U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
73544 Hwy 64
Meeker, CO 81641

DECISION RECORD/FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT CO-110-2004-032-EA DR/FONSI

REFERENCE: Environmental Assessment (EA) Record CO-110-2004-032-EA, Wilson Creek Transportation Plan Amendment to the White River Resource Management Plan (RMP).

PROPOSED DECISION/RATIONALE: It is my decision to amend the White River Resource Management Plan as described in the proposed action (Alternative 1) of EA CO-110-2004-032-EA.

The rationale for choosing Alternative 1 is: In accordance with 43 CFR 8342.1, all public lands are required to be designated as open, limited, or closed to off-road vehicles (OHVs). For the Wilson Creek Planning Area, which has been open seasonally to cross country travel, proliferation of new, unplanned roads and trails are creating unacceptable degradation to the resources that are present. Due to the existence of some poorly engineered ATV trails, there is potential that OHV users could get injured with this existing land use designation. In addition, private land trespass issues created by the land ownership patterns, and existing roads that provide access to public land across private lands have also contributed to this problem.

LAND USE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION:

Implementation of the Wilson Creek Transportation Plan Amendment: Implementation of the decision to limit access to designated roads and trails would begin immediately. Initial implementation would be signage to close the routes identified in the attached environmental assessment from further recreational motorized use. Rehabilitation of these routes and building the newly proposed routes would follow as funding permitted.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has determined that the Proposed Action alternative for the above referenced environmental assessment will have no significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required. BLM's determination is based on the analysis of the potential environmental impacts from this alternative contained in the Environmental Assessment (EA) CO-110-2004-032-EA

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS: BLM conducted a public review of the alternatives and the environmental assessment for this plan amendment. A summary of these comments with BLM responses is attached (see Appendix A) to the environmental assessment.

PROTEST PROCEDURES FOR PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE WHITE RIVER FIELD OFFICE:

Any person, who participated in the planning process for the Proposed Amendment to the White River Resource Area Management Plan and has an interest which is, or may be adversely affected, may protest approval of this proposed plan amendment. A protest may raise only those issues which were submitted for the record during the planning process. New issues may not be brought into the record at the protest stage. A letter of protest must be filed in accordance with the planning regulations, 43 CFR 1610.5-2(a) (1). These regulations require that letters of protest must be in writing and sent to the following address (for regular mail):

Director (210)
Bureau of Land Management
Attn: Brenda Williams, Protest Coordinator
P.O. Box 66538
Washington, DC 20035

For overnight (FedEx only) mailing, send protests to:

Director (210)
Bureau of Land Management
Attn: Brenda Williams, Protest Coordinator
1620 L Street, N.W., Suite 1075
Washington, DC 20036

For an amendment, the protest must be filed within 30 days of the publication of the notice of its effective date. The effective date is August 2, 2004.

To be considered complete, your protest must contain, at a minimum, the following information:

1. The name, mailing address, telephone number, and interest of the person filing the protest.

2. A statement of the issue or issues being raised.

3. A statement of the part or parts of this amendment being protested. To the extent possible, this should be done by reference to specific pages, paragraphs, sections, tables, maps, etc., included in the document.

4. A copy of all documents addressing the issue or issues that you submitted during the planning process, or a reference to date the issue or issues were discussed by you for the record.

5. A concise statement explaining why the Colorado BLM State Director's proposed decision is believed to be incorrect. *This is a critical part of your protest.* Take care to document all relevant facts. As much as possible, reference or cite the planning documents, environmental analysis documents, or available planning records (i.e., meeting minutes or summaries, correspondence, etc.). A protest which merely expresses disagreement with the proposed decision, without any data, will not provide us with the benefit of you information and insight. In this case, the Director's review will be based on the exiting analysis and supporting data.

There is no provision for an extension of time for the filing of protests. Protests filed late, or protests sent to the Field Manager or State Director, unless also sent to the Director, BLM at one of the above addresses, shall be rejected.

The Director will promptly render a decision on the protest. The decision will be in writing and will set forth the reasons for the decision. The decision of the director will be the final decision of the Department of the Interior.

At the end of the 30-day protest period and after the Governor's consistency review, the amendment excluding any portions under protest, will become final. Approval will be withheld on any portion of the amendment under protest until final action has been completed on such protest.

Please direct question about this Decision Record/FONSI to Chris Ham (Outdoor Recreation Planner), Bureau of Land Management; 73544 Highway 64; Meeker, CO; 81641; (970) 878-3800.

SIGNATURE OF RECOMMENDING OFFICIAL:

Kent E. Walter

Kent E. Walter
Field Manager
White River Field Office

7/28/04
Date

APPROVAL

It is my decision to approve the amendment for the Wilson Creek Transportation Management Plan to the White River Resource Management Plan, as described in the White River Field Manager's recommendation, and analyzed in environmental assessment CO-110-2004-032-EA.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

Ron Wenker

Ron Wenker
Colorado State Director

December 7, 2004

Date

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
73544 Hwy 64
Meeker, CO 81641

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: CO-110-2004-032-EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional): N/A

PROJECT NAME: Wilson Creek Transportation Management Plan

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

T2N R93W Sec 4, 5, 6, 7
T2N R94W Sec 1, 2
T3N R93W Sec 19, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33
T3N R94W Sec 25, 34, 35, 36

APPLICANT: BLM

ISSUES AND CONCERNS (optional):

BLM initiated the planning process for the Wilson Creek Transportation Management Plan with a Notice of Intent (NOI) published in the *Federal Register* on March 26, 2003. The NOI contained preliminary issues that were confirmed as the issues of concern through public scoping that BLM conducted from March 26, 2003 through February 13, 2004. These issues are:

1) Road & Trail Proliferation/Resource Damage: The proliferation of new, unplanned roads and trails that have or will create unacceptable resource damage. Existing land use designations that allow cross-country travel within the Wilson Creek area during a portion of the year contribute to this proliferation.

2) Trespass: Private land trespass issues created by land ownership patterns, and existing roads that provide access to public land cross private land.

3) Noise/Hunting: Effects of off-highway vehicle (OHV) noise on quality hunting experience.

4) Trail Safety: There is potential that OHV users could get injured due to existence of some poorly engineered ATV trails.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Background/Introduction:

During its initial internal planning sessions, the White River BLM Staff developed the preliminary planning criteria. Planning criteria establish constraints, guidelines, and standards for the planning process. They help to define the scope of the process, and estimate the extent of data collection and analysis. BLM distributed the preliminary planning criteria to interested members of the public in a newsletter. The newsletter was also made available on the office internet web site. BLM solicited comments from the public on these criteria from December 17, 2003 to February 13, 2004, but received none. These criteria are:

1) Planning Area: The planning area is defined by the public lands and adjacent private lands specified on the attached maps.

2) Redesign of Roads and Trails: Existing roads and trails which are contributing to resource damage or public safety will be reengineered or rerouted to reduce these concerns.

3) Private Land Owners: Owners of private adjacent lands are critical participants in the planning process. They will be invited, along with other public stake holders, to work with BLM as needed and appropriate.

4) Transportation Planning: The focus of the planning process will be travel management. While other resources and issues will be considered during the process, the plan amendment will address only decisions in the Resource Management Plan related to transportation and travel management

OHV Designation and Land Use Plan Decisions. All public lands are required to be designated as open, limited, or closed to off-road vehicles (OHVs) in accordance with 43 CFR 8342.1. According to 42 CFR 8342.2, this designation, or redesignation must be accomplished through the land use planning process. Therefore, redesignation requires an amendment to the existing resource management plan (RMP). The Proposed Action and Alternative 2, listed below, would involve redesignation, and would constitute an amendment to the White River Approved Resource Management Plan. In the descriptions of these alternatives, the italicized text indicates the portion of the alternative that would amend the RMP. The remainder of the descriptions (not italicized) would become implementation decisions.

Proposed Action*: Motorized vehicles will be limited to designated roads within the planning area (Map 1)*. Trails will be constructed to allow safe, legal access to public lands (Map 2).Trails that are constructed will be open to motor vehicles less than 50 inches in width. OHV routes that are closed will be revegetated with native seed to dissuade future use unless route is used for access to private lands and/or right-of way activities (i.e. powerline). Parking areas (Map 2) will be identified and improved to encourage safe parking off of BLM 1544. The following routes will be closed to further recreational motorized use (Numbers describing closed routes below correspond to map locations on Map 1).

1. Route west of Devil's Hole Mountain which follows surface pipeline. Route is approximately 1.05 miles in length and terminates on private land in T3NR94W Section 35 and is identified for closure as it follows an eroded surface pipeline route which is not designed or maintained for OHV travel, does not provide any real access to public lands and terminates on private land.

2. OHV access route in T2NR94W SW ¼. Route follows powerline corridor which is not designed to safely allow for OHV travel. Route is in excess of 50% slope in places and is beginning to erode in both depth and width of tread. Route would be rehabilitated and replaced with safer route.

3. Powerline tower access routes within T2NR94W northern ½ of section 1.

4. Powerline tower access routes within T2NR94W northern ½ of section 1.

5. Powerline access route in T3N R94W SE ¼ Section 36

6. Route in T2N R94W NE ¼ Section 1.

7. Route in T2N R93W ¼ Section 6.

Mitigation:

Any new trail construction will be evaluated on a case by case basis to see if inventory is required in accordance with the Colorado Protocol with the Colorado SHPO. Any sites, on or off trails will be evaluated for significance and to determine what impacts if any recreational activities have caused and what remedial action may be necessary to stabilize the resource or otherwise protect archaeological values.

Prior to final routing of new proposed trails, BLM will conduct a raptor inventory by June 1 to determine: 1) the status of raptor nesting in the project area and 2) if vegetation clearing would have an adverse influence on the function or utility of any newly discovered raptor nest sites. In the event raptor nest activity is found, RMP-approved stipulations (i.e., TL-04 on page A-16 of ROD, NSO-03 on page A-4 of ROD) would be applied as appropriate.

Because proposed trail construction is relatively small in scale, vegetation clearing and dirt-moving (if any) will be scheduled after July 15 in order to avoid active nesting efforts of migratory birds. Final trail construction will be routed to avoid cavity sites suitable for nesting use by purple martin and red-naped sapsucker. Actual determinations would be made by a BLM biologist in conjunction with required raptor surveys (above).

Native Seed Mix #2 will be used to re-vegetate all soil disturbances in a timely manner and noxious weeds, present along any closed trail, will be treated.

If at any time it becomes necessary to excavate into the underlying bedrock formation to level any of the proposed parking areas or construct portions of the trail a paleontologist shall be given

the opportunity to examine the excavated areas for the presence of fossil resources. If paleontological materials (fossils) are uncovered during project activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities that might further disturb such materials, and contact the authorized officer (AO). The operator and the authorized officer will consult and determine the best option for avoiding or mitigating paleontological site damage.

BLM will install informational boards both outside of the planning area and inside at Sheriff Ridge vicinity that include maps of the area as well as other regulatory and ethics information. BLM will provide signage to minimize trespass on private land. Routes will be signed on the ground as open or closed.

There will be no clearing of trail corridors, other than that necessary for construction and user safety. Amount of spill material from trail construction activities will be kept to a minimum.

Alternative 2: *The entire area will be closed to all motorized use. Foot and horse access will continue to be allowed.* Range permittees and rights-of-way holders may continue to use motorized vehicles in the same manner, degree and intensity as were utilized historically to maintain their facilities. BLM permitted outfitters and guides will not be allowed to utilize motorized vehicles in the transport of clients or in any activity associated with their special recreation permit. No camping within the area will be allowed as the area will be identified as day-use only. Camping will be allowed only along BLM 1544 prior to the gate on private land. OHV access routes to Sheriff and Agee Ridges will be closed and revegetated.

No Action Alternative: The area designation will remain "open" to motorized vehicle travel May 1 through September 30 of each year and limited to existing routes the remainder of the year. Motorized access to Wilson Creek will continue on unsafe routes. We would expect continued creation of unplanned routes due to authorized and unauthorized cross-country travel.

NEED FOR THE ACTION: Refer to Issues and Concerns above for a complete discussion on the need for the action.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: 2-44

Decision Language: A comprehensive Travel Management plan will be initiated upon approval of this document.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES:

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH: In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

AIR QUALITY

Affected Environment: There are no special designation air sheds or non-attainment areas nearby that would be affected by the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Impacts from the proposed action are not anticipated.

Environmental consequences of Alternative 2: Closing all of the roads would help reduce fugitive dust caused by human activities.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: During periods of low precipitation, air quality in the area is often diminished by dust caused by human activity.

Mitigation: None

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: Virtually all of the existing roads and trails have some level of inventory, associated with oil and gas or coal developments in the area. However, there are some current trails shown on Map 1 that do not have any inventory. At the present time there are no sites shown on the roads and trails identified on Map 1.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Limiting motorized vehicles to designated roads and trails will help to reduce impacts to cultural resources that are located off of the trails. Closing other trails (map 1) will be helpful in reducing impacts such as unauthorized collecting or camping on any cultural resources that may be on or near the closed trails as access will be more restricted. Leaving the trails open to foot and horse traffic means there will continue to be some access, and possible collecting or other activities, to the resources, but the numbers will likely be less than would be possible with motorized travel into the area.

Environmental consequences of Alternative 2: Closing the areas to motorized recreation, except permitted uses, and closing the area to camping will greatly reduce impacts to any cultural resources in the area. Having the area open to day use will not totally eliminate potential impacts, such as unauthorized collecting, but should greatly reduce those impacts.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Cultural resources that have not been identified that were being impacted under the current situation will continue to be impacted by unauthorized vehicular traffic, collecting or other activities on the sites.

Mitigation: Mitigation included as part of the Proposed Action will minimize impacts.

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: Within the planning area noxious weeds are a serious problem. Noxious weeds currently found in this area include; houndstongue, leafy spurge, yellow toadflax, Canada thistle, musk thistle, bull thistle. Weeds of imminent concern include hoary cress and Dalmatian toadflax. All of these weeds negatively impact the forage and cover resources. Leafy spurge, yellow toadflax and Dalmatian toadflax are resistant to chemical control making them very difficult to control. Houndstongue is currently the most common noxious weed found in the area. Invasive weed treatments are on-going within the planning area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Restricting use of OHVs to designated roads and trails would prevent wide scale off-roading which has in the past disturbed vegetation communities providing suitable habitat for noxious weed establishment. ATV's have also been implicated in the transporting of noxious weed seeds. It is expected that the designated trails will remain as disturbed soils providing suitable habitat for noxious weed establishment. Weeds will grow and prosper on these trails, making seed which will be available for transportation off-site. Since most of the use of OHVs would be during seed dispersal season this is highly likely. Seeding reclaimed trails with native seeds would prevent regulatory conflicts with using non-native species.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2: Under this alternative the area would be closed to recreational ATV use. Trails are expected to be infested with noxious weeds, primarily Houndstounge with the opportunity for the entire above noxious weed species to be present. Over time there is expected to be an increase in grass competition displacing some of the noxious weeds.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Existing trends described in the affected environment would continue. The advance or decline of noxious species would be a function of control effort effectiveness, and the establishment of priorities outside the scope of this environmental assessment.

Mitigation: None

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: An array of migratory birds fulfill nesting functions throughout the project area's aspen, sagebrush, and mountain shrub habitats during the months of May, June, and July. Species associated with these shrubland and woodland communities are generally typical and widely distributed in the Resource Area and region. Those birds identified as having higher conservation interest (i.e., Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, Partners in Flight program) are listed in the table below. Special interest species associated with the sagebrush and mountain shrub communities, as well as the hummingbird and warbler from the aspen community are common and well represented in their respective habitats. The remaining species in the aspen community are rather specialized in their habitat preferences. These birds are present, but uncommon, and their distribution is sporadic in the project area.

Birds with High Conservation Priority by Habitat Association (see text)		
Sagebrush	Mountain shrub	Aspen
Brewer's sparrow green-tailed towhee	blue grouse common poorwill Virginia's warbler	broad-tld hummingbird, red-naped sapsucker, purple martin, Cordilleran flycatcher, MacGillivray's warbler

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Trail construction conducted from approximately mid-May to early July has potential to disrupt nesting activities of migratory birds. With the application of proposed mitigation, impacts to nesting birds would be wholly avoided. Prevailing use of existing roads by livestock and utility permittees during the summer is both low in frequency and intensity and would have no measurable influence on nest efforts. Concentrated use by the public (August through November during the big game seasons) would occur well after the reproductive season.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2: No trail construction or surface disturbance is associated with this alternative. Prevailing use of existing roads by livestock and utility permittees during the nest season is both low in frequency and intensity and would have no measurable influence on nest efforts. Concentrated use by the public (August through November during the big game seasons) would occur well after the reproductive season.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: The development of unauthorized trails would be apt to continue under this alternative, but it is likely that these routes would be pioneered during the big game hunting seasons and have little, if any, influence on bird nesting activity. Prevailing use of existing roads by livestock and utility permittees during the nest season is both low in frequency and intensity and would have no measurable influence on nest efforts. Concentrated use by the public (August through November during the big game seasons) would occur well after the reproductive season.

Mitigation: Mitigation included as part of the Proposed Action will minimize impacts.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: There are no listed, proposed, or candidate animals known to inhabit or derive important benefit from the project locale. There is a remote chance that northern goshawk, a BLM sensitive species, may nest in mature aspen habitats associated with existing or proposed trails. The likelihood of nesting is considered low due to the relative rarity of goshawk nest sites in these habitats and the proximity of these trails to established forms of disturbance (e.g.., improved roads or existing powerline right-of-ways).

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: There would be no affect on species associated with the Endangered Species Act. Potential effects on raptor nest habitat, including northern goshawk, are discussed in the terrestrial wildlife section below.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2: There would be no affect on species associated with the Endangered Species Act. Potential effects on raptor nest habitat, including northern goshawk, are discussed in the terrestrial wildlife section below.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no affect on species associated with the Endangered Species Act. Potential effects on raptor nest habitat, including northern goshawk, are discussed in the terrestrial wildlife section below.

Mitigation: Mitigation considered necessary to reduce potential effects on raptor nest habitat, including northern goshawk, are incorporated into the Proposed Action.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: The proposed action and its various alternatives would have no influence on animal populations listed, proposed, or candidate to the Endangered Species Act, nor on the habitats or seasonal use areas associated with these species. Thus there would be no effect on meeting the land health standard.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE PLANT SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: There are no threatened, endangered or sensitive plant species within the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: None.

Environmental consequences of Alternative 2: None

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: None of the alternatives will impact achieving public land health standards for threatened and endangered plant species.

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND (includes a finding on Standard 5)

Affected Environment: The proposed action is located in segment 3e identified in the Stream Classifications and Water Quality Standards. It is described as being the mainstem of Good Spring Creek above Wilson Reservoir and Wilson Creek and their tributaries except for Jubb Creek. A review of the Colorado's 1989 Nonpoint Source Assessment Report (plus updates), the 305(b) report, the 303(d) list and the Unified Watershed Assessment was one to see if any water quality concerns have been identified. All actions are within the Yampa River watershed.

The State has classified this stream segment as "Use Protected" reach. Its designated beneficial uses are: Warm Aquatic Life 2, Recreation 1b, Water Supply and Agriculture. The state has further defined water quality parameters with table values. These standards reflect the ambient water quality and define maximum allowable concentrations for the various water quality parameters. The anti-degradation rule does not apply to this segment meaning no further water quality degradation is allowable that would interfere with or become harmful to the designated uses.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Surface runoff could be expected until successful reclamation has occurred.

Environmental consequences of Alternative 2: Closing all of the roads except for administrative purposes would help reduce impacts associated with vehicular travel; however this reduction would not be immediate and would be dependent on successful reclamation.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Increased sediment deposition would continue with the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality: The water quality of this drainage is will within the parameters set by the state. This will likely continue under any of the alternatives.

WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on Standard 2)

Affected Environment: There would be no potential for direct involvement of riparian or wetland communities under any alternative. Old beaver workings in the upper tributaries of East Fork Wilson Creek, about 0.25 mile downstream of the existing trail in the west half of section 1, support small intermittent flows early in the year.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Sediment mobilization that exceeds the transport capacity of a channel system can prompt increased downstream bank and

channel erosion. Small, higher-gradient channels that derive a large degree of bed level control from beaver workings are particularly susceptible to sediment imbalances that results in excessive sediment deposition (e.g., aggravated lateral cutting). Downstream sediment delivery from ongoing trail erosion in the west half of section 1 would be alleviated by closing and successfully rehabilitating this trail and reconstructing an appropriately engineered alternative. Further sediment contributions from inappropriate trail development in the future would be forestalled by designating road and trail use in the travel management plan area.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2: Impacts to riparian and channel systems in the project area would be similar to the proposed action, assuming effective reclamation were applied to the powerline corridor in the west half of section 1.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Downstream sediment originating from the active gullying in the west half of section 1 would continue, but at rates that would likely accelerate over time. It is likely that downstream reaches of the East Fork Wilson Creek would be subjected to various forms of long-term channel disruptions (e.g., lateral bank and channel cutting from premature sedimentation of beaver ponds) until this headcut deters vehicle travel and the hillslope naturally stabilizes (i.e., many decades). Adverse channel adjustments would tend to accumulate and progress downstream (i.e., onto private lands) through time.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems: The Proposed Action and Alternative 2 offer the means to stabilize active headcutting along the powerline corridor and eliminate the unplanned proliferation of vehicle trails--measures that are conducive to long-term channel stability in East Fork Wilson Creek and West Fork Good Spring Creek, thus contributing to meeting the land health standard. The No Action Alternative involves neither measure and would likely contribute to downstream channel instability and riparian degradation, with potential to affect meeting of the standard.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED:

No Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, flood plains, prime and unique farmlands, Wilderness Areas, or Wild and Scenic Rivers exist within the area affected by the proposed action. There are also no Native American religious, hazardous waste, or environmental justice concerns associated with the proposed action.

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following elements **must** be addressed due to the involvement of Standards for Public Land Health:

SOILS (includes a finding on Standard 1)

Affected Environment: The soils have been mapped by the NRCS in an order III soil survey. This survey is available for review at the White River Field Office.

Proposed Action	Soil Number	Soil Name	Slope	Range site	Salinity	RunOff	Erosion Potential	Bedrock
Middle Trail	45	Jerry-Thornburgh-Rhone complex	8-65%	Brushy Loam/Brushy Loam	<2	Medium to rapid	Moderate to high	>60
Upper and Lower Trail	77	Rhone-Northwater-Lamphier loams	3-50%	Brushy Loam/Aspen Woodland/Aspe n Woodland	<2	Medium	Slight to very high	40-60

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: A temporary increase in soil erosion is expected until successful reclamation of the old OHV access trails to Sheriff and Agee Ridges are completed.

Environmental consequences of Alternative 2: Closing the roads except for administrative purposes would help reduce impacts associated with vehicular travel; however this reduction would not be immediate. A temporary increase in soil erosion is expected until successful reclamation of the old OHV access trails to Sheriff and Agee Ridges are completed.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: The no action alternative would result in increased soil erosion due to continued use of a steep trail through erosive soils.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils: The Proposed Action and Alternative 2 would help these soils in the immediate area to meet Land Health Standard. The No Action Alternative would not.

VEGETATION (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The proposed action is located within Brushy Loam/Aspen Woodland range sites and contours around several slopes and across several drainages. The dominant plant community for this site consists of serviceberry, snowberry, Gambel oak and aspen with an understory of mountain brome, Columbia needlegrass, and elk sedge. Hounds tongue is an undesirable, invasive, and alien plant species that is present within the area of the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action would disturb a mid seral class of mountain shrub community. New soil and vegetation disturbances would be offset by reclamation and re-vegetation of the existing disturbed area using a seed mix suited for this ecological site. Successful re-vegetation would increase desirable plant species in this area and reduce the risk of noxious weed spread.

Environmental consequences of Alternative 2: Alternative 2 would have minimal impacts on authorized grazing use in the affected allotment.

A restriction of motorized vehicles within this portion of the allotment would reduce the spread of noxious weeds by motorized means to local and offsite areas. However, livestock would continue to be a source of transportation of these seeds within the confines of the allotment. Any reduction in the spread of noxious weeds is a positive benefit of the range's forage component.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: The no action alternative would result in increased soil erosion due to continued use of a steep trail through erosive soils. Cattle use on this steep unauthorized trail would also contribute to soil erosion. Excessive soil erosion negatively impacts vegetation resulting in reduced forage production. Spread of noxious weeds present along the unauthorized trail could also potentially reduce the forage component.

Mitigation: Mitigation incorporated into the proposed action will minimize impacts.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial)*:* The proposed action would disturb small segments of Brushy Loam and Aspen Woodland range sites and will tie in to existing routes. Re-vegetation of un-authorized routes off-sets this disturbance so further fragmentation of plant communities would not be a factor. The Proposed Action and Alternative 2 would contribute to meeting the land health standard, while the No Action Alternative would not.

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The mainstem of Wilson Creek is the nearest perennial system that supports more than the most rudimentary arthropod-dominated aquatic community. Its juncture with the East Fork Wilson Creek is about 4 channel miles downstream of proposed trail construction and the powerline trail.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action and Alternative 2: Assuming successful reclamation of the powerline trail in section 1, it is likely that sediment contribution to downstream reaches would decline over time, helping to establish channel conditions more conducive to long-term channel stability and reducing the probability of adversely affecting downstream aquatic habitats.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Sedimentation originating from the eroding powerline corridor and incremental expansion of unplanned and poorly designed vehicle trails would persist. It is likely that aggravated sediment yield from these sources would be excessive in these systems and contribute to downstream channel and riparian degradation. Because most downstream channel segments are privately owned and the ultimate influence on the mainstem of Wilson Creek from sediments originating from East Fork would depend on the condition of these riparian reaches. It is not possible to predict how or when Wilson Creek would be affected.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial): Similar to the finding for Standard #2, the proposed action and second alternative offer the means to stabilize active headcutting along the powerline corridor and eliminate the unplanned proliferation of vehicle trails--measures that are conducive to long-term stability of channel and aquatic habitat conditions in East Fork Wilson Creek and West Fork Good Spring Creek, thus contributing to meeting the land health standard. The No Action alternative involves neither measure and would likely contribute to downstream channel instability and riparian degradation that would lead, ultimately, to the deterioration of downstream habitats (e.g., unstable channel substrate, high turbidity, high width: depth ratios) which could contribute to not meeting the standard.

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The Wilson Creek area is used throughout the year by deer and elk. Summer use by deer and elk is prevalent in the upper tributaries of Wilson and Good Spring Creeks and much of the travel management area is designated elk production area—a State-defined critical habitat in Game Management Unit (GMU) 211 that sustains inordinately high levels of elk calving activity and is used throughout the calf rearing period. The ranges are also used by elk through the earlier winter months. Current road/trail density on BLM lands within the travel management area is about 1.8 miles per square mile—a figure relatively consistent with road density objectives established for big game critical habitats in the White River ROD/RMP. The planning area encompasses relatively large tracts of mature aspen, a woodland type that typically supports high raptor nest densities (e.g., Cooper's hawk, northern goshawk). No systematic nest surveys have been conducted in the Wilson Creek area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Assuming prevailing levels of low-intensity livestock and utilities traffic would continue during the spring through mid-summer months, it is expected that big game summer use functions would remain relatively unaffected. Although 0.75 mile of alternate trail would be constructed through preferred aspen woodlands, relocating these features closer to the periphery of woodland stands would, in a small way, enhance stand utility for all seasonal big game use. Fall and winter big game distribution as affected by vehicle access would be influenced only slightly less than the current situation. The closing of lateral trails and the trail beneath Devils Hole Mountain and instituting a designated road/trail system would stabilize road densities at about 1.6 miles per square mile in the long term—a figure consistent with White River ROD/RMP road density objectives.

Proposed trail construction would persist in traversing aspen woodlands preferred by certain raptors, but the two alternate routes are generally situated in locations less amenable to raptor nesting (i.e., in close proximity to existing road and right-of-way features). Proposed trail routes will be surveyed for raptor nest activity by BLM and the routes modified as necessary to avoid nest site involvement or compromising long term nest site utility. Ongoing livestock and utilities management use would have no substantive influence on raptor nesting use of the area.

Recreational use of these trails is expected to be infrequent and light during the nesting season (May-early July) and is not expected to adversely influence raptor nesting in surrounding habitats. Designated roads and trail status would prevent future incursions into undisturbed nest habitats.

Road designations would reduce the likelihood of weeds being transported into remote woodland and shrubland habitats and help prevent the attendant deterioration of herbaceous understory communities that are important habitat components of nongame and small game wildlife.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2: Livestock and utilities traffic would affect big game summer use functions in a manner similar to the Proposed Action. However, there would be no potential for infrequent (current situation) or increasingly popular (potential future situation) vehicle-based summer recreation use to alter the distribution of big game (particularly elk) on Public Lands during the post-partum period.

Recreational vehicle closure would not be expected to drastically affect animal distribution or use in fall and early winter. Because the travel management area is small enough to be effectively accessed from the margins, any tendency to concentrate animals (reduced human activity) during the hunting seasons would likely attract increased walk-in or horse-back access.

Ongoing livestock and utilities management use would continue to have no substantive influence on raptor nesting use of the area. There would no vehicle-based recreational use of the area that could disrupt raptors or other nongame or small game during the reproductive season.
The likelihood of weeds being transported into remote woodland and shrubland habitats within the travel management area would be similar to the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Left unattended, there is an undetermined potential for the haphazard development of an extensive trail network that may attract and intensify summer recreation use, thereby compromising the utility of BLM lands for summer big game use (e.g., activity-related displacement and habitat disuse). Road and trail proliferation would elevate road densities to levels inconsistent with RMP-prescribed road density objectives as applied to big game critical habitats (i.e., >1.8 miles per square mile). The risk of vehicle travel contributing to the deterioration of bottomland habitats (e.g., riparian) as a source of succulent big game forage during later summer or early fall months would increase. Increasing road density and road use during the fall and winter big game seasons would tend to displace big game more rapidly and completely from the travel management area to surrounding private lands.

With no control over the location or use of trails over time, it would be increasingly likely that vehicle travel would adversely affect the utility of raptor nest habit, both in terms of nest site disruption during the nesting season and the introduction of noxious weeds that would affect the integrity of habitats as cover and forage for prey species.

Mitigation: Mitigation incorporated into the proposed action will minimize impacts.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): The Proposed Action and Alternative 2 would generally complement land health standard 3 by promoting conditions that deter the spread of noxious weeds and allow resident wildlife equitable use of forage and cover resources across a landscape matrix of private and public lands. The No Action Alternative carries an undetermined, but increased risk of compromising the land health standard in terms of noxious weed proliferation, displacement of animals from preferred reproductive habitats, and the deterioration of bottomland habitats (i.e., vehicle-induced damage to riparian and channel systems).

OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS: For the following elements, those brought forward for analysis will be formatted as shown above.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Access and Transportation			X
Cadastral Survey	X		
Fire Management		X	
Forest Management		X	
Geology and Minerals	X		
Hydrology/Water Rights	X		
Law Enforcement		X	
Paleontology			X
Rangeland Management			X
Realty Authorizations			X
Recreation			X
Socio-Economics		X	
Visual Resources			X
Wild Horses	X		

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

Affected Environment: Access to the Wilson Creek planning area is provided by RBC 9 and BLM 1544. The majority of the roads within the planning area were/are developed and maintained for oil and gas operations and public utilities. The roads are also used for local range management activities and hunting season recreation. Numerous other routes occur in the area, come begin on private lands, others follow pipeline routes and still others have been created by recreation users during the fall hunting season. Primary OHV routes (identified as "existing OHV routes" on Map 1) which provide access to Agee and Sheriff Ridges were not constructed or maintained to BLM standard and are unsafe. Many of the user created routes have no apparent destination. At present, the RMP allows for cross country travel in the planning area from May 1 through September 30 each year and limited to existing routes the remainder of the year. The fall archery seasons have historically begun prior to the cross-country travel closure which creates a period of time where off-road travel is permissible and has led to user created trails during this

window of recreation use. Parking currently is unregulated and occurs along sides of roads and occasionally, parked vehicles block the gate that accesses private lands.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Proposed action will require that all motorized vehicles remain on designated routes (see Map 1) for the entirety of the year. Exceptions to this would be extended to lease and/or right-of-way holders. Access to the area will be unchanged as access routes (See Map 1 – Routes 2 and 6) that are closed and revegetated will be replaced with trails engineered for OHV use. It is likely that some road closures will be unpopular with the public. Signed parking areas should keep parking off of designated routes and from blocking gates.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2: The area will be closed to all motorized uses except permitted users. The action would be divergent based on past motorized access. Historically, the area has been accessed by OHVs for hunting season. Changing the access profile would likely disperse hunters elsewhere where motorized use is allowed.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Cross country travel would be permitted during the period of May 1 to September 30 of each year. Travel of existing routes would more than likely continue. Public would continue to utilize unsafe routes to access Agee and Sheriff Ridges. Parking will continue to be unregulated and unrestrained and may lead to private gates to be blocked.

Mitigation: None.

PALEONTOLOGY

Affected Environment: The area of the travel management plan is mapped as primarily the Williams Fork Formation with small islands of the Iles Formation on the higher peaks (Tweto 1979). The BLM has classified the formations as Category II formations meaning that the fossil bearing potential of the formations is not clearly understood at this time.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Construction if new trails for ATV type vehicles with track widths no more than 50 inches may present new threats to fossil resources from construction, if it become necessary to excavate into the underlying bedrock in order to have the trail meet BLM safety and engineering standards. Restricting vehicles to designated roads and trails only will limit the aerial extent where vehicular impacts to outcrops of stone could occur though pedestrian visitation to the locations will not necessarily be stopped. Unauthorized collection of any vertebrate fossils, should any be present, would potentially be reduced but not necessarily stopped completely. Fossil resources could potentially be impacted during construction of the proposed parking areas adjacent to BLM route 1544 should that construction activity involve excavation into the underlying bedrock formations. The Williams Fork formation would be the primary formation to be impacted by the parking lot construction activity.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative Two: Closing the area to all recreational motorized use, except for authorized maintenance of right-of-way facilities and range improvements, would result in a substantial reduction of impacts to bedrock outcrops in the area due to motorized vehicle activity. There would be no new construction to impact the formations except where the proposed parking lots would be located adjacent to BLM road 1544. Fossil resources could potentially be impacted during construction of the proposed parking areas should that construction activity involve excavation into the underlying bedrock formations. The Williams Fork formation would be the primary formation to be impacted by the parking lot construction activity. Restricting the area to day use only would cause a substantial reduction in the collecting of fossil materials, should any be present, due to the short period of time available for collection and the difficulties in transporting the material out of the area. There would be a slight increase in trampling related impacts to exposed outcrops as visitors to the area increase the use of horses/mules to access the areas behind the gate shown on Map 1.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no change in any impacts that might already be occurring in the area. Exposed outcrops will continue to be impacted by vehicular traffic and exposures of the bedrock could still be heavily prospected/collected by visitors interested in any fossil resources that might be present in the area. There would be no new potential impacts from parking lot construction adjacent to BLM route 1544.

Mitigation: The mitigation incorporated into the proposed action will minimize or eliminate potential impacts.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The proposed project is located in the Smith-Crawford Allotment (06625) which is authorized for cattle use between early summer and late fall. The proposed trail will contour around the slope and tie in with an existing designated route.

Soil types occurring within the proposed project area are Rhone-Northwater-Lamphier loams and Jerry-Thornburgh Rhone complexes. Potential plant communities within these soil types include mountain brome, Columbia needlegrass, elk sedge, serviceberry, snowberry, Gambel oak, and some aspen. These mountain shrub/grass communities are utilized by cattle for meeting forage requirements, particularly during summer months. Soil types are moderately permeable with high water holding capacity; however runoff is medium to rapid with high water erosion hazard.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action would have minimal impacts on the authorized grazing use in the affected allotment. The amount of surface disturbance created by the proposed trail construction would be off-set by the closure and re-vegetation of the unauthorized trail. Noxious weeds (Hounds tongue) are present and could spread into the new trail and potentially reduce the forage capacity of the adjacent rangelands.

Overall, the proposed action would have no direct impact on the authorized Animal Unit Months (AUMs) in the allotment. A positive benefit would be gained through closure and successful re-

vegetation of the steep unauthorized sections of trail. This action would help reduce establishment and spread of noxious weeds in the disturbed area. Cattle would establish new travel routes to access the area.

Environmental consequences of Alternative 2: Alternative 2 would have no significant impact on authorized grazing use in the effected allotment. Range permittees would continue to have access to maintain their facilities and perform ranching duties.

A restriction of motorized vehicles within this portion of the allotment would reduce the spread of noxious weeds by motorized means to local and offsite areas. However, livestock would continue to be a source of transportation of these seeds within the confines of the allotment. Any reduction in the spread of noxious weeds is a positive benefit of the range's forage component.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: The no action alternative would result in increased soil erosion due to continued use of a steep trail through erosive soils. Cattle use on this steep unauthorized trail would also contribute to soil erosion. Spread of noxious weeds present along the unauthorized trail could potentially reduce the forage component.

Mitigation: Mitigation incorporated into the proposed action will minimize impacts.

REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS

Affected Environment: The proposed action encompasses an area that has numerous rights-of-way: Powerlines; COC0107451, COC58177, COC39342, COC58085, COC 44250 (White River Electric); phone lines; COD051612, COC30683, COC0111205; communication site (Qwest); pipeline COC49107 Texaco Inc.; 138 kV powerline Tri-State Generation & Transmission/Public Service Company of Colorado; COC39330 power line Mark Sheridan.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The holders of rights-of-way in the planning area will require continued access in order to maintain their facilities.

Environmental consequences of Alternative 2: The holders of rights-of-way in the planning area will require continued access in order to maintain their facilities.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: None

RECREATION

Affected Environment: The proposed action occurs within the White River Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA). BLM custodially manages the ERMA to provide for unstructured recreation activities such as hunting, dispersed camping, hiking, horseback riding,

wildlife viewing and off-highway vehicle use. The area is located within Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) game management unit (GMU) 211. The primary recreation use within the planning area is hunting and the Wilson Creek area is one of the only publicly accessible hunting areas within GMU 211 outside of the Yampa River corridor to the north. Hunters using motorized conveyance and those hunters that chose to walk or use livestock frequent the area with slightly more hunters opting for motorized access. There have been historic problems with hunters trespassing on private lands adjacent to BLM lands and with the creation of non-system motorized routes. Overnight camping, although not prevalent in the area, does occur along Sheriff Ridge in a single large camp area and an area in the Devil's Hole Mountain vicinity with many more camping along BLM 1544 prior to the private land gate. Two BLM Special Recreation Permits for upland big-game outfitting are permitted within the planning area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: By implementing this action, safe OHV access routes will be constructed to replace the unsafe unplanned routes that have persisted for several years (see Map1). Additionally, by limiting OHVs to designated routes, the likelihood of an OHV driving off-road and impacting a person's hunt should be eliminated altogether. By limiting OHVs to designated routes a decrease in trespass on private land would be expected as well due to increased information and directional signage. Routes identified for closure do not appreciably provide an additional access to public lands or lend themselves to the creation of loop rides. An increase in hunting quality and recreation experience would be expected with this alternative.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2: This alternative will close the planning area to all forms of motorized use with the exception of permitted activities associated with rights-of-way operations or maintenance. The public will lose one of the few OHV accessible areas within GMU 211 and the only OHV accessible area within the Rio Blanco County portion of GMU 211. The opportunity to use motorized equipment will be lost. However, the opportunity for nonmotorized recreational hunting will increase within GMU 211.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: By continuing the current management regime, the potential for OHV accidents will continue with the further use of existing OHV access routes. More that likely, as the unsafe OHV trail deteriorate over time through use and erosion, it is likely that new trails will be constructed and/or pioneered by users to avoid these existing OHV access routes. This type of activity will likely contribute to poor recreation experiences and eventual dispersal of recreation users in the area. If current travel management policy derived from the RMP continues, it is likely that an increase in cross-country off-road travel will occur impacting the recreational hunting experience.

Mitigation: None.

VISUAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: The Wilson Creek planning area is within a Visual Resource Management (VRM) class II area. The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management

activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the line. Form, color and texture found in the predominant features of the characteristic landscape. At present, VRM class II objectives are not being met in the majority of the area adjacent to and within the planning area. Oil and gas roads, wells and pipelines, communication sites and powerlines dominate the viewshed.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Although new trails are to be constructed, they will be hidden from view by heavy vegetation and although the trails may be seen the will not dominate the view of the casual observer. VRM class II objectives will continue to not be met, but the proposed action will not further degrade the viewshed.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2: VRM class II objective will continue to not be met but this alternative will not further degrade the viewshed.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: If OHVs are allowed to continue to travel off of existing roads and trails, it could be suggested that new trails may be created and may come to dominate the view of the casual observer but this seems unlikely given current trends in use and land ethic. VRM class II objective will continue to not be met but this alternative will not further degrade the viewshed.

Mitigation: None.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY: There is a large amount of oil and gas development in and around the planning area. This development includes access roads, well pads, and pipelines. There are also powerlines running down some of the ridges. Contribution of any of the alternatives to the impacts from these existing activities/facilities (spread of noxious weeds, soil erosion, and impacts to water quality) would be minimal.

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Air Quality
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Threatened and Endangered Plant Species
Michael Selle	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources Paleontological Resources
Robert Fowler	Forester	Invasive, Non-Native Species
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal Species, Wildlife
Marty O'Mara	Petroleum Engineer	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Water Quality, Surface and Ground Hydrology and Water Rights
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Wetlands and Riparian Zones
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Soils
Mary Taylor	Rangeland Management Specialist	Vegetation
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Access and Transportation
Ken Holsinger	NRS	Fire Management
Robert Fowler	Forester	Forest Management
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals
Mary Taylor	Rangeland Management Specialist	Rangeland Management
Penny Brown	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Visual Resources
Valerie Dobrich	NRS	Wild Horses

ATTACHMENTS: Appendix A; Public comments and BLM responses to the comments.
Wilson Creek Map 1; Preferred Alternative
Wilson Creek Map 2; Preferred Alternative
Map of the location of the proposed action.

APPENDIX A: PUBLIC COMMENTS ON WILSON CREEK TRANSPORTATION PLAN AND BLM'S RESPONSES TO THE COMMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The public comment period for this RMP amendment was from May 28 through June 30, 2004. We received a total of 17 letters, of which 13 were received by electronic mail. Comment letters received from local, state and other federal agencies are required to be printed in this amendment. Copies of the other comment letters are available upon request from the White River Field Office.

Comment letters were read and comments identified. Of the total letters received, nine letters did not contain comments that required a response. For the remainder eight letters, the appropriate team members were assigned the comments relating to their specialty in order to develop a response. An effort was made to consolidate comments that contained similar subject matters. By combining the comments, this reduced redundancy and the overall number of responses required. Table A-1 list the commentors, their affiliation, the number of comments in their letter, and where to find the response to those comments.

Table A-1: List of Commentors

Name/Affiliation	Number of Comments	Comment Numbers
Roz McClellan/Rocky Mountain Recreation Initiative	7	6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 21
Jennifer Seidenberg/Self	1	6
Gayle Rogers/ Self	1	8
SeEtta Moss/Conservation Chair Arkansas Valley Audubon Society	3	7, 16, 17
Kirk Cunningham/Rocky Mountain Chapter Sierra Club	5	6, 10,11, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22
Bob Mayo/ChevronTexaco	4	1-4
Richard Levy/Trappers Lake Sierra Club	2	6, 21
Allan Ward/Self	2	9, 5

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

1. Comment: Access to locations, rights of way, and private property by ChevronTexaco will be unrestricted for maintenance and operations. For example, the route marked (1) for closure is still and active right-of way and access will be needed for maintenance.

Response: As stated in the proposed action, third sentence, "OHV routes that are closed will be revegetated with native seed to dissuade future use unless route is used for access to private lands and/or right-of way activities (i.e. powerline)." Therefore, this action does not curtail the access rights to permittees or right-of-way holders in the Wilson Creek Area.

2. Comment: BLM Routes will be properly signed to discourage trespassing on adjacent ChevronTexaco and other private land.

Response: As stated in the proposed action, pg. 4, second paragraph, "BLM will install informational boards both outside of the planning area and inside at Sheriff Ridge vicinity that include maps of the area as well as other regulatory and ethics information. BLM will provide signage to minimize trespass on private land. Routes will be signed on the ground as open or closed." All routes will be signed to identify allowable recreation access and vehicular travel.

3. Comment: Signage will be provided to discourage camping/parking in areas that would either impede ChevronTexaco access to locations or rights-of way or expose travelers to potential hazards.

Response: As stated in the proposed action, (i.e. "Trails will be constructed to allow safe, legal access to public lands (Map 2)." and areas will be signed to encourage parking, (i.e. "Parking areas (Map 2) will be identified and improved to encourage safe parking off of BLM 1544.").

4. Comment: That this travel plan not be used as a method of progressively restricting access and development of natural resources in the area.

Response: The proposed action in no way is intended to curtail the development of natural resources, such as oil or gas within the project area.

5. Comment: I also understand that there has been some type of impact research study done on this area for the affect on local resources by this type of access. I have been unable to access this study as the BLM website has been down, however I have some questions regarding the study.

Response: The BLM is not aware of an "impact research study" in the Wilson Creek Area.

6. Comment: The proposed action to open Wilson Creek to legal ATV access is predicated on the assumption the ORV use will stay at manageable levels. This assumption does not account for the recent growth in ATV hunting throughout the west and the rush to find back country areas in which to engage in this activity. The EA needs to acknowledge this potential for growth in use and to include provisions to deal with it should it occur.

Response: Wilson Creek is presently open to motorized vehicular travel on existing roads and trails from October 1 through April 30 and open to cross-country travel the remainder of the year so the statement that the BLM is opening Wilson Creek to new motorized access is false.

7. Comment: My main concern now is a fence/gate at certain places so they (OHVs) won't go onto private land.

Response: Additional signage and/or gates indicating private lands will be determined in consultation with affected private landowners.

8. Comment: The EA needs to acknowledge case examples elsewhere in Colorado where trail construction has invited unanticipated increases in ORV use.

Response: The BLM is unaware of the specific case examples where trail construction invited "unanticipated" OHV use. Reference examples would be acknowledged if they had been provided.

RECREATION

9. Comment: If it has been illegal to use these vehicles in this area and these people have done this in obvious violation of the law how can the BLM in good conscience even consider allowing this proposal to move forward?

Response: It has not and is not currently illegal to utilize motorized equipment within the Wilson Creek area. The White River Resource Management Plan identifies this area as open to cross country motorized travel for the period of May 1 through September 30 and limited to existing roads and trails for the period of October 1 through April 30 of each year.

10. Comment: This travel management plan is mainly pushed by out-of –town and out- of-state entities.

Response: The BLM initiated the plan as a result of degradation to natural resources, access issues, recreation opportunities, and public safety.

11. Comment: The EA needs to compare estimated implementation costs with reasonable budget forecasts for the BLM.

Response: It is not possible to predict what the budget will be in future years. Funding for projects is competed for nationally through the Challenge Cost Share and Cooperative Conservation Initiative Agreements. Requirements for these types of funding are; an environmental assessment must be in place, and the recipient budget must account not only for BLM funds but also the recipient's 1:1 matching contribution. The non-Federal match can be in the form of supplies, services, or funding. In addition, the recipient's valuation of supplies and/or services must be fair and reasonable.

12. Comment: Develop an education and outreach plan designed to educate citizens about the need for travel and recreation planning and management, personal responsibility, the impacts of inappropriate recreation, etc.

Response: Along with on-site directional signage two kiosks will be installed with a Wilson Creek Area Map as well as educational information such as that distributed by "Tread Lightly!".

WILDLIFE

13. Comment: The seasonal closure should extend from December through July. An extended closure is necessary to protect the full range of life-cycle needs of the area's numerous wildlife species. This life cycle needs include reproduction, forage, cover security and migration.

Response: There is no strong basis on which to institute seasonal vehicle closures between December and April, when deep and drifted snows limit big game utility and the potential for vehicle use. The incidental and dispersed vehicle use that this area currently sustains from May through August does not warrant seasonal use restrictions. We believe this level of summer recreation use does not interfere with habitat function or compromise animal condition within the project vicinity.

14. Comment: The EA states that raptor inventories are not complete that will show impacts of relocating existing user created ATV trails into the proposed new locations." "The decision should not proceed until these determinations are known.

Response: See response to comment fifteen below concerning BLM survey results.

15. Comment: Because of the small size and ecological sensitivity of Wilson Creek, the area should be closed to over night camping.

Response:. Under prevailing use, the area's ecological functions are currently intact. BLM field inspections found no evidence of ATV use through late July. Particularly with respect to big game, the current availability of ATV access has not deterred persistent summer use by elk that has resulted in strong localized streambank damage. There appears to be no basis from which to expect increased use in response to this action. The actual number of road miles will decrease, the ease of trail use would not differ substantively, and proposed trail construction would merely duplicate access that is currently available. The term "ecological sensitivity" has no specific links to overnight camping impacts therefore closing the area to camping has no scientific basis.

16. Comment: It is essential that any trail building or other such activities which would be disruptive to the breeding activities of this species (Brewer's sparrow), be conducted outside the breeding season.

Response: Although Brewer's sparrow and Virginia's warbler are mentioned as occurring in the Wilson Creek project area, their respective habitats (i.e., big sagebrush, mountain shrub, and mixed shrub) would not be involved with trail construction (solely in aspen, with exception of where trail would follow existing roads or powerline right-of-ways).

17. Comment: And other disruptive activities such as the concentrated use by the public for big game season, especially if OHVs will be allowed in the area, should not be allowed until mid-August (Brewer's sparrow) or mid-October (Virginia's warbler) to allow nestling birds to fledge successfully and disperse to safer areas.

Response: Based on our local data as well as information from the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas effort specific to our area, we believe virtually all the primary nesting efforts of Brewer's sparrow and Virginia's warbler are finalized by mid-July. Our local records also indicate that these warblers and sparrows are grouped and moving by the end of August. Although there may be late and/or renest attempts, based on the limited amount of shrubland habitat involved along designated OHV trails (collectively less than 10 acres based on 100' disturbance width, Alternative A), we do not believe the potential for adverse influence is sufficient to warrant a travel restriction during Colorado's big game hunting seasons. There is no clear consequence in infrequent and localized avoidance of human activities along roads during fall movements. We do not believe this proposal would have any positive or negative influence on populations of Brewer's sparrow or Virginia's warbler even at the most local of scales.

18. Comment: Develop a restoration plan that specifies how and when recreation-related damage (e.g. two-tracks over cryptogamic soils or wetlands) will be mitigated through state-of-the-art restoration techniques, and how the agency will monitor restoration progress and prevent reoccurrence of damage.

Response: As stated in the document, specific OHV related impacts (such as old routes) will be rehabilitated. Rehabilitated routes will be physically closed and signed.

19. Comment: For example, even though the BLM is planning to move the recently pioneered ATV routes to slightly less impacting locations, the routes will still be located in prime raptor nesting habitat and aspen stands that support numerous bird species…"

Response: The proposed ATV routes were surveyed by a BLM biologist in June and July 2004. Approximately 4,250 feet of trail construction would occur in aspen communities. The bulk of affected woodlands consist of open, submature stands (i.e., 2,850 feet of trail or 67% in sub-8" diameter, 30 to 40 feet in height) and dense pole-size regeneration (i.e., 800 feet of trail or 19% in 3-4 inch diameter, 20 feet in height) with limited utility for raptor nesting (e.g., no sizable

lateral branching for nest support) or cavity development (e.g., vigorous with little disease or structural damage). About 600 feet of trail traverses mature aspen growth (10-14 inch diameter, 40-50 feet in height) that held potential as suitable nest substrate. BLM found no evidence of recent or past raptor nesting activity in affected stands. No cavities occupied by woodpeckers, including red-naped sapsuckers, were found within about 100 feet either side of the trail proposal. The nearest purple martin nesting was found about 0.25 mile downstream of this project; characteristically along an intermittent stream and a series of beaver dams.

20. Comment: Scheduling route construction after July 15 to avoid nesting season does not address the impacts of permanent year-round ATV trails on nesting habitat. The BLM must complete baseline wildlife inventories, if this has not been done already, before making any determinations about the impacts of the proposed action.

Response These inventories have been completed and are discussed above. Aspen habitats that would be influenced by new trail construction are not considered prime nest habitat for raptors, martin, or sapsuckers because of substrate (e.g., age class of stands) or topographic position. At prevailing levels of use, ATV use during the nesting season is momentary and infrequent and would not be considered sufficient to adversely disrupt nesting functions (e.g., nest abandonment or prolonged absences of adult birds in tending young, premature fledging of young), particularly cavity-dwelling birds.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

21. Comment: The BLM should develop a monitoring plan linked to the defined indicators and standards.

Response: As part of the NEPA process, an implementation and monitoring plan will be developed. At this time, some type of monitoring plan to identify the numbers of users (motorized and non-motorized) and to monitor new trail proliferation, will be developed.

22. Comment: If the BLM decides to proceed with the proposed action, the agency also needs to establish contingency measures that will be implemented at the first sign that use is causing degradation.

Response Colorado's Public Land Health Standards were applied to this action; any subsequent change in use would be subject to reevaluation of the land health findings. It is important to note that this project involves about 0.2% of the White River Field Office's land base, and special or more intensive monitoring efforts are not indicated at this time.

STATE OF COLORADO

Bill Owens, Governor
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Bruce McCloskey, Director
6060 Broadway
Denver, Colorado 80216
Telephone: (303) 297-1192

For Wildlife-
For People

June 21, 2004

Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
Chris Ham, Outdoor Recreation Planner
73544 Highway 64
Meeker, CO 81641

Re: Wilson Creek Transportation Management Plan EA

Dear Mr. Ham:

This letter is a response to your request for comments on the evaluation of the travel management plan for the Wilson Creek Area. The Colorado Division of Wildlife (Division) recognized the significance of evaluating travel in this area.

The Division believes Alternative #1 will provide the best solution to current travel issues. The Division also recognized the significance of this area as it relates to hunter recreation and harvest. The Division believes Alternative #1 will continue to allow for adequate hunter access to the area. The Division also believes improved signage will alleviate hunter conflicts with adjacent private property. Adequate signage should also identify established roads and reduce vegetation damage.

The Division would like to thank the BLM for the opportunity to provide comments on this evaluation. If you have further comments or questions regarding these comments, please feel free to contact District Wildlife Manager Jon E. Wangnild at 970-878-6067.

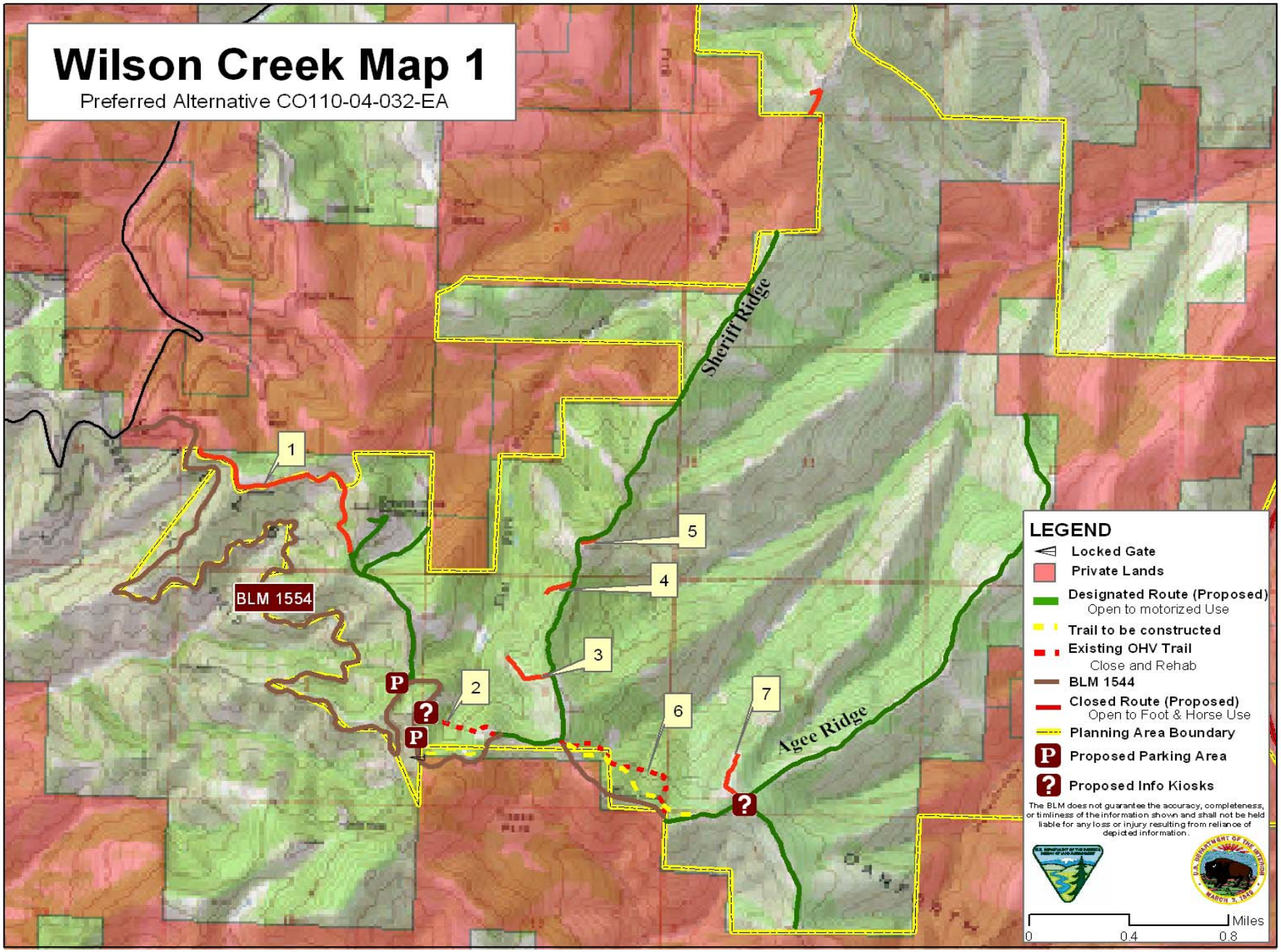
Sincerely,

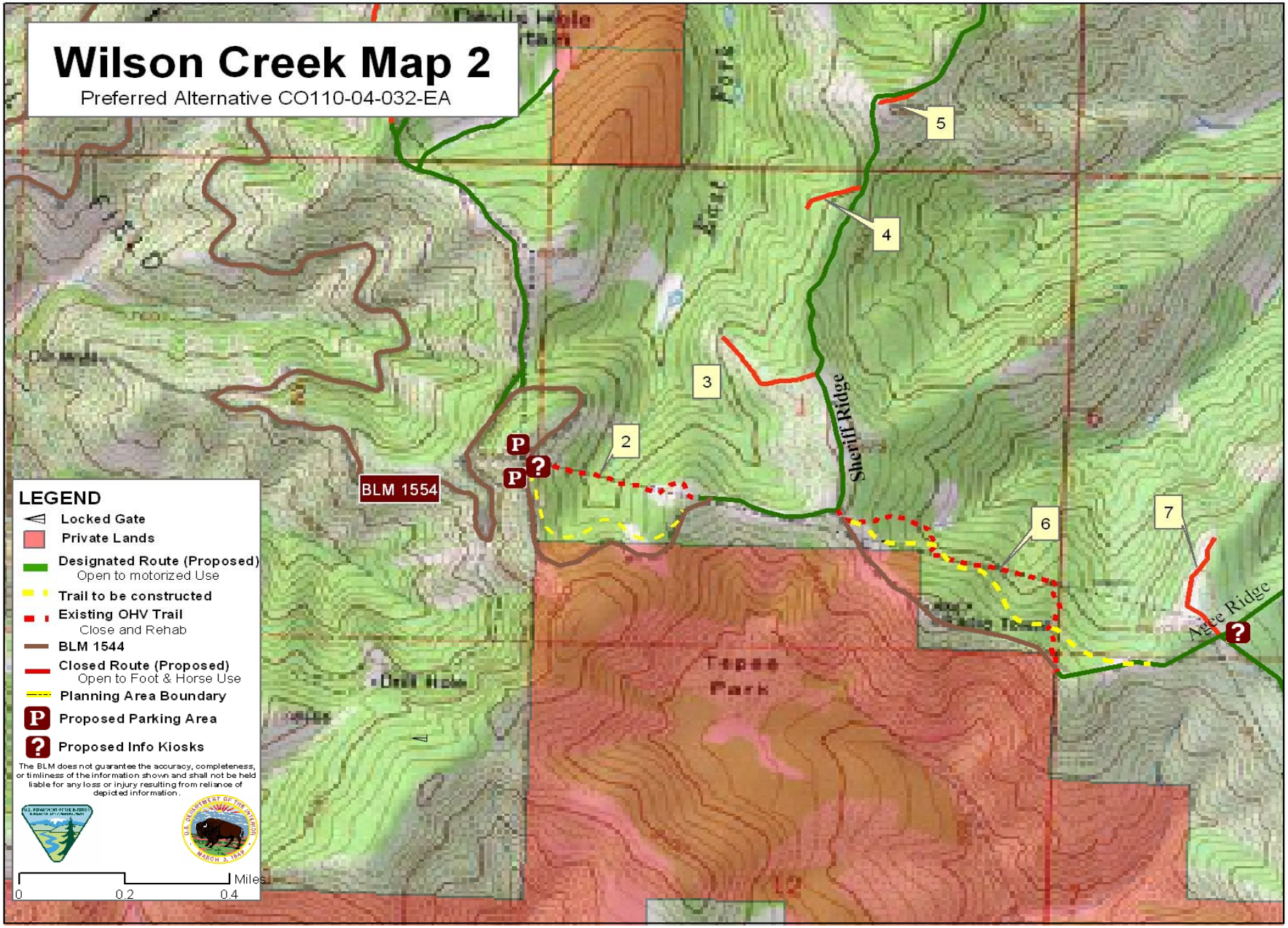
Dan Prenzlow by Bailey Franklin (Acting AWM)

Dan Prenzlow, Area Wildlife Manager, Meeker

cc: Jon E. Wangnild, DWM, Meeker North
Brad Petch, Habitat Biologist, Meeker
Ron Velarde, West Regional Manager
John Smeltzer, Public Services Administrator

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, Russell George, Executive Director
WILDLIFE COMMISSION, Philip James, Chair • Jeffrey Crawford, Vice-Chair • Brad Phelps, Secretary
Members, Bernard Black • Tom Burke • Rick Enstrom • Claire O' Neal • Robert Shoemaker • Ken Torres
Ex Officio Members, Russell George and Don Ament


Wilson Creek Map 1
Preferred Alternative CO110-04-032-EA
Sheriff Ridge
Agee Ridge
BLM 1554
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
LEGEND
Locked Gate
Private Lands
Designated Route (Proposed)
Open to motorized Use
Trail to be constructed
Existing OHV Trail
Close and Rehab
BLM 1544
Closed Route (Proposed)
Open to Foot & Horse Use
Planning Area Boundary
Proposed Parking Area
Proposed Info Kiosks
The BLM does not guarantee the accuracy, completeness, or timliness of the information shown and shall not be held liable for any loss or injury resulting from reliance of depicted information.
Miles
0
0.4
0.8


Wilson Creek Map 2
Preferred Alternative CO110-04-032-EA
LEGEND
Locked Gate
Private Lands
Designated Route (Proposed)
Open to motorized Use
Trail to be constructed
Existing OHV Trail
Close and Rehab
BLM 1544
Closed Route (Proposed)
Open to Foot & Horse Use
Planning Area Boundary
Proposed Parking Area
Proposed Info Kiosks
The BLM does not guarantee the accuracy, completeness, or timliness of the information shown and shall not be held liable for any loss or injury resulting from reliance of depicted information.
0
0.2
0.4
Miles
BLM 1554
Sheriff Ridge
Tepee Park
Ayee Ridge
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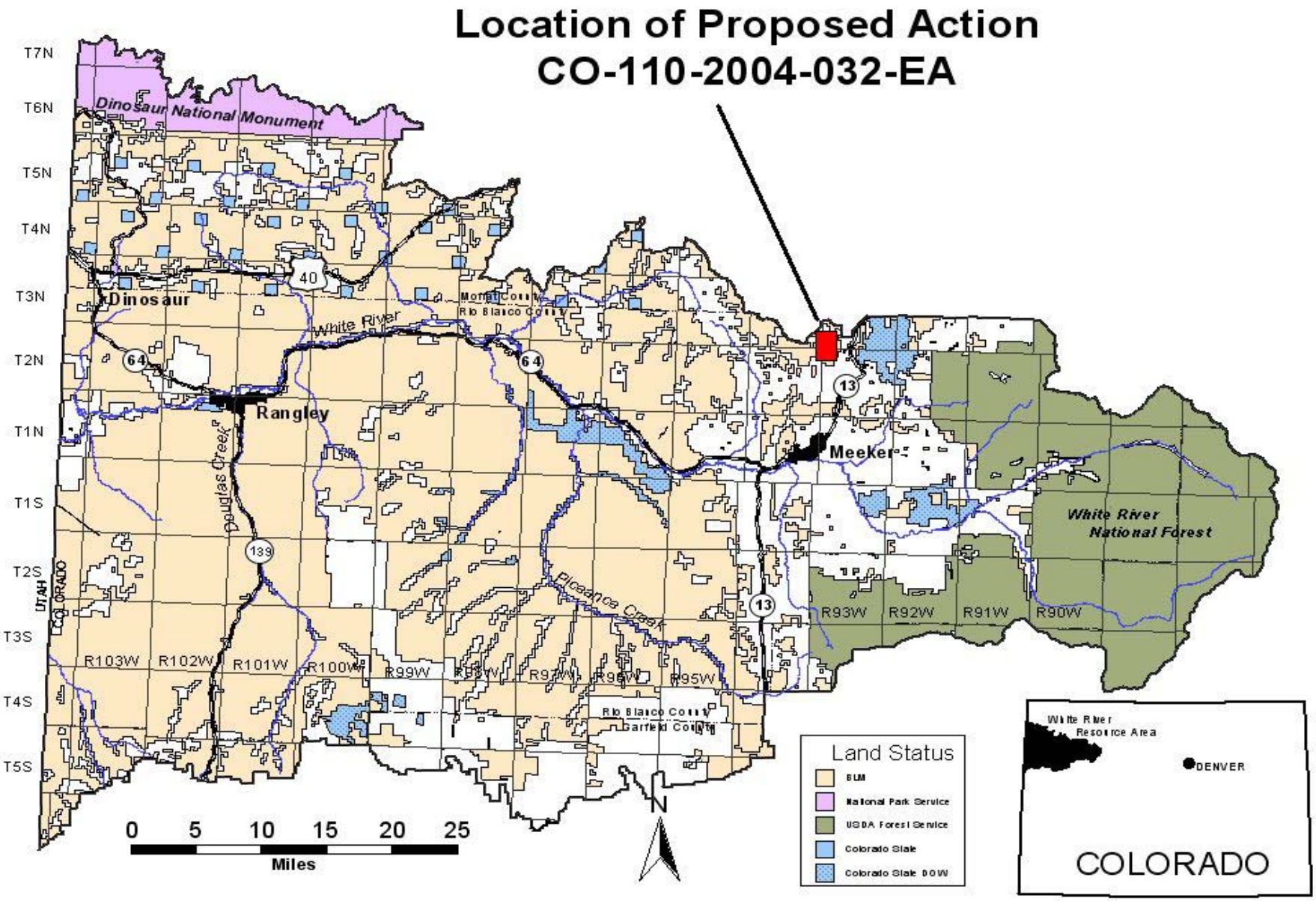
Location of Proposed Action
CO-110-2004-032-EA
T7N
T6N
T5N
T4N
T3N
T2N
T1N
T1S
T2S
T3S
T4S
T5S
Dinosaur National Monument
Dinosaur
Rangley
Meeker
White River
Douglas Creek
Piceance Creek
White River National Forest
Moffat County
Rio Blanco County
Garfield County
UTAH
COLORADO
R103W
R102W
R101W
R100W
R99W
R98W
R97W
R96W
R95W
R93W
R92W
R91W
R90W
40
64
13
139
0 5 10 15 20 25
Miles
N
Land Status
BLM
National Park Service
USDA Forest Service
Colorado State
Colorado State DOW
White River Resource Area
DENVER
COLORADO