adjacent to the Rio Grande Trail consist of intact functioning ranchlands and former ranchlands now used as pasture for livestock. This pastoral setting provides the scenic backdrop to the trail. Noxious weeds are the biggest threat to this community and the main ongoing management issue along the trail.



Agricultural field near Basalt.

### Sagebrush Shrublands

Along the trail in Woody Creek, sagebrush shrubland is the predominate vegetation type. Big Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) is the dominant species, accompanied by Balsamorhiza (*Balsamorhiza sagittata*), Thurber fescue (*Festuca thurberi*), and snowberry (*Symphoricarpos oreophilus*). Other graminoids and forbs may be present in sagebrush shrublands.



Sagebrush shrubland near Woody Creek.

Rated as one of the most imperiled ecosystems in North America, significant acreages of sagebrush shrublands have been lost to agriculture, urbanization and other human activities and less than 3 percent of the remaining sagebrush is protected in reserves. The largest non-human threats are from invasive species.

### Mountain Shrublands

Mountain shrublands line some areas of the trail. Gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*) is the dominant species and is accompanied by serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos oreophilus*), and sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*). Mountain shrublands provide big game winter range and habitat for wildlife, including nesting birds and raptors.

### Noxious Weeds

Invasive, noxious weeds are the biggest threat to the corridor and the main management issue for Pitkin County. The main noxious weed species include plumeless thistle (*Carduus acanthoides*), Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), and houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*). In addition, small populations of leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) occur in the Woody Creek area.

Pitkin County has been managing noxious weeds through mechanical (mowing), chemical and biological methods. The amount of noxious weeds found along the corridor has been significantly reduced and monitoring and spot removal continue annually.



## Wildlife

The vegetation communities listed above provide the habitat for a diverse range of wildlife species. The following are the main species found along the Rio Grande Trail.

### Rocky Mountain Elk and Mule Deer

The grassland, sagebrush and mountain shrub communities contains critical winter range and a migration corridor for elk (*Cervus canadensis*) and mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*). Elk are seen along the corridor mostly in the fall, winter and spring, while deer are present year-round.



A small herd of elk above the Rio Grande Trail.

### Predators

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), black bear (*Ursus americanus*) and mountain lions (*Felis concolor*) have been seen along the trail. Most of the predators seek the cover of shrublands, but coyotes can be observed in the open fields, pouncing on prey.

### Small Mammals

Micordine rodent (*Microtus sp.*), least chipmunk (*Neotamius minimus*), northern pocket gopher (*Thomomys talpoides*), montane vole (*Microtus montanus*) and mountain cotton-tail rabbit (*Sylvilagus nutalli*) exist along the corridor.

### Birds

Avian species are the most common wildlife seen along the trail. Many of the species found in the upper Roaring Fork Valley are seen along the trail. Maintaining high quality riparian habitat is critical for birds. Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) can be seen in the winter from the trail where it closely parallels the Roaring Fork River.

## 2.5 Trail and segments

The goal of the 1999 *Recreational Trails Plan* was to create the “ultimate” valleywide trail - a multi-use, dual-surface, barrier-free trail. Ninety percent of the Rio Grande Trail in Pitkin County today consists of a dual surface (hard and soft) and, with a few exceptions, meets ADA standards. As stated in the recreation section, it is most definitely a multi-use amenity.

The hard surface is asphalt and the soft surface is a crusher-fine material. The goal is where the two surfaces are joined, the asphalt is a minimum of 8 feet wide and the soft surface is a minimum of 6 feet wide. When the two surfaces are separated, the asphalt is a minimum of 10 feet wide and the soft surface is a minimum of 4 feet wide. The *Recreational Trails Plan* identified the need for an additional bridal path with maximum separation from the “fast moving users.” Open Space strives to fully separate the hard- and soft-surface trails where ever feasible; Pitkin County do not currently construct separate bridal paths along the Rio Grande Trail.

**Appendix B** contains maps of the Rio Grande Trail segments.

### County Line to Basalt High School (Emma)

This 1.7-mile stretch of the Rio Grande Trail is the first that one encounters as one crosses the Pitkin County line in the mid-valley. It is a dual-surface trail with the soft surface consistently located on the north side of the trail. This stretch of the Rio Grande can be accessed from the Emma Schoolhouse or Basalt High School trailheads. It has a popular picnic area in the shade of cottonwoods about mid-way between the two trailheads. Due to sensitive wildlife habitat and working ranches, the Rio Grande Trail between the Emma Schoolhouse and the Rio Grande railroad bridge over the River (near the Wingo Pedestrian Bridge) is a zero-tolerance zone for dog offenses. The minimum fine is \$100 and regulations are strictly enforced.



Views of Emma area from the Rio Grande Trail.





## Basalt High School to Arciero

This segment of the Rio Grande Trail continues up-valley for 3.37 miles, connecting Basalt High School to the Arciero Trailhead. All but approximately 1 mile of this stretch has a dual surface. The Basalt-Old Snowmass Trail joins the Rio Grande 2.3 miles up. From this intersection to the Arciero Trailhead, the soft surface trail jumps from one side of the hard surface to the other, in some stretches there is no soft surface at all, there are many asphalt patches as well as issues with tree roots in the asphalt anytime the hard surface leaves the rail grade. Three trailheads provide access to this portion of the Rio Grande Trail - Basalt High School, Wingo Junction and Arciero. The river can be accessed from the trail near the Wingo Bridge, at points along the stretch from the Wingo Trailhead to the Basalt-Old Snowmass Trail intersection and at the Arciero Trailhead. The section of trail from Basalt High School to the Rio Grande Bridge over the Roaring Fork River is under the same zero-tolerance policy for dog offenses as the previous section.



View from Rio Grande Trail, heading upvalley from the Basalt High School Trailhead.



Soft surface on the rail grade down-valley of Arciero.



The Wingo bridge over Highway 82.



Here, the hard surface leaves the rail grade.

## Arciero to W/J

These 9 miles of the Rio Grande connect the Old Snowmass area to Woody Creek. The segment provides a dual surface, with 1.5 miles in Woody Creek completely separated. Sections of soft-surface between the Arciero and the Woody Creek trailheads are in need of repair and have the potential to also be fully separated. Trailheads serving this stretch of the Rio include Arciero, Woody Creek and Jaffee Park. The 1999 *Recreation Trails Plan* identified the potential for two other trailheads along this stretch but neither has been constructed: a Gerbazdale Trailhead and a Pitkin Iron Trailhead. The river can be accessed from the trail in the Phillips Curve area, Gerbazdale and at Pitkin Iron. Portions of the old tracks can still be seen along this stretch of Rio Grande.



The Rio Grande Trail bisects lower Snowmass Canyon, between Old Snowmass and Woody Creek.



Separated surfaces in Woody Creek.



Joined surfaces through Pitkin Iron.



Section of rail remaining in Woody Creek.



View of surfaces through Pitkin Iron the section of right of way.



### W/J to Stein Park (the Roaring Fork Gorge)

This section of the trail, approximately 4.2 miles, was addressed in *the Roaring Fork Gorge Management Plan*. Highlights of this stretch include a waterfall, river access, secluded views, and connections to the AABC and Snowmass Village. For a detailed description of this portion of trail, please refer to the *Gorge Management Plan*.



Stein Falls, between W/J and Stein Park.

### Stein Park to the Aspen Post Office

These last two miles of the Rio Grande Trail bring one into the City of Aspen. This dual-surface stretch of the Rio Grande is owned by Pitkin County but is jointly managed and maintained with the City of Aspen. This section of trail can be accessed from Stein Park or multiple connections within the City of Aspen. Major trails connecting to the Rio Grande along this stretch include Cemetery Lane Trail, the Aspen Meadows trails, Sunnyside Trail and the Hunter Creek Trail. This segment of trail is the most heavily used portion of the Rio Grande Trail within Pitkin County. The steep, downhill, corner, near the Pitkin Reserve Open Space, has been proven to be an issue of the years and the design should be reviewed during the next trail resurface. The section of trail beneath the Cemetery Lane vehicular bridge can be an issue during high water and could also be served well with design improvements.



Rio Grande Trail near Aspen.



Rio Grande Trail near Aspen.



The trailhead near the Aspen Post Office.

Steep corner near Pitkin Green.







Railroad tracks remain along some sections of the Rio Grande Trail - a reminder of the past. Todd Patrick photo

### 2.6 Historic, scenic and natural features

The Rio Grande right of way was historically a rail corridor, serving many stops along the valley floor. Many features from this bygone era can still be seen today. Starting in Emma, the schoolhouse and Emma Store are both visible from the trail. The trail crosses the Roaring Fork River on the old railroad bridge in Wingo Junction and, at Wheatley Open Space, trail users pass by a sign for “Bates,” an old rail siding, as well as the old Wheatley School. Sections of tracks have been left in place around the Phillips Curve section and in Woody Creek. And, in various locations along the trail, one can see old telegraph poles and rail signs. Pitkin Iron has the last remnants of an old loading dock and in the Gorge, one can see the rock cuts required to get the train through the canyon.



The Emma Schoolhouse, as seen from the trail.

The trail travels through a very scenic landscape of both manmade and natural features. Much of the Emma, Basalt and Woody Creek stretches are surrounded by lush agricultural fields and pastures, many of which are conserved. In the Wingo Junction, Old Snowmass, Gorge and Aspen stretches, the Roaring Fork River is visible. Interesting geologic features are also visible, including Mount Sopris, the red cliffs in Snowmass Canyon, Triangle Peak and Red Canyon, Mount Daly, the Roaring Fork Gorge, Snowmass Ski Area, Aspen Highlands, Buttermilk, Aspen Mountain and much more.

Historic rail sign along the trail.



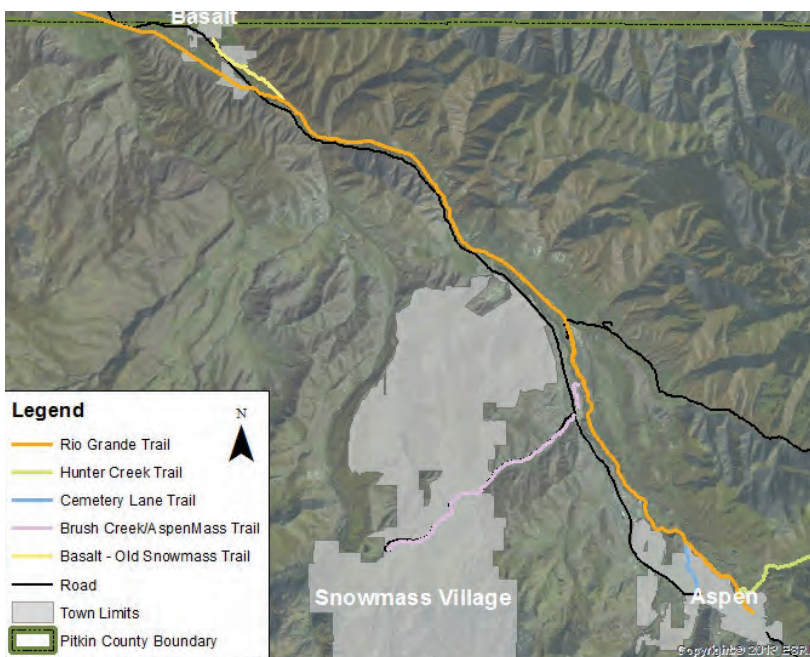
## 2.7 Regional connections

The Rio Grande Trail is the central spine in an extensive regional trail system. Looking at the entire valley, the Rio Grande Trail directly connects the communities of Glenwood Springs, Carbondale, Basalt and Aspen. In Aspen, the Hunter Creek and Cemetery Lane trails connect the Rio Grande Trail user to the greater Aspen trails system. Near Jaffee Park, the Aspen-Mass and Brush Creek trails connect the Rio Grande Trail to the Town of Snowmass Village. In Woody Creek, multiple soft surface trail can be reached from the Rio that lead a user onto the federal lands to the northeast. Near Old Snowmass, just downvalley from the Arciero Trailhead, the Basalt/Old Snowmass Trail provides connection into downtown Basalt.

Multiple missing trails links have been identified between the Rio Grande Trail and population centers within Pitkin County. Highway 82 provides a major barrier between downtown Basalt and the Basalt High School Trailhead. The Town of Basalt is currently working with regional partners on a highway underpass to help alleviate this barrier. Between the Wingo Junction and Arciero trailheads, approximately 100 homes in the neighborhood of Lazy Glen reside across the Roaring Fork River from the Rio Grande Trail. These residents have no direct access to the Rio Grande Trail; instead they must walk or bike along the shoulder of Highway 82 to reach a crossing that allows access to the trail and Arciero Trailhead. Aspen Village, on the upvalley end of Snowmass Canyon, contains approximately 150 homes. There is a trail connection between Aspen Village and a CDOT underpass that takes users beneath Highway 82, but there is no trail connection between the underpass and the Rio Grande Trail. Pedestrians and bicyclists must travel Gerbaz Way to reach the trail. The *Roaring Fork Gorge Management Plan* identifies a few regional trail connections that need improvement, namely the connection between the Rio Grande and the AABC community, and the connection between the Rio and the Brush Creek Trail.



Basalt/Old Snowmass trail intersection.



RFTA is currently leading a regional planning effort, comprised of local jurisdictions, to evaluate the regional trail connections and identify missing links in the system.

Map of existing regional trail connections



## 2.8 Parking, pullouts and trailheads

The *Recreation Trails Plan (1999 RTP)* identified potential locations for Rio Grande trailheads. Most of these have been implemented, with the exception of a few, and few trailheads not originally identified have been created.



Emma Schoolhouse Trailhead

### Primary Trailheads

Emma Schoolhouse:

- 15 parking spots
- Lot is owned by the Emma Schoolhouse Trust (EST)
- Port-a-potty paid for by EST
- No designated space for trailer parking
- No designated space for ADA parking
- Not identified in the *1999 RTP*



Basalt High School Trailhead

Basalt High School:

- 15 parking spots
- Located within the trail right of way
- Port-a-potty paid for by OST
- No designated space for trailer parking
- ADA parking available
- Identified in the *1999 RTP*



Arciero Trailhead

Arciero:

- 4 legal parking spots, often used for 7-plus vehicles
- Parking lot is owned by OST
- Parking serves trail and fishing access
- No designated space for trailer parking
- ADA parking available
- Identified in the *1999 RTP*



Woody Creek Trailhead

#### Woody Creek:

- 15 parking spots
- Located within the county road right of way and on Pitkin County property
- No designated space for trailer parking
- ADA parking available
- Outside the 1999 RTP planning area



Jaffee Park

#### Jaffee Park:

- 20-plus parking spots
- Parking lot is owned by OST
- Parking serves: fishing, boating and trail users
- Trailer parking available
- ADA parking available
- Actions in the *Gorge Management Plan* for improvement
- Outside the 1999 RTP planning area



Stein Park

#### Stein Park:

- 20-plus parking spots
- Parking lot is owned by AVLT, managed by the City of Aspen (COA)
- Port-a-potty paid for by COA
- Parking serves fishing, boating and trail users
- Actions in the *Gorge Management Plan* for improvement
- ADA parking available
- No designated space for trailer parking
- Outside the 1999 RTP planning area



Aspen Post Office

#### Aspen Post Office:

- No parking
- Major connection to the COA
- Outside the 1999 RTP planning area

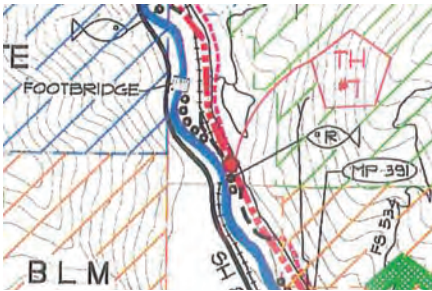


Wingo Junction Trailhead

## Secondary Trailheads

### Wingo Junction:

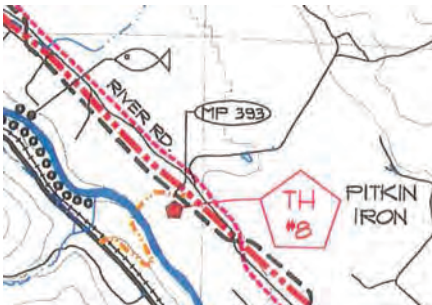
- 5 parking spots
- Parking lot is owned by OST
- No space for trailer parking
- ADA parking available
- Not identified in the *1999 RTP*



## Trailheads not currently implemented

### Gerbazdale:

- Roughly located in the right of way between Phillips Curve and Gerbaz Way
- Identified in the *1999 RTP*



### Pitkin Iron:

- Roughly located in the right of way and/or on Pitkin County property
- Identified in the *1999 RTP*

## Informal Parking and Pullouts

There are many locations where users park to access the Rio Grande Trail that are not formally recognized. All of the recognized parking areas experience times of peak use and overflow parking will start to occur on the surrounding roads. This problem is most prevalent at the Arciero Trailhead. This trailhead is undersized for the amount of use it sees, which often results in vehicles parked along North River Road. Between the Arciero Trailhead and the Woody Creek Trailhead there are multiple pullouts that are often used to access the Rio Grande Trail. Trail users can be seen parking along Lower River Road near Wheatley Gulch and in various locations near Pitkin Iron, including the corner where Upper River Road crosses



Pullout along Upper River Road

the right of way. This is a long stretch with no formal parking area and no trailer parking areas.





Memorial bench on a bridge over Roaring Fork River.

## 2.9 Signage, interpretation and memorials

The *2014 Sign Standards Update* encompasses all the signage within the Open Space and Trails system, including the Rio Grande Trail and trailheads. At this time, implementation is just beginning, but the goal is to follow the *2014 Standards* as existing signage comes up for replacement. With regard to the Rio Grande, trailhead signage is the most crucial component, with a corridor-wide replacement effort to be prioritized.

The 1999 *Recreation Trail Plan* and the associated 1999 *Reading the Roaring Fork Landscape*, have a large interpretation component. The plans advise creating a network of nodes, avoiding clutter along the trail with signage, placing nodes/signage out of the trail clear space and relating interpretation directly to the themes developed in *Reading the Roaring Fork Landscape*. The broad themes include: Reading the Landscape (ecosystems), Learning from History, Being Stewards, and Water as a Lifeblood. RFTA has implemented some of this interpretation on the lower sections of the Rio Grande Trail, but thus far, none has been done in Pitkin County.



From Aspen to Woody Creek, there are interpretive panels about the planets in our solar system. The idea is that users will start in Aspen and “travel” through the solar system as they head to Woody Creek. The signs were installed by the Aspen High School Astronomy Club in 2011. Many of the signs are placed within the trail clear space and are often in need of repair due to the materials used in their construction.

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails currently has a moratorium on new memorials. Memorials are not allowed unless opportunities have been specifically identified in a management plan. The Rio Grande from Stein Park to the Aspen Post Office is jointly managed by the City of Aspen and Pitkin County Open Space and Trails. There are multiple memorial benches managed by the City of Aspen in this corridor. At this time, there are no opportunities for additional benches. There are a few memorials in the Gorge, as well as a bench on the bridge over the Roaring Fork River at Wingo Junction. This bench is located on the trail and there has been discussion about relocating it out of the clear space.



Running events often make use of the Rio Grande Trail.

## 2.10 Commercial use and special events

The Rio Grande Trail continues to be a popular place for commercial and special events. Commercial operations and special events brought upwards of 4,000 users onto portions of the Rio Grande Trail in Pitkin County in 2014, based on estimates of participation provided by the event permittees. Events ranged from a small film shoot to supported bicycle tours and long-standing, local fundraisers that regularly draw hundreds of participants. Five commercial operators who made use of the trail for bike tours or cycling events reported roughly 405 participants in all. In addition, two nonprofit bike events drew an estimated 180 riders. Six running events drew an estimated 3,450 participants to the trail in 2014. These numbers do not include users of rented bikes. Although the Rio Grande Trail is a popular destination for individuals on rented bikes, an Open Space and Trails permit is not required for the renting of bikes.

All commercial uses and special events on the Rio Grande Trail and associated facilities, such as parking lots, require a permit. Permits may be obtained through the Open Space and Trails office and RFTA office.



## Partner and Public Comments

In preparation for development of a draft Rio Grande Trail Management Plan, comments were gathered from our partners, user groups, caucuses and other county departments. These comments, along with existing conditions and staff input, help guide the development of Action Items for the future management of the Rio Grande Trail. Once the Draft Plan was released, staff presented to the Horse Council, Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners, RFTA Board, City of Aspen Open Space and Trails Board, Woody Creek Caucus, SnowCap Caucus, and the Basalt POST Committee. The Draft Plan was online with a comment form and ads were placed in the papers and at trailheads. All of the comments were reviewed and the Draft Plan was updated accordingly to create the Final Plan. All comments received can be found in (Appendix C).



### 3.1 Comments before Draft Plan Creation

A Rio Grande Trail user survey was set up on the OST project website to gather feedback for draft plan development. Notifications were emailed to all of our partners, user groups and caucuses. Public announcements were placed in newspapers and in the Open Space and Trails newsletter and signs were placed along the Rio Grande. OST staffers were available to attend caucus and user group meetings in order to further explain the process and gather comments.

Woody Creek and Emma Caucus representatives said they would pass the information on to their constituents. The only user group that requested a presentation by OST was the Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council. Comments collected at the Horse Council meeting indicated the desire for trailer parking at trailheads, particularly in the midvalley, and the continuation of soft-surface trail, preferably separated from the hard surface.

The online survey gathered approximately 50 responses. Those who did respond are generally happy with the overall state of the trail. Respondents would like to see: development of singletrack in the trail right of way, horse trailer parking, the continuation of soft surface for equestrians and separation of surfaces where possible, a speed limit for bikes, adjacent singletrack developed in the sage meadows, user education outreach on rules and regulations, and rest areas with toilets and picnic shelters.



Outreach sign along the Rio Grande Trail.



Online survey results are in Appendix C

## 3.2 Caucus, User Group, Board and Public Comments

### 3.2.1 Town of Basalt POST committee

Staff met with the Town of Basalt Parks, Open Space and Trails committee (POST) before Draft Plan development and once the plan had been developed to gather comments and feedback. POST members referred to their 2013 Master Plan and emphasized their desire to work collaboratively on the redesign of the Basalt High School trailhead, citing the need for better signage, restrooms, places to rest and, potentially, a water fountain. Other items POST would like to see addressed include better directional signage along the Rio Grande Trail corridor and more rest areas. In general they were happy with the Draft Plan; they would prefer to see the Basalt trail design begin this year and further clarifications regarding privately built trail connections.

### 3.2.2 County Engineer

OST staff met with the county engineer to talk about how the Rio Grande Trail interfaces with county roads and road right of ways. From the Public Works perspective, the biggest concern is providing proper sight distances and signs where the trail crosses county roads. In addition, there are locations where parking for trailheads occurs in the road right of way or overflows onto county roads. The county engineer would prefer to see angle parking at trailheads or parking with enough space for a vehicle to completely back out without interrupting the traffic on the road.

### 3.2.3 City of Aspen

OST staff met with City of Aspen staff to discuss the 2 miles of trail jointly managed by the city and county, as well as the Nordic system, prior to Draft Plan development. Then staff presented the Draft Plan to the City of Aspen Open Space and Trails Board. The jointly managed stretch of trail is in need of resurfacing; this is an opportunity to look at sections for ADA improvements, Nordic realignment, separation of surfaces, address corner sight lines and alternate singletrack trails. Private connections to the Rio Grande are acceptable if they are flush and provide clear space. Other topics discussed with the city included interpretive signage, the existing interpretation on this section and potentially looking for a better location for the planet signs, as they are often in need of repair and are currently located in the clear space for the trail. Other considerations are night use of the trail and reflectivity of objects within the clear space, and Nordic grooming/solutions to the melting of snow over manhole covers.

### 3.2.4 Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council

Staff presented to the Roaring Fork Horse Council prior to draft development and once the draft plan had been developed. The Council would like to see a continuation and improvement of the soft-surface portion of the trail, striving for separation and adequate widths for horse traffic. The Council would also like to see adequate trailer parking at trailheads and equestrian-friendly road crossings, keeping in mind that horses do not like to go into an underpass. The formal letter from the Horse Council can be found in Appendix C.



Two miles of dual-surface trail was constructed in 2014 above Woody Creek. The construction of fully separated hard and soft surfaces is the goal where possible. Cindy Klob photo

### **3.2.5 Woody Creek Caucus**

Staff presented the Draft Plan to the Woody Creek Caucus. Comments received at the Caucus meeting include: more signage on rules and etiquette, working with neighbors at driveway crossings, more signage educating trail users on the public/private boundaries, more frequent Nordic grooming, more restrooms, more dog pots, a better connection to Aspen Village, and better trash cleanup along the trail.

### **3.2.6 Snowmass/Capitol Creek Caucus**

Staff presented the Draft Plan to the Snowmass/Capitol Creek Caucus. The Caucus sent a formal letter specifically asking these issues be addressed: separation of hard/soft surface tracks whenever possible, safe footing for horses on bridges and narrow portions of trail, prioritization of trailer parking sites, and solutions for overcrowded trailhead parking.

### **3.2.6 Emma Caucus**

The Emma Caucus sent a letter providing comments on the Draft Plan. They would like to see: maintenance of the soft-surface trail, a wider soft-surface trail, separated surfaces whenever possible, more trail etiquette signage, monitoring of the race events and potentially limiting the amount, horse trailer parking and bathrooms at the Basalt High School trailhead, better signage at the intersection of the Rio and Emma Road, and improvements to the underpass connection the Rio to the Emma Spur Trail.



## Management Actions

Management actions are developed based on the review of existing conditions, public comment, and partner agency input. The *Roaring Fork Gorge Management Plan* contained action items for the Gorge section of the Rio. Those actions can be found in **Appendix D**.

### 4.1 Design Standards

#### 4.1.1 Trail

The Rio Grande Trail will continue to be a multi-use hard- and soft- surface trail with a minimum of 8 feet of hard surface and 6 feet of soft surface when joined and a minimum of 10 feet of hard surface and 4 feet of soft surface when separated. The goal is to have fully separated surfaces where possible. Resurfacing and maintenance projects are always opportunities to evaluate and improve the trail, including reviewing and improving Nordic grooming alignments. When sections of trail are up for replacement, OST will work with user groups on potential design improvements.

#### 4.1.2 Signage

All signs in the Rio Grande Trail right of way relating to the trail, regional connections, way finding, trailheads, and any other recreational resource must follow the *2014 Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Signage Design Guidelines*. All other signs will be removed. Interpretation standards will be developed as an action item of this plan and any interpretation along the Rio Grande Trail will need to adhere to these standards.



Two-rail, split rail fence is standard along the Rio Grande Trail.

#### 4.1.3 Fences

Two-rail, split rail fence is the standard fencing used along the Rio Grande Trail. Exceptions can be made on a case- by-case basis with proper justification for deviation from the standard.

#### 4.1.4 Memorial and Commemorative Opportunities

At this time there is a moratorium on memorials along the Rio Grande Trail. This Management Plan is not identifying any opportunities. There may be opportunities identified in the future as part of the Interpretation and Node plan.

#### 4.1.5 Trail connections to the Rio Grande Trail

Trail connections to the Rio Grande Trail are split in to two categories: Emma County line to Woody Creek and Woody Creek to Aspen. If an entity wants to build a trail connection to the Rio Grande trail, and they are located between Emma and Woody Creek, they will need to seek permission from Pitkin County Open Space and Trails and the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority. If an entity would like to build a trail connection to the Rio Grande Trail, and they are located between Woody Creek and the Aspen Post Office, they will need to seek permission from Pitkin County Open Space and Trails.

## 4.2 Ongoing Actions

### 4.2.1 Trail Maintenance

The Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Capital Replacement Plan indicates the schedule for resurfacing work on the Rio Grande Trail. An annual inspection is done and resurfacing needs are identified and reflected in an updated capital plan. The plan calls for crack sealing of asphalt every 2-3 years and replacing asphalt sections every 12-15 years.



Preparing a dual surface above Woody Creek.

Winter maintenance of the trail, including when and where it is plowed or groomed for Nordic use, is outlined in the Winter Trail Maintenance Policy. From April 15 to October 31, OST will plow paved trails that are at least 85 percent clear of snow and ice. Snow and ice on soft-surface trails will be allowed to melt naturally. Between November 1 and April 15, the county maintains Nordic trails via grooming with snowcats or other Nordic grooming equipment.

Summer maintenance of the trail includes sweeping the paved portion as necessary; this usually occurs at least once per month. The soft surface sections are maintained annually by grading and compacting. “Volcanoes,” or high points where roots push up through the asphalt are repaired as discovered.

### 4.2.2 Weed Management

Open Space and Trails has been and will continue to manage noxious weeds on the Rio Grande Trail right of way in Pitkin County. The main noxious weeds encountered in the corridor are plumeless and Canada thistle, houndstongue, hoary cress, mullein, and leafy spurge. An integrative approach to management of noxious weeds is used for control. Mechanical removal through mowing or pulling, chemical spot treatment, and biological agents are used in the corridor.

### 4.2.3 Bridge Maintenance

There are 6 bridges on the Rio Grande Trail in Pitkin County that are maintained by Open Space and Trails. There are two railroad bridges just west of the Aspen Post Office that were re-decked and stabilized in 2009. A new bridge over Woody Creek was installed in 2013. The Wingo overpass over Highway 82 was installed in 2003, while the former railroad bridge across the Roaring Fork River was decked for pedestrian and bicycle use in 2000. The Emma Railroad Bridge is jointly managed by OST and RFTA. Bridges in the OST system are inspected by engineers every 5 years. Any maintenance that is required as a result of these inspections is reviewed to determine whether the repairs will be done internally or by outside contractors.



Emma Bridge at the Pitkin County line.

#### 4.2.4 ADA accessibility review and improvements

The Rio Grande Trail shall be ADA accessible where ever feasible; this includes trailheads and access from parking to the trail. Each time a new construction project takes place, striving to achieve ADA accessibility should be a key component. Periodic audits shall be completed to ensure that ADA-accessible areas continue to be so.



An opportunity for ADA improvement exists at the Emma Schoolhouse Trailhead.

#### 4.2.5 Work to improve regional trail connections

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails will continue to improve regional trail connections to and from the Rio Grande Trail as opportunities present themselves. Missing links that have been identified include: a connection to Lazy Glen over the Roaring Fork River, improvement of the link between the Aspen Village/ Highway 82 underpass and the Rio Grande Trail and those identified in the Roaring Fork Gorge Management Plan, such as connections between the Rio, the AABC and the Brush Creek Trail.

#### 4.2.6 Develop an Open Space and Trails special events policy

OST, in collaboration with Community Development, is currently reviewing the county's permit program and the impacts of Special Events that utilize county properties. The Rio Grande Trail is part of this study, which encompasses all assets.



#### 4.2.7 Work with Community Development to create Rio Grande Trail view corridor protection

Many of the comments OST received regarding the Rio Grande Trail note the scenery along the route. OST will take steps to protect the scenic quality of the trail user's experience. Staff will work with Community Development to explore developing viewshed protection of natural vistas, agrarian landscapes and riparian corridors from the Rio Grande Trail corridor. This action will coincide with ideas presented in the *West of Maroon Master Plan*.

#### 4.2.8 Work with adjacent landowners to maintain Nordic trail at driveway crossings

There are multiple driveway crossings of the Rio Grande Trail. In the winter, plowing of these driveways interrupts the skiing. Staff will work with landowners on leaving this snow in place and allowing the groomer to pack it down.



## 4.3 2015 Actions

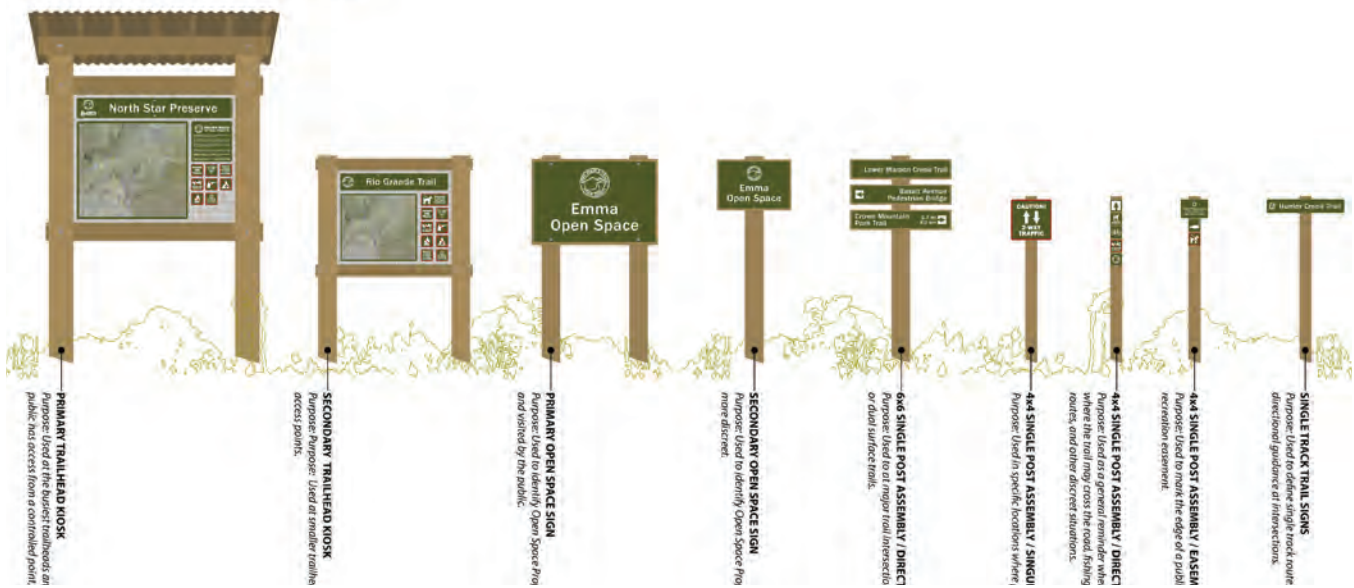
### 4.3.1 Implement directional, trailhead and property signs per the 2014 Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Signage Design Guidelines

Staff will perform a directional, trailhead and property signage audit along the Rio Grande Trail and replace and/or install signage according to the standards developed in the 2014 *Sign Standard Guidelines*.

Start Date: 2015-2017

Financial Implication: \$75,000

#### SIGN TYPE OVERVIEW + DEFINITIONS



Refer to Appendix E for Sign Standard Graphic

## 4.4 2016 Actions

### 4.4.1 Work with RFTA to outline 20-foot Recreation Easement and Maintenance Agreements

Per the 1999 *Conservation and Trail Easement*, RFTA and Pitkin County need to determine the boundaries of the 20-foot recreation easement through the corridor by 2020. This will provide an opportunity to get maintenance agreements in place for elements occurring outside that easement, such as weed management and recreation amenities. All trail amenities are subject to relocation when the commuter rail becomes a reality.

Start Date: 2016

Financial Implication: TBD

#### 4.4.2 Rio Grande Trail traffic control sign audit and plan

Perform a traffic control signage audit along the Rio Grande Trail and create a plan of locations and specifications for all of the traffic control signage on the Rio Grande and on roads that the trail intersects. The goal of this plan is to provide Open Space and Trails and Public Works staff a specific plan and guidelines for signing and striping the Rio Grande Trail and the roads intersecting the trail.

Start Date: Summer 2016

Financial Implication: \$30,000



#### 4.4.3 Redesign hard and soft-surface alignments from the Basalt/Old Snowmass Trail intersection to the Arciero Trailhead

This section of trail is due for resurfacing in 2015. This provides the opportunity to look at re-aligning the hard-surface trail back onto the railroad grade and possibly create a fully separated soft-surface trail. Improvement of regional trail connections to Lazy Glen and Basalt should be reviewed and considered as part of this project, as should the Arciero parking lot layout and striping.

Start Date: 2016

Financial Implication: \$300,000



Patch jobs and blind corner.



Soft surface and asphalt transitions.



Arciero Trailhead parking.



#### 4.4.4 Develop an interpretation and node plan for the Rio Grande Trail in Pitkin County

The plan will look comprehensively at the entire trail within Pitkin County and evaluate the best locations to place interpretation, benches, picnic tables, bathrooms etc. , as well as design the nodes. The plan will include development of specific interpretation panels based on opportunities in the landscape. It will include collaboration with the City of Aspen staff on the two miles of trail that are jointly managed by the city and county, and evaluate the success or relocation of existing interpretive signs. All signs in the plan shall follow the themes in the *1999 Reading the Roaring Fork Landscape*.

The plan will also strategically locate benches, picnic tables and evaluate restroom locations. All nodes shall be located out of the trail clear space and be of a consistent design. The ground plane, views, shade opportunities and distance to other rest areas should all be taken into consideration. The plan shall cover the node details from locations to construction documents.

Start Date: Spring 2016

Financial Implication: \$50,000



A Bates siding sign still stands on the Rio Grande today.



The Emma Store, pictured here in 1952 with the railroad tracks still in place, is an opportunity for historical interpretation along the Rio Grande Trail. Courtesy of Isabel



A former railroad bridge carries the Rio Grande Trail over the Roaring Fork River between Basalt High School and Arciero.



#### 4.4.5 Redesign of the Basalt High School Trailhead

Work with the Town of Basalt's Parks, Open Space and Trails committee and RFTA to redesign the Basalt High School trailhead. Ideas to explore include: redesign of parking layout, restroom/port-a-potty, water fountain, winter trailhead map and potential Nordic storage. Signage will follow the *2014 Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Signage Design Guidelines* and potential for interpretation will be covered by the Interpretation and Rest Area Plan Action Item.

Start Date: 2016

Financial Implication: TBD



#### 4.4.6 Host an e-bike Management Discussion

Pitkin County will host a meeting with staff from RFTA and the City of Aspen to discuss the management of electric bikes, or e-bikes, on the Rio Grande Trail. The goal is a seamless system from one jurisdiction to the next, including the rules governing e-bike use. The staff will review the latest information on electric bikes and listen to the different jurisdictions' thoughts on how this quickly evolving and expanding recreational use and the Rio Grande Trail will interface. If any change in management is proposed, this would ultimately require Board action.

Start Date: Winter 2016

Financial Implication: TBD

### 4.5 2017 Actions

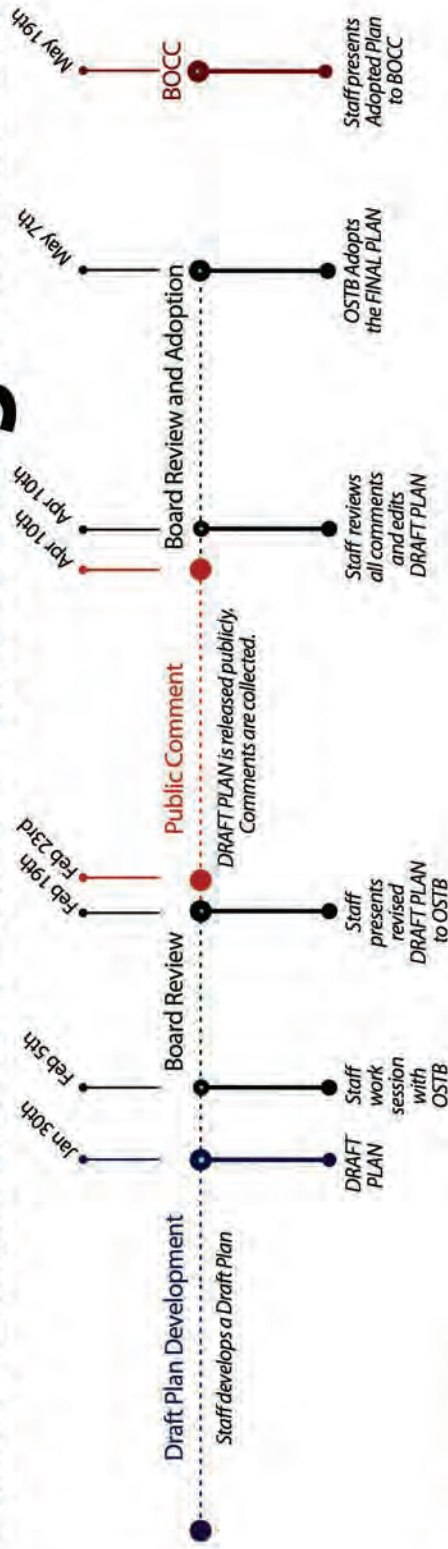
#### 4.5.1 New trailhead in the Gerbazdale/Woody Creek area to accommodate additional use, particularly trailer parking

Options shall be reviewed for a new trailhead in the Gerbazdale/Woody Creek area to accommodate the increase in user demand and trailer parking. Potential locations: Pitkin Iron, the Red Canyon lots or additional places that present themselves. Options shall be discussed with users and the caucus before implementation.

Start Date: 2017

Financial Implication: \$75,000

# Rio Grande Trail Planning Process



## Draft Plan Development

Staff will review existing conditions and previous planning documents, contact user groups and caucuses, conduct surveys, and meet and collaborate with partners.

Staff will contact and/or meet with:

- Emma Caucus
- Basalt POST Committee
- Woody Creek Caucus
- The City of Aspen Trails staff
- Nordic Council
- Bike and Equestrian user groups
- County Roads Department

RFTA Staff will be involved in all meetings and Draft Plan development.

## Board Review

Staff will present the Draft Plan to the OSTB in a work session. Staff will give a detailed review of existing conditions, public and partner comments, themes that were developed and how this informed the development of the Action Items. Board will ask questions, comment and give Board direction. The purpose of the work sessions are to collaborate with the Board on their thoughts for the Draft Plan. Public comment is encouraged to wait until after the official Draft Plan is released.

Staff will take the Board's directions and edit the plan accordingly. The Draft Plan will be presented to the OSTB at a subsequent meeting. Once the OSTB has approved the Draft Plan, it will be released for public comment.

## Public Comment

After the OSTB has approved the Draft Plan, it will be released for a 1.5-month public comment period. This includes: posting the draft to our project site with a comment/survey link, advertising, press release, open houses, presentations to partners, newspaper and radio and/or other pertinent means of advertising. All comments need to be captured in writing and will become an appendix in the final report. This includes any formal comments from Boards, partners, user groups, etc.

Staff will give the BOCC an update on the process to date in a work session and gather any thoughts they may have.

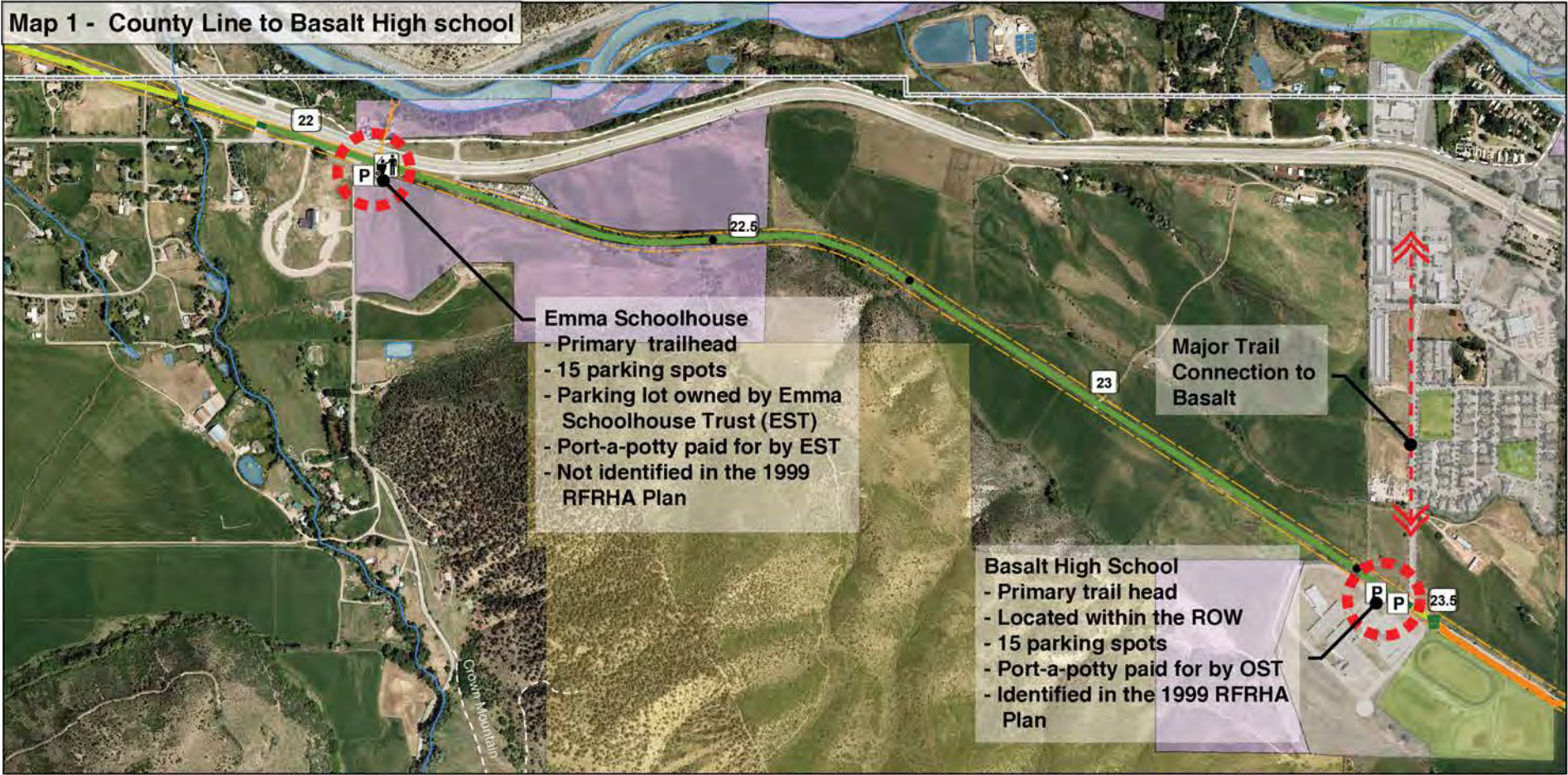
## Board Review and Adoption

After the public comment period closes, staff will update the Draft Plan to develop a Final Plan. Staff will present the Final Plan to the OSTB, highlighting the comments received over the Public comment period and any changes in the plan. The Board will provide comment and/or Board direction on edits. Staff will bring the revised Final Plan back to the OSTB for adoption at a subsequent meeting.

## BOCC Presentation

Staff will present the adopted Final Plan to the BOCC.

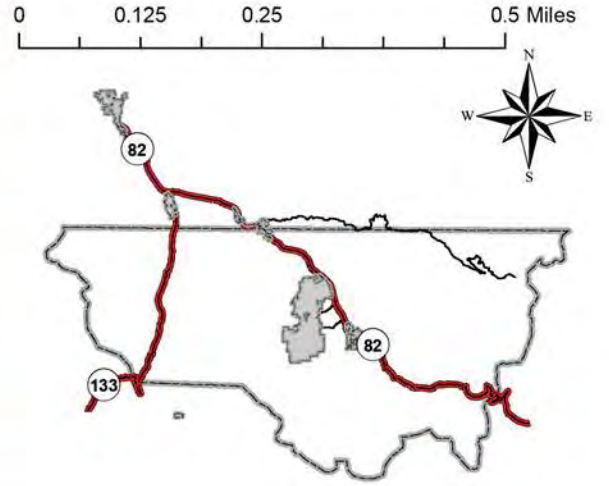
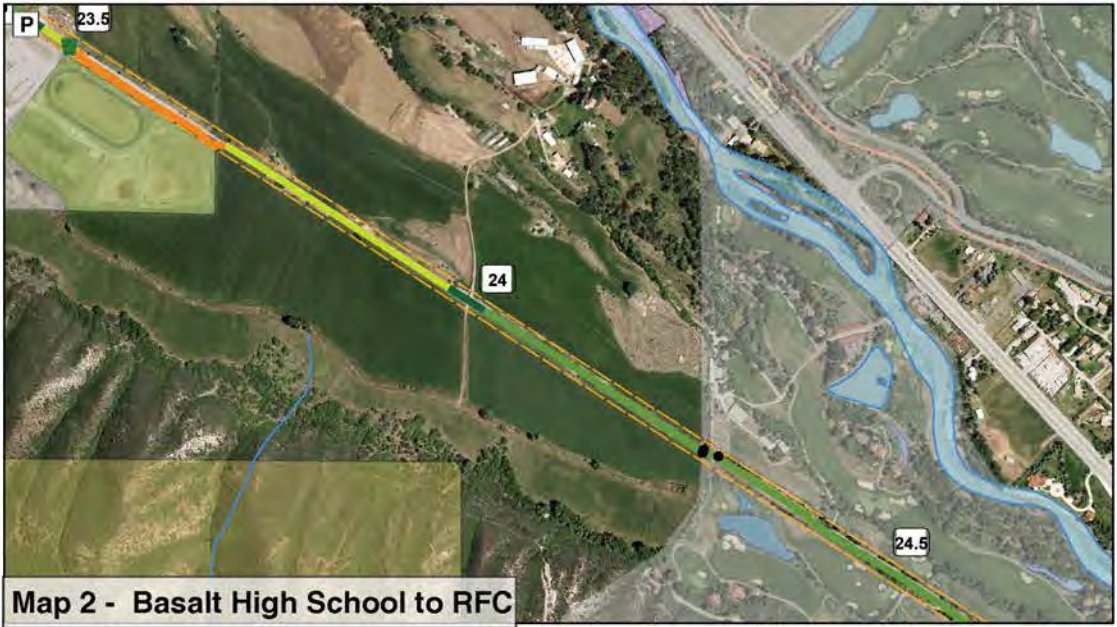




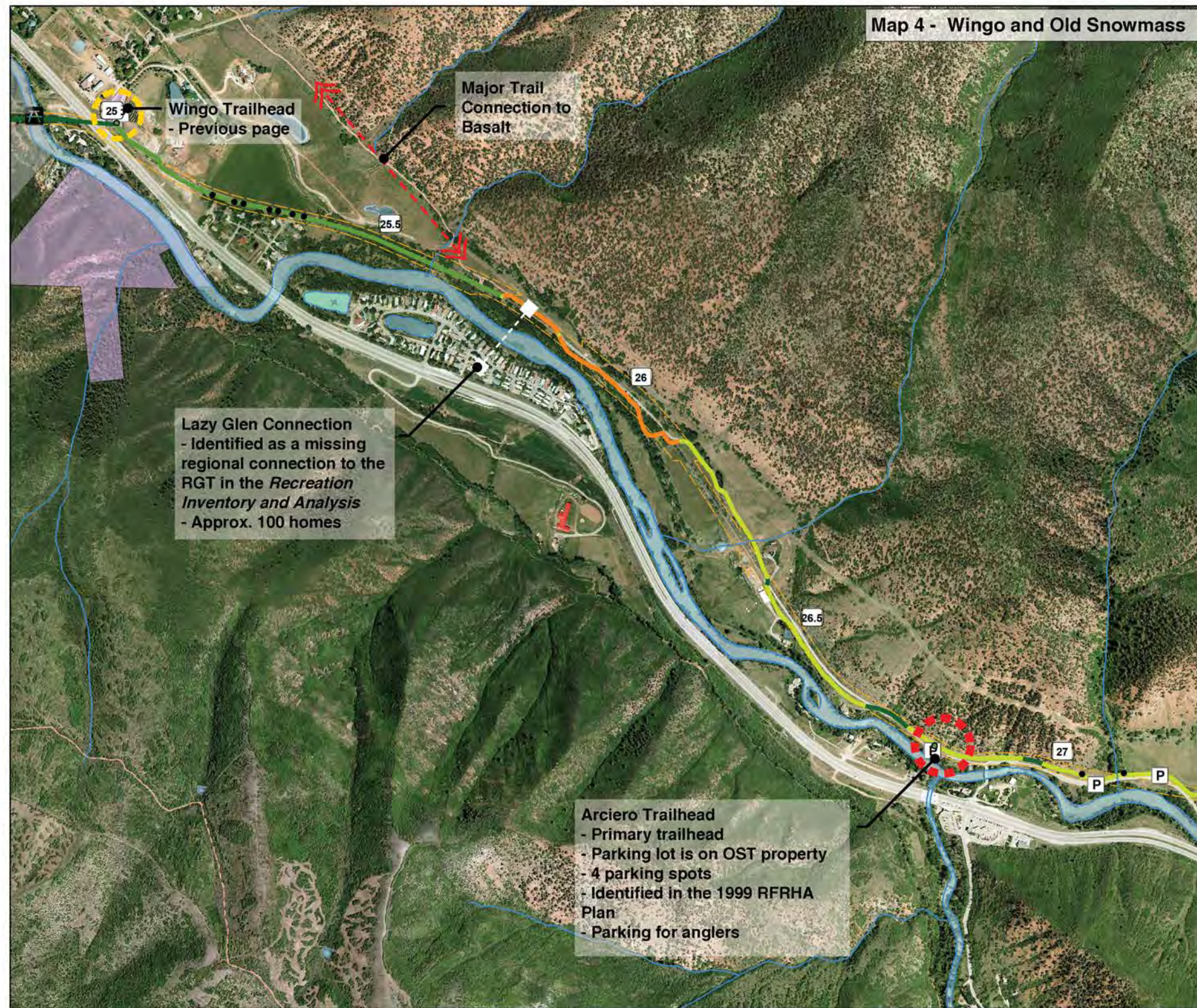
### Emma, Basalt and Wingo

**Legend**

	County Line		Rio Grande Trail Mile Markers
	Picnic Table or Bench		<b>Rio Grande Trail</b> Location of Soft Surface
	Boat Launch		NA
	Memorials		North Side
	Trash Can		South Side
	Fishing Trail		Separated - North Side
	Horse Trail		Separated - South Side
	Private Trail Connection		Soft Surface Only
	Trailhead		RFTA ROW
	Port-a-potty		Other Trails
	Pet Station		Openspace
	Parking Area		Parks
	Creek or River		Town Boundary
	Primary Trailhead		BLM
	Secondary Trailhead		STATE OF CO
	Major Regional Trail Connection		USFS







### Wingo and Old Snowmass

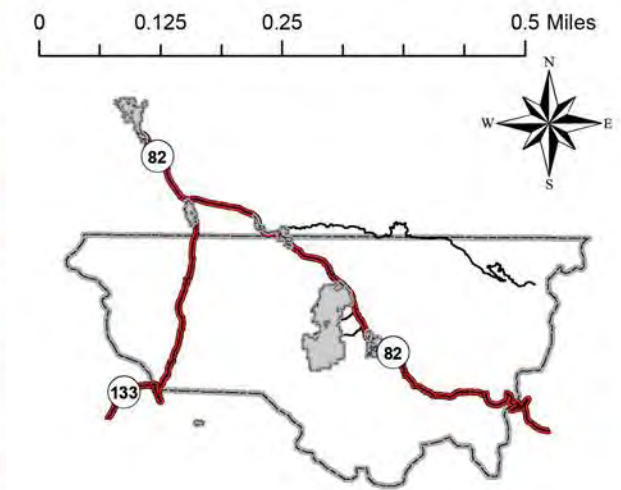
**Legend**

County Line	<b>Rio Grande Trail</b>
Rio Grande Trail Mile Markers	<b>Location of Soft Surface</b>
Picnic Table or Bench	NA
Boat Launch	North Side
Memorials	South Side
Trash Can	Separated - North Side
Fishing Trail	Separated - South Side
Horse Trail	Soft Surface Only
Private Trail Connection	RFTA ROW
Trailhead	<b>Other Trails</b>
Port-a-potty	Openspace
Pet Station	Parks
Parking Area	Town Boundary
Creek or River	BLM
	STATE OF CO
	USFS

Primary Trailhead

Secondary Trailhead

Major Regional Trail Connection







### Snowmass Canyon

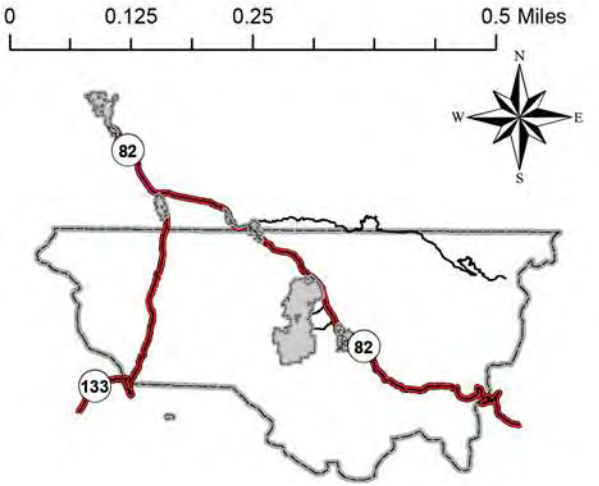
**Legend**

County Line	<b>Rio Grande Trail</b>
Rio Grande Trail Mile Markers	<b>Location of Soft Surface</b>
Picnic Table or Bench	NA
Boat Launch	North Side
Memorials	South Side
Trash Can	Separated - North Side
Fishing Trail	Separated - South Side
Horse Trail	Soft Surface Only
Private Trail Connection	RFTA ROW
Trailhead	<b>Other Trails</b>
Port-a-potty	Openspace
Pet Station	Parks
Parking Area	Town Boundary
Creek or River	BLM
	STATE OF CO
	USFS

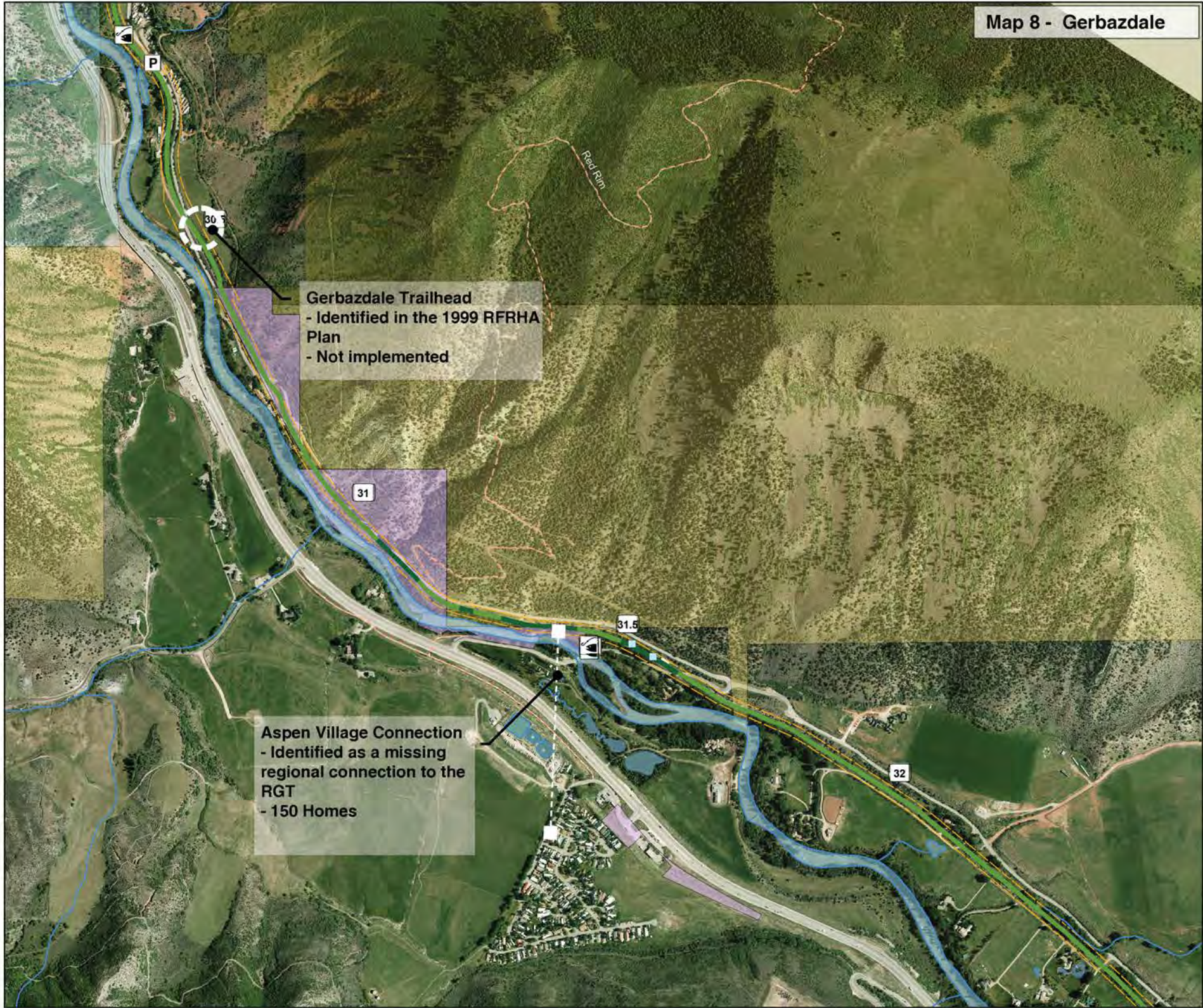
Primary Trailhead

Secondary Trailhead

Major Regional Trail Connection

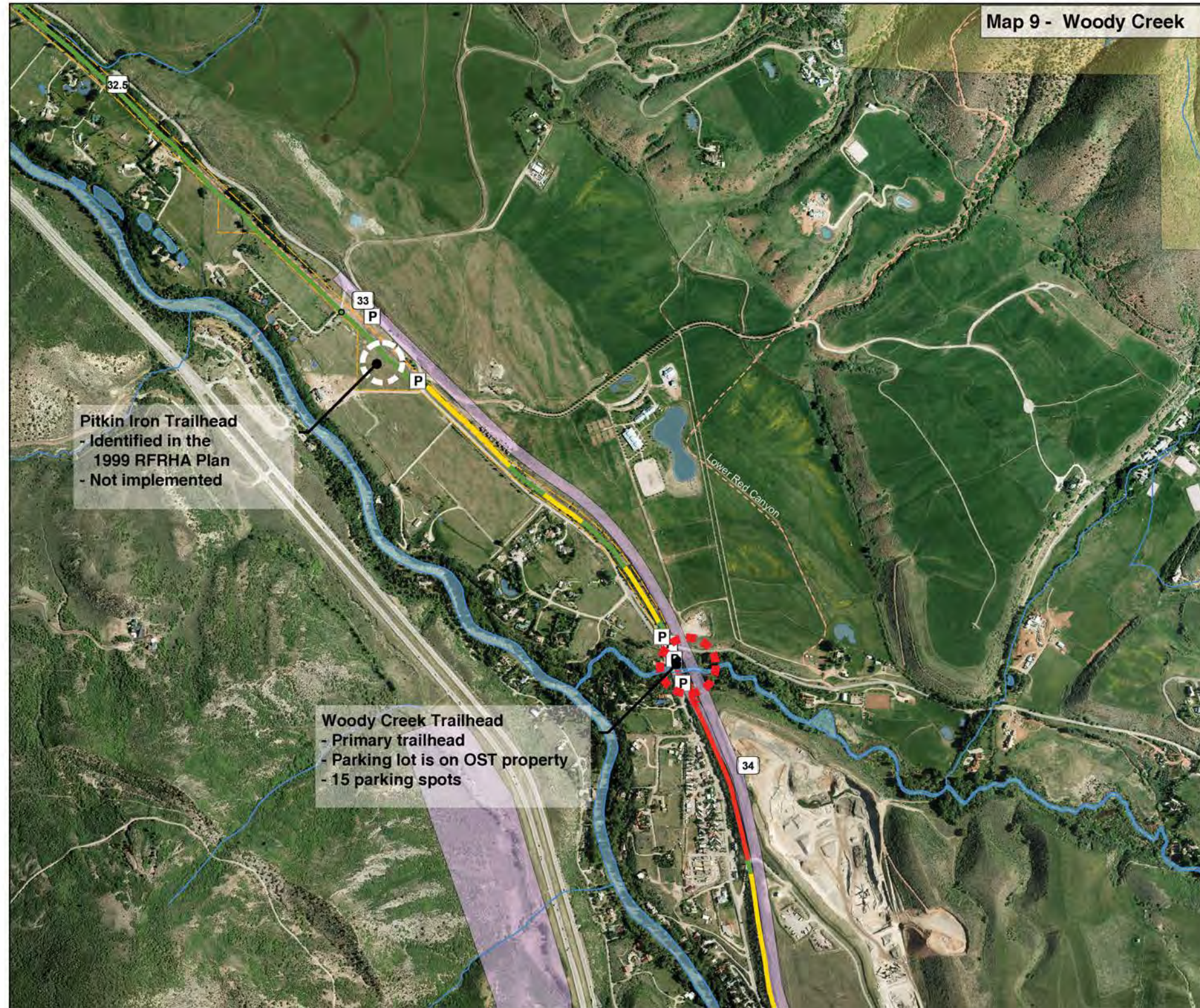




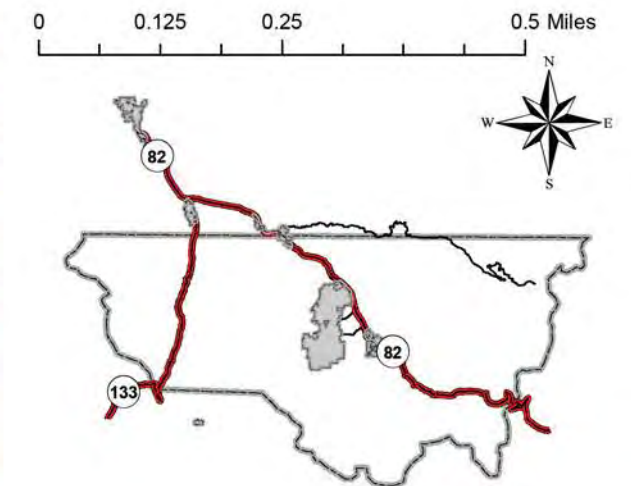


# Gerbazdale

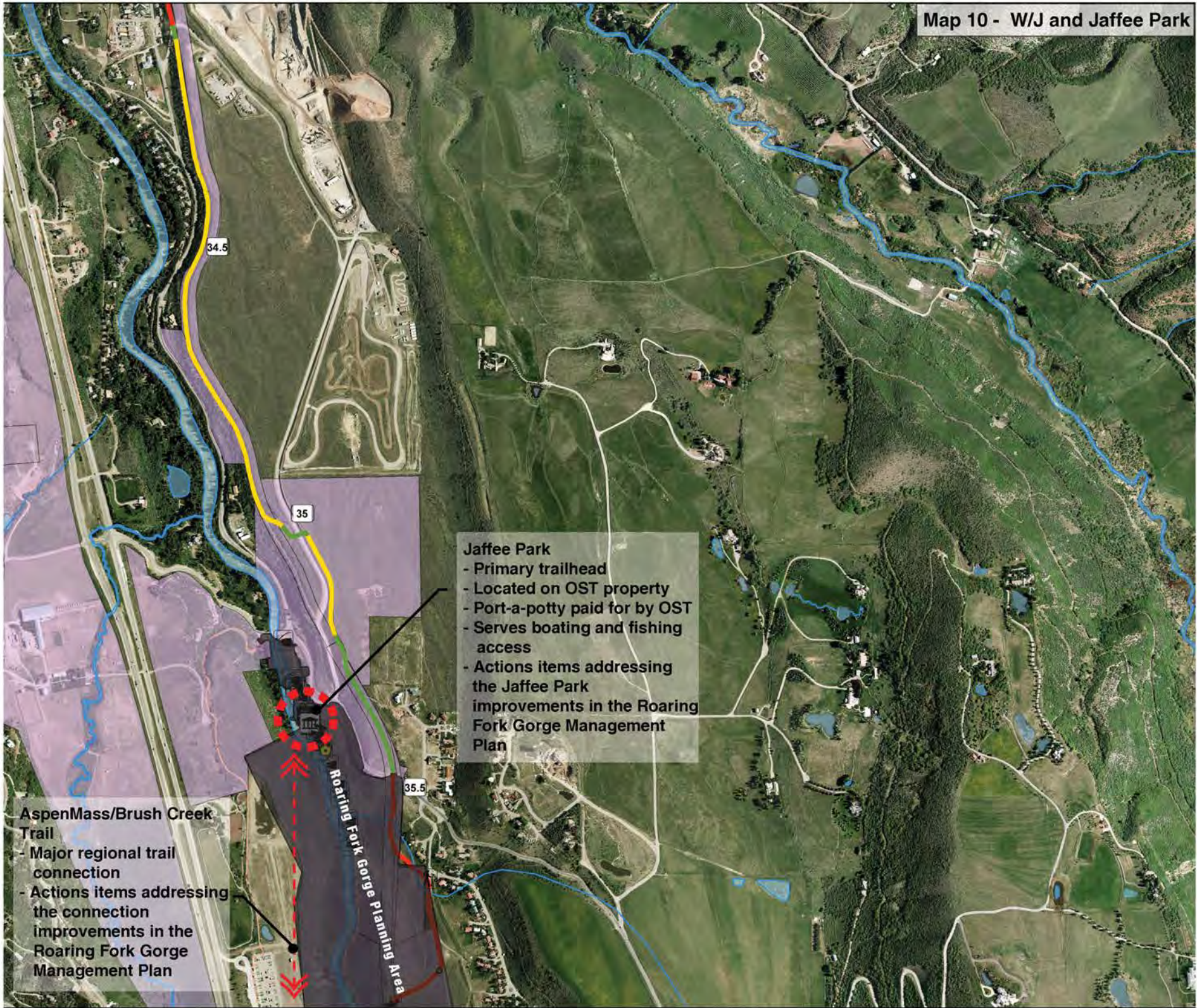




## Woody Creek







# Woody Creek and Jaffee Park

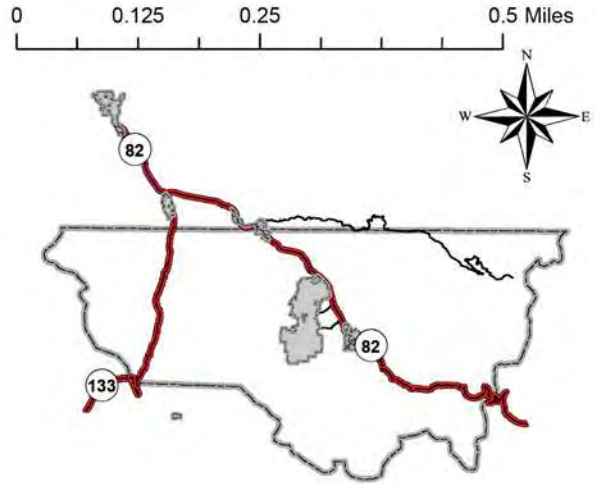
**Legend**

County Line	<b>Rio Grande Trail</b>
Rio Grande Trail Mile Markers	<b>Location of Soft Surface</b>
Picnic Table or Bench	NA
Boat Launch	North Side
Memorials	South Side
Trash Can	Separated - North Side
Fishing Trail	Separated - South Side
Horse Trail	Soft Surface Only
Private Trail Connection	RFTA ROW
Trailhead	Other Trails
Port-a-potty	Openspace
Pet Station	Parks
Parking Area	Town Boundary
Creek or River	BLM
	STATE OF CO
	USFS

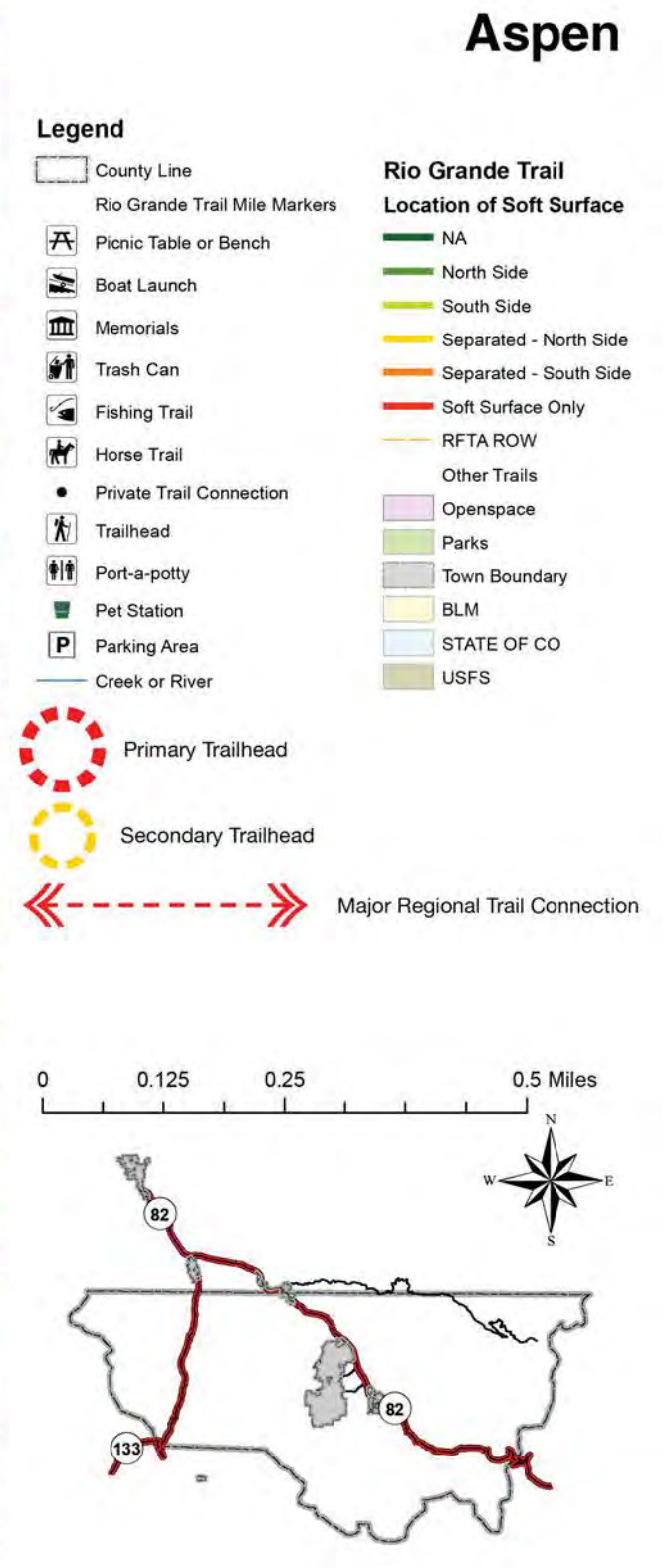
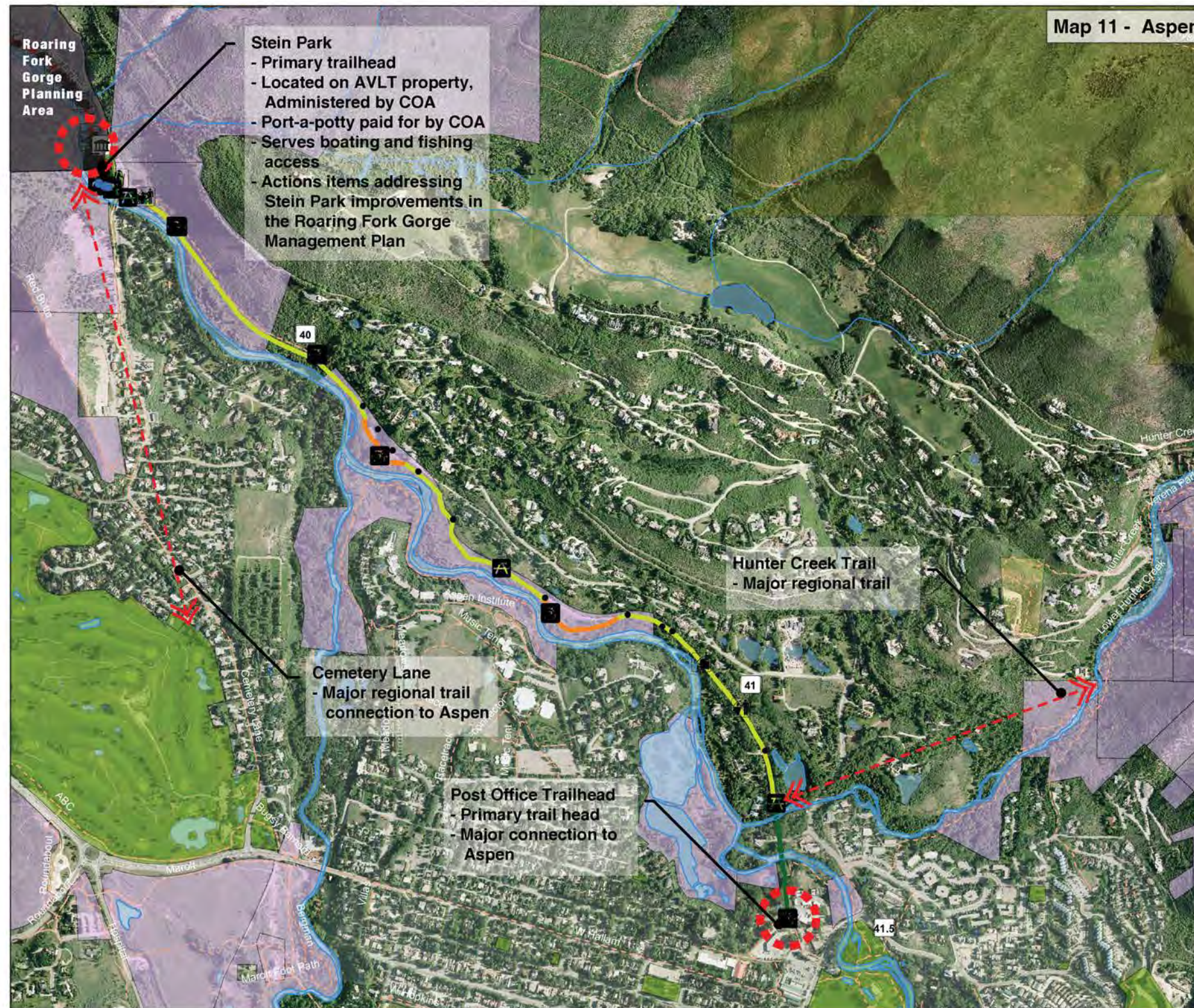
Primary Trailhead

Secondary Trailhead

Major Regional Trail Connection









### PUBLIC COMMENTS ON DRAFT RIO GRANDE TRAIL MANAGEMENT PLAN

*Comment period – Feb. 23 – April 10, 2015*

I would like to add my voice to those who really want to see a soft track next to the trail from Aspen to Glenwood. The unpaved trail on the Lower Rio Grande is such a delight for dog walkers, joggers, and people like me on a horse.

It is imperative that The Rio Grande Trail be all inclusive and encourage all sorts of transportation and recreation alternatives.

§ § §

4.2.5 of Rio Grand Trail Mgmt Plan needs to more explicit on connecting to soft trails such as the Crown, Glassier/Crown and other soft trails. Many people use the Rio Grande to access public lands, soft trails and dirt roads.

§ § §

As a person who wishes to enjoy this wonderful valley on horseback. I ask you to sincerely to consider the safe and pleasant use of the Rio Grande Trail. Soft surface is key to that enjoyment. Without it I feel excluded from one of the main gift that this valley has to offer to the community as a whole. Soft surface is more in keeping with nature, it is less expensive to maintain and for the most part more to the liking of the majority of the users. I would recommend that where there is not room for both soft and hard surface that soft surface be the surface of choice. There is a catch 22 for most equestrian users. Hard surface and lack of trailer parking has just shut out the use of the trail. So both trailer parking and soft surface that is at least 6 feet wide preferably 10 feet would be a wonderful gift to this valley as a whole.

§ § §

I like the idea of putting up signs about the railroad and mining history along the RGT. Leadville has done an excellent job with this along the Mineral Belt Trail and I find their signs very interesting. I don't like the signs about the planets - I don't see any connection with the RGT or Aspen. This school project would be better in a different location.

§ § §

No segways or electric bikes please!

§ § §

On behalf of the Bicycle Products Suppliers Association, I was encouraged to read in the Rio Grande Trail Draft Management Plan that staff from RFTA and the City of Aspen will be considering the use of electric bicycles on the Rio Grande Trail.

Electric bikes – quiet and low-speed transportation devices – would be an important addition to the Roaring Fork Valley's energy-efficient transportation system. These bikes are quickly becoming the "vehicle" of choice for thousands of Coloradans who are discovering the health benefits of bicycling while helping to reduce the environmental impact of our Colorado's transportation system. Electric bikes benefit people new to cycling who may be discouraged from riding a traditional bicycle due to limited physical fitness, age, disability or convenience. They are often a "gateway" to fully self-propelled bicycling and are especially important for senior citizens, parents with children, people with disabilities, and people whose trips involve steep hills or whose work commutes are within the 5-20 mile range and who traditionally drive.

## Appendix C - Public Comments

I would welcome the opportunity to provide any further information needed on the electric bicycles in Colorado before, after, or when your winter 2016 meeting occurs, and I will be following the development of the Rio Grande Trail Management Plan carefully.

§ § §

I am writing to request that the upgrade of the Rio Grande Trail include, where there is enough room, a “soft” track to reasonably accommodate horseback riding and jogging, for those who don’t like doing that on a paved way. I realize that there are some portions of the trail where there might not be enough space to do both parallel hard and soft tracks, but I hope you will make an effort to provide soft track, where possible. I am not a horse person myself, but I have a lot of friends who are, and this is very important to them.

§ § §

This plan is most comprehensive and quite impressive. We are delighted to be a part of it.

§ § §

I am a frequent user of the Rio Grande Trail accessing it usually from Old Snowmass and parking in the small lot provided there. I am a bike rider myself and have used the trail frequently to ride to Basalt. The last few years I use it more in the capacity for walking my dog. I have found that, even though it is a multi-use trail, bike riders in general tend to see it as a race track and priority for their needs. It is so heavily used in the summer months (to its great overall success) that I find it almost impossible and definitely displeasurable to be on foot and dangerous when I am walking with a leashed dog. Many riders are courteous and alert you that they are coming upon you (and expect you to get out of their way) and many do not warn you and surprise you as they pass going quite fast. Not only is it frightening to dog and owner alike, but I have seen riders going fast enough that they do not anticipate or successfully negotiate turns -- I have seen accidents and even someone thrown and unconscious by the trail because their speed did not allow for a safe journey. This trail is for everybody; how will you manage a safe and enjoyable outing for all? I support a wider soft track for horses and for walkers; what would be a solution to the above would be a separated path for bike riders. The other issue is discarded used doggy bags; I saw that John Armstrong made a statement in the Aspen Times regarding this and I always wonder if people think there is a dog-doo trash service! What can they be thinking? Don’t know how that will be managed, but it needs to be. I would also strongly advocate an underpass from the Old Snowmass park-n-ride lot under Highway 82, connecting to the Rio Grande Trail. That intersection is incredibly dangerous even in a car (with the multitude of drivers who run red lights) and it would get people parking at that corner and walking to the trail, alleviating the need for massive parking on the Rio Grande side of the highway. CDOT nor RFTA ever made any safe underpass crossing for the people of Old Snowmass to access the bus stops nor the Trail but would be welcomed and greatly appreciated now. Thank you.

§ § §

Waste of money. simple rural trail does not need huge cost structure. keep it simple with little impact on environment and my wallet.

§ § §

Having multi use available is great but perhaps signage as to the respectful use would be helpful.

Some people may no longer walk the trail because of of inconsiderate bikers

A separate soft surface foe equestrians if they choose to use

## Appendix C - Public Comments

appreciated

An additional benefit of secondary surface - a way to get out the way of a speeding cyclist

Perhaps now is the time to have license plates for bicycles at a small fee - would help expense of maintaining trails and give the opportunity to report offenders... a thought.

§ § §

Rio-Grande Trail officials are encouraged to follow the lead of the City of Glenwood Springs and forbid the use of mechanical/electrical conveyances on the trail. The GWS Chief of Police was consulted early during the preparation of the trail ordinance. This six foot three, over two hundred pound cop said his first consideration was “esthetics”.

The Riverside Trail, as it is known locally, is a wide ten feet of excellently laid and well maintained concrete. Families find it to be a place where they can let very small children free roam without fear of them being struck by heavy, fast moving conveyances.

It would be wonderful if the entire Rio-Grande Trail could enthrall its vast majority of users. Please do not cater to very small special interest groups.

§ § §



## Appendix C - Public Comments

Molly Child  
Snowmass/Capitol Creek Caucus  
April 10, 2015

Lindsey Utter  
Pitkin County Open Space & Trails  
Aspen, CO

Re: Rio Grande Trail Management Plan

Dear Lindsey,

Thank you for your presentation to the Snowmass-Capitol Creek Caucus Board at our March meeting, regarding the Rio Grande Trail Management Plan. We appreciate the OST's work to improve the safety, accessibility, and signage of the trail system. Many residents in our Caucus area enjoy using the Rio Grande Trail year-round - what a wonderful amenity it is!

We would like to support the Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council's efforts and goals of achieving safer and more accessible equestrian use of sections of the Rio Grande. We realize that there will be some areas where two trails may not be possible, but we think it advisable to provide equestrians a soft track, and to separate equestrians from bikers, pedestrians, roller bladers, baby carriages, etc wherever possible. We understand that you are working towards this goal, and -urge you to continue informational outreach to the various trail user groups about safe trail etiquette.

We hope Pitkin County's Rio Grande Management Plan will specifically address these issues:

- Separation of hard/soft track where possible
- Safe footing for horses on bridge surfaces and narrow portions of the trail
- Prioritization of OST/RFTA evaluation of potential additional trailer parking sites
- Solutions for overcrowded trailhead parking

Respectfully submitted,

Molly Child for the Snowmass-Capitol Creek Caucus Board

## Appendix C - Public Comments



Our mission is to create and sustain the best possible mountain bike trail system and experience in the Roaring Fork Valley.

April 8, 2015

Pitkin County Open Space & Trails  
Lindsey Utter, Recreation Planner  
530 E. Main Street  
Aspen, CO 81611  
(submitted via email: [lindsey.utter@pitkincounty.com](mailto:lindsey.utter@pitkincounty.com) )

RE: Comments on Draft Rio Grande Trail Management Plan

Dear Lindsey,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Rio Grande Trail Management Plan. Please accept this letter as a general vote of support for the both the process and the current proposed actions. Following, please find specific comments on this Draft Plan as well as a copy of our comments submitted on 11/5/2013 for the Roaring Fork Gorge Management Plan.

1. RFMBA supports 4.2.5, Work to improve regional trail connections. Regional connections, as indicated in the draft plan, comprise the core value for mountain bike trail users who utilize the Rio to connect between soft surface trail systems or from their home neighborhoods. The fact that the Rio Grande acts as a spine for all trails between Aspen and Glenwood Springs is a resource of immeasurable value for both recreation and transportation by cyclists. Continual investment and proper management of this resource is greatly appreciated by the mountain bike community.
2. RFMBA supports 4.3.1, Signage implementation, action anticipated 2015-2017, and would like to offer review and suggestions for proposed signage, especially where connections to contiguous or nearby soft surface trail systems exist.
3. RFMBA supports 4.4.6, e-bike Management Discussion. While the Rio is primarily a paved path, it's worth noting that IMBA will be studying the impacts of e-MTB's on natural surface trails and trail users during 2015. <https://www.imba.com/news/electric-mountain-bike-study> The results of this study will help to identify the range of impacts and will guide the development of best management practices for trails. At this time, IMBA only supports the use of e-Bikes anywhere that currently allows other motorized uses. When classification is necessary, mountain biking should be part of the non-motorized class given its impacts are similar to hiking and equestrian uses.

We applaud the Pitkin County's efforts to manage a broad spectrum of recreation on the Rio Grande Trail. Thank you for your time and consideration of our comments. We look forward to

**Imagine! The best trails on the planet – right outside your door!**

RFMBA, an IMBA Chapter, is a 501(c)(3) public charity. RFMBA, PO Box 2635, Aspen, CO 81612, [www.rfmba.org](http://www.rfmba.org)

## Appendix C - Public Comments



Our mission is to create and sustain the best possible mountain bike trail system and experience in the Roaring Fork Valley.

continuing a productive relationship in the future. Please feel free to call me (970) 948-3486 or email (mike.pritchard@imba.com) if we can be of further assistance.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Pritchard

Executive Director, Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association  
CO/WY Associate Region Director, IMBA

November 5, 2013

**TO:** Lindsey Utter, Recreation Planner, Pitkin County Open Space & Trails

**RE:** Comments on Draft version of Roaring Fork Gorge Management Plan

**Sent via email:** [lindsey.utter@co.pitkin.co.us](mailto:lindsey.utter@co.pitkin.co.us)

### **Comments regarding proposed management actions:**

#### Section 4.1.1:

Strongly support acquisition of described lands, especially those on the east side of the Rio Grande Trail, generally comprised of flatter sage brush land that would be ideal for development of a compact network of singletrack trails that would offer beginner level and younger mountain bikers a focus area that would be accessed from parking lot at Jaffee Park, or directly from Aspen area along the Rio Grande trail. See Appendix B, Mountain Bike and Cross Bike Open House map, for general location.

#### Section 4.2:

Strongly support all listed management actions that have the intention of improving the natural resources of the planning area.

#### Section 4.3.1.1:

Strongly support the creation of a parallel singletrack option along the length of the dual surface proposed for Rio Grande Trail Phase I wherever possible. Given the terrain along Phase I, wherever possible should really mean the majority of this length of trail, wherever terrain and land ownership is not an obstacle. If land ownership is an obstacle, keep the singletrack directly adjacent to RG trail, within the legal right of way. This parallel singletrack would be as far from away from the Rio Grande trail as possible, and offer sinuous curving features that flow well for mountain bikers of all experience levels, while offering a great experience for beginner level riders. The trail should be wide enough that sage brush does not require lopping every summer season, but narrow enough to offer a distinct experience from the adjacent RG trail. This singletrack system should be planned to tie into a future phase singletrack system of trails just to the east of the Phase I area, on the flat sage fields that are currently on the radar for potential open space acquisition.

**Imagine! The best trails on the planet – right outside your door!**

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## Appendix C - Public Comments



Our mission is to create and sustain the best possible mountain bike trail system and experience in the Roaring Fork Valley.

### Section 4.3.3 & Section 4.3.4.4:

Strongly support the improvement of trail connection between Jaffee Park and the sage brush fields east of RG trail Phase I area. While the current soft surface trail is of generous width, it is steeper than desired for beginner level and younger mountain bikers that would be the key demographic for the potential sage brush field singletrack trail network. While the existing trail route is proposed as a dual surface trail improvement project, a sinuous singletrack alternative that cuts grade steepness by winding its way up from riverside to sage fields is of equal or greater importance to the mountain bike community. Given proposed project costs, and given that this is a spur of the RG trail, a singletrack alternative should be considered mandatory for this portion of the project.

### Section 4.3.4.1:

Strongly support the ongoing trail improvement for a bike friendly connection from AABC to the river bottom.

### Section 4.3.4.2:

Strongly support the concept of a bike friendly trail connection between Burlingame and the Rio Grande trail. However, budgeting \$25,000 to study trail concepts seems excessive. Suggest limiting these study costs as much as possible, and allocate funds to trail construction costs instead.

### Section 4.3.4.3:

Strongly support the Stein Bridge improvement project. Agreed that focus on a new trail alignment between the bridge and RG trail will improve the experience for cyclists traveling to and from the AABC.

### Section 4.3.4.5:

Strongly support the concept of a soft surface AspenMass trail connecting Jaffee Park towards the Intercept Lot. Given the relatively low user numbers than might be expected, this trail should be made available to all user groups, including mountain bikers. If equestrian use is monitored and shown to be higher than other trails, introduce signage designed to inform and educate all users on how to avoid conflicts.

### Section 4.3.5.2:

Strongly support the concept of a direct trail & bridge connection between the RG trail and the Intercept Lot. Although the estimated cost of this project is very high, it would be seen as critical link between the growing network of trails at Sky Mountain Park, trails beyond in Snowmass, the major transportation and parking hub of the Intercept Lot itself, and the many destinations afforded by the RG trail. This project would immediately increase loop opportunities for riders and increase the ease of access for a potential network of beginner level singletrack trails in the sage fields just east of this project area.

### Section 4.3.5.3:

Strongly support the concept of a trail connection between the Intercept Lot and the AABC area. However, given the estimated cost for an 8' wide hard surface trail, we would instead propose a singletrack trail connection that would be used by hikers, runners, and mountain bikers. While there will be some sections of shale to contend with (possibly a challenge for construction of a truly sustainable trail), much of the potential alignment could be standard 24" wide singletrack trail construction that would more readily undulate with the existing topography in a manner not possible for a wide hard surface trail. Specialized wildlife crossings should not be required for a traditional singletrack trail. This would provide for a high quality loop opportunity utilizing bike paths, and the new Airline & Cozyline Trails. Additional trail construction ideas for this alignment are offered in the appendix comment section (see long comment "emailed after online entry closed").

### Section 4.3.7

Strongly support updates to signage program. Suggest going in the direction that Town of Snowmass Village is going with their new signage design: modular, informative, easy to update, as opposed to the more simple USFS style of sign that only provides a trail name and no real opportunity for additional information.

**Imagine! The best trails on the planet – right outside your door!**

RFMBA, an IMBA Chapter, is a 501(c)(3) public charity. RFMBA, PO Box 2635, Aspen, CO 81612, [www.rfmba.org](http://www.rfmba.org)

## Appendix C - Public Comments



Our mission is to create and sustain the best possible mountain bike trail system and experience in the Roaring Fork Valley.

### Section 4.3.8

Strongly support the amenity of an interpretive sign plan for interesting geological and historic culture issues. Also, suggest improving the existing wooden Solar System signage system so that it becomes a permanent amenity that helps trail users to understand the awesome scale of Nature!

### **Additional Comments:**

1. Study and provide future potential for a singletrack trail that would connect the Airline Trail to a potential singletrack trail that would connect Intercept Lot to AABC (utilizing existing underpass under Highway 82). Properly monitor the underpass to determine if its current use by wildlife would not allow for co-existence of a recreation trail.

2. Undertake a trails plan that identifies all possible opportunities for singletrack trails within this greater management plan area. The forthcoming Upper Roaring Fork Trails Plan will hopefully accomplish this need, and will partially do so by referring to the Roaring Fork Gorge Management Plan.

Many thanks for all of your efforts on this management plan, and to the work that everyone at Open Space and Trails has put in to get to this point. There is no doubt that this plan is setting the stage for many great improvements in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Mike Pritchard  
RFMBA, Board President

**Imagine! The best trails on the planet – right outside your door!**

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April 3, 2015

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails  
530 E. Main St.  
Aspen CO 81611



Re: Rio Grande Trail Management Plan

Dear Pitkin County Open Space and Trails,

Lindsey Utter, Recreation Planner, presented the Draft Rio Grande Management Plan to the Town's POST Committee on March 4, 2015. The Town appreciates the County's efforts in keeping us apprised of the planning efforts and giving us the opportunity to comment on the Draft Plan.

The POST Committee was extremely pleased with the Draft Plan. POST felt that the plan supported the Town of Basalt's planning objectives as reflected in the Town's adopted Parks, Open Space, and Trails Plan, and recognized that the draft plan included important implementation steps advocated by the Town's Plan which can only be implemented through Pitkin County. The Town's POST Committee had two comments for consideration by the Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Board which the Town Council supports.

1. 4.4.5 Redesign of the Basalt High School Trailhead

Current draft: Work with the Town of Basalt's Parks, Open Space and Trails Committee and RFTA to redesign the Basalt High School trailhead. Ideas to explore include: redesign of parking layout, restroom/port-a-potty, water fountain, winter trailhead map and potential Nordic storage. Signage will follow the 2014 Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Signage Design Guidelines and potential for interpretation will be covered by the Interpretation and Rest Area Plan Action Item

Start Date: 2016

Financial Implementation: TBD

Town of Basalt Comment: The Town recommends that planning for the improvements begin in 2015 with the objective of implementing the improvements in 2016. The Town has been waiting for the Rio Grande Trail Plan to be completed so that this important improvement can be made. The Town realizes that implementation is un-realistic in 2015 but we are hopeful that enough planning can be underway to include the project in 2016 budget(s) for implementation.

2. Current Plan: 4.4.5 Privately built connections to the Rio Grande Trail

Current Plan: Connections to the Rio Grande built by private entities must be approved by the Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Stewardship staff and, in the case of the jointly managed

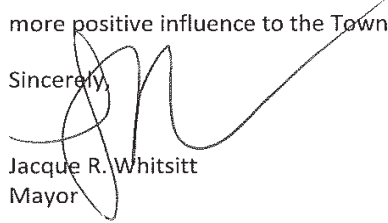
## Appendix C - Public Comments

section of the Rio, the City of Aspen staff or, in the county line to Woody Creek Road segment, RFTA staff. These trail connections must be flush with the trail and not introduce any obstructions into the clear space. Trails should also be soft surface and may be removed at any time when deemed necessary by Open Space staff.

Town of Basalt Comment: The Town's only concern is that we have requested private entities to build public trails for the Town to other public amenities such as public bathrooms (e.g. the original Stott's Mill development approval or the Continuing Care Retirement Facility approval). While we recognize that the Town needs permission from the County and RFTA, it makes us uncomfortable that language reads that the trail could be removed at any time when deemed necessary by Open Space staff. This could be clarified by adding a few words. It could read, **Private** connections to the Rio Grande built and maintained by private entities must be approved ....

Thank you for keeping the Town of Basalt involved in the management and planning process for the Rio Grande Trail. The Town looks forward to working with the County to make the Rio Grande Trail an even more positive influence to the Town and Roaring Fork Valley.

Sincerely,



Jacquie R. Whitsitt  
Mayor



### EMMA CAUCUS

P.O. Box 1405  
Basalt, CO 81621

DATE: April 9, 2015

TO: Lindsey Utter, Senior Environmental Planner  
Pitkin County Open Space and Trails

CC: Bret Meredith, RFTA

RE: Rio Grande Trail Draft Management Plan

The Emma Caucus received a link to the Rio Grande Trail Draft Management Plan from Lindsey Utter, which was distributed to all Caucus members by email to allow comments to be forwarded directly to Open Space and Trails. Although no meeting was called to discuss the Draft Plan, the topic has come up in other meetings of the Caucus, including those updating the Emma Area Master Plan. Our records indicate that, shortly after it was first organized, the Emma Caucus wrote to Pitkin County Open Space regarding the Rio Grande Trail in July, 2005, including the following statements:

*“Emma, as you probably know is a rural neighborhood with ranches and ranchettes. Horses are prevalent and many residents take advantage of the trail heading east from the Emma School house to ride year round. In addition, residents also utilize the trail in the winter for Nordic skiing as well as jogging. Summer use includes walkers, runners, horseback riders and bikers as well. There are safety concerns when horseback riders and even joggers share the trail with bicyclists. Soft surface trails are safer for horseback riders year round, as well as for joggers and x-country skiers in the winter as ice is not built up.*

*“Based on our discussion with Dale and the responses we received back from our Caucus members. The executive committee has the following recommendation: We feel a soft surface needs to be continued and ideally separated from a paved surface if paving this stretch of trail is going to happen. This will make the trail safer and allow all the multiple users to share in the usage.”*

A follow-up letter was sent from then Moderator of the Caucus, George Newman, in April, 2006, which stated:

*“Our Caucus meeting with Dale Will last summer addressed the needs of this multi-use trail and safety concerns. An email and telephone poll was conducted prior to sending Dale the Caucus letter. The ideal situation as suggested by Dale is to utilize the entire right of way from the Emma School House to the Basalt High School and east, including a hard surface trail with a separate adjacent soft surface trail. This would solve first and foremost the safety issue of combining bicyclists with runners and especially horseback riders.*

*“A problem to discuss on the 14 foot wide trail, where 10’ are paved and 4’ soft, is maintaining the 4’ soft surface width so that it does not deteriorate from erosion, etc., making it narrower and basically unusable. A larger percentage of soft surface would be better. Case in point is the trail section that RFTA did from the Emma School House heading west. RFTA did not allow enough width for a soft surface as they said they would, so it is basically a paved trail.*

*“The Emma portion of the trail sees perhaps the most number of horseback riders, partly due to the high usage by the neighborhood and others who want to ride on a soft surface. The soft surface also by its nature keeps off the road bicyclists and thus solves the safety issue that runners have with them as well. Seeing a group of road bicyclists come at you whether you are horseback riding, running or just walking is nerve-wracking to say the least.*

*“Finally, in regards to parking at trail heads, we are finding that at least at the Emma Schoolhouse parking lot, there has been and continues to be abandoned vehicles left there. This winter the number of vehicles grew to 5 at one time. The Emma Community Trust (Schoolhouse owner) has asked for and been denied help from the County in*

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*removing these vehicles. Given the public use as trail head parking, the Schoolhouse no longer has the option of locking or closing off this parking lot. This has been a recurring concern at our Caucus meetings. It should be noted that PITCO roads and bridge department have recently placed no overnight parking signs in and along the lot. We thank them for that. We would ask that OST or Pitkin County take responsibility in the removal of these vehicles if this problem continues.”*

Over the past 10 years the trail has become a highly valued amenity by both residents of the Emma area and the Roaring Fork Valley as a whole. Maintained with both hard and soft surfaces, usage has increased dramatically, and long distance bicycle races are held regularly each summer. The parking lot at the Emma Schoolhouse has been well maintained and protected by Open Space and Trails, and many enjoy the Nordic ski tracks from Emma all the way to Aspen when snow is available. Users range from walkers, runners, families with strollers and small children on their first bicycles, and equestrians to bicyclists commuting singly to work or recreating/ racing in large groups. At certain times, the trail seems nearly “loved to death”.

The Emma Caucus recognizes the difficulties inherent in managing such a well-loved amenity. However, we offer the following comments:

- The soft surface of the trail should be maintained to serve equestrians as well as walkers, runners and Nordic skiers as described in our initial assessment. While some sections of the trail may be too narrow for expansion, the width of the soft surface should be increased wherever possible, including separation from the paved trail, to promote safety among user groups.
- Signage along the trail should be improved to control speeds of bicyclists and promote courtesy among different user groups, both as to right of way safety precautions, be they horses, pedestrians with dogs or bicyclists, and picking up after dogs (and horses).
- Although we are notified through Pitkin County Community Development of upcoming Special Events in our area, the number of large organized races held along the trail has been proliferating and there may need to be a system put in place by which these are limited
- Parking facilities should be improved to include port-a-johns at the Basalt High School lot and to allow space for horse trailers there or on nearby Open Space land.
- Additional signage is necessary at the intersection of Emma Road and Highway 82 where several close calls have occurred with bicyclists crossing from the Trail. Although the Trail includes stop signs, these are often ignored by Trail users who may not see cars trying to enter from the Highway from the east.
- Finally, the connection to the Trail from Emma Spur across Highway 82 requires attention since the underpass beneath the highway next to Sopris Creek is both poorly designed and maintained. Although currently underutilized, this underpass could provide valuable connectivity not only to Emma Road and downtown Basalt but also the pedestrian bridge over the Roaring Fork River which accesses the RFTA stop at Aspen Junction.

The Emma Caucus considers the presence of the Rio Grande Trail a valuable amenity for our area and we appreciate the work of both Pitkin County Open Space and RFTA in maintaining it for everyone to enjoy. Thank you!



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### ROARING FORK VALLEY HORSE COUNCIL

P O Box 127  
Snowmass, CO 81654  
[www.rfvhorsecouncil.org](http://www.rfvhorsecouncil.org)

4/10/2015



Beautiful Emma Open space soft track trail is next to the bike path.

Rio Grande Trail signs alert pedestrians and bicyclists to yield for equestrians.

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To Lindsey Utter, for the Rio Grande Management Plan,

We have read the entire Rio Grande Management Plan and all corresponding documents. We congratulate you on your comprehensive and thoughtful management plan. The equestrian community greatly appreciates the plan's recognition for improving the trail and parking for equestrian use.

Originally, starting in 2000, the RFTA Rio Grande Trail was a multi use trail for bikes, pedestrians and equestrians, and was soft track from Aspen to Glenwood Springs. Many of the old time locals remember all the meetings and articles in the paper regarding the construction and management of the soft track implementation. The entire community was very excited to have a public trail for their use. Somehow the Rio Grande Trail changed from soft track to mostly asphalt. From recent inspection we could see that the Rio Grande Trail is beautifully maintained and that in some sections effort has been made to widen and separate the soft track for equestrian use. The reality is that for most horsemen asphalt is slick and dangerous for barefoot or steel shod horses. They can fall down and injure themselves and their riders. Many pedestrian users also miss the old soft track. Soft track is easier on the human body for joggers and walkers. When the summer sun heats up the black asphalt, dog walkers can keep their best friends footpads from burning on the hot bike path. It is called "Soft Track" for a reason. It is kinder and more inclusive for all users.

The asphalt path is great. People love riding their bikes on the Rio Grande Trail, lunching at "The Tavern", enjoying the mountains, the river, the wildlife and the beautiful open spaces. The soft track improvement would offer the slower, kinder path for those walking. Everyone should have a place and a way to move along the Rio Grande Trail.

Now is the opportunity to put into the management plan an improved soft track for a more enjoyable experience for everyone's use. The soft track improvements meet the goals of the Pitkin County Home Rule Charter and 2011 Pitkin County Strategic Plan.

Some of the Rio Grande Trail from Aspen to Emma has soft track in place. Some sections are narrow, directly next to the bike path with drop off shoulders, which makes them unsafe if a horse should shy from bike path traffic. Some of the trails are fenced to constrict the bike and soft track configuration, again making it dangerous. There are soft track sections that are separated from the hard surface path. There are several areas along the Rio Grande corridor where the old unimproved railroad bed is already separate from the hard surface. With some small improvements this old railroad bed would be ideal for equestrian use. In many places there is no soft track, only hard surface, which makes equestrian use dangerous.

The Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council greatly appreciates that Lindsey Utter from OST & Bret Meredith from RFTA came and made a presentation to RFVHC about the Rio Grande Management Plan. Lindsey and Bret asked that the equestrian community give specific input on the soft track and equestrian parking to be added to the plan. They also wanted specific design ideas for how the soft track and parking could work along restricted areas due to limitations through portions of the trail corridor. We have included photos and notes showing different trail sections



where improvements can be made. Also we show examples where the existing trail is in good shape for multi users. Rather than submitting a comprehensive foot, by foot explanation of trail improvements, the RfVHC would like to be a consultant for OST on the design for equestrian trail and parking. Working together the OST and RfVHC will save time and money, while making the trail implementation process smooth and easy. We realize that improvements may not be implemented all at once, but as long as soft track and parking for equestrian use is specifically addressed in the management plan, then the equestrian community will feel confident that their needs will be met.

### Soft Track



This is the current existing Rio Grande Trail just east of the Emma School House, where the soft track and the hard surface are side by side, almost 50% - 50% in width, and in a fairly constricted section of the corridor. This soft track footing that OST is using is excellent for equestrian use. You can see many pedestrian and dog foot prints on the soft track next to the bike path. These impressions are left by the different users who are enjoying the soft track. This soft track section works for equestrians, and is a good solution in a constricted area.



This photo shows the steep soft shoulder with a dangerously narrow existing trail section just east of the Emma School House. In sections of the soft track, where you have a soft shoulder of 20% or more steep grade, a horse could lose it's footing and unexpectedly fall off the steep side. We recommend the terrain for soft track should be 8 feet of flat surface to allow horses or other users to pass each other safely. Some sections of trail may be so narrow that an 8-foot



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flat soft track will not fit along side the hard surface. In these locations a 50%-50% soft track – hard surface width split would accommodate the many users. As you can see there are many user prints in the soft track.

- Temporary rubber mats, that can be removed for winter can be used on bridges, and can cover existing asphalt through narrow short sections.



Mr. Fox, one of the multi users of the Rio Grande Trail, in front of the bridge just west of the Woody Creek Tavern. The soft track on the right of the photo is almost 50%-50%, and it works adequately for equestrians at this time.

- The photo shows an ideal example of where 50% - 50%, soft & hard surface would work for all users.



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driveway to homes is on right. The driveway is narrow and in bad condition. The soft track through this section of the Rio Grande is non-existent.



Pinch point through the narrow constricted Arciero Rio Grande Trail section. The driveway for local homeowners is below on the left. This is another example of where 50%-50% soft and hard surfaces could accommodate all users.



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- In places where the Rio Grande Trail is asphalt hard surface, there may be room off to the side for a separate single track, to be used for horses and pedestrians. If the terrain is not flat the trail can meander around boulders, trees, and bushes.



This trail meanders above the bike path through the sagebrush as a separate path for horses and hikers on the Rio Grande Trail just above the old lumberyard near the bridge across Hwy 82.



On Lower River Road the old railroad bed is separate from the Rio Grande hard surface trail, which you see on the right of the photo. A little leveling and the addition of soft track footing would make the railroad bed very suitable for all soft surface users.



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Looking towards Woody Creek, this photo shows the railroad bed separate from the hard surface along Lower River Road.

**Soft Track** -If space and topography allows, the ideal scenario would be to have soft track and hard surface separate.



The Iron Works in Woody Creek is an excellent location for a separated soft track trail. On the newly purchased OST Arciero parcel there exists an excellent opportunity for a separate soft track trail on the old railroad bed.



Woody Creek at the Iron Works area, where soft track separates from hard surface. This is a wonderful example of separate trails for all users.

- **Parking** – In general there is a lack of parking for equestrians. Some trucks and trailers are smaller, some are larger, but the average truck & trailer size is 40 feet. Most people ride with other horses and riders because horses are more comfortable with company. Equestrians use the buddy system for safety. Planning for parking spaces should allow for two to four rigs. Equestrians would prefer small, unpaved parking lots, landscaped into the environment, in multiple locations along the Rio Grande Trail to spread the density of users onto the many existing and proposed trail systems above the valley floor. A 40-foot rig needs a 100-foot turn around. Parking can be accomplished along roads with wide shoulders with turnouts, in fields, and designated parking lots, as long as there is room to pull in, park, and turn to pull out.



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This photo shows potential truck and trailer parking at Arciero in the old riding arena.



This is the existing Arciero trail parking, which is very limited at this time.

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This photo shows potential truck and trailer parking on the newly acquired Dart OST property on Lower River Road.



The Iron Works railroad bed is ideal for a separate soft track trail and plenty of room for truck and trailer parking also.



## Appendix C - Public Comments



This photo shows potential truck and trailer parking on the newly acquired Dart OST property on Lower River Road.



The Iron Works railroad bed is ideal for a separate soft track trail and plenty of room for truck and trailer parking also.

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There are two pull out parking areas just west of the bridge and west of the Woody Creek Tavern. Mr. fox is headed across the road to the existing Rio Grande soft track.



There is ample truck and trailer pull off parking near the entrance of Aspen Valley Ranch for public access to the Red Canyon Trail.





There is room for truck and trailer parking for the Arbany-Kittle Trail. This trailhead is just east of the Arciero Rio Grande Trail.

- **Connections** – The Rio Grande Trail gives the public a way of getting to the many connecting trails leading up from the valley floor to the high country trails. With the addition of more parking for cars, along with trucks and trailers, the improvements to the Rio Grande soft track will allow all users to get to the many connecting trails.



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The red trail leading out of Chaparral Ranch can easily be accessed from the Rio Grande trail. The public could benefit from the additional parking for cars and trucks and trailers at the old Iron Works site.



Arbany-Kittle Trailhead, the Red Canyon Trail, the Chaparral Ranch Trail, provide access to BLM lands from Basalt to Lenado, and on to Hunter Creek, Smuggler Mountain, and the wilderness beyond.





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This is a multi use two-track trail allowing horses, but with no parking to access this trail, horsemen must ride along the asphalt Lower River Road from the Rio Grande Trail.



On the right, above the arrow sign, you can see the trail to Light Hill. The Rio Grande Trail and OST owned property next to the Emma School house could access this trail nicely.



Near the train car after the Aspen Valley Ranch heading west, there is a pull out which could accommodate one truck and trailer with access to the trail that you see at the center of the photo. Hunters use this every fall, and is a suitable riding trail.



Aspen Valley Ranch – Red Canyon Trail access for the public.

A trail through the Aspen Mass OST property could connect Cozy Point Horse Park, the Intercept Lot, to Jaffe parking lot and the Rio Grande Trail. This would allow you to head East towards Aspen, or west through Woody Creek, and on down valley. This could also connect users across Brush Creek Road to Sky Mountain and Snowmass. Talk about connections!

### **Highway and Road Crossings to access the Rio Grande Trail**

Aspen is a unique community. Our vision for crossing Brush Creek Road and Hwy 82 would make the entrance to aspen unique and very beautiful while creating a pathway for wildlife, pedestrians, and equestrians to cross safely.

#### **I thought it best to address the dangers of a multi use tunnels.**

Horses are extremely skeptical about dark, enclosed areas. Most horses become very nervous in tunnels. The flight from fear instinct is peeked causing horses to shy and run from the smallest trigger. A shying horse in enclosed dark areas can be disastrous. They can be trained to tolerate almost anything, but even if horses have repetitive, positive experiences over a long period of time, the natural instincts often surface, causing danger for all involved. If for example a horse was learning to go through a long tunnel under Brush Creek Road, another party might approach from the front or behind the horse. (be it a person on foot, another mounted equestrian, wildlife, or worst case scenario a man on a bike) most horses would have some reaction to flee. Horses and bikes together in a tunnel create a most dangerous situation.

Many communities throughout the world have used Living Bridges to solve this crossing problem. I have included some photos of these bridges for use by horses, pedestrians, mountain bikers, and wildlife. Not only are they functional, but also absolutely beautiful.



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As planes fly into Aspen, the aerial view of these bridges would be spectacular, unique, and make our entrance corridor rare and wonderful.

**Living bridges for living beings, for all creatures, great and small.**



**Introducing the Rocky Mountain Wildlife Bridge Company!**



**Highway A50 in The Netherlands**



**Ecoduct (wildlife bridge) on highway A1 through nature area the Veluwe, the Netherlands**



**Group Looks To Protect Drivers & Wildlife On Highway 9 - Silverthorn, CO**



**World's Coolest Animal Bridges**

Under construction –  
Smithsonian.com

How exciting to think of the potential for this beautiful and safe highway crossing.

**A beautiful highway crossing for wildlife, equestrians, pedestrians and mountain bikers would be across Highway 82 from Cozy Point Ranch.**

The wildlife could then cross to the Roaring Fork River for watering, and back to their winter range on the hill behind Cozy Point leading to Wild Cat. This crossing would enable wildlife to cross safely to all the BLM lands and National Forest Wilderness for summer grazing. Equestrians from the Cozy Point Horse Park could use the “Green Living Bridge” to access the soft track, with the proposed improvement for horses, on the Rio Grande Trail. A bridle path – trail could be constructed across from the main ranch, on the Aspen Mass trail leading to the Roaring Fork River at the Woody Creek bridge crossing, then safe crossing of this bridge could be done with site visits and planning. Pedestrians and mountain bikers could obviously use the bridge, but the parking at the intercept lot places them on the correct side of the highway for easy access to the Rio Grande Trail, without using the “Living Bridge”.

**Another option for Brush Creek Road and Highway 82 crossings would be the use of traffic crossing buttons at horse and rider height with stoplights for both road and highway junctions. This, however, will not help the wildlife.**

Colorado Dept. of Transportation (CDOT) listed Highway 82 a hot spot for wildlife crossings deaths. That is why they constructed the 8’ deer fence along the corridor in places from Glenwood to El Jebel. This has decreased the car-deer collisions by half, but in 2014 there were still 65 wildlife deaths on Highway 82. On Sunday, February 8<sup>th</sup>, the front page of the Aspen Times features an article about the decline of elk and deer, calf-to-cow, fawn-to-doe numbers well below desired levels in the Aspen area.



Thank you so much for asking the RFVHC for our input in your Rio Grande Management Plan Update. We can see in your draft that you are working to achieve equestrian truck and trailer parking, and a trail design for safe equestrian use.

The RFVHC would like to consult with you on design specifics for equestrian truck and trailer parking and trails. The Rio Grande Trail is a fabulous amenity that Pitkin County and OST have provided for the community. We are excited about the opportunity to work with you.



We ask that your new updated management plan will include language that includes:

- Separation of hard/soft track where possible
- 50%-50% trail width construction for soft and hard surfaces in narrow constricted portions of the trail
- Safe footing for horses on bridge surfaces and narrow portions of the trail
- Prioritization of OST/RFTA evaluation of potential truck and trailer parking sites
- Solution for overcrowded trailhead parking

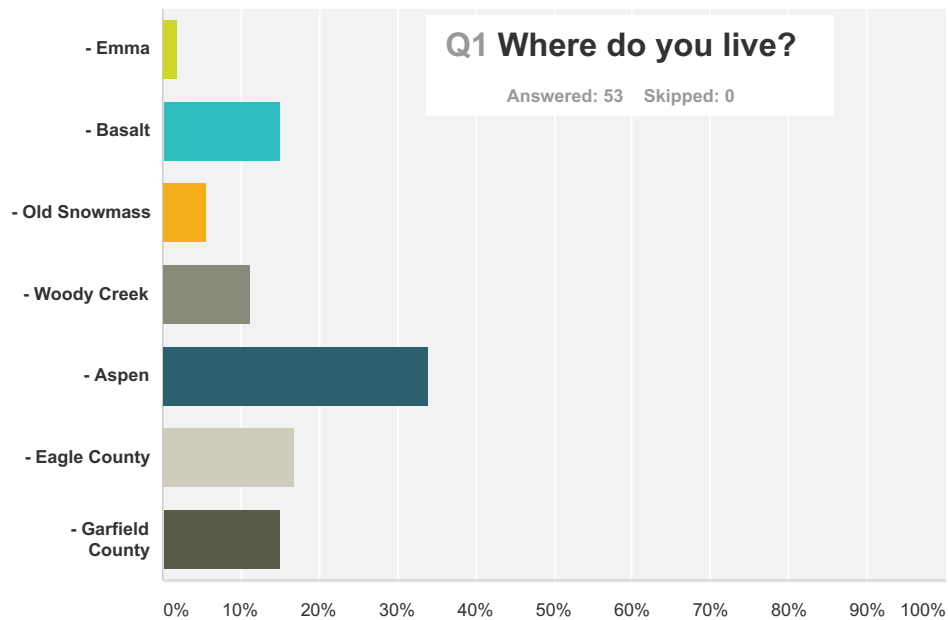
Most sincerely,

Carol Dopkin  
RFVHC President  
[carol@caroldopkin.com](mailto:carol@caroldopkin.com)  
970 618 0187

Leslie Thomas  
RFVHC Membership Chairman  
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Holly McLain  
RFVHC Communication Chairman  
[rumbleridge@gmail.com](mailto:rumbleridge@gmail.com)  
970 948 2151

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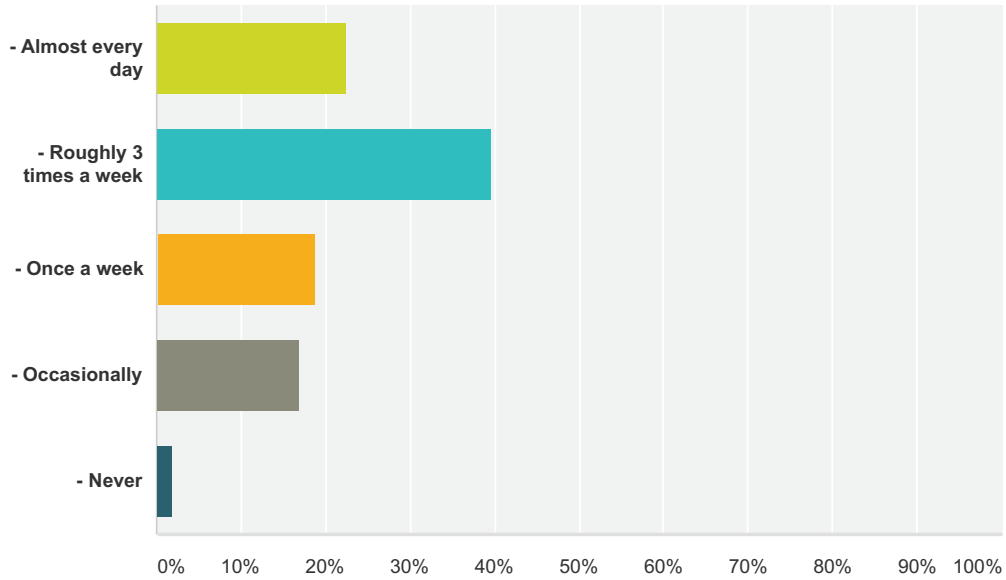
Answer Choices	Responses
- Emma	1.89% 1
- Basalt	15.09% 8
- Old Snowmass	5.66% 3
- Woody Creek	11.32% 6
- Aspen	33.96% 18
- Eagle County	16.98% 9
- Garfield County	15.09% 8
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>

#	Other (please specify)	Date
1	Snowmass village	1/26/2015 4:33 PM
2	Missouri Heights	1/26/2015 11:53 AM
3	New Castle	1/18/2015 10:36 AM
4	Split between Snowmass Village and Houston, Tx	1/14/2015 6:34 PM
5	frtying pan	1/14/2015 7:55 AM
6	Snowmass Village	1/13/2015 8:37 PM
7	Carbondale	1/13/2015 7:12 PM
8	Snowmass Village	1/13/2015 2:33 PM
9	Aspen Village not Woody Creek. Your survey makes you pick one	1/13/2015 1:33 PM
10	West Hollywood Calif	1/13/2015 12:31 PM
11	Indianapolis IN.	1/13/2015 10:42 AM
12	Delaware	1/13/2015 5:09 AM



**Q2 How often do you use the Rio Grande Trail in summer?**

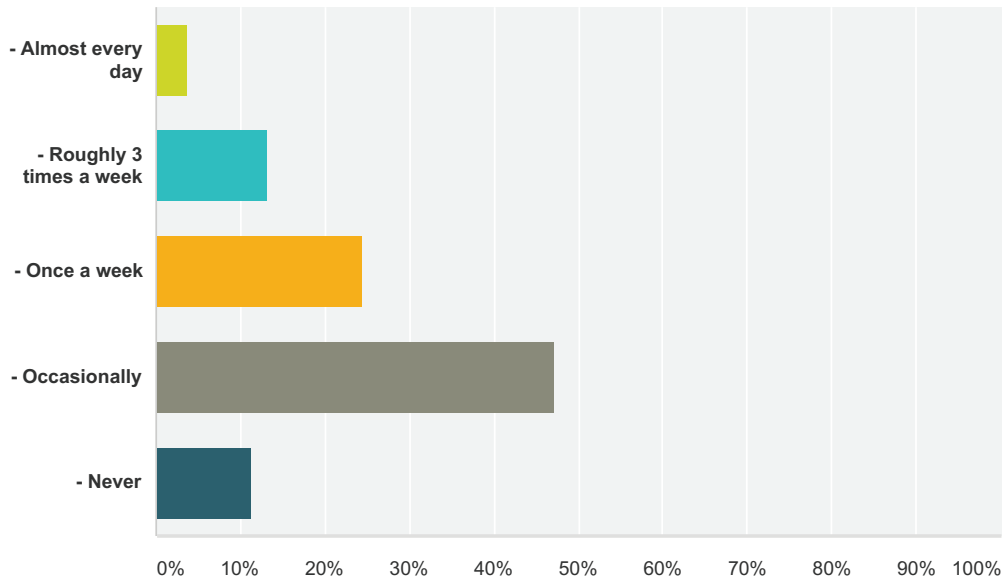
Answered: 53 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
- Almost every day	22.64%	12
- Roughly 3 times a week	39.62%	21
- Once a week	18.87%	10
- Occasionally	16.98%	9
- Never	1.89%	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>53</b>

## Trail in winter?

Answered: 53 Skipped: 0

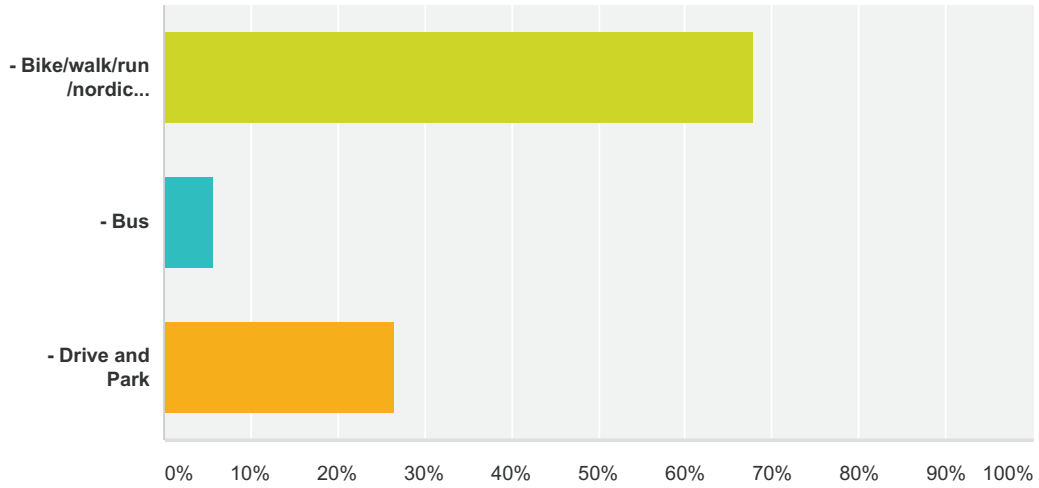


Answer Choices	Responses	
- Almost every day	3.77%	2
- Roughly 3 times a week	13.21%	7
- Once a week	24.53%	13
- Occasionally	47.17%	25
- Never	11.32%	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>53</b>



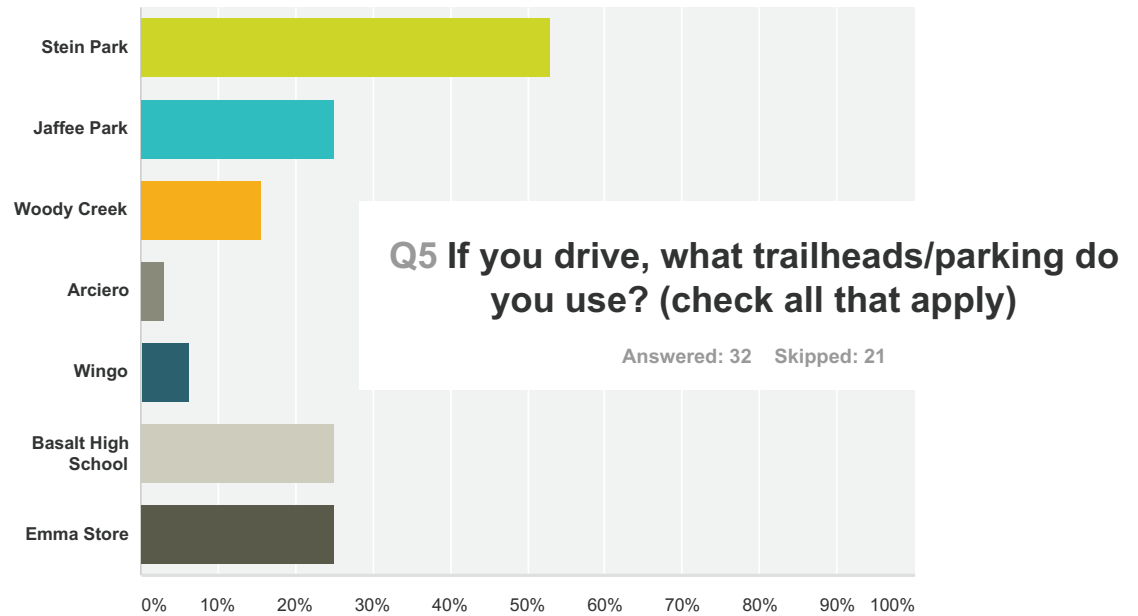
### Q4 How do you most often access the Rio Grande Trail?

Answered: 53 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
- Bike/walk/run/nordic ski/horse	67.92%
- Bus	5.66%
- Drive and Park	26.42%
<b>Total</b>	

## Appendix C - Public Comments

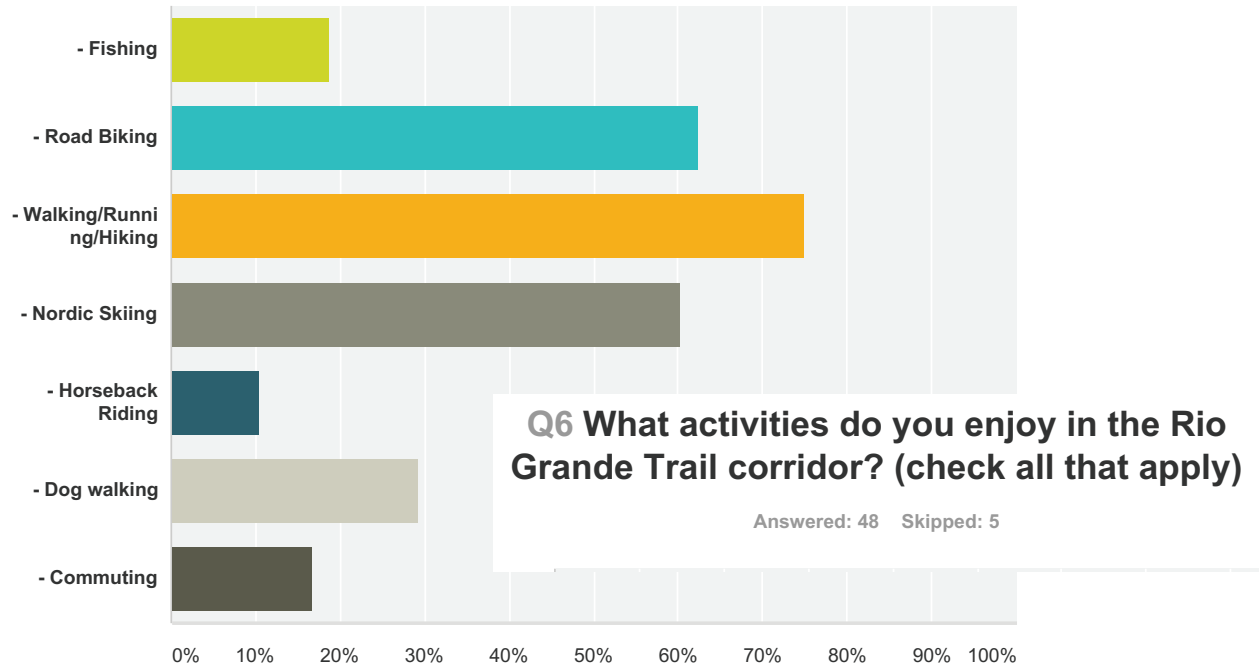


Answer Choices	Responses
Stein Park	53.13% 17
Jaffee Park	25.00% 8
Woody Creek	15.63% 5
Arciero	3.13% 1
Wingo	6.25% 2
Basalt High School	25.00% 8
Emma Store	25.00% 8
<b>Total Respondents: 32</b>	

#	Other (please specify)	Date
1	Catherine Store	1/26/2015 7:30 PM
2	Hoping to use the Glassier Open Space for equestrian truck and trailer parking, to access a soft track for horses, not yet in place.	1/26/2015 11:53 AM
3	Glenwood by Holy Cross Energy, Catherine Store, I run different sections on my lunch break	1/18/2015 10:36 AM
4	Intercept lot	1/13/2015 8:37 PM
5	Old Sowmass Hooks bridge	1/13/2015 4:00 PM
6	Turn around spot at intersection of Gerbaz Way and Lower River Road	1/13/2015 1:33 PM
7	We shuttle to Carbondale ParknRide	1/13/2015 12:31 PM
8	Willits	1/13/2015 12:03 PM
9	None	1/13/2015 10:42 AM
10	Hooks Spur	1/13/2015 8:40 AM
11	Gerbazdale	1/13/2015 7:51 AM
12	Old Snowmass Park and Ride	10/14/2014 6:39 PM
13	w/j	9/25/2014 9:12 PM



## Appendix C - Public Comments



Answer Choices	Responses
- Fishing	18.75% 9
- Road Biking	62.50% 30
- Walking/Running/Hiking	75.00% 36
- Nordic Skiing	60.42% 29
- Horseback Riding	10.42% 5
- Dog walking	29.17% 14
- Commuting	16.67% 8
<b>Total Respondents: 48</b>	

#	Other (please specify)	Date
1	We need a soft track for horses.	1/26/2015 11:59 AM
2	Longboarding from Glenwood to Woody Creek. Made for one of the best Summers of my life!	1/13/2015 11:33 PM
3	Bird watching	1/13/2015 7:10 PM
4	rollerskiing and access to mtb trails	1/13/2015 12:10 PM
5	Watch birds and other wildlife	1/13/2015 9:26 AM
6	Roller skiing	1/13/2015 8:46 AM
7	Mountain biking	1/5/2015 10:37 PM
8	I have ridden my horse on the Hook's spur dirt road, because the paved part is dangerous for the steel shoes on our riding horses.	12/14/2014 6:00 PM
9	Mountain Biking; use the RG trail to access connected singletrack networks.	10/8/2014 12:04 AM

### Q7 What is your favorite thing and/or fondest memory about the Rio Grande Trail corridor?

Answered: 39 Skipped: 14

#	Responses	Date
1	Having grown up in the East (Pennsylvania), I became accustomed to paved road and trails. After moving to the Roaring Fork Valley, I learned about the concept of Open Space and discovered a true love for places untouched. The Rio Grande trail is the bridge from everyday life full of everyday stresses and an untouched pristine world where I can lose myself in pursuit of a fat Brown Trout or with a quiet evening ski past the "waterfall". The Roaring Fork is where is learned to fish properly (with flies) and where the trail is the gateway to that wonderful treasure.	1/28/2015 11:05 AM
2	The quietness - it's the most accessible trail from Aspen to escape from it all. My fondest memories are when I've been lucky enough for a deer, elk, fox, or bear sighting on the trail!	1/27/2015 7:29 PM
3	A river runs thru it	1/26/2015 10:47 PM
4	Stopping at Rock Bottom Ranch on my walk to see the new spring lambs	1/26/2015 7:32 PM
5	Showing my grandchildren the beautiful trail.	1/26/2015 4:36 PM
6	Actually, not so fond memory of having my horse slide and almost fall on the asphalt bike path. The when on the existing soft track, great fun.	1/26/2015 11:59 AM
7	A primitive, undeveloped, rural vibe—with 40 million dollar G5s just over the ridge. Aspen's last chance to follow our enlightened neighbor Crested Butte. Keep it primitive for walkers, runners, skiers, and the user numbers will continue to grow.	1/22/2015 6:28 PM
8	Scenery	1/20/2015 9:44 AM
9	Fondest memory - RFOV's Town to Town Tour. Favorite thing - plenty of continuous mileage without vehicles for daily running through awesome scenery, especially along the river.	1/18/2015 10:40 AM
10	The scenery	1/17/2015 1:27 PM
11	Safe distance from highway.	1/16/2015 1:24 PM
12	Walking with our grown children	1/14/2015 6:37 PM
13	I love the loop opportunities for biking. How great was it when it opened all the way from aspen to glenwood!	1/14/2015 7:58 AM
14	Experiencing the changing seasons, the wildlife, fellow trail users. I also helped in upgrading the trail behind the Carbondale town hall. also kind of by Dos Gringos. The Community rallied together and pitched in on beautifying the trail. it would also nice to make that area more bee/ songbird friendly. I did receive a lot of compliments while working. it seemed to that the general community wanted to help. It could really bring together the community.	1/13/2015 11:33 PM
15	I love the natural stretch from McClain flats road to the open meadow as you head down valley. I commute home from Aspen to Carbondale once a week with co-workers during the summer months. How great to have a resource like that!	1/13/2015 7:15 PM
16	Sound of river, quiet early morning, bird song	1/13/2015 7:10 PM
17	Wilderness w/o toilets and uber signage	1/13/2015 5:03 PM
18	I take the bus down Cemetary Lane and walk to town from Stein Park.	1/13/2015 2:49 PM
19	scenery, quiet, distance from cars	1/13/2015 2:36 PM
20	It's a beautiful asset to our valley	1/13/2015 2:16 PM
21	Discovering it forty-eight years ago when one had to hop boulders to use it and then the time spent on solitude near the river, watching the water ouizil and contemplating life.	1/13/2015 12:46 PM
22	That it exists as a nonmotorized corridor.	1/13/2015 12:33 PM



## Appendix C - Public Comments

23	keeps me away from traffic!	1/13/2015 12:10 PM
24	the outdoor beauty	1/13/2015 10:14 AM
25	Mountain biking it in muddy conditions before it was "improved."	1/13/2015 9:26 AM
26	I love the section between Rock Bottom Ranch and Catherine Store bridge. I wish it was open in the winter for Nordic skiing.	1/13/2015 8:46 AM
27	it is a fabulous amenity	1/13/2015 8:14 AM
28	Quiet mornings on my bike or with my dogs	1/13/2015 7:54 AM
29	Commuting by bike from El Jebel to Aspen without conflicts with cars and trucks.	1/13/2015 7:04 AM
30	The quiet beauty	1/13/2015 5:12 AM
31	The history of the Rio Grande Trail Corridor. It is an amazing historical experience to utilize the corridor.	1/6/2015 7:20 PM
32	Having it all to myself	1/5/2015 10:37 PM
33	Fishing along the Roaring Fork River, Biking and walking my dog	1/5/2015 10:30 AM
34	Town to town ski event; walking or biking with the kids to the "waterfall" on a hot day	1/5/2015 9:00 AM
35	My boyfriend having one of his pedals fall off on his bike, and having to walk it ll the way back from Rock Bottom Ranch to Emma School.	12/14/2014 6:00 PM
36	hiking along the old wagon road and horse trails leaving from Jaffee Park	10/14/2014 6:41 PM
37	That it is continuous from Aspen to Glenwood Springs.	10/8/2014 12:04 AM
38	love the parts that are more peaceful and remote	10/6/2014 2:28 PM
39	Morning bike commutes	9/25/2014 9:14 PM

## Appendix C - Public Comments

### Q8 If you could improve one thing about the Rio Grande Trail corridor, what would it be?

Answered: 46 Skipped: 7

#	Responses	Date
1	I love the Rio Grande Trail corridor as it is and I would hate to lose the natural feel of the gravel trail to a paved path that is HOT in summer and to warm to hold snow in winter. It would be a terrible loss to our Valley. What a wonder it is to have such an accessible trail so close to our homes that remains natural and untouched.	1/28/2015 11:05 AM
2	Nothing	1/27/2015 7:29 PM
3	Separate trail for horses	1/26/2015 10:47 PM
4	Provide a soft track for equestrian use.	1/26/2015 7:32 PM
5	Slow down the cyclists and teach them trail etiquette; more soft trails for horses	1/26/2015 4:36 PM
6	Offering a soft track for equestrians, 8' wide, with good footing for horses.	1/26/2015 11:59 AM
7	Leave it alone. Time, benign neglect, and 2 miles of the prettiest river on earth, have created something no committee or career planners can improve.	1/22/2015 6:28 PM
8	Better control of speeding bicyclists. There are signs but most bicyclists do not think the rules apply to them.	1/20/2015 9:44 AM
9	PAVE IT! Need more bathrooms too.	1/19/2015 10:05 AM
10	Water stations.	1/18/2015 10:40 AM
11	Pave it from Aspen to Woody Creek	1/17/2015 1:27 PM
12	love it as is, to perfect, more picnic or bench stop points.	1/16/2015 8:28 PM
13	Access to drinking fountains.	1/16/2015 1:24 PM
14	get the bikers to slow down/call out their approaches to walkers/runners	1/14/2015 6:37 PM
15	Rubber type road crossings for nordic skiing. A little longer season for the willits to carb stretch	1/14/2015 7:58 AM
16	Drinking water stations, trash cans.	1/13/2015 11:33 PM
17	Water, restroom at Wingo, woody Creek, and Old Snowmass.	1/13/2015 8:39 PM
18	I'm very happy with it as is. Paving the entire thing would be great, but I can handle the unpaved portions.	1/13/2015 7:15 PM
19	less pavement	1/13/2015 7:10 PM
20	Leave it along w/o further improvements	1/13/2015 5:03 PM
21	More rest rooms in the Basalt, Woody Creek and Aspen areas. Finish the paving to Aspen.	1/13/2015 4:04 PM
22	More bathrooms	1/13/2015 2:49 PM
23	Toilet facilities between Aspen and Willits. Water stations.	1/13/2015 2:36 PM
24	Already identified as a missing link on your maps; I would like to have safe access from Aspen Village to the trail. We have a great tunnel but Gerbaz Way is dangerous.	1/13/2015 2:16 PM
25	Require cyclists to have and use one of those old- fashioned thumb bells on their handlebars to warn walkers and others that they were approaching from behind. Two short rings. Require riders to clean up after their horses. Require dogs on leash, and clean up after them also.	1/13/2015 12:46 PM
26	Better Nordic trails and work with neighbors to not chop through them for direct access from their homes.	1/13/2015 12:33 PM



## Appendix C - Public Comments

27	My husband and I both work in Aspen and bicycle commute on the trail pretty much daily when the weather allows. The stretch from Emma to Old Snowmass is a critical link because there is no other option to riding on 82, which is especially dangerous during rush hours. In the spring when the snow on the trail has deteriorated too much to allow Nordic skiing, please plow it to allow bicycle commuters to use it. Even plowing one side of it would work. Nothing against skiing--I am an avid Nordic skier. But there comes a point when the snow is no good for skiing and it precludes riding (and can even make walking difficult). Denver plows its commuter bike paths. Making it easier for bicycle commuting is the responsible and green thing to do. Thank you!	1/13/2015 12:10 PM
28	single track dirt trails on the side of the cement	1/13/2015 10:14 AM
29	Trails and Open Space should be smoke free and tobacco free.	1/13/2015 9:30 AM
30	Enforcing the dogs-on-leash rule. Dogs running ahead of and behind their owners and into the woods disrupt nesting birds and threaten other wildlife and trail users. When owners lose sight of their dogs, dog feces get left on and near the trail, though that seems to happen anyway.	1/13/2015 9:26 AM
31	More bathrooms! I am out there for many hours at a time and once I am east of Basalt High School, I have to relieve myself in the brush - both #1 and #2.	1/13/2015 8:46 AM
32	allow dogs off lease if und voice and visual control in the winter at early and late daytime hours when trail is infrequently used	1/13/2015 8:14 AM
33	Water stations along the path or at key parking areas.	1/13/2015 7:54 AM
34	Dogs, both leashed and unleashed, are out of control and a safety risk to bikers, joggers, walkers, wildlife, children. I love dogs but owners don't get it. Get control of your pets and pick up after them. Putting dog feces into a bag and leaving it on the trail for someone else to pick up tells us everything about you.	1/13/2015 7:04 AM
35	A permanent "outhouse" and a wider shoulder for hikers to seek refuge from the speeding cyclists	1/13/2015 5:12 AM
36	The section of the Rio Grande Trail that is unpaved ... should be paved. It just makes sense.	1/6/2015 7:20 PM
37	All dogs on leashes	1/5/2015 10:37 PM
38	In Pitkin County, add more stops including toilets and picnic table shelters similar to Eagle County in quality and duration.	1/5/2015 10:30 AM
39	I would ask you to prohibit people biking with their dogs. If they have them on a leash, it is dangerous for people and other bikes. If they don't have them on a leash it's even more dangerous, since the dog is concentrating on their owner and runs into children and other bikers.	1/5/2015 9:00 AM
40	pave it	12/17/2014 9:59 AM
41	make it horse friendly, with soft track next to, or near the the paved bike path. The equestrian community is the original traditional ranching history in the Roaring fork Valley. If bikes only are allowed to take over all recreational areas, it will be sad for all the horse lovers in the area. Most of the open space that is privately owned is kept for horses by their owners.	12/14/2014 6:00 PM
42	Keep soft surface	10/23/2014 3:16 PM
43	keep as is now	10/14/2014 6:41 PM
44	All traffic should know to keep to their right and be aware that faster users may pass on their left.	10/8/2014 12:04 AM
45	less bikers, they think they own it , very difficult to walk especially with dogs with bikers flying by and they never yield to anyone else . Love it in the shoulder months when it's closed to bikers , much more peaceful	10/6/2014 2:28 PM
46	Center stripe; many ride two abreast.	9/25/2014 9:14 PM

## Q9 Any other thoughts or comments you would like to share regarding how the Rio Grande Trail corridor is maintained or managed in the future?

Answered: 31 Skipped: 22

#	Responses	Date
1	I think the Rio Grande Trail is currently maintained meticulously and I commend the trails departments with their fantastic work. Again, I would be deeply saddened to see a wonderful treasure go the way of every other pathway that man has set foot to - black tar pavement. I want to leave you all with a quote from John Muir, "Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt."	1/28/2015 11:05 AM
2	Can you work on alleviating the stink downwind from the treatment plant during the busy seasons? gross!	1/27/2015 7:29 PM
3	I love the trail and am grateful for the work that the county does to maintain it. You guys are the best!	1/26/2015 7:32 PM
4	Please provide soft track equestrian trails for our community. We are only asking RFTA for equal consideration, along with the bicycles and hikers. Please consider helping to keep horses a viable recreation in our community. Thank You, Holly McLain, Communication Chair - Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council (RFVHC)	1/26/2015 11:59 AM
5	If this survey's results is to be used to justify paving the last dirt section from Cemetery to Mrs. Sardy's house, the public needs to see the impact of the required bike safety barriers. If they will look like the 6' high, prison-bar steel behemoths on the bike path between Carbondale and Avalanche—especially Slaughterhouse Rapids (on BOTH sides of the trail), by the waterfall, the sewage plant curve, and the curves before the new paved section—there will be a response. An illustration showing how the barrier will impact the view of the river for both those on the trail and those seeing it from the river, must be included with the survey.	1/22/2015 6:28 PM
6	A few portable potties between Cemetery Lane and the post office would be appreciated. It can be difficult for someone over 65 to walk that distance without needing one and having to break the law by urinating in public.	1/20/2015 9:44 AM
7	Maybe a few more easy access points down to the river. But overall I think it is great as is.	1/18/2015 10:40 AM
8	signs at trail entrances reminding us of trail manners/rules. At Basalt High, signage routing tourist riders to historic downtown basalt. A clear map (with mile markers) showing how they can get back on the trail from downtown without backtracking to BHS.	1/16/2015 8:28 PM
9	Minimize vehicle access wherever possible.	1/16/2015 1:24 PM
10	Great use of an old railroad bed	1/14/2015 6:37 PM
11	Looking forward to riding in a few months. Maybe if you had volunteer events at various times in the season. People could make friends as well as give back to the trail. The trail means a lot to a lot of people. You should encourage the care people have for the path. I would even say it's something very spiritual. Like a church.	1/13/2015 11:33 PM
12	Please don't pave the last few miles!	1/13/2015 7:10 PM
13	I strongly oppose the future build out of non-wilderness non-improvements to this trail system	1/13/2015 5:03 PM
14	I really like that in the winter you have 1/2 Nordic trail and 1/2 cleared of snow, that way you can do either. Also, whoever is grooming the Nordic section, thank you for avoiding the sewer lids - that's an improvement.	1/13/2015 2:49 PM
15	Great resource. Thanks.	1/13/2015 2:36 PM
16	Thanks for asking	1/13/2015 2:16 PM
17	Only those above. The trail certainly has become more than a hideout for elusive types like me, but the user public must have a role in maintaining it and, of course, in accepting how others use the trail as the area grows and stretches.	1/13/2015 12:46 PM
18	The surface around Emma is in poor shape.	1/13/2015 12:33 PM
19	I would be happy to help with plans or to answer questions. 303-359-1577	1/13/2015 12:10 PM
20	Please consider a smoke free tobacco free policy for trails, parks and open space.	1/13/2015 9:30 AM



## Appendix C - Public Comments

21	It's a lovely stroll by the river, and we should strive to keep it usable for everybody and safe for wildlife.	1/13/2015 9:26 AM
22	I wish the leash law was enforced. I have had to slam on my brakes while cycling many times for unleashed and out of control dogs. People just don't seem to care that there is a law. A dog is an animal and will chase a squirrel no matter how well behaved otherwise!	1/13/2015 8:46 AM
23	Trail access from Gerbazdale parking areas is dangerous. If I park at the fishing access area, then I have to walk up the road (with no shoulder) to the trail and if I park above at the junction of roads, I have to walk down the same road with lots of traffic, blind corners and no shoulder. I would use this access point more frequently if the trail access was safer. Thanks for all you do! Our trail system is terrific!	1/13/2015 7:54 AM
24	The managers have a tough job and do the best they can. Lets educate the users on cooperation and user responsibility.	1/13/2015 7:04 AM
25	Keep up the great work. The trail is a treasure. Most people are respectful and vigilant walkers can navigate the large cycling groups; don't text while walking!	1/13/2015 5:12 AM
26	Develop the Sage Meadow trails to connect with the trail down to Roaring Fork River. Also align trail that comes up from Jaffee Park with the new soft surface trail that goes through Sage Meadows	1/5/2015 10:37 PM
27	Speed limit for bikes? Yes, I'm a biker too!	1/5/2015 9:00 AM
28	It would be important to build soft tracks for equestrian use, Side by side to the bikes on the paved track, or separately, but in the corridor. Please help to retain the traditional equestrian use in the Roaring Fork Valley.	12/14/2014 6:00 PM
29	Horse trailer parking	10/23/2014 3:16 PM
30	Offer adjacent parallel but sinuous singletrack within the trail's right of way. This will help to separate users, reduce conflict, provide a relatively flat beginner experience for riders new to dirt singletrack, and improve the quality of experience for mountain bikers using the corridor to connect to nearby singletrack trail networks.	10/8/2014 12:04 AM
31	keep the winter closures and do not relent , we live very near the trail and it is a very active corridor for wildlife , too much traffic particularly with bikes and people who never leash their dogs is disruptive	10/6/2014 2:28 PM

### ***Rio Grande Trail Management Plan* discussion with Basalt Parks, Open Space and Trails Committee**

Town of Basalt Council Chambers

10.22.2014

4:00pm

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Information regarding the *Rio Grande Trail Management Plan* is located on: [www.pitkinOSTprojects.com](http://www.pitkinOSTprojects.com) A user survey, existing plans, maps, and ability to sign-up for further project updates are all located under the *Rio Grande Trail Management Plan* page.

Items discussed during the POST meeting:

- Would like to see a unified plan covering the entire length of the Rio Grande Trail Corridor.
- Would like to see directional signage/wayfinding on the Rio Grande Trail directing users to downtown Basalt. Signage should include mileage. Think about how an “outsider” would try navigate.
- Would like to see a restroom at the Basalt High School Trailhead.
- Would like to see more rest areas along the Rio Grande Trail.
- OST staff will review the POST Master Plan. Basalt Staff will provide a list of elements from the Master Plan pertaining to the Rio Grande Trail.
- POST would like to be part of Basalt High School Trailhead redesign.
- Nordic Groomer storage is still an issue to resolve.
- Directional signage should include the Nordic program trails.
- Maps at the trailheads and maps should include Nordic system.
- Would like to see Nordic grooming on the hillside behind the high school. Hills are fun for the children learning to ski.

Items not discussed but comments are encouraged:

- Thoughts on interpretation opportunities focused on history and specific ecological resources.
- Missing regional connection links
- Any other ideas that POST will like to share!

Please send all additional comments to [Lindsey.Utter@pitkincounty.com](mailto:Lindsey.Utter@pitkincounty.com) by December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014.



### Rio Grande Trail Management Discussion with City of Trails Aspen Staff

**Wednesday October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 10am**

Austin Weiss, Matt Kuhn, Lindsey Utter

#### Questions to review:

*How is the Rio currently managed? Maintained? Issues?*

*How would you want things to change in the future?*

*Thoughts on trail connections to private properties?*

*Thoughts on interpretation ?*

*Nordic thoughts?*

*Natural resource thoughts?*

*Regional connections?*

#### Thought from the City of Trails Aspen Staff:

- The Rio is currently managed by both departments. When there is a need for maintenance the City takes the lead and the County will contribute dollars.
- There is a need to resurface and we should work on getting it scheduled
- Should strive to improve grades to meet ADA (Willoughby)
- Potential for alternate single tracks
- Address blind corners
- Nordic thoughts: Need to try to address manhole cover melt issues
- There is a potential soft surface bump-out below Willoughby and maybe a small pocket park at confluence
- Do we want to expand center striping?
- Private connections to Rio should be flush and provide clear space
- Interpretation:
  - The RFTA Rio plan downvalley speaks specifically to history and environmental focus with Interpretive “nodes”
  - Different themes such as : Historical
  - Planets discussion
    1. Maintenance issue needs to be addressed or adopt and make more permanent
    2. Should look at potential alternative locations that cover less distance
    3. Ask bike shops nearing anything about them
- Night use discussion:
  - Reflectivity
  - Mark corners
  - Center stripe locations
  - Mark things within 24 inches of trails
- Other items:
  - Potential need for a greater ebike conversation
  - Mirrors at Elam crossing

## Appendix D - Roaring Fork Gorge Management Actions

- Boaters were historically able to set up a slalom course between Stein Park and Slaughterhouse Falls. They would like to preserve this ability in the future, as well as their ability to enter and exit the river from the Rio Grande Trail.
- Boaters would also like to see improvements to the river at Stein Park, removing man-made features created during bridge construction, to lengthen the park's launch season. They would also like to see the Stein Bridge raised to allow for boating during high runoff.



Kayakers Scout the Slalom Course  
Photo courtesy of Burnham Arndt

### 4. Management Actions

The following Management Actions are to accomplish the purpose of the Roaring Fork Management Plan and to address the opportunities, constraints and issues raised by staff and through public comment. The Management Actions are divided into three areas: Property Ownership, Natural Resources, and Recreational Use, Parking, and Amenities and Commercial Use and Special Use. Appendix H includes an Action Item Decision Chart which provides additional information of who and when future decisions regarding some of the action items will be made.

#### 4.1 Property Ownership Management Actions

OST's mission includes "acquiring open space properties for multiple purposes including, but not limited to, recreational, wildlife, agricultural, scenic and access purposes." It became apparent from public feedback that there are properties that OST should pursue for recreational, scenic, access, and wildlife purposes.

##### 4.1.1 Acquisition of Easements and/or Fee Simple Properties

Continue to work with willing, adjacent property owners to acquire inholdings, trails easements and/or fishing easements. Multiple properties within the Roaring Fork Gorge planning area have been highlighted by members of the public as properties they currently use or would like to be able to use in the future. Securing the public's ability to use these properties would fill in trail gaps and create a cohesive unit for natural resource planning.

Start Date: Ongoing

Estimated Cost: TBD



# Appendix D - Roaring Fork Gorge Management Actions

## 4.2 Natural Resource Management Actions

The natural resource management actions outline the wildlife and vegetation studies and the management implications of those studies; as well as water resource actions. Wildlife and vegetation studies will continue to be updated in order to track success or failure of the management practices.

### 4.2.1 Update and Expand the Natural Resource Inventory for Roaring Fork Gorge Properties

The Natural Resource Inventory will take the existing vegetation and wildlife data and expand and update the information to cover the all of the gorge properties. The report will also have recommended actions regarding the natural resources in the gorge.

Start Date: Spring 2014

Estimated Cost: \$25,000

### 4.2.2 River Conservation Plan

Develop a River Conservation Plan, incorporating information presented in the vegetation and wildlife reports and identifying areas of preservation, restoration and sustainable access routes down to or along the river. The conservation plan will address many ideas brought up in public comments including: restoration of disturbed areas, protection of riparian areas, opportunities for any type of new trail routes or reroutes and restoration of poorly planned existing routes.

Start Date: Summer 2015

Estimated Cost: \$25,000

### 4.2.3 Work to Increase Water Quality and Water Quantity

Open Space and Trails will work with the Healthy Rivers and Streams Board and the Roaring Fork Conservancy to maintain healthy stream flows. In addition to water quantity, Open Space and Trails will work with both groups to improve water quality.

Start Date: Ongoing

Estimated Cost: TBD



View of the Gorge above Jaffee Park



First sign of Fall in the Gorge



## Appendix D - Roaring Fork Gorge Management Actions

### 4.3 Recreational Use, Parking, and Amenities Management Actions

The Roaring Fork Gorge has a long history of being a recreational destination with a diversity of users and experiences. Users interested in developing recreational amenities outside those proposed in the Roaring Fork Gorge Management Plan, or subsequent plans, will need to request an amendment to the plans from the OST Board. The user group will be able to present the recreation concept and show why the activity fits within the overall goals of the Management Plan and/or subsequent plans.

#### 4.3.1 Rio Grande Trail Improvements

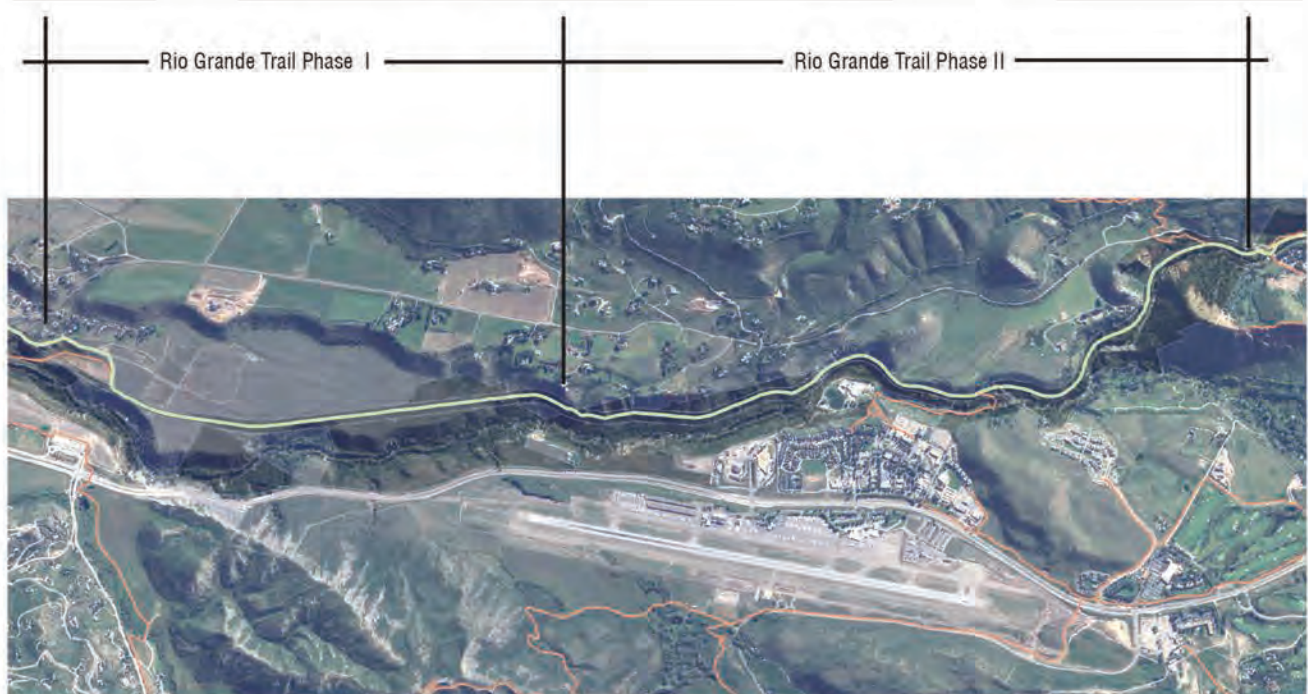
The segment of the Rio Grande Trail through the gorge was the focus of a 2012 feasibility study. It was also the feature we received the most comments on in the public outreach in preparation for the draft gorge plan. We have split the Rio Grande Trail improvements in the gorge into two phases. *The Option decision for Phase II will be made after Phase I is completed. It will give us time to see how users respond to the Phase I improvements and determine which option works best for the upper 2 miles of the gorge.* Soft surface maintenance will continue to be implemented in the Phase 2 section to provide a well compacted surface and repair land slides and rockfall in the gorge.

##### 4.3.1.1 Rio Grande Trail Phase I

Design and construct the approximately 2 miles of dual-surface trail from McLain Flats Road through the sage flats, to where the shale bluff geologic formation starts to narrow the trail platform. The trail design shall incorporate separated hard and soft surfaces, and singletrack options where possible. Design will investigate the possibility for the nordic groomer to follow the soft surface. Design shall also provide locations for benches or picnic tables and potential locations for interpretive panels, to be placed after the completion of the 2014 Rio Grande Trail Management Plan.

Start Date: Summer 2014

Estimated Cost: \$1,431,256





## Appendix D - Roaring Fork Gorge Management Actions

### 4.3.1.2 Rio Grande Trail Phase II

After the completion of the Rio Grande Phase I improvements in the gorge, Phase II construction discussions will begin. Phase II will focus on the approximately 2 miles of trail from Stein Park through the shale bluff formation. Design shall incorporate locations for passive recreation or observation, including benches or picnic tables, locations where users need sustainable river access and potential interpretation opportunities, plus preserve the ability for the nordic groomer to pass.

Two trail surface options for completion:

- i. Continue to maintain a well compacted soft surface within the existing trail platform. Improve sections that have drainage and erosion issues with grading, retaining walls, culverts, and new crusher fines that incorporate a hardening agent. This does not create the base for asphalt.

Potential Start Date: Summer of 2015

Estimated Cost: \$300,000

- ii. Trail will be replaced with a 10-foot minimum asphalt surface, working with in the existing trail platform and will have adjacent soft-surface where there is space, approximately 31% of the time. Trail will need railings in locations where the drop-off from trail is steep, this may require retaining wall to accomplish. The design will accommodate the nordic groomer and would need to explore ways to retain snow. Design will also address areas where standing water, water flows and rockfall create trail maintenance issues.

Potential Start Date: Summer of 2015

Estimated Cost: \$3,510,335

### 4.3.2 Stein Park Improvements

Stein Park and the portion of Red Butte Ranch Open Space directly across the road from the park will be redesigned, considering the potential for more or alternatives to parking, efficient boating shuttle drop-offs, independent and van accessible ADA parking, permanent ADA accessible restrooms, river enhancements to allow for a longer Stein Park launch season, water fountain/bottle filling station, riparian area restoration and designated river access routes; while maintaining or improving current park uses.

Potential Start Date: Summer of 2015

Estimated Cost: \$200,000 (requires Aspen City Council to make funding appropriations)

### 4.3.3 Jaffee Park Improvements

Jaffee Park parking area will be redesigned considering the potential for trailer-designated parking, independent and van-accessible ADA parking, ADA-accessible restrooms, a permanent restroom versus a port-a-potty, and ADA-accessible fisherman access; while maintaining or improving current park uses. The redesign will also look at ways to provide a better trail connection between Aspen-Mass and the Jaffee Connector.

Potential Start Date: Summer of 2015

Estimated Cost: \$75,000



## Appendix D - Roaring Fork Gorge Management Actions

### 4.3.4 Near-Term Regional Trail Connections

The need for improved connections between the Rio Grande Trail and regional trails were made very apparent during the public open houses. There are near-term solutions that can be addressed while the long-term, more intensive solutions are analyzed.

#### 4.3.4.1 Stein Trail Improvements

Stein Trail is currently part of a Public Works construction project. As part of this project, the Stein stairs will be replaced in their previous location and a new, sustainable, lower grade trail will be designed to connect next to the Holy Cross facility. The switchback construction creates the opportunity to develop a bike-friendly trail connection from the backside of the AABC down to the river bottom.

Start Date: Ongoing

Estimated Cost: TBD

#### 4.3.4.2 Burlingame Connection Study

The City of Aspen and Pitkin County will evaluate ways to create the best sustainable grade trail connection between Burlingame and the Rio Grande Trail.

Start Date: 2014

Estimated Cost: \$25,000

#### 4.3.4.3 Stein Bridge and Trail Repairs

Stein Bridge abutments are in need of repairs/replacement. This will raise the bridge to accommodate high-water boating and realign and repair the portion of the Stein Trail connecting the bridge to the Rio.

Start Date: Spring 2014

Estimated Cost: \$261,096



Stein Bridge



## Appendix D - Roaring Fork Gorge Management Actions

### 4.3.4.4 Jaffee Connector Dual Surface and Potential Singletrack Alignment

The Connector Trail between Jaffee Park and the Rio Grande Trail is currently a steep soft-surface route, prohibiting certain user groups from using the trail link. The redesign of the Jaffee Connector will be included in Phase I of the Rio Grande Trail improvements. The redesign will encompass ways to reduce the trail grade, replacing the soft surface with a dual surface and look at the potential of a singletrack alternate route.

Start Date: Spring 2014

Estimated Cost: \$250,000

### 4.3.4.5 AspenMass Soft Surface Trail

The City of Aspen has proposed a soft-surface trail alignment that will provide a trail with lower grades than the existing hard-surface AspenMass trail. The goal is to make the soft-surface trail a more user friendly connection.

Start Date: Spring 2017

Estimated Cost: \$65,000

### 4.3.5 Long-Term Potential Regional Trail Connections

The need for a hard-surface trail connection between Aspen, the downvalley communities, and the Brush Creek Trail is something that has been expressed in multiple public forums and plans. There are a few different options for long-term regional trail connection solutions. The options listed below were analyzed as part of the 2012 Feasibility Study, looking at the different routes to get a hard-surface trail connection into Aspen. Design standards included meeting ADA grades with a hard-surface trail. *After completion of Rio Grande Trail Phase II, the long-term regional connection options can be reviewed and the need and/or merits of the alternatives discussed at that time.*

#### 4.3.5.1 Rio Grande Connection Options to the AABC/Burlingame area

i. Loris and Associates did a feasibility level look at how to connect a bridge into the backside of the AABC. This area would be challenging to access and construct in, as the Rio Grande Trail platform is quite a bit higher than the Stein Trail platform and constructing abutments along the Rio Grande in this location would be very difficult. The cost estimate also included the hard surface trail on the AABC side of the river. The City of Aspen's 2014 study, looking at the connection to Burlingame, will provide further information about how this potential connection would function.

Start Date: TBD

Estimated Cost: \$4,170,000 to \$4,740,000

ii. Loris and Associates did a feasibility-level look at how to connect a bridge from the Rio Grande Trail to the sage flats along Hwy. 82. The least constrained, and therefore most affordable, place to connect was downvalley of the shale bluffs across the gorge and landing just downvalley of the private property. This area would be easily accessible from the Rio and Hwy. 82 sides of the gorge, span one of the narrowest sections of gorge and have plenty of room for abutment construction. The overhead power lines would need to be avoided during construction. The approximately 1 mile of hard-surface trail that would be needed to be constructed to connect from the AABC area to the bridge is part of the estimate.

Start Date: TBD

Estimated Cost: \$3,858,623

## Appendix D - Roaring Fork Gorge Management Actions

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### 4.3.5.2 Rio Grande Connection to the Intercept Lot

Loris and Associates did a feasibility-level look at how to connect a bridge from the Rio Grande Trail to the Intercept Lot. This area would be easily accessible from the Rio and Intercept Lot sides of the gorge with plenty of room to construct abutments. This connection would also require the construction of approximately 1,635 feet of hard-surface trail to connect to the Brush Creek Trail.

Start Date: TBD

Estimated Cost: \$3,338,000

### 4.3.5.3 Intercept Lot Connection to the AABC area.

Loris and Associates did a feasibility-level look at how to construct a 8' wide hard-surface trail from the Intercept Lot to the AABC. The trail would need to traverse shale bluff and cross multiple drainages/wildlife crossings; therefore its construction would require extensive structures. The total trail length is about 1.9 miles.

Start Date: TBD

Estimated Cost: \$12,211,000

### 4.3.5.4 McLain Flats Climbing Lanes

Loris and Associates did a feasibility-level look at how to construct bike climbing lanes on the uphill travel lanes on either end of McLain Flats. The lanes would require retaining walls in very steep side slope sections.

Start Date: TBD

Estimated Cost: \$4,111,664

### 4.3.6 Climbing or Ice Climbing Opportunities

No fixed hardware to facilitate climbing or ice climbing is being identified as part of this plan. Anyone wishing to install fixed hardware will need to apply through the review committee per the *Gold Butte Management Plan*.

No climbing is permitted on Hanging Rock, the large, rock feature overhanging the Rio Grande Trail, due to lack of belay space, the loose rock formation, and its proximity to the Rio Grande Trail.



## Appendix D - Roaring Fork Gorge Management Actions

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### 4.3.7 Update to and implementation of OST Sign Standards, including the development of Trailhead sign guidelines

Updates are needed to the existing OST sign standards, including the design guidelines for trailhead signage. OST will work with our adjacent managing trail agencies to create a seamless system while maintaining our current sign guidelines and identity. Signage updates are also an Action in the 2012 *Recreation Inventory and Analysis*.

Start Date: Ongoing

Estimated Cost: \$45,000 to \$75,000

### 4.3.8 Interpretive Sign Plan

The Roaring Fork Gorge has a very interesting geologic and human history. In addition, it is a scenic destination and one OST's most heavily used assets. These factors make it a logical candidate for a few simple, interpretive panels, well designed and appropriately placed, educating the public on how the landscape around them came to be in its current state.

Start Date: Summer 2016

Estimated Cost: TBD

## 4.4 Commercial Use and Special Use Management Actions

The Roaring Fork Gorge is a very beautiful and accessible setting, placing it in high demand among both locals and visitors. We continue to see the popularity of the gorge grow each year and with that, the demand for commercial and special events grows. OST strives to maintain an enjoyable experience for the public while providing opportunities for commercial entities to provide an enjoyable experience for their clients.

### 4.4.1 Develop a Commercial Fly-fishing Guide Permit System

Collaborate with local fly-fishing guides and interested members of the public to form a Steering Committee to design and implement a permit system for commercial flyfishing guides utilizing the public properties of the Roaring Fork Gorge. This includes both those guides who float the Gorge as well as those who access from the Hwy. 82 corridor, Stein Park or Jaffee Park. The system developed will be expanded to encompass all OST assets.

Start Date: Summer 2014

Estimated Cost: \$10,000

### 4.4.2 Develop an Open Space and Trails Special Event Policy

OST, in collaboration with Community Development, is currently reviewing the process to permit and the associated impacts of Special Events that utilize county properties. The Rio Grande Trail through the Roaring Fork Gorge is part of this study, which encompasses all assets.

Start Date: Ongoing

Estimated Cost: TBD

## 4.5 Commemorative Opportunities

No commemorative or memorial opportunities are being identified in the planning area at this time. Final and construction related Action Items in this plan may identify future opportunities. Until then, the existing county memorial policy applies.



## SIGN TYPE OVERVIEW + DEFINITIONS





# Appendix F - Rio Grande Trail Counter Data

## SUMMER USE (JUNE-AUGUST)

### • Trail counter below Aspen Post Office 2012

Average: 16,906  
Maximum: 21,399

### 2013

Average: 17,998  
Maximum: 22,463

### 2014

Average: 18,944  
Maximum: 24,870

### • Trail counter at Stein Park 2012

Average: 16,485  
Maximum: 19,896

### 2013

Average: 14,997  
Maximum: 17,079

### 2014

Average: 16,107  
Maximum: 19,150

### • Trail counter at Woody Creek 2012

Average: 8,731  
Maximum: 10,942

### 2013

Average: 7,202  
Maximum: 8,360

### 2014

Average: 8,802  
Maximum: 10,304

### • Trail counter at Roaring Fork Club 2012

Average: 4,308  
Maximum: 4,706

### 2013

Average: 4,621  
Maximum: 6,060

### 2014

Average: 5,164  
Maximum: 6,271

### • Trail counter at Emma 2012

Average: 3,441  
Maximum: 3,797

### 2013

Average: 4,821  
Maximum: 5,363

### 2014

Average: 4,430  
Maximum: 4,557

## WINTER USE (DECEMBER-MARCH)

### • Trail counter below Aspen Post Office 2012-13

Average: 2,832  
Maximum: 4,157

### 2013-14

Average: 2,759  
Maximum: 4,433

### • Trail counter at Stein Park 2012-13

Average: 1,064  
Maximum: 1,278

### 2013-14

Average: 1,196  
Maximum: 302

### • Trail counter at Woody Creek 2012-13

Average: 681  
Maximum: 773

### 2013-14

Average: 378  
Maximum: 434

### • Trail counter at Roaring Fork Club 2012-13

Average: 721  
Maximum: 877

### 2013-14

Average: 658  
Maximum: 835

### • Trail counter at Emma 2012-13

Average: 392  
Maximum: 516

### 2013-14

Average: 505  
Maximum: 603



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