

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management**

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**Finding of No Significant Impact  
and  
Decision Record  
Environmental Assessment  
DOI-BLM-UT-C030-2023-0017-EA**

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**October 2023**

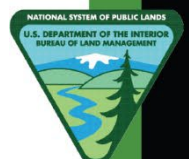
**St. George Field Office  
West Mountain Trail Construction**

**Location:**

Salt Lake Meridian, Utah

T. 42 S., R. 18 W., sections 8, 9, 17, 18, 20, 21, 29, 30

**St. George Field Office**  
345 East Riverside Drive  
St. George, Utah 84790  
Phone: 435-688-3200  
Fax: 435-688-3252



**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
**Environmental Assessment**  
***DOI-BLM-UT-C030-2023-0017-EA***  
***St. George Field Office West Mountain Trail Construction***

**INTRODUCTION**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-UT-C030-2023-0017-EA analyzing the potential impacts associated with the Proposed Action and the No Action alternative. The EA is incorporated by reference for this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based on my review of the attached Environmental Assessment and supporting documents, I have determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The Proposed Action is a site-specific action with minor, localized effects. None of the effects identified in the EA or in the below considerations are considered to be significant and none exceed the effects described in the St. George Field Office Resource Management Plan 1999 amended 2016 and 2021. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required as per section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The following are considered in my evaluation of the effects of the Proposed Action:

**1. Degree of short-and long-term effects**

Permanent disturbance for the proposed trail and trailheads totals 6.58 acres.

**Fish and Wildlife Excluding USFW Designated Species**

Habitat at the lower trailhead is classified as Mojave Mid-Elevation Mixed Desert Scrub and the area containing the two upper trailheads is classified as Great Basin Pinyon-Juniper Woodland. The proposed project area likely provides habitat for resident mammals, birds, and reptiles. Wildlife that typically would be found in this area include antelope ground squirrels, kangaroo rats, deer mice, desert wood rats, common ravens, wrens, house finches, side-blotched lizards, whiptails, and sagebrush lizards. Infrequently, larger animals such as raptors, coyotes, gray fox, and mule deer may pass through the project areas.

The project area also contains “winter substantial,” and “crucial winter” mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) habitat as well as “crucial year-long” habitat for desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*) (UDWR 2020, UDWR 2019). Therefore, it is likely that bighorn sheep use the area year-round, and mule deer utilizing the

area during the winter months, with critical foraging and lambing/fawning for both species occurring during the winter and early spring months. Overall impacts to most wildlife species within the project area would be direct and short-term. During construction, the surface disturbance and removal of vegetation could result in the potential disturbance or displacement of small mammals. Permanent loss (6.2 acres) of available forage to mule deer and bighorn sheep would result after trail construction. Ongoing recreational use may interrupt behaviors temporarily and seasonally.

To offset potential negative effects of the proposed project to the natural environment, specifically for mule deer and bighorn sheep, the BLM has coordinated with UDWR to develop specific actions to offset impacts. The resulting conservation measures and design features that BLM will commit to for this project were identified in the Environmental Protection Measures (see **Section 2.5**). The BLM also committed to avoiding construction during critical lambing season (**Section 2.5**).

### Migratory Birds

The elevational changes along the proposed trail footprint represents a variety of habitat types for migratory bird species protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Woodland bird species are found at the higher elevations, and downslope, bird species that inhabit scrublands are found.

During construction, direct impacts such as removal of large shrubs and other vegetation may impact nesting, and indirect impacts, such as noise and dust created from construction activities, may negatively impact migratory birds during breeding season by flushing them off their nests, directly killing birds, and causing abandonment and nest failure.

Once construction is completed, both nesting and non-nesting birds would return to the area. Subsequent ongoing recreational use may briefly interrupt behaviors temporarily and seasonally. Due to the more technical nature on the upper half of the proposed trail, it is expected that the number of users would be much less than compared to the lower half. It would therefore be assumed that impacts to bird species would be greater in the scrubland habitat as opposed to woodland habitat.

Environmental Protection Measures are included to protect migratory birds during construction of the Proposed Action (**Section 2.5**).

### Recreation

The proposed action would add a downhill-specific flow trail to Washington County's trail system, which is the one missing component to mountain biking opportunities in the St. George Field Office. Other than two-track motorized trails and short user-created trails to access climbing areas, the Beaver Dam Mountains do not contain a recreation trail network. With the exponential growth in

visitation, a trail system would have direct and positive impacts to recreational opportunities in the area.

Over time, the proposed trail would create a new opportunity for mountain biking, trail running, and other forms of trail-related recreation, and reduce proliferation of user made trails. This would have a positive impact on these types of recreation. New trails typically generate new interest, which will likely bring in a greater number of users.

### Cultural Resources

The Area of Potential Effects (APE) is the proposed project area, the trail 13.3 miles long, 3' wide trail, and the .62 acres identified for the trailheads, totaling 6.2 acres. The results of the literature search revealed low potential for cultural sites within the APE. A total of 30 miles of roads adjacent to the project area have previous Class III cultural resource survey. These surveys have resulted in 10 archeological sites being recorded. The most common site type is multicomponent with both prehistoric lithic artifacts and historic artifacts. Of the 10 sites, three are determined eligible for the National Register. The average slope for the APE is 23 degrees, with the steepest areas being up to 50 degrees. The naturally steep conditions and terrain of the APE do not present conditions conducive to long-term, significant archeological sites.

While the proposed action may have impacts, the effects would not diminish the integrity of the property's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association that make the property eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Class III intensive survey was conducted for all three proposed parking areas and no cultural resources were found.

Construction of the trail may result in encounters with cultural resources. However, the proposed ground disturbance is minimal. Scraping to ground surface at a width of 3' through an archeological site would not result in an adversely affect or remove a site's potential for eligibility to the National Register.

### Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

The proposed trail is entirely within the Beaver Dam North (UT-040-052) and Beaver Dam South (UT-040-129) units. Inventory data show that wilderness characteristics exist along the entire length of the proposed trail. Together, these two units contain 31,094 acres of Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC). To the casual observer, this area is a rugged Mojave Desert landscape that appears to be primarily affected by the forces of nature as opposed to human development. This area has ecological, geological, and supplemental values with opportunities for remote hiking, backpacking, climbing, hunting, horseback riding, rock-hounding, sightseeing, and photography.

The proposed action would have both short-term and long-term impacts to the wilderness characteristics present on 6.2 acres, or 0.02% of the two LWC units. However, the remaining 31,087 acres of the inventory units would retain their current levels of wilderness characteristics, including naturalness, solitude, and primitive and unconfined recreation.

## **2. Degree of both beneficial and adverse effects**

The EA considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the Proposed Action and No Action alternatives, as documented in Chapter 3 Affected Environment and Environmental Effects. The proposed Environmental Protection Measures in **Section 2.5** of the EA indicates how the BLM plans to avoid or minimize impacts to the resources and prevent undue degradation to the public lands.

## **3. Degree of effect on public health and safety**

Upon review of the EA and its supporting documents, indications are that the implementation of the Proposed Action will have no adverse effects upon the human environment and public safety.

## **4. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment**

The Proposed Action would not violate Federal, State, Tribal, or local laws protecting the environment as documented in **Section 1.5** of the EA.

## **APPROVAL**

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Jason R. West

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Date

St. George Field Office Manager

**DECISION RECORD**  
**Environmental Assessment**  
***DOI-BLM-UT-C030-2023-0017-EA***  
***St. George Field Office West Mountain Trail Construction***

**Introduction**

The St. George Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze impacts to the human environment related to the federal action of to align and construct up to 13.3 miles of new singletrack mountain bike downhill trail and three trailheads on West Mountain in Washington County, Utah.

**Description of the Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action consists of the construction of up to 13.3 miles of non-motorized, single-track downhill trail on West Mountain near the city of St. George, UT. The trail would begin on the east side of Hell Hole Pass and would weave along the southern cliff edge heading west. The trail then turns south and traverses rolling terrain. The trail ends just north of Welcome Springs. The Proposed Action is located on public lands managed by the BLM SGFO, in Washington County, Utah.

Trail construction would consist of removing brush and vegetation down to bare earth in a 3- foot-wide corridor. The total amount of disturbed surface area would be approximately 210,672 square feet (5.59 acres). In addition to the trail, there will be three trailheads all delineated by round-rail fencing. The Upper Parking Area will measure 0.05 acres, allowing for 7 parking spaces. The natural terrain of the upper trail portion is very steep and rugged and will have a Black Diamond rating. Due to the technical riding difficulties of this upper portion of the trail, this trailhead is expected to receive fewer users, which is why the proposed parking area is smaller than the other trailheads.

The Indian Spring/Middle Parking Area has two phases of construction planned. Phase I construction is for one parking area with up to 15 spaces and a bathroom. Phase II would be constructed if the BLM determines there is a need for additional parking. Phase II would add up to 15 parking spaces. The area of disturbance for both phases measure 0.12 acres, for a total of .24 acres.

The Lower Parking area would be 0.70 acres. Twenty-four parking spaces and a bathroom are planned.

The combined acreage of disturbed area for the three trailheads is approximately 0.99 acres total.

**Design Features**

Section 2.5 in the EA contains Environmental Protection Measures.

**Alternatives Considered in Detail**

The EA considered two alternatives: the No Action and the Proposed Action.

Under the Proposed Action, the BLM would construct up to 13.3 miles of downhill singletrack trail and three trailheads on West Mountain. This would result in 6.58 acres of permanent disturbance.

Under the No Action Alternative, the BLM would not align and construct the proposed West Mountain Trail. This would not respond to the need to meet the increased recreational needs in the area.

### **Alternatives Considered but Dismissed from Further Analysis**

One alternative alignment for the trail, described below, was considered but dismissed from further analysis.

One alignment that was considered, but not brought forward for detailed analysis was for a trail terminating at the Welcome Spring area adjacent to Beaver Dam Wash National Conservation Area. The BLM dismissed this alternative due to the potential for increased traffic on the Lytle Ranch Road that traverses the Beaver Dam Wash NCA and Welcome Spring roads. The parking areas for the Proposed Action were selected based on feasibility and after cultural and biological surveys were conducted in the area.

### **Plan Conformance and Consistency**

The Proposed Action is subject to the *St. George Field Office Record of Decision/Resource Management Plan* (SGFO RMP), approved in 1999 and amended in 2001, 2016, and 2021 (BLM 1999; amended 2001, 2016, 2021). The SGFO RMP includes the following applicable objectives:

- **Recreation Objective**

BLM's objective for recreation management will be to provide an array of quality recreation experiences within the agency's capability and logical recreation niche to meet the reasonable needs and expectations of residents and visitors from outside the area. Because the fiscal and staffing resources available to BLM are likely to remain inadequate to fully accomplish this objective, BLM will use innovative partnerships, pursue grant monies, and work with volunteers, organized user groups, and other recreation providers in developing and managing selected recreation opportunities on the public lands.

- **RC-02:** BLM will work collaboratively with affected user groups and organizations, state and local officials, and other interested parties in identifying existing and potential trails and use areas to meet public needs for hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, and equestrian use. Where appropriate, BLM will enter into cooperative agreements with applicable partners to plan for, implement, and maintain such areas. Site steward programs may also be employed to put volunteers on the ground to monitor use and resource conditions and provide assistance for sign installation and maintenance, visitor information, and detection of conflicts or violations. Where appropriate, BLM will work with partners to map and profile approved trails and develop guides to help users remain safe, well-prepared, and informed of special conditions needed to protect sensitive resources.

- **RC-04:** Mountain bike use on public lands will be subject to the open, limited, and closed designations described in Table 2-9 and shown on Map 2.11. Closures or limitations reflect the minimum constraints necessary to protect sensitive resources from impacts of sustained biking use over many years. In addition, the mountain bike closure on lands directly north of the town of Rockville, previously published in the Federal Register (Volume 61, Number 123, July 9, 1996), will remain in effect until site specific planning has been completed for that area.
- Fish and Wildlife
  - **FW-01:** BLM will manage suitable public land habitats for the recovery or reestablishment of native populations through collaborative planning with local, state, and federal agencies, user groups, and interested organizations. BLM will also seek to limit additional adverse impacts to crucial habitats on public lands from urbanization and encroachment to preserve the integrity of wildlife corridors and migration routes and access to key forage, nesting, and spawning areas.
  - **FW-04:** Desert bighorn sheep habitat in the Beaver Dam Mountains will continue to be managed in collaboration with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) to support the existing herd in that location

### **Public Involvement**

Information on the proposed project was posted on the BLM's ePlanning site on September 21, 2023 (<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2023398/510>). After publication of the draft EA, a 30-day public comment period was offered from September 21, 2023, to October 21, 2023. Eighty-two comment emails or letters were received. The substantive comments and the BLM's responses to substantive comments are contained in Appendix B of the EA.

### **Decision Record**

It is my decision to approve the construction of the West Mountain Trail as described in the Proposed Action of the EA. This decision shall take effect immediately upon the date it is signed by the Authorized Officer (43 CFR 4190.1 and 5003.1).

### **Rationale for Decision**

The decision to implement the Proposed Action, as described and analyzed in the EA, is made because it best meets the purpose and need for the project and conforms to the existing land use plan. No other alternative considered would be as effective as the Proposed Action at meeting the purpose and need. The primary purpose and key elements of the Proposed Action are encapsulated in the following purpose and need descriptions. The purpose of the proposed action is to provide a structured recreational opportunity to accommodate for the increasingly popular activities of mountain biking, hiking, and trail running and to help alleviate off-trail impacts to a multitude of resources resulting from unstructured recreational use in the area. The Trail Alliance of Southern Utah (TASU) has partnered with the BLM in support of this proposed new trail. The BLM and TASU

received a grant from the Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation to match BLM funds for trail construction.

The need for the proposed action is to respond to the increased recreational demand in the area by constructing a singletrack, downhill mountain bike trail in the western part of the county. The proposed mountain bike trail also embodies the commitment of BLM's recreation program, which is to enhance recreational opportunities, support strong local economies, and public land conservation. Additionally, the Proposed Action would reduce stressors of off trail impacts by providing a structured recreational trail. If permitted, construction of the Proposed Action would begin in spring of 2024.

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Jason R. West  
St. George Field Office Manager

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Date

### **Protest/Appeal**

This decision shall take effect immediately upon the date it is signed by the Authorized Officer and shall remain in effect while any appeal is pending unless the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) issues a stay (43 CFR 2801.10(b)). Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of the decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at St. George Field Office, 345 E Riverside drive, St. George, Utah 84790. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St. Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.

If you wish to file a petition for stay pursuant to 43 CFR Part 4.21(b), the petition for stay should accompany your notice of appeal and shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
- (2) The likelihood of the appellants success on the merits,
- (3) The likelihood of irreparable harm to the appellant or resources if the stay is not granted, and
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

If a petition for stay is submitted with the notice of appeal, a copy of the notice of appeal and petition for stay must be served on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, and with the IBLA at the same time it is filed with the Authorized Officer.

A copy of the notice of appeal, any statement of reasons and all pertinent documents must be served on each adverse party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken and on the Office of the Regional Solicitor, U.S. Department of the Interior, 6201 Federal Building, 125 South State Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84138-1180, not later than 15 days after filing the document with the Authorized Officer and/or IBLA.