



# Draft Decision Notice

Magnolia Non-Motorized Trails  
USDA Forest Service  
Boulder Ranger District, Roosevelt National Forest Service  
Boulder and Gilpin Counties, Colorado

August 2016

## INTRODUCTION

This draft Decision Notice documents my intended decision and my rationale for approving the proposed Magnolia Non-Motorized Trails project. My decision is based on and supported by the August 2016 Magnolia Non-Motorized Trails Project Environmental Assessment (EA). The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) included in the EA, supports the determination that the alternative that I intend to select is not anticipated to have a significant impact on the human or natural environment and therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required.

## Location

The Project Area totals approximately 6,000 acres on the Boulder Ranger District of the Roosevelt National Forest in Boulder and Gilpin Counties, Colorado. The project occurs predominantly on National Forest System (NFS) lands, but there are interspersed private and Boulder County lands. The project area is on both sides of the intersection of Highway 72/119 (Peak-to-Peak Highway) and Magnolia Road. The western portion of the intersection is known locally as Haul Road. The eastern portion is also along Magnolia Road known as Highway 132. This project area is located between the town of Nederland to the north and the town of Rollinsville to the south. The project extends south to Gilpin County Road 16 and west to private lands. The area location is in both Boulder and Gilpin Counties: T. 1S, R. 73 W, sections 13, 23, 24, 26, 27, 34, 35, 36 and in T. 1S, R. 72 W, sections 9, 10, 15-21 (Map #1 and 3, Appendix A of the EA).

## Background

The Magnolia area of the Boulder Ranger District contains a large network of non-motorized system and social trails. Over the past several decades, this trail system has experienced a substantial increase in recreation use, including unauthorized trail construction (also known as non-system or social trails). This use has led to resource damage, trail damage and unmanaged recreation use in the project area. As a result, the trail system has become unsustainable with environmental impacts increasing every year.

Trail system improvements are needed to comply with the intent of *Forest Plan* direction to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and reduce visitor conflicts and resource impacts. An effective trail system provides a safer recreation experience for visitors, who are less likely to get lost. In addition, an effective trail and trailhead system minimizes the impacts associated with the creation of social

trails and ad hoc parking areas; improves sanitation; reduces soil compaction and erosion; sedimentation of sensitive waterways; and minimizes impacts to cultural values and sensitive wildlife habitat.

Another reason this project is needed is due to the 2012/2013 fuels reduction project in the western portion of the project area. As a result of the fuels reduction project, the landscape experienced a change and some trails needed to be either re-routed or repaired in response to this new condition. Another fuels project is planned for the eastern portion of the project area. These past and future changes in landscape conditions have resulted in the need for this decision to include adaptive management for future changing conditions.

Additionally, the Boulder Ranger District has partnered with Boulder County to provide sustainable connector trails from NFS lands onto County trail systems. The County's Reynolds's Ranch Open Space, located in the central and eastern portions of the project area (East Magnolia zone), and the Toll Conservation Easement for a trail crossing the southwestern portion of the project (South Magnolia zone) offer unique opportunities to tie in with the trail systems that the County is planning. An update to the 2013 proposed action was made during the planning process to accommodate the recent Toll Conservation Easement on 5000 acres of private land bordering the western edge of the project area. This conservation easement also includes a trail easement granted to Boulder County that would provide regional connectivity with Forest Service system trail alignments being proposed within this project area. (Map #6, Appendix A of the EA).

The purpose of this project is to create a sustainable and manageable non-motorized trail system within the Magnolia area. The desired condition is to have a well-functioning trail system that the recreating public uses and enjoys and that minimizes impacts to other resources in the area. The objectives for this project are:

- To enhance the recreation experience of the non-motorized recreating public by:
  - providing a trail system that is both sustainably built and agency compliant;
  - providing a safer recreation experience for users of the system, who are less likely to get lost by providing adequate signing along the trail system and information at trailheads;
  - providing a high-quality recreation user experience by offering a variety of trail experiences, both in difficulty and character, that would minimize the impacts associated with the creation of social trails;
  - minimizing conflict between the various non-motorized users by designing optimized trail features within the multi-use trail system;
  - providing community access points to the trail system near the towns of Nederland and Rollinsville;
  - providing a regional connection with the Toll Conservation Easement Trail to the west of the Magnolia project area and with Boulder County's Reynolds Ranch Open Space area in the eastern portion of the project area;
  - improving sanitation with toilet facilities at trailheads;
  - addressing increasing winter recreation use, by providing a groomed non-motorized trail system for on-snow/winter use.
  
- To reduce soil compaction and erosion by correctly locating, designing and constructing trails

- To minimize impacts to wildlife and their habitat
- To provide flexibility to adjust the trail system after implementation if monitoring of the system indicates that changes would be necessary to continue to meet the purpose of a sustainable trail system

## **Public Involvement**

The Forest Service initiated public scoping and requested comments on its proposed action in August 2013. An information meeting at the Nederland Community Center was held in August during the comment period. More than 300 comment letters were received, with nearly as many unique comments. Many commenters were interested in having the Forest Service enable trail connectivity to Rollins Pass. In response to requests for connectivity, and with the agreement between the Toll family (private landowners) and Boulder County to establish the Toll Conservation Easement Trail to the south and west of the project area, the Forest Service revised its proposed action by expanding the project area south and west, adding an estimated 1,700 acres. Additionally, this revised proposed action addresses many of the other comments such as: intermixed private lands and private landowner concerns; Nordic and equestrian opportunities; and trail sustainability. Because of these additions, and the length of time since the first scoping, the Forest Service wanted to provide the public another comment period.

More than 300 e-mails and postal mail were sent to interested publics. Publishing the legal notice in the Boulder Daily Camera on September 14, 2015 initiated the 30-day comment period. Over 400 letters and e-mails were received. Approximately 800 unique comments were identified, though many of these could be grouped into very similar comments. See Appendix C of the EA for the Forest Service response to these comments.

Public comments received on the proposed action sent to the public in 2015 caused a modification to the proposed action by putting Social Trail 4 back into the proposed action. This trail provides a connection to the community of Nederland from the East Magnolia zone. It was pointed out that Social Trail 38 was labelled on three different sections. This was corrected and these sections are now labelled Social Trail 38, 42 or 43. During final analysis it was discovered that Social 36 was labelled on two different sections. This was corrected and these sections are now labelled Social Trail 36 and 41. See the EA, Appendix B for a list of all trails included in the proposed Action

In addition to gathering public information and comments, the Forest Service reached out to other agencies for their input. A Colorado State Trails Planning Grant funded a planning effort that included a public open house and a survey of recreational users of the Magnolia Area. More than 20 stakeholder groups and agencies and nearly 700 individuals were contacted. From these efforts the Proposed West Magnolia Trail System Master Plan was developed. (ContourLogic, 2014)

Using all these sources of comments, the Forest Service developed the issues it addressed in detail for the EA. Some public issues were incorporated into the proposed action and some public issues were determined not to require detailed analysis. Refer to Section 1.8 of the EA for further detail.

## Issues Analyzed in the EA

### 1. Recreational Use Of The Project Area:

- a. Non-motorized recreation use could:
  - i. Cause conflicts among users (private landowners, equestrians, hikers, mountain bikers, campers, hunters, and motorized users).
  - ii. Provide opportunities for select recreational users and not others.
  - iii. Cause the trails to deteriorate by overuse or inappropriate use.
- b. Motorized wheeled recreation use of roads could:
  - i. Be affected by elimination or conversion to trails, segments of motorized roads.
- c. Motorized snowmobile recreation use could:
  - i. Be affected by elimination of snowmobiling in the project area.
- d. The proposal to improve the current non-motorized trail system would not improve the Forest Service's ability to manage the trails and enforce regulations in the area. A lack of funding and personnel exacerbate this issue.

### 2. Physical Sustainability Of The Non-motorized Trail System

- a. The non-motorized trail system could adversely affect soils, hydrology, and the spread of noxious weeds because the trails may not be designed or maintained in a sustainable fashion.

### 3. Wildlife In The Project Area

- a. Non-motorized and motorized users within the project area during all seasons could disturb wildlife and fragment wildlife habitat. In particular, trails and associated activities may impact effective habitat, as defined in the Forest Plan as well as spring and fall elk migration.

## Other Legally Required Issues Analyzed:

- 1. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 requires analysis of the effects to Proposed, Threatened or Endangered wildlife, fish and plant species that could be affected by the project proposal. Lynx, a threatened species, may be adversely impacted by snow compaction caused by use in the winter months.
- 2. Forest Service regulations require analysis of Regionally Sensitive wildlife, fish and plant species as well as Management Indicator Species (MIS) that could be affected by the project proposal.

## **DECISION**

My intended decision is to select Alternative B-Proposed Action: Improved Non-motorized Trail System. My decision includes re-routing some existing trails, creating new trails, closing system and social trails, and converting some portions of roads and social trails to system trails (Maps #6 and #7 in the EA).

Additional proposed actions include:

- Equestrian and bicycle users will be restricted to designated trails.
- All new social trails created after the decision of this analysis will be obliterated.
- Snowmobiles will be prohibited within the project area for resource protection.
- Winter grooming for Nordic and fat tire use will be allowed under a Forest Service authorization on approximately 4 miles of existing roads.

For a few of the trails with wildlife or landowner needs, I intend to utilize a collaborative process during trail layout, utilizing input from user groups, landowners and other agencies. My decision incorporates design criteria, adaptive management and monitoring as identified in the EA and included below. Appendix A – Maps and Appendix B – Proposed Actions for Each Trail or Road are referenced in this draft decision document. These 2 appendices will be included in my final decision document.

## ***TRAILS***

### Trail Class:

- Level 2 through Level 4 (based on the US Forest Service Trail Level 1-5 scale with 1 being the least developed and 5 the most developed.)

### Corridor Width Needed For Trail Design And Layout:

- 400' wide (200' each side of centerline). This relates to the area analyzed by Forest Service specialists, not the total impacted area of the final trail design nor the final trail width.

### Final Widths:

- The trail system will be designed for optimized use, taking into account the type of non-motorized users for the trail. For instance some trails that could be suited for horses may require a wider width. Therefore, trail width will range between 1 and 4 feet. (On average, the trails are expected to be between 1' and 2'. The widest width of 4' will be collector points adjoining trailheads. Some places due to resource issues or safety concerns may require a wider trail width (e.g., trail structures, turning widths, or grade.)

### Other Trail Features:

- Ancillary recreation activities, facilities, clearings (trail pullouts, passing lanes, overlooks, picnic clearing, hardened stream fords for horses, hitching posts, etc.) will be considered on a trail-by-trail basis.

### Trail/Area Regulations:

- Winter motorized use (including snowmobiles) will be prohibited within the project area for resource protection (except by Forest Service authorization and special use permit). This will go into effect when the decision is finalized.
- Area seasonal closures throughout the road and trail system will be enforced when soils are excessively wet (usually in the spring after snow melts or if there are excessive rain events during the later summer monsoon season). These closures will go into effect as needed, though usually from November into May.
- Mountain bike and equestrian use will be restricted to designated roads and trails year round. Cross-country travel by mountain bike or horse will not be allowed. (Incidental off-trail use from an adjacent developed trail for picnicking and other incidental uses will be allowed.) This regulation will go into effect as implementation occurs throughout the project area.

### Signing:

- Sign to minimize confusion of trail users, to provide a safe experience for trail users and to avoid social trail development. Use standard designs and procedures found in Engineering Manual 7100-15, Sign and Poster Guidelines for the Forest Service.
- Signs are a necessary component of trail management. They provide the user with information that will allow them to make an informed choice.
- The hierarchy of signs will be comprised of three levels:
  - Trail Network Kiosks – Located at a parking lot or similar entrance to a network of trails or trailhead. Basic information will be trail etiquette and safety.
  - Trail Junction Signs – Located at the entrance(s) of a particular trail to provide the user with the information necessary to make an informed decision whether to proceed or not.
  - Trail Advisory Signs – Used to alert users to: road crossings, acceptable or restricted users, and specific restrictions on the upcoming section of trail as these restrictions might arise.

### Pursue Legal Public Access for Trails As Needed

- Some Forest Service trails cross other ownerships. The Forest Service will pursue acquiring or maintaining this access, whether it is on private or other agency lands.

### Partnerships and Funding

- The Forest Service will pursue partnerships as well as alternative sources for funding for design, layout, implementation, operations and maintenance, obliterating user created social trails and public education.

### Trail Design Guidelines:

- The trail system will be a combination of Trail Class: Level 2, 3 and 4 trails. See Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 2309.18, Chapter 20 for the Forest Service design parameters for non-motorized uses (Hiker/Pedestrian; Pack and Saddle; and Bicycle).
- Official direction for the USDA Forest Service can be found in:
  - Trails Manual (FSM 2353)
  - Trails Management Handbook (FSH 2309.18)
  - Direction found on the Forest Service website at:
  - [USDA Forest Service Standard Trail Plans and Specifications webpage \(http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/trail-management/trailplans/index.shtml\)](http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/trail-management/trailplans/index.shtml)
  - [Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook \(0723-2806-MTDC, 2007\) \(http://www.fs.fed.us/t-d/pubs/htmlpubs/htm07232806/page02.htm\)](http://www.fs.fed.us/t-d/pubs/htmlpubs/htm07232806/page02.htm)
  - Forest Service Standard Specifications for Construction and Maintenance of Trails (EM-7720-103)
  - Sign and Poster Guidelines for the Forest Service (EM-7100-15).
  - Bridges and Structures (FSM 7722 and FSM 7736)
  - Forest Service Health and Safety Code Handbook (FSH 6709.11)
  - Deschutes National Forest: Mountain Bike Trail Standard: Tiered to FSH 2309.18 23.13 Bicycle Design Parameters
- Because design criteria found in the above Forest Service direction for biking trails is limited, additional bicycle standards will also be considered. These may include publications by: by the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), the Student Conservation Association (SCA), and the Appalachian Mountain Club. Publications include: *Managing Mountain Biking-IMBA's Guide to Providing Great Riding, 2007; Trail Solutions-IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack; Lightly on the Land: The SCA Trail Building And Maintenance Manual 2nd Edition; and Complete Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance (Appalachian Mountain Club). Central Oregon Trail Alliance (IMBA affiliated non-profit organization) Draft Trail Standard (October, 2011)*

### **Adaptive Management for System Trails**

Forest Service crews and Forest Service partners, either during routine maintenance or recreational use of the trails, will inspect the condition of the trail system for safety and resource concerns. Inspections will be recorded on Forest Service provided inspection sheets. The triggers for not passing inspection will be: 1) not meeting Forest Service trail standards and trail management objectives; 2) changes in the environmental landscape, 3) social use and user interaction on trails or 4) lynx habitat impacts due to snow compaction by winter forest users. If one or more of these triggers are identified the trail may be temporarily closed until repaired, have seasonal closures for wildlife requirements implemented, be realigned or permanently removed from the trail system through obliteration and revegetation or have user-specific modifications made. For any trail system adjustments Forest

Service resources specialists will be consulted for design, layout and implementation. The following are examples for the four types of triggers.

### **Maintenance/Realignment/Closure/Obliteration Triggers**

**1. FSH 2309.18 Trails Management Handbook, Other Forest Service Direction or other Design Guidelines Used in this Project's Trail Development and Approved Trail Management Objectives:**

- Unplanned or excessive use of system trails
- Short-cutting of climbing turns and/or switchbacks
- Trail drifting or sliding down the hill
- Unsafe conditions developing
- Trail proliferation (widening or braiding)
- Trail rutting or soil loss (erosions exceeding 6" depth)
- Continued use of closed social trails/cross county travel

**2. Changes in the Environmental Landscape**

- Floods, wind events, fire, insect infestation
- Changes associated with long-term management implications (fuels treatment or other projects causing displacement of trail users)
- Changes in wildlife patterns such as elk movements, species populations, listing of Threatened or Endangered species

**3. Social Use and User Interaction of Designated Trail System**

- Users reaction to trail design (excessive or lack of use)
- User conflict (could lead to one-way trails or single user type only trail designation)
- Winter non-motorized users consistently expand beyond the groomed winter trail system nearing or into lynx habitat

**4. Lynx Habitat Impacts Due to Snow Compaction by Winter Forest Users into Lynx Analysis Unit (LAU) (see Map 8, Appendix A of the EA)**

### **Adaptive Management Actions**

Trail Deactivation of an Existing System Trail (resulting in trail removal/obliteration) - There may be a number of reasons for obliterating an existing trail. When considering obliteration of a trail, take into account;

- Is the trail popular?
- Is the level of impact acceptable or can it be made acceptable by management?
- Can the trail or part of the trail be rerouted to improve the situation?
- Are there suitable alternatives for users if the trail is obliterated?
- Is the trail historically significant?

### Alternates to Trail Obliteration

- Management of trail use
- Temporary closures
- Reroute sections of trail
- Exclusion of damaging users
- Education of users with signs or other education initiatives

### When Considering Obliteration of System Trails

Steps could include the following:

- Public notice
- Signs informing users of reasons for closure
- Fencing
- Monitoring to ensure trail remains obliterated

### Adjustments due to Lynx Habitat Impacts during the Winter Season

- If monitoring shows that consistent snow compaction develops in lynx habitat, implement winter closures as needed to prevent compaction. (see Glossary, p. iv for definition of snow compaction)
- If new winter non-motorized trails are proposed in the future, consult with a Forest Service wildlife biologist to insure that no winter trail expansion goes into lynx habitat.

### Monitoring of Trail System

- Forest Service recreation crews and Forest Service partners either during routine maintenance or recreational use of the trails will inspect the condition of the trail system for safety and resource concerns. Inspections will be recorded on Forest Service provided inspection sheets and turned into the Forest Service for any necessary action.
- Forest Service Specialists/Program Managers: Monitor during and after implementation for design criteria implementation and effectiveness and to determine if triggers indicate adaptive management actions need to be taken.
- Monitoring Trip for Forest Service Specialists/Program Managers: Annually for the first several years and then as needed to assess the sustainability of the portion of the decision that has been implemented prior to the field review.
- Monitoring elk movement by Forest Service wildlife biologist in conjunction with monitoring by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and others to determine if adaptive management is needed to protect the elk migration corridor and/or winter range.

## **ROADS AND TRAILHEADS**

No new roads are planned. Some system road sections may be converted to trails, designated for administrative use, or decommissioned and obliterated.

### **Signing:**

- Sign to minimize confusion of road users and to warn motorized users of non-motorized trail junctions. Use standard designs and procedures found in Engineering Manual 7100-15, Sign and Poster Guidelines for the Forest Service.

### **Front Range and West Magnolia Trailheads:**

- Toilet Facilities may be provided at the Front Range Trailhead and the West Magnolia Trailhead
- Horse trailer parking facilities may be provided at the West Magnolia Trailhead
- Parking capacity at each trailhead will be designed for approximately 10-25 vehicles

## **DESIGN CRITERIA**

In addition to the trail design guidelines described in the preceding pages, the following project design criteria have been developed during the planning process and will be applied my intended decision. These design elements are necessary to ensure that implementation of the selected alternative complies with laws, policies and the *Forest Plan*. The intent of these design criteria is to avoid, reduce or minimize resource effects related to project implementation.

### **General:**

- Pursue a collaborative approach to trail layout, utilizing input from user groups, landowners and other agencies.

### **Cultural Resources:**

- When project implementation occurs (ground disturbances during trail construction; Forest System and social trail obliteration; trail reroutes; and conversion of some roads to official trails) the designs are flagged on the ground, a Class III Cultural Resource Inventory will be completed in consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) prior to project implementation. Implementation will not begin until the SHPO has concurred with a determination of *no historic properties affected* or *no historic properties adversely affected*.
- National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 consultation will be negotiated with the appropriate agencies (the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO); the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer(s) (THPO); the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP); and/or other interested consulting parties) prior to implementation (in accordance with 40 C.F.R. 1500-1508).

- If ground disturbing activities are required for any project activity, then all NRHP eligible or unevaluated sites within project area (including the known historic property 5GL2048.1) will be buffered by 50 feet and flagged on the ground for avoidance during implementation. No ground disturbing activities will occur within these flagged areas, unless determined to be appropriate by the Project Archaeologist in consultation with State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).
- All trail and road improvement, construction, deconstruction, decommissioning, or rerouting, will be surveyed for cultural resources prior to implementation and receive concurrence with the SHPO on a determination of No Adverse Effects or No Historic Properties Adversely Affected.
- Previously undiscovered sites encountered during the course of project activities will be avoided until they can be evaluated by an archaeologist. If affected properties are discovered after project activities are completed, the Forest will document any damage and consult with SHPO and Council pursuant to 800.13(b).
- **Inadvertent Discovery:** The Boulder Ranger has been informed of the recommendations above. If additional prehistoric or historic materials are found during the course of this project, work in that area will cease until the District Ranger has been notified. Work in the area of the cultural resource may not resume until a professional archaeologist has evaluated the cultural materials and potential effects. The discovery must be protected until notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer (36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 800.110 & 112, 43 CFR 10.4).
- If so requested by the SHPO or an Indian Tribe, the Forest will conduct additional consultation for the identification of properties of traditional cultural and religious significance to Indian Tribes or other interested parties. Additional mitigations may be required if areas or sites are determined to be of importance to an Indian Tribe.
- **Pre-Implementation Survey:** If any new actions are planned that were not specifically identified in this report, an archaeological assessment is required since additional cultural resource surveys may be needed.

#### Invasive Plants:

- To minimize risk of noxious weed introduction and spread, require all equipment to be used for ground-disturbing activities for this project (not including service trucks or other vehicles that remain on roadways) to be clean, i.e., free of mud, dirt, plant parts, and seeds, or other debris that could contain or hold seeds, prior to entering the project area. Trail building equipment will be considered free of soil and other debris when a visual inspection does not disclose such material.
- For known weed occurrences and for any new noxious weed infestations found in or near impact areas prior to implementation, implementation personnel will coordinate with the District Invasive Plants Coordinator to implement appropriate prevention measures, such as avoidance, treatment of weeds prior to implementation, and/or additional equipment cleaning requirements, such as between infested and uninfested areas.
- Coordinate with District Invasive Plants Coordinator to locate staging areas, and other areas of severe soil disturbance to best reduce risk of spread of invasive plants.

- As soon as possible after trail building or obliteration are complete, reclaim disturbances by a combination of covering them with slash and raking in dirt and duff from adjacent areas and revegetation where needed.
- Consult with a Forest Service botanist regarding government furnished seed if revegetation will occur.
- Use only seed free material such as native slash and “Wood Straw” for mulching

**Plants:**

- Prior to implementation, the project botanist and or botany technicians will survey for Region 2 sensitive plant species identified as having possible habitat. If Region 2 sensitive plant species are observed within the area to be impacted by the project; the project botanist or botany representative will work with the recreation staff to avoid all observed occurrences.
- Trail restoration activities will be coordinated with the project botanist.

**Soil and Water Resources:**

**Trail Alignment and Design:**

- Design stream crossings to minimize sedimentation and/or direct impacts
- Minimize “fall line” alignments
- As a general guideline, maximum trail grade should be 15 percent (except for natural or built rock structures). Average trail grade should stay under 10 percent (with grade reversals)
- Follow the half-rule to the extent possible. A trail's grade shouldn't exceed half the grade of the side-slope.
- Minimize alignments through completely flat areas where few drainage options exist the hillside
- Apply cross drainage as frequently as needed to minimize erosion of the trail tread. Techniques include out-sloping where possible, dips and water-bars
- Armor trail tread if/where needed. For highly technical trails where grade will sometimes exceed 15 percent, use natural rock, rock armoring or other rock features to add challenge and improve sustainability
- Specify and maintain recommended trail widths
- Minimize trail alignments within or directly adjacent to inner gorges, riparian vegetation zones, wetlands or stream channels
- Consult US Forest Service Watershed personnel for review of trails with potential to impact soils and water resources
- Trail/stream crossing will be constructed to limit erosion and avoided if at all possible

**Trail/Area Regulations and Signing:**

- Apply area seasonal closures throughout the road and trail system and enforce when soils are excessively wet (usually in the spring after snow melts or if there are excessive rain events during the later summer monsoon season)

**Trail Obliteration and Restoration:**

- Re-contour and de-compact for natural appearance and improved watershed function
- Control erosion through creating hummocky micro-topography and re-establishing ground cover through mulching with US Forest Service approved imported materials and/or forest litter/duff, slash or downed logs
- Re-vegetate according to plans and/or design criteria approved by USFS personnel
- Consult US Forest Service Watershed and Botany personnel to provide input for restoration plans and activities

**Wildlife:**

- Prior to building new trails or rerouting or obliterating existing trails, consult with a Forest Service wildlife biologist for a determination of surveys needed. Results of surveys and/or observations during implementation, such as breeding activity of amphibians or other wildlife or active bird nests of any species, may result in timing adjustments for trail work, seasonal closures, or adjusting trail locations.
- Prior to building new trails or rerouting or obliterating existing trails, consult with a Forest Service wildlife biologist regarding any construction timing restrictions needed to avoid or minimize impacts to wildlife during critical periods/activity, for example spring or fall elk migration.
- During trail reroutes and new trail construction, where possible route trails to allow retention of existing snags that do not pose a safety hazard to trail users, especially snags 10" dbh or greater and snags with cavities.
- In consultation with a Forest Service wildlife biologist, where possible, route trails near the edges of patch cuts and clearcuts, and away from large bordering forested stands, to reduce disturbance to wildlife.

## **IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY AND SCHEDULE**

Forest Service funding for this project will be sought on an annual basis in alignment with Forest priorities and to support opportunities to leverage additional funding through outside sources, including but not limited to partnership and volunteer group fundraising and grant application opportunities. Managing and enforcing proposed regulations and maintaining the recreational opportunities within the project area will be achieved through Forest Service and related partnership involvement.

Implementation of the project will largely depend on partnership/volunteer group involvement. Involvement includes continued efforts towards on-the-ground project work, education, training, fundraising, and grant applications to supplement Forest Service budgets and resources. Involvement in the implementation strategy will include an initial public meeting followed by partnership meetings as necessary. The implementation strategy will consider fundraising/grant cycle opportunities and subsequent on-the-ground project work will be phased in each year as resources become available. All implementation activities will be guided by the Forest Service.

Implementation strategy goals will include:

- Signing of the approved system as soon as possible after the decision and as implementation moves ahead.
- A zone-phased approach to implementing the decision’s actions, starting at the West Magnolia Trailhead and working outward.
- A zone-phased approach to best strategize funding opportunities and regional connectivity opportunities with adjacent agency/townships.
- Waiting to implement any portion of the decision until after any other current projects are analyzed and implemented (i.e. East Magnolia Zone and Forsythe 2 fuels treatment) that may directly affect the trail actions.

Table 1: Summary of Trail/Road Mileages for the Decision (Alternative B-Proposed Action)  
(Mileages are only on NFS lands)

<b>Trails</b>		
System Trails - Existing (no action)	14.28	14.28
New Trail Construction	8.94	8.94
Social Trails - Converted to System Trail	16.75	16.75
Road Converted to System Trail	4.11	4.11
System Trails - Decommissioned/Obliterated	(1.75)	
Social Trails - Obliterated	(28.95)	
Miles of Proposed Activities	74.78	
<b>Total Miles of Final Trail System</b>		<b>44.08</b>
<b>Roads</b>		
Existing Roads (no action)	15.76	15.76
Roads for Forest Service Administrative Use Only	2.41	2.41
*Road Converted to System Trail	(4.11)	
*Road Decommissioned/Obliterated	(1.24)	
Miles of Proposed Activities	23.52	
<b>Total Miles of Final Road System</b>		<b>18.17</b>

\*Some of the road mileage is currently closed to public use

## RATIONALE FOR MY DECISION

Two alternatives were evaluated in the EA. They included the No Action Alternative (Alternative A) and the Proposed Action (Alternative B). No other alternatives were considered or eliminated for analysis for this project. Alternative B was considered an iterative proposed action, because as the proposed action was modified, the Forest Service kept our stakeholders informed and involved in the modifications. See p.14, Section 2.1 of the EA for more details on this iterative process. Per public comments and this iterative process the No Action and the Proposed Action fulfill consideration of a reasonable range of alternatives.

I have made this decision after careful consideration of the environmental analysis of the effects of the two alternatives, Alternative A and Alternative B. My decision meets the requirements of the National Forest Management Act and the National Environmental Policy Act; responds to the purpose and need for this project described in Chapter 1 of the EA; addresses the issues identified during the planning process and comments received from the public during scoping and the public comment periods. I have made this decision based on the rationale described below.

First, I considered whether the proposed activities would achieve and comply with the *Forest Plan* general direction and standards and guidelines (Forest Plan, pp.1-42; EA, Section 1.5 *Forest Plan* Direction) and then looked at the desired conditions and specific standards and guidelines in the Lump Gulch Geographic Area (Forest Plan, pp. 81-83). In my review of the EA, *Chapter 3-Affected Environment and Environmental Effects* I did find that Alternative A-No Action as the existing condition of the project area was below the effective habitat guidance (Guideline 109, *Forest Plan*, p. 31). However, my decision includes obliteration of about 29 miles of social trails; prevention of new social trail development through better signing; and elimination of cross-country travel by bicyclists and equestrians. This is expected to increase effective habitat above the existing condition as per guidance as stated in Guideline 109. I have found that my decision is in full compliance with the *Forest Plan* for all resources analyzed.

The purpose and need as stated for this project is valid (EA, pp 2-4). It was especially important to me to ensure that the project objectives were met (EA, pp. 3-4; p. 2 of this decision document). Therefore, I am not selecting the No Action Alternative (Alternative A), because it does not fully meet the purpose and need. Maintaining the status quo as Alternative A does, is not in keeping with the mission of the Forest Service nor in the best interest of the public, who uses the trails in the project area. Increasing Front Range populations are expected to bring additional visitors to the area and by selecting Alternative B the Forest Service is being proactive to improve this trail system, make it more sustainable, minimize maintenance costs, provide needed facilities and enforce regulations, which will mitigate the expected increased visitation.

Alternative B best meets the purpose and need by proactively protecting natural resources while providing a quality recreation experience and enhancing visitor safety. As stated in Chapter 3 of the EA, the soil and water resources in the area will be enhanced by closing and obliterating the identified social trails (approximately 29 miles); following the required design criteria and implementing adaptive management actions as future monitoring indicates. A less confusing, better functioning and better signed trail system will enhance the trail users' experience. For those seeking a longer non-

motorized trail, my decision will connect to trails managed by Boulder County. Safety of visitors will be improved by signing to eliminate conflict and navigation confusion among trail users and by signing to prevent conflict with motorized road use.

I realize that not all people will like all components of my decision. This is why I have included a design criteria stating, "Pursue a collaborative approach to trail layout, utilizing input from user groups, landowners and other agencies." (EA, p. 24) In this way, we will be able to lay out a trail taking into account landowner needs as well as being sensitive to wildlife concerns and the recreation user of the trail.

I reviewed the EA site-specific analysis that was completed for the project area on resource areas and issues raised by my Interdisciplinary (ID) Team and by the public and feel there has been sufficient site specific environmental analysis completed on the alternatives.

## **PREDECISIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW PROCESS**

This draft decision is subject to the predecisional administrative review process pursuant to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. Written objections, including any attachments, must be filed with the reviewing officer within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of the EA and Finding of No Significant Impact and draft Decision Notice in the Boulder Daily Camera. Objections must be filed in writing with the reviewing officer and meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

The publication date of the legal notice in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection (36 CFR 218.6(b)). Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Only those individuals and organizations that submitted written comments during the comment period may file an objection pursuant to 36 CFR 218.6(a). Pursuant to 36 CFR 218.8(c), issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after the opportunities for comment.

Objections may be mailed, hand-delivered, faxed or e-mailed to:

USDA Forest Service  
Region 2 Rocky Mountain Region  
Attn: Strategic Planning – Objection Reviewing Officer  
740 Simms Street Golden, CO 80401-4720

Hours: Mon-Fri 8:00 A.M.- 4:30 P.M., excluding holidays

Fax: (303) 275-5134

Email: [r02admin\\_review@fs.fed.us](mailto:r02admin_review@fs.fed.us)

*(Acceptable formats for electronic appeals are: rtf, pdf, doc, or docx)*

For electronically submitted objections, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgment from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgment of the receipt of the objection, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other acceptable means.

If no objection is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the objection filing period. If an objection is received, the decision may not be signed until after five business days following the issuance of the Reviewing Officer's response to the objection.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

For further information on this draft decision, contact Karen Roth, US Forest Service, 2150 Center Avenue-Building E, Fort Collins, CO 80526, phone (970) 295-6621 or Matt Henry, US Forest Service, 2140 Yarmouth Avenue, Boulder CO 80301, phone (303) 541-2510.

(To be signed for final decision)

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SYLVIA G. CLARK  
District Ranger  
Boulder Ranger District  
Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests  
and Pawnee National Grassland

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DATE

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