

Signal Peak Trails Environmental Assessment Alternatives Summary

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

Located in close proximity to the City of Gunnison, Western State Colorado University, and outlying neighborhoods, the Signal Peak area has long attracted recreators. Hikers, equestrians, runners, mountain bikers, hunters, motorized users, and target shooters represent a broad spectrum of recreators with a long history of use on the landscape. This recreation has occurred along with other valid uses such as mineral exploration from the 1930's through the 1950's, training for collegiate sports, and historic and current livestock grazing. Today this landscape has been partially modified by fences and powerlines as well as bearing the marks of decades of dispersed recreation and human use; and yet a sense of wildness and solitude pervades. The Signal Peak area has long served as a quick escape for Gunnison residents and college students seeking fresh air and perspective in the wide open space of the Gunnison Country.

The project area contains one active Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek, as well as critical winter range for mule deer and Rocky Mountain elk. The Gunnison Sage-Grouse is classified as a threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Mule deer and elk rely on south facing aspects of the project area into the spring months to survive and recover from Gunnison winters.

Due to its proximity to the City of Gunnison and Western State Colorado University, the Signal Peak area has seen a steady and increasing number of recreators accessing their public lands. Recognizing this, the Signal Peak area was identified as an "Urban Interface Recreation Area" in the Gunnison Sage-Grouse Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA, 2013). A stated goal of that document was to strike a "practical compromise" to balance wildlife and recreation needs.

Signal Peak contains 7.8 miles of open non-motorized system trails, as well as 53 miles of high clearance roads open to all uses. In addition to these routes are 140 miles of closed routes (open to foot and horse traffic unless otherwise posted, per the 2010 Gunnison Basin Travel Management Plan), including 7.7 miles of trails; most in existence since the 1990's, that see a high level of mountain bike use. These 7.7 miles of trails, along with an additional 37.6 miles of proposed new construction were submitted to the BLM Gunnison Field Office in January of 2017 as part of Gunnison Trails' Signal Peak Master Trails Plan. The Gunnison Trails Signal Peak Master Trails Plan proposal was subsequently modified by BLM due to some conflicts with existing guidance (see Section 2.5, Plan Conformance Review for further information). Among other things, conceptual trails were removed from further consideration to bring the overall open/closed mileage total into compliance with the Proposed Condition identified in the Gunnison Sage-Grouse Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) while still providing an appropriate spectrum of trail experiences, loop options, and connectivity.

The key issues identified through public scoping that may drive alternative development for this Environmental Assessment are related to Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation and the management of seasonal habitat important to wintering big game. Other preliminary issues include trail location and trail use, and the consideration of connected actions such as parking and camping within the project area.

1.2. PURPOSE AND NEED

The need for the action is to define a sustainable recreation environment that satisfies current and future needs of trail users and other recreators while protecting natural values. The purpose of the action is to respond to a proposal from Gunnison Trails to construct a non-motorized single-track trail system within the Signal Peak area northeast of Gunnison.

1.3. DECISION TO BE MADE

BLM will determine route-by-route trail locations, mode of travel, and season of use.

BLM will determine associated facility development on BLM lands.

BLM will determine whether dispersed camping restrictions (i.e. "Day Use" designation) would be appropriate for all or part of the project area.

1.4. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The following tribes were notified of the upcoming Signal Peak project via certified letter and map package in March of 2013: the Ute Indian Tribe, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, and the Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe. They were asked to identify traditional cultural places or any other areas of traditional cultural importance that need to be considered within the area of potential effect. The BLM did not receive any comments or concerns from the three tribes.

A Public Meeting was held on April 27, 2017 to discuss the proposed action. BLM accepted public comments on the proposed action until May 22, 2017.

Public involvement is ongoing for this project.

1.5. ISSUES AND CONCERNS

1.5.1 ISSUES TO BE ANALYZED

1. **Big Game Habitat/Wintering Wildlife** – Southern exposures in the project area are crucial to wintering deer and elk – particularly in severe winters – as snow depths at higher elevations limit access to food plants. What effect would the proposed action have on wintering wildlife? Northern exposures in the project area have value as summer habitat for mule deer. What effect would the proposed action have on the viability of year round big game habitat in the project area? What effect would the proposed action have on the proliferation of invasive weeds and their impacts to wildlife habitat in the project area?

2. **Gunnison Sage-Grouse** - In 2000 the Gunnison Sage-Grouse was recognized as a distinct species from the Greater Sage-Grouse that occurs in scattered populations in the western U.S. Both species are declining but the Gunnison Sage-Grouse has a much smaller range limited to southwest Colorado and a small portion of southeast Utah. This range has been shrinking over the years and the population of the bird in the remaining habitat has also been declining. The Gunnison Basin has the largest remaining population of this species. How can BLM provide for habitat conservation, yet at the same time provide for recreation values?

3a. Trail Use/Recreator Access – BLM system trails within the project area are currently managed for non-motorized uses. Access into the area from adjacent portals (WSCU, City, County) in the urban interface are also non-motorized. However, system roads in the project area do see some motorized recreation use; predominantly as a connector to other points on the broader landscape. What uses will be allowed on any new routes to be considered within the project area?

3b. Trail/Facility Location and Design – After consideration of resource parameters and project sideboards (avoidance of sensitive wildlife habitat, adherence to mileage limitations in the CCA), where should BLM consider development of trailheads, parking, and regulatory signage/management controls? What affect would the proposed action have on Gunnison and outlying neighborhoods as a place to live?

2.0. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ACTION ALTERNATIVES

2.0.1. In all alternatives except the No Action Alternative, all trail construction would follow International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) trail guidelines and standards to provide high quality trails. These include but are not limited to:

1. A trail's grade should not exceed half the grade of the hillside or side slope where it is located unless located on a suitable surface (i.e. bedrock);
2. An average trail grade of 10% or less is most sustainable;
3. Maximum trail grade should not exceed 10-20% and should be based on considerations such as soil type, number and type of users, and annual rainfall;
4. Frequent grade reversals (such as rolling dips, drainage dips, etc.) should be used to promote drainage of water; and
5. Trail tread should be out sloped where appropriate to encourage water to sheet across and off of the trail.

2.0.2. In all alternatives except the No Action Alternative, construction activities requiring vegetation disturbance would be avoided May 15th to July 15th. This is the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds.

2.0.3. In all alternatives except the No Action Alternative, fence crossing locations, including gates and rollovers, would be identified with input from livestock grazing operators.

2.0.4. In all alternatives except the No Action Alternative, a trail stewardship/adoption program would be developed to ensure that appropriate maintenance, as well as trail short cutting and illegal trail building are addressed promptly. BLM would work with partners to prevent the spread of noxious weeds within the project area.

2.0.5. In all alternatives, the main access point to the Signal Peak trail system would be via an improved Trailhead facility at Mountaineer Bowl on WSCU Campus property.

2.0.6. In all alternatives, the area immediately surrounding Signal Peak (9,042 ft.) would continue to be managed for non-motorized/non-mechanized uses.

2.0.7. In all alternatives, grooming of routes for winter recreation on BLM lands within the project area would be prohibited to protect wintering wildlife.

2.0.8. In all action alternatives, best management practices for trail layout would be observed. This includes avoidance of drainage bottoms and ridgelines for principle alignments, avoidance of saddles and decadent vegetation where practicable to minimize impact to wildlife habitat, avoidance of rare plant populations, and treatment and control of invasive weed populations prior to construction.

All ground disturbing activities are subject to Section 106 of the NHPA. Under the provision of Section 106 and its implementing regulations (36CFR800), the BLM is required to identify, evaluate, and mitigate effects to historic and prehistoric properties within the Area of Potential Effect for any undertaking. An intensive cultural inventory will be conducted over all ground disturbing project areas within the proposed analysis area. Results will be evaluated and mitigated so that effects and impacts of the undertaking will be minimized.

2.0.9. In all action alternatives, all trails on BLM lands in the system would be subject to a closure period that mirrors the current shed antler season closure enforced by Colorado Parks and Wildlife to benefit wintering wildlife. **Shed antler season closure dates are January 1st through April 30th, and then from legal sunset to 10am daily May 1st through May 15th.** In all action alternatives, this closure period could be extended during severe winter years based on the presence and condition of wintering big game animals, and modified accordingly to reflect emergency changes to shed antler collection dates. The trail closure applies to mechanized uses. In severe winters resulting in exceptional hardship or stress on wintering animals, the project area may be closed to all entry.

2.1. ALTERNATIVE A (PROPOSED ACTION) GUNNISON TRAILS MODIFIED PROPOSAL

Note: Alternative A (Proposed Action) was previously released for public comment in April of 2017.

The proposed action is to construct a community/destination mountain bike optimized trail system accessible from the town of Gunnison as well as Western State Colorado University and outlying neighborhoods. The trail system would utilize 7.8 miles of existing system single-track trails as well as adopt, retrofit, or realign 7.7 miles of existing single-track routes. In addition to the above, the proposed action is to design and construct approximately 20 miles of new trails utilizing sustainable trail building techniques.

The proposed action would:

Subject all trails on BLM lands in the system to a closure period that mirrors the shed antler season closure enforced by CPW to benefit wintering wildlife. **Shed antler season closure dates are January 1st through April 30th, and then from legal sunset to 10am daily May 1st through May 15th.** This closure period could be extended during severe winter years based on the presence and condition of wintering big game animals, and modified accordingly to reflect emergency changes to shed antler collection dates. The trail closure applies to mechanized uses. In severe winters resulting in exceptional hardship or stress on wintering animals, the project area may be closed to all entry.

Require that dogs be on leash from March 15th to May 15th within the project area for Gunnison Sage-Grouse and wintering wildlife conservation.

Continue to prohibit unauthorized motorized travel March 15th to May 15th within the project area for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Subject new trails in areas sensitive to lekking Gunnison Sage-Grouse to closure March 15th to May 15th.

Retrofit or realign the existing trail connecting Cranor Hill Ski Area to the Ridge Trail. **Cranor Hill Trail** would be closed March 15th to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Adopt and maintain the existing **Rasta Gulch Trail**. Rasta Gulch Trail would be closed March 15 to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Close and restore the existing Chicken Scratch Trail to avoid Gunnison Sage-Grouse brood-rearing habitat and improve drainage function. Construct a realignment of **Chicken Scratch Trail** utilizing east facing slopes within the same drainage. The realigned Chicken Scratch Trail would be closed March 15th to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Construct a reroute of a dangerous and unsustainable section of the **Ridge Trail** above the old Chicken Scratch alignment. This reroute would utilize southern exposures below the ridgeline feature west of Signal Peak.

Close and restore the existing Shoelace Trail. Shoelace is an existing user created trail located on the north-facing slope on the ridge feature immediately west of Signal Peak.

Close and restore the existing Lost Canyon Trail. Relocate the trail to sustainable grades connecting the Ridge Trail to Lost Canyon Road. The realigned **Lost Canyon Trail** would be closed March 15 to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Adopt, retrofit, and maintain the existing **North Woods Trail** segments (including connectors) and join them via newly constructed segments to connect to Sheep Gulch Road (BLM 3108a).

Construct a new trail connecting Sheep Gulch Road to Lost Canyon Road. **Sheep Gulch Trail** would be accessed via a parking site/trailhead to be located on Lost Canyon Road.

Construct the **South Rim Trail** traversing below Signal Peak and Signal Mesa to connect to BLM 3211c.

Construct the **Southern Cross Trail** from the eastern terminus of the Contour Trail to connect to the South Rim Trail.

Adopt, retrofit, and maintain the existing **Music Rocks Trail**.

Construct the **Three Canyons Trail** as an advanced level trail below the South Rim/Music Rocks Trails connecting to BLM 3211b.

Construct the **Midland Trail** connecting BLM 3123 to the Broadcaster/Three Canyons area.

Construct the **Broadcaster Trail** (identified as "descent 3" in Gunnison Trail's Signal Peak Master Plan); a descent-optimized route connecting BLM 3211b to the Contour Trail.

New Trail Mileage Total: 28

Place user signage at trail entrances and intersections, as well as regulatory map kiosks at key entrance points. Key Entrance points would include the Radio Tower area above Western State Colorado

University, the Sheep Gulch conceptual trailhead, and the powerline intersection behind the Tomichi Heights subdivision.

2.2. ALTERNATIVE B (BLM Preferred) – See Map

Alternative B incorporates many of the elements of the Proposed Action (as well as items common to all action alternatives identified in section 2.0), but with a focused reduction in trail miles and an enhanced seasonal closure to benefit wintering wildlife and Gunnison Sage-Grouse. Alternative B recognizes that new trails will have some draw as a regional destination, but takes steps to preserve Community Trail System characteristics. Alternative B was developed with input from the following cooperating agencies: The City of Gunnison, Gunnison County, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Western State Colorado University. This alternative would:

- Subject all trails on BLM lands in the system to a closure period that mirrors the shed antler season closure enforced by CPW to benefit wintering wildlife. **Shed antler season closure dates are January 1st through April 30th, and then from legal sunset to 10am daily May 1st through May 15th.** This closure period could be extended during severe winter years based on the presence and condition of wintering big game animals, and modified accordingly to reflect emergency changes to shed antler collection dates. The trail closure applies to mechanized uses. In severe winters resulting in exceptional hardship or stress on wintering animals, the project area may be closed to all entry.
- This alternative would also institute an **area closure** to benefit Gunnison Sage-Grouse from 3/15 – 5/15 in the Ridge Trail West area.
- Eliminate proposed trailhead development along BLM 3110 (Lost Canyon Road) by removing conceptual trails that connect to BLM 3110. Consequently, the project area boundary would be adjusted south to exclude Lost Canyon Road and west to exclude Cabin Creek Road from the project area.
- Avoid site specific impacts associated with competitive events, as well as the increased visibility and visitation resulting from those events by prohibiting competitive events within the project area; other than those that are affiliated with WSCU or Gunnison school sponsored cross country or mountain bike teams. No commercial use or competitive events would be considered during established closure periods (wintering wildlife or Gunnison Sage-Grouse; 1/1 – 5/15).
- Limit site specific and neighborhood impacts associated with camping by managing the area for day use/no overnight camping. Exceptions may include dispersed camping for legal hunting during hunting seasons.
- Limit neighborhood impacts by encouraging trail access to the area via an improved trailhead located on WSCU property and other adjacent portals (WSCU, City, County) in the urban interface. BLM system roads in the project area would be maintained to their current standards. Secondary trailheads on BLM lands would have basic features to contain resource impacts as well as adequate directional, regulatory, and informational signage.

Alternative B Trail Development

Alternative B limits trail development on the north side of the Project Area by removing Lost Canyon (2.2), Sheep Gulch (1 & 2.1), and North Woods (1.7) trail segments from the Proposed Action. “Lost Sheep” was added to increase route connectivity utilizing existing system roads by adding a connector between BLM 3218 and BLM 3108a (a trail alignment between these routes was proposed in Gunnison Trails’ original ‘Master Plan’ proposal). Lost Sheep would be open to motorized single-track users. These alterations were in response to landowner comments and wildlife habitat concerns that were specific to the North side of the project area.

Trail development on the South side of the project area is unchanged from the proposed action but with 3 notable exceptions; the South facing re-route of the Ridge Trail west of Signal Peak is replaced with “Shoelace,” an existing route. Shoelace would be adopted and retro-fitted to address drainage issues, and be closed through May 15th annually for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation. The 1.4 mile segment connecting “Three Canyons” to BLM 3211b would be eliminated from this alternative due to wildlife habitat and livestock grazing concerns.

A non-motorized single track connector (identified as “Tomichi Point” on the Alternative B Map) would be constructed from the Eastern terminus of ‘South Rim’ trail at BLM 3211c to bypass a steep section of road and connect to BLM 3211c1.

Alternative B would:

Subject Ridge Trail West and adjoining trails to an area closure 3/15 to 5/15 for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation. **Ridge Trail West** would be closed to all uses March 15th to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Retrofit or realign the existing trail connecting Cranor Hill Ski Area to the Ridge Trail. **Cranor Hill Trail** would be closed to all uses March 15th to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Adopt and maintain the existing **Rasta Gulch Trail**. Rasta Gulch Trail would be closed to all uses March 15th to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Close and restore the existing Chicken Scratch Trail to avoid Gunnison Sage-Grouse brood-rearing habitat and improve drainage function. Construct a realignment of **Chicken Scratch Trail** utilizing east facing slopes within the same drainage. The realigned Chicken Scratch Trail would be closed to all uses March 15th to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Construct a reroute of a dangerous and unsustainable section of the **Ridge Trail** above the old Chicken Scratch alignment. Ridge Trail West would be closed to all uses March 15th – May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Adopt and retrofit the existing **Shoelace Trail** to connect to the re-route section of Ridge Trail West. Shoelace is an existing user created trail located on the north-facing slope on the ridge feature immediately west of Signal Peak. Shoelace Trail would be closed to all uses March 15th – May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Adopt, retrofit, and maintain the existing **North Woods Trail** segments (including connectors) and join them via a newly constructed segment to BLM 3108a (a north to south road that adjoins BLM 3122 and BLM 3108).

Construct a new trail connecting BLM 3218 to BLM 3108a. **Lost Sheep Trail would be open to motorized single track uses.**

Construct a new trail connecting BLM 3211c to BLM 3211c1. **Tomichi Point Trail** would bypass a steep ridge line section of BLM 3211c.

Construct the **South Rim Trail** traversing the south aspect below Signal Peak and Signal Mesa to connect to BLM 3211c.

Construct the **Southern Cross Trail** from the eastern terminus of the Contour Trail to connect to the South Rim Trail.

Adopt, retrofit, and maintain the existing **Music Rocks Trail**.

Construct the **Midland Trail** connecting BLM 3123 to the Broadcaster/South Rim area.

Construct the **Broadcaster Trail** (identified as “descent 3” in Gunnison Trail’s Signal Peak Master Plan); a descent-optimized route connecting BLM 3211b to the Contour Trail.

The updated new trail mileage in Alternative B would be **21.6 miles**.

With the exception of Lost Sheep, all new Alternative B trails would be non-motorized. All forms of motorized travel, including e-bikes, would continue to be allowed on system roads. Per the Gunnison Basin Travel Management Plan, Foot and Horse use would continue to be allowed cross-country and on closed routes unless otherwise posted.

Alternative B Seasonal Closures

Alternative B Seasonal Closures by Use Type

Motorized: Closed from **1/1 – 5/15** for Winter Wildlife Management and Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation. This closure includes over snow motorized travel.

Mechanized: Closed from **1/1 - 4/30** annually for Winter Wildlife Management. **No Trail Use Prior to 10am 5/1-5/15.** An additional area closure applies to all uses in the Ridge Trail West area from 3/15 – 5/15 for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Foot/Horse: **No Use Prior to 10am 3/15-5/15.** No other restrictions, with the exception of an additional area closure which applies to all uses in the Ridge Trail West area from 3/15 – 5/15 for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Alternative B proposes an augmented annual seasonal closure of 1/1 through 4/30 to prevent unnecessary disturbances to wintering deer and elk. This seasonal closure would be in compliance with CO Shed Antler Restriction/Season dates, and would affect all BLM roads and trails in the project area. This alternative would:

- Close BLM roads in the project area to motorized use (including over snow travel by tracked vehicles) from 1/1 - 4/30 to prevent disturbance to wintering deer and elk. The wintering wildlife motorized closure period of 1/1 – 4/30 overlaps with the previously established Gunnison Sage-Grouse motorized closure of 3/15 – 5/15, effectively closing the area to unauthorized motorized use from 1/1 – 5/15.
- Close BLM roads and trails to mechanized use (i.e. mountain bikes) from 1/1 – 4/30 to prevent disturbance to wintering deer and elk. Road and trail closures could begin as early as 12/1 and be extended past 4/30 based on the presence and condition of wintering animals in non-typical years. Trails would be closed to mechanized use when sufficient snow accumulates to: a.) impede mechanized travel, b.) displace big game animals (mule deer and elk) to their winter range; or January 1, whichever comes first.

Alternative B would additionally close the area and all trails surrounding Ridge Trail West (west of Signal Peak) seasonally for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation. Ridge Trail West, Cranor Hill Trail, Shoelace Trail, Chicken Scratch Trail, and Rasta Gulch Trail would be **closed March 15th – May 15th to all uses** to prevent disturbance to Gunnison Sage-Grouse during lek season. This area closure would apply to BLM lands and would begin at the west entrance to Ridge Trail West (immediately North and East of the radio tower), to be bounded by the BLM boundary to the North, including Shoelace Trail, bounded by but not including BLM 3123 (Signal Peak Road) on the East, bounded by but not including BLM 3211 (powerline road) and the BLM boundary to the South.

To prevent disturbance to wintering wildlife and Gunnison Sage-Grouse, dogs would be required to be on leash from 1/1 – 5/15.

2.3 NO ACTION (see Signal Peak Trails Existing Condition map)

The No Action Alternative maintains the existing condition of the Signal Peak project area.

There are 7.8 miles of system trails currently open to foot, horse, and bicycles (Ridge Trail West, Contour Trail West and East).

7.7 miles of existing trails (Rasta Gulch, Cranor Hill, Chicken Scratch, Shoelace, North Woods 1 & 2, Lost Canyon, and Music Rocks) would be closed to mountain bikes. Per the Gunnison Basin Travel Management Plan, these routes would remain open to foot and horse traffic unless otherwise posted. These existing trails would remain in their current alignments and not be subject to maintenance.

Current seasonal (Gunnison Sage-Grouse) closures would remain in effect: all routes would be closed to motorized use 3/15 – 5/15 for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation. Roads could be closed earlier to prevent damage during spring snow melt. Foot, Horse, and bicycle use would continue to be voluntarily restricted until 9am daily from 3/15 – 5/15 for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Per the Gunnison Basin Travel Management Plan, camping would continue to be allowed on existing routes within 300 feet of designated routes.

Figure 1. Comparison of Alternatives

	Proposed Action	Alt B (BLM Preferred)	No Action
Seasonal Closures	1/1 – 3/15 trail closure. 3/15 – 5/15 motorized closure	1/1 – 4/30 trail closure. Area Closure 3/15 – 5/15 For BLM managed portion of Western Zone. No use prior to 10am 3/15 – 5/15.	3/15 – 5/15 closed to motorized use.
Dogs on Leash?	Yes. 3/15 – 5/15	Yes. 1/15 – 5/15	No restrictions
Camping?	No restrictions proposed	No camping except for during hunting season	No restrictions
Competitive Events	No restrictions proposed	No competitive events	No restrictions
Motorized Use	System Roads	System Roads and Lost Sheep Trail	System Roads
New Trail Mileage (including 7.7 miles of existing: Rasta, Chicken Scratch, etc.)	28	21.6	0

2.4 Alternatives Considered But Eliminated from Further Analysis

An alternative (Alternative C) was developed considering single track motorized use on new Alt B trails with no connection or conflict with system trails that are currently managed for non-motorized uses. South Rim, Music Rocks, Midland, Tomichi Point, Lost Sheep, and North Woods were identified as potential motorized single track routes. Alternative C was eliminated from further consideration (with the exception of Lost Sheep Trail) based on the following criteria:

1. Sphere of Influence. From a wildlife management standpoint, the original planning guidance from the Gunnison Basin Travel Management Plan and the Gunnison Sage-Grouse Candidate Conservation Agreement that reference development of a *non-motorized trail system* are based upon the rationale that recreational pursuits powered by a motor have the potential to impact more wildlife over a greater distance per outing than human powered recreation. These wildlife impacts are based on human presence as well as decibel level.
2. Terrain/soil type. Soil types in the project area are of a clay composite that becomes impassable to non-motorized users when it is saturated. Motorized use when these soil types are saturated could result in a high level of trail damage, more so considering that the trail layouts proposed by Gunnison Trails were not developed with motorized use in mind. Given the steep side slopes of much of the project area, safely yielding trail right of way would also be difficult to the trail user when navigating two way traffic.
3. Infrastructure demand. Adjacent (non BLM) portals to the project area are managed for non-motorized trail access. While the majority of non-motorized users would utilize these adjacent portals to access the project area, higher demand would be placed upon secondary access points to accommodate motorized staging needs. Motorized staging could result in higher

vehicle traffic through residential neighborhoods, and higher demand for expanded parking and loading facilities.

2.5. Plan Conformance Review

Gunnison Resource Area Record of Decision, Approved Resource Management Plan, and Rangeland Program Summary (1993), Chapter 2 Description of the Approved [RMP], Standard Management for the [RMP], pg. 2-13. “Public lands not within a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) will make up the Gunnison Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA), and will be managed for a diversity of recreation opportunities.

Gunnison Resource Area Record of Decision, Approved Resource Management Plan, and Rangeland Program Summary (1993), Chapter 2 Description of the Approved [RMP], Standard Management for the [RMP], pg. 2-33, Management Unit 12 ‘elk and deer crucial winter range.’ The unit will be managed to improve habitat conditions and increase the production and diversity of shrub species in upland and riparian vegetative types to support wintering populations of deer and elk, and to help meet [CPW] long-range herd goals.”

“Activities that will result in unnecessary disturbances to big game will be excluded from December 1 through April 30.”

Pg. 2-34. “Motorized vehicular traffic on public lands in the unit north of US Highway 50, east of the Gunnison River and west of Quartz Creek will be limited to designated routes from December 1 through April 30, if necessary, due to big game herd concentrations or excessive snow depth, to prevent disturbance to wintering deer and elk.” *Map and table F-1 indicate Lost Canyon Road and Quartz Creek Road as the only designated routes within the area described.*

Gunnison Basin Federal Lands Travel Management Plan 2010, Environmental Effects of the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 5) pg. 221. “One system of new [mountain bike] trails would be in an area northeast of Gunnison between Gunnison and Cabin Creek. While the goal of this system of new non-motorized trails would be to provide trail loops of varied lengths, the exact location of these trails has not been determined. If viable routes can be found to avoid impacts to sage-grouse habitat and cultural resources, then approximately 20 to 25 miles of new trails open to mountain bikes, hikers, and horseback riders could be developed.”

Gunnison Basin Federal Lands Travel Management Plan 2010, Environmental Effects of the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 5) pg 222. “Hikers, runners, and horseback riders would continue to be able to use existing roads and trails open for public travel. In addition, although we would encourage these visitors to use roads and trails whenever possible, federal lands would continue to be open for cross-country travel by these users. Some existing trails would no longer be managed and maintained as system trails, but that would not restrict travel by these users.”

“If the proposed system of new single-track trails is approved and developed northeast of Gunnison, then it would be open to foot and horse use along with mountain bike use.”

Gunnison Basin Federal Lands Travel Management Plan 2010, Environmental Effects of the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 5) pg 222. “Access to dispersed camping would be allowed only on existing routes (existing as of January 1, 2010) within 300 feet of designated routes open for public travel.

Gunnison Basin Candidate Conservation Agreement Programmatic Biological Assessment: Gunnison Sage-grouse, Section 2.4 Affected Area, pg. 15. “...one existing and two conceptual Urban Interface Recreation Areas are located within Gunnison sage-grouse occupied habitat that would be managed for recreation use, including Hartman Rocks, Signal Peak, and Van Tuyl.”

Gunnison Basin Candidate Conservation Agreement Programmatic Biological Assessment: Gunnison Sage-grouse, Section 3.4.2, Effects Analysis: Urban Interface Recreation Areas, pg. 51. “Some new routes may be constructed within .6 miles of active leks, which could reduce the integrity of leks if non-natives become established along the routes and spread, and if predators use these routes during the lekking season.

“New routes within .6 miles of leks will be closed during the lekking season. The BLM will implement reroutes and decommission routes in close proximity to leks and within riparian areas, as well as routes that may be highly erosive and unsustainable. No off-site mitigation standards would be required in association with new routes.”

Gunnison Basin Candidate Conservation Agreement Programmatic Biological Assessment: Gunnison Sage-grouse, Section 6.1.2, Siting and Construction, pg. 89. “If research indicates additional restrictions are necessary to sustain the sage-grouse population, seasonal restrictions in identified seasonal grouse habitat may be applied to minimize disturbance during the following critical biological periods: nesting, brood rearing, or winter periods of use by grouse.”

“Avoid construction and ground-disturbing activities within .6 miles of a lek, with the following exceptions: Urban Interface recreation areas.”

Candidate Conservation Agreement for the Gunnison sage-grouse, *Centrocercus minimus* Gunnison Basin Population, Appendix B ‘Urban Interface recreation Areas,’ Part B., Signal Peak, pg. 77. “The Numbers: Current condition: 93 miles existing (open) and 140 miles (closed) = 233 miles of disturbance. Proposed condition: 121 miles of open routes, including up to approximately **28 miles** of new construction.”

To Comment: Comments will be accepted until Friday February 16, 2018 and can be mailed to the Gunnison Field Office, Attn: Jim Lovelace, 210 West Spencer Avenue, Suite A, Gunnison, CO 81230 or emailed to: blm_co_gfo_nepa_comments@blm.gov with “Signal Peak Trails Plan” referenced in the subject line.