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Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Region 2

White River
National Forest

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Interpretive & Education Plan

for the

Aspen Ranger District Visitor Center

Inviting people to

EXPLORE ✕ CONNECT ✕ ACT





Acknowledgments

Planning Team

- » Mateo Sandate, Visitor Information Specialist (Aspen Ranger District)
- » Martha Moran, Recreation Manager (Aspen Ranger District)
- » Kevin Warner, Conveyance Program Manager (White River National Forest)
- » Rich Doak, Forest Recreation Program Staff (White River National Forest)
- » Donna Sullenger, Visual Information Specialist (Center for Design and Interpretation)
- » Cheryl Hazlitt, Interpretive Planner (Center for Design and Interpretation)
- » Lois Ziemann, Interpretive Planner (Center for Design and Interpretation)
- » Marcella Wells, Consultant (Wells Resources, Inc.)

Reviewers

- » Terry Wong, Contractor (Aspen RD Redevelopment Liaison)
- » Pat Thrasher (Forest Public Affairs Office)

Approved by



1/24/12

Scott Snelson, Aspen District Ranger

Date

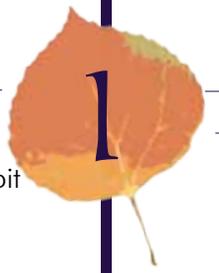
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Purpose and Need

The Aspen Ranger District Visitor Center Interpretive and Education Plan guides the development of the visitor center portion of the office redevelopment.

The Interpretive and Education Plan provides the following:

- » **Chapter 2: Current Conditions** - an assessment of our current situation—including the current audiences—to provide the basis for anticipated trends
- » **Chapter 3: Goals and Interpretive Objectives** - primary and secondary site goals provide the overall direction; objectives and desired outcomes guide product and program development by describing what we want visitors to know, feel, and do while visiting or upon their return home
- » **Chapter 4: Themes and Subthemes** - provides the messaging framework for all interpretive media
- » **Chapter 5: Exhibit Recommendations** - describes both physical and electronic media for the visitor center
- » **Chapter 6: Education Programs and Partnerships** - describes educational programming beyond the physical Visitor Center, and the potential partnerships to make them happen
- » **Chapter 7: Evaluation and Monitoring** - gives suggestions for ways of measuring our success, based on our stated desired outcomes
- » **Chapter 8: Exhibit Approval Process** - shows the process

for obtaining approval of large exhibit proposals

Planning Assumptions

This plan is based on a number of assumptions about the current and anticipated future use and projected management of the Aspen RD Visitor Center.

1. The Aspen Ranger District will continue to be a popular recreation destination for local, state, regional, national, and international visitors, particularly as the Maroon Bells Scenic Area continues to receive more publicity, the five Wilderness Areas see increased visitation, the Aspen Ski Areas continue to develop, and the Top of the Rockies Scenic Byway becomes well known.
2. The Aspen Ranger District will continue to recruit and work cooperatively with various partners to provide quality visitor information and services.
3. The Aspen Ranger District Visitor Center will continue to contribute to the community's vitality as a highly visible and utilized community resource.
4. The Aspen Visitor Center and Ranger Station will serve as a gateway to the White River National Forest, four ski areas, and the Top of the Rockies Scenic Byway.
5. Future development of interpretive media beyond the office redevelopment should be consistent with this plan and evaluated against the goals and objectives shown herein.

Interpretation is...

- » A teaching technique
- » A service provided to visitors that entertains and provides meanings
- » A management tool that can be used to increase visitors' appreciation for, and sensitivity to, the natural and cultural resources of the area (FSM2390)

In his landmark book "Interpreting our Heritage" (1957), Freeman Tilden shows how effective interpretation relates to the visitor, reveals new ways of seeing things, and provokes the visitor into deeper contemplation.



Related Plans

This plan is consistent with:

- ◇ *White River National Forest Plan (2002)*
- ◇ *All Wilderness Education Plans for the White River National Forest (2005)*
- ◇ *The Maroon Valley Corridor Interpretation and Exhibit Plan (2001)*
- ◇ *Top of the Rockies Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan and Interpretive Plan (in progress)*

Staffing

Currently, the Aspen District Office has one permanent full-time Visitor Information Specialist (VIS) and expands in the summer with one additional VIS. Both are funded through a national forest fund for recreation, heritage resources, and Wilderness. In past years, active recruiting has resulted in a small volunteer and intern staff, expanding the summer VIS staffing to five. This is the minimum level needed to adequately meet our visitors' needs.

However, with the staff focused on filling information requests, there is virtually no time left for interpretive and education efforts, and the Aspen RD relies heavily on partners to meet those needs. District staff would like to be able to provide interpretation and education while they are at the visitor center, either through media or personal programs.

The current hours of operation for the Aspen Visitor Center are (8:00 am– 4:30 pm, 5 days per week, 261 days per year). An experiment with opening over Labor Day weekend in 2011 resulted in a enough walk-in traffic to warrant the expense. However, future national forest recreation funding is not expected to increase.

Use Patterns

Current visitation to the Aspen Ranger Station averages over 800 people per month, ranging from 1,800 in July to less than 200 in December. Peak walk-in visitation generally occurs from June through September. During this time, peak daily contacts can reach over 300 per day (phone and in person).

Phone calls average over 1,100 per month, ranging from 2,200 in July to 120 in December.

Although no data have been collected, district VIS staff estimate that they respond to over 1,000 e-mails each year.

Demographics

According to the recent National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) figures, the White River NF receives approximately 10.5 million visitors annually which ranks it as the most visited national forest in the nation. Other statistics include the following:

- » Average group size - 3.7 people per vehicle
- » Age - The largest age groups are those between 30-50 years old
- » Distance traveled - Visitors tend to be either local (23% travel less than 25 miles) or from over 200 miles away (50%)

Visitor Information Specialists on the district report that visitors to the Aspen Ranger District have varying degrees of knowledge and expertise in outdoor recreation and skills, including Wilderness ethics. Visitors can be particularly unfamiliar with the Rocky Mountain altitude and climate, and the dangers they present (*Aspen RD staff, personal communication*).

Detailed demographic information may be found in Appendix A.

Visitor Information Requests

A majority of visitor inquires at the existing visitor center are recreation-related, as shown below:

Summer: May - October

- » Maroon Bells Scenic Area information
- » Recreation information
 - ◊ Day hiking opportunities
 - ◊ Backpacking opportunities
 - ◊ Wilderness use and permits
 - ◊ Campground camping
 - ◊ Climbing 14ers
 - ◊ Mountain biking
 - ◊ 4X4, ATV, and dirt biking opportunities
 - ◊ Fishing
 - ◊ Hunting



- » Wildflower viewing
- » Natural history questions
- » Guided hikes and interpretive programs
- » Driving for pleasure, scenery viewing
- » Rules, ethics, and safety information
- » Forest permit information – firewood permits, Golden Age, etc.
- » Fall color times and locations for viewing
- » General tourist information
 - ◊ Rafting
 - ◊ Horse rides
 - ◊ Lodging, shopping, and eating

Fall: September – November

- » Scenic drives and fall colors
- » Camping
- » Day hiking
- » Backpacking
- » Hunting
- » Climbing
- » General tourist information
- » Fuelwood permits

Winter: November – April

- » Christmas tree cutting permits
- » Snowmobiling
- » 10th mountain huts
- » Snowshoeing and skiing
- » Day hiking in town
- » Summer planning
- » Avalanche conditions and forecast
- » General tourist information

The average length of a visitor contact varies, although a typical length of stay is about 5-15 minutes. However, staff report that it is not uncommon for visitors to return after their forest activity and share their experiences while they “hang out” with the staff.

Forest Website Use

The White River NF website recreation pages continue to see increasing use as more people take advantage of the upgraded site for trip planning purposes.

In December 2010, there were over 6,200 visitors to the site from a total of 49 different

countries around the world. In this month there were over 28,000 individual page views. Roughly 17% (1,070 visitors) looked up information specific to the Maroon Bells Scenic Area.

Specific website traffic information may be found in Appendix A.

Local Media

Information outreach occurs with local media in the Roaring Fork Valley, using these outlets to promote agency identity, credibility, and an understanding of current management issues.

- » **Radio** - The White River NF Public Affairs Officer and the Aspen VIS have teamed up to host a monthly radio show on KDNK 88.1 in Carbondale.
- » **Local TV** - An Aspen RD VIS has made regular appearances on the Plum TV network sharing information about Wilderness, LNT, and wildfire issues with visitors. The VIS and the district Wildlife Biologist hosted a regular safety and education feature on black bears in Aspen.
- » **Newspapers** - Press releases are used regularly to inform people of current issues and safety concerns on the district.

Other Sources of Information

In addition to the Aspen RD visitor center, there are several other locations in Aspen that provide visitor information:

- » **Transit Center** - The Roaring Fork Transit Authority staffs Rubey Park and focuses on bus schedules and Maroon Bells information in the summer. They operate from 6:30 am to 12:15 am.
- » **Aspen Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center** - The CoC operates sites at the Aspen Airport, Wheeler Opera House, the mall (open after-hours), and at Rio Grande Park. They report nearly 200,000 visitors per year, with questions as varied as the activity possibilities around Aspen.

- » **Aspen Highlands Pro Mountain Shop**
- This shop provides activity planning advice and information for the adventurous visitor
- » **Maroon Bells Welcome Booth and the Day Use Information Center** - Both provide White River NF information with a concentration on the Maroon Bells Wilderness and Scenic Area

Unmet Needs

Based on the experience of the Aspen RD VIS staff, there are currently several categories of information desired by our visitors that are not adequately being provided:

- » Trail and road reports/current conditions
- » Information on area closures
- » Maps and tips on how to read them
- » After-hours and off-site trip planning information and assistance
- » Bear activity and advisories
- » Backcountry sanitation

Implications

Recreation information is likely to continue being the primary request at the new Aspen RD Visitor Center. Families and individuals from over 200 miles away with varying degrees of expertise and preparedness will likely continue to make up this group. The new visitor center should focus on this demographic by devoting a substantial portion of the space to filling their needs.

While many visitors spend only a few minutes getting the information they need, the new visitor center design should promote lingering for longer exhibit viewing time and greater staff interaction so that:

- » Visitors get better prepared for their planned trip and associated activities.
- » Visitors can potentially expand their knowledge base and understanding about resources, national forest management, and current issues on the White River NF.

- » District staff have a greater opportunity to elicit feedback and other pertinent information from our visitors that would enable us to better do our jobs.
- » Partners can be better recruited and relationships built.

It should be noted that the planned infrastructure will not significantly increase parking availability beyond the existing capacity. More people may visit the Aspen RD by virtue of more user-friendly pedestrian access and bus stop locations. However, the visitor experience focus should be on increasing the amount of quality time that people spend at the center, rather than increasing the quantity of visitor traffic.

Based on VIS observations and stocking patterns of outside publications, many visitors arrive after hours (evenings and weekends). The redevelopment should provide for a 24/7 availability of maps, camping information, Wilderness regulations and registration information, road and trail conditions, avalanche conditions, and Maroon Bells Scenic Area fee information.

Because there are several other entities providing information about (and pertinent to) the Aspen RD, it is important to stay coordinated with them to ensure consistency of messages and adequate coverage of needs. District VIS staff should routinely monitor these locations, publications, and associated messages, and visit with partner staff to discuss relevant messaging.

As the forest website continues to expand, it should do so in conjunction with the Aspen RD Visitor Center themes and subthemes in this plan to ensure consistency and continuity of messaging.

In addition, the Aspen RD Visitor Center exhibits should incorporate a variety of electronic features that allow website access for downloading maps, podcasts, videos, and other information.



Notes

Visitor Center Site Goals

Site goals describe what we want the Visitor Center site (its staff, exhibits, and ambiance) to provide to our visitors, as well as what need we want to fulfill for the Aspen RD.

Considerations relevant to the site goal include the following:

- » The visitors' need to easily get the information, maps, and permits they desire in a professional and user-friendly environment
- » The White River NF's desire to promote:
 - ◊ *Safe and sustainable use of national forest resources, and;*
 - ◊ *An awareness of the role that national forests play in contributing to local, regional, national, and international resource conservation*
- » The role that partners will play in the function of the Visitor Center and associated offices
- » The planned infrastructure opportunities and limitations, including parking
- » The current and anticipated audiences that will use the Visitor Center
- » Similar facilities and services currently provided in the Aspen area (i.e. the current supply)
- » The White River NF Recreation Niche Statement

The **Primary Site Goal** for the Aspen RD Visitor Center is to be a welcoming facility where visitors become prepared to safely recreate on the White River NF, while also promoting a Forest Service brand of land stewardship and conservation ethics about their environmental choices both on and off the national forest.

Secondary Site Goals for the Aspen RD Visitor Center are to promote a partnership model for public land management, and provide opportunities for visitors, residents, and partners to learn about and discuss the national forests' past, present, and future role in local, national, and global resource conservation issues.

The Primary and Secondary Goals are met via:

1. Knowledgeable and professional staff
2. Relevant and engaging exhibits, and other interpretive media such as publications and digital media that complement (but do not duplicate) other similar services in the area
3. Forest Service and partner events (e.g. presentations and temporary exhibits) in the visitor center conference room.

Objectives and Desired Outcomes

Interpretive and education objectives describe what managers want to accomplish through various media, services, and programs in order to reach the Site Goals. They are measurable items that can be monitored and evaluated to determine progress and success.

The desired outcomes guide product and program development by describing what we want visitors to know, feel, and do while visiting or upon their return home. They also describe what results White River NF staff can expect from their investment in interpretive and education services.

Objective 1: At least 90% of visitors will leave the Aspen Visitor Center adequately prepared to safely visit the White River NF, and with a positive image of the Forest Service.

Desired Outcomes:

1. Visitors are appropriately guided to the experience they desire (particularly those looking for backcountry solitude rather than a popular Wilderness), and have the information, maps, permits, passes, and/or products they need.
2. Visitors stay safe and legal during their visit. White River NF managers see less need for mountain rescues and more compliance with regulations.



- 3. The District receives positive feedback from visitors about their interactions with staff and volunteers.
- 4. Visitors are confident that information and interpretation is current and accurate; managers feel it is timely and relevant.
- 5. Visitors are able to find the information they need after hours, off-site, and via an adequate phone message system.

Objective 2: At least 50% of our visitors will expand their connection to public lands and waters, and in particular, their stewardship responsibilities and roles.

Desired Outcomes:

- 1. Visitors gain a greater appreciation of the social, economic, and environmental benefits of the nation’s forests and how they contribute to their quality of life.
- 2. Visitors are motivated to become stewards of public lands and waters, and make informed and thoughtful decisions about how their actions affect these lands.
- 3. White River NF managers see less negative impacts to the natural and cultural resources from inadvertent behaviors (i.e. depreciative actions that result from lack of knowledge or misinformation).

Objective 3: At least 15% of our visitors will learn something new about the natural and/or cultural resources of the White River NF.

Desired Outcomes:

- 1. Visitors are motivated to learn more about the District’s natural and cultural resources and will want to explore further (physically or intellectually) outside of their initial visit.
- 2. Visitors are familiar with the concepts of congressionally designated Wilderness—

its values and the purpose it fulfills within the spectrum of public lands.

- 3. Visitors leave with a better understanding of the Forest Service mission, policies, plans, projects, initiatives, competing demands and/or challenges.
- 4. Visitors develop an understanding of the relationships that have existed throughout time with both wildlife and human cultures in the mountains and the mountain environments they are a part of.

Objective 4: At least 10% of our visitors will develop a better understanding of the Forest Service mission—including emerging service-wide issues such as climate change, integrated resource restoration, water quality/quantity, and sustainable operations—and will be motivated to become involved with public and/or private land planning and management.

Desired Outcomes:

- 1. Visitors become active with local resource issues and are motivated to volunteer with local non-profit partners, and/or provide assistance with district project planning.
- 2. Visitors and residents connect the Forest Service and its mission to larger regional and global environmental issues, and support efforts at resource restoration and sustainable operations.
- 3. Visitors support the Rocky Mountain Nature Association, and other non-profit partners that are dedicated to helping the Aspen Ranger District accomplish its mission.
- 4. Visitors feel encouraged to provide feedback about their national forest experience to help the White River NF improve their services; visitors receive positive reinforcement about the usefulness and validity of this feedback.

Telling Our Story

Several existing mission and goal statements already exist that provide a framework for the significant stories of the Aspen RD:

White River NF Vision Statement (2012):

We are a 21st century organization, leading the nation in innovative landscape conservation, connecting citizens to the land through world-class recreation, restoring and enhancing resilient ecosystems, and contributing to sustainable economies. We share our story and take care of each other as we continue our legacy of meeting incredible challenges with passion, creativity and collaboration

White River NF Central Interpretive Theme (Unofficial Interpretive Plan 2003):

The White River National Forest is a landscape with diverse recreation opportunities and a diversity of natural resources requiring management that serves to balance land stewardship and meet public demands.

White River NF Recreation Niche Statement (2004):

The White River NF offers sharp contrasts of recreation opportunities with a focus on highly developed year-round recreation near resorts and primitive backcountry experiences.

These three statements have important threads that should be carried over into the Aspen RD Visitor Center themes:

- » The Aspen RD provides a high-quality setting for a spectrum of recreation opportunities.
- » The White River NF provides a balance of public benefits of local and national importance, but the benefits require stewardship.
- » Partnerships are critical for achieving the management goals of the White River NF.

Themes and Subthemes

The use of themes provides focus, continuity, and consistent meaning for interpreters. Themes convey the main ideas about a topic—typically in one-sentence declarative statements—and provide the framework for the development of interpretive media.

Subthemes expand on the themes, providing more direction for the development of the narrative. Subthemes are linked to certain resources, issues, or locations, and become the focus for telling the story through the appropriate interpretive media. Storylines (not included in this plan) are developed from subtheme topics and provide specific messages to be used in the development of the media.

The challenge in developing the themes for the Aspen RD Visitor Center is in determining the most important stories, concepts, and messages to convey. With a limited amount of space (approximately 1,300 sq. ft.), it is impossible to address every potential theme without (a) reducing each theme to a brief and superficial storyline, and (b) overloading the visitor with so many messages that they are unable to focus on any of them to a significant degree.

The **central theme** for the new Aspen RD Visitor Center is:

The Aspen Ranger District beckons visitors to explore the national forest's mysterious wild beauty, and connect with its lands and waters in a way that inspires stewardship actions.

Explore ✕ Connect ✕ Act

Three themes and numerous subthemes expand on the central theme in a manner that supports the visitor center goals and interpretive/education objectives (see pages 7-8).



Theme #1: EXPLORE: Where do you want to go today? We can help you find the experience you're looking for.

- » Subtheme: The recreational opportunities on the Aspen RD are nearly endless.
 - ◊ Topic: Seasonal activities, facilities, and areas (what's available where and when)
- » Subtheme: Know Before You Go! Recreating in an environmentally responsible manner ensures that opportunities continue for future generations.
 - ◊ Topic: Safety (altitude, avalanches, hypothermia, lightning, bear awareness, other information on being prepared)
 - ◊ Topic: Regulations and the "Authority of the Resource" or "The Price of Popularity"
 - ◊ Topics: Tread Lightly and Leave No Trace

Theme #2: CONNECT: You can connect to the majestic lands and waters of the White River National Forest in a myriad of ways that can inform and inspire your daily life.

- » Subtheme: The national forests are the headwaters of our nation.
 - ◊ Topic: Fryingpan-Arkansas water project
 - ◊ Topic: The importance of the Roaring Fork watershed
 - ◊ Topic: The value and benefits that water provides to outdoor recreation enthusiasts
 - ◊ Topic: From Forest to Faucet: where does your water come from?
 - ◊ Topic: Watershed restoration
- » Subtheme: The National Wilderness Preservation System provides for congressionally designated places that perpetuate wildness for future generations.
 - ◊ Topic: The value of Wilderness (whether you visit it or not)
 - ◊ Topic: Wilderness values
 - ◊ Topic: Wilderness areas on the Aspen RD
- » Subtheme: The White River NF manages

for a diversity of flora and fauna, for their extrinsic, intrinsic, and yet-to-be discovered values.

- ◊ Topic: The value of biodiversity
- ◊ Topic: Threatened or endangered species on the White River NF and why we should care about them

Theme #3: ACT: The mission of the US Forest Service has become increasingly more vital on a global scale, but individual involvement is a key to our success.

- » Subtheme: National forests and global climate change have effects on each other.
 - ◊ Topic: The role that the Aspen RD, White River NF, and other national forests play in carbon sequestration, the moderation of climate change, clean air and water, and other environmental services
 - ◊ Topic: "Save the Snow" campaign
 - ◊ Topic: How climate change affects wildfire, drought, water supply, insects and disease
 - ◊ Topic: A valuable byproduct of forest restoration on the White River NF is the woody biomass that could be contributed to regional energy production
- » Subtheme: An informed and engaged citizenry is a fundamental aspect of excellent national forest management.
 - ◊ Topic: Gifford Pinchot and his philosophy on being involved ("The vast possibilities of our great future will become realities only if we make ourselves responsible for that future.")
 - ◊ Topic: Aspen RD land and resource management planning—current issues and competing demands (focusing on resource restoration and sustainable operations)
 - ◊ Topic: History of the Aspen area with regards to how it shapes the decision-making space of today (e.g. how does historic mining affect land and water management today?)
- » Subtheme: Because the US Forest Service is in the conservation business, this visitor

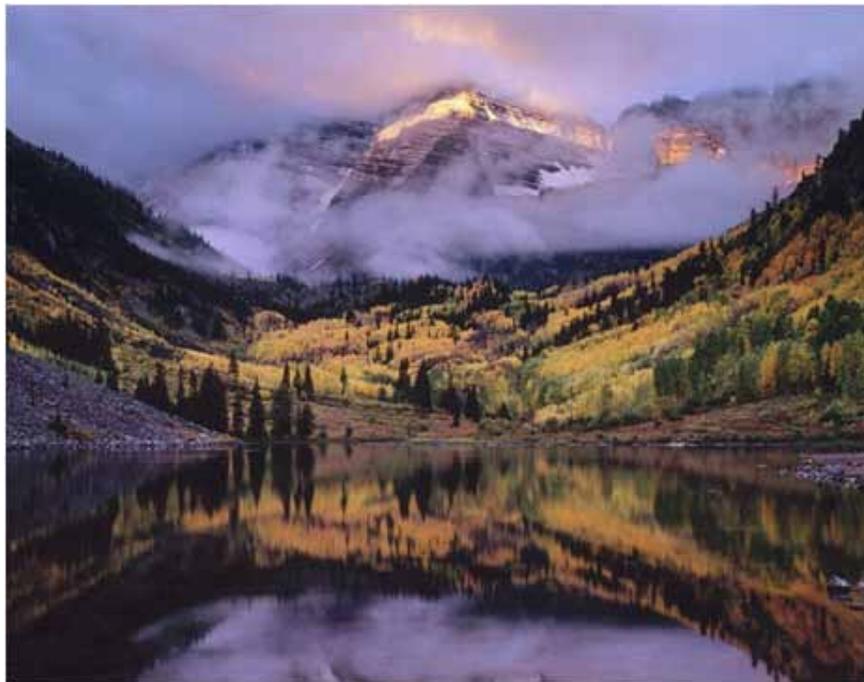
center was designed as a model of environmental sustainability and energy efficiency.

- ◇ *Topic: Forest Service mission statement*
- ◇ *Topic: LEED certification*
- ◇ *Topic: Designs and materials used for energy efficiency, and take-away ideas for personal energy conservation*

Top of the Rockies Scenic Byway Theme

The **Top of the Rockies Scenic Byway Interpretive Plan** identifies the Aspen RD Visitor Center as a gateway to the byway, along with Forest Service offices in Minturn and Leadville. As such, the Aspen RD Visitor Center should incorporate the Top of the Rockies byway theme in its exhibitry. The byway theme is:

The Top of the Rockies Byway provides an elevated experience amongst the highest mountains in Colorado, crossing the continental divide into unparalleled wilderness and journeying through historic and living working towns founded on mining.





Notes

Section 5 gives interpretive exhibit recommendations for the Aspen RD Visitor Center. These recommendations are based on the draft 25% drawings for the Aspen Redevelopment released by Chamberlin Architects on 8/26/11.

Electronic media are not dependent on the design of the facility, but are included in this section to provide a more complete picture of the Aspen RD Visitor Center services.

General Design Guidelines

Specific design guidelines for exhibitry are not a part of this plan. However, there are several general guidelines that should be considered as the redevelopment progresses:

1. Specific design guidelines should include a color palette, fonts, graphic styles, consistent use of agency identifiers, and consideration of other existing media that will complement the visitor center design. To the extent appropriate, the Aspen RD Visitor Center design guidelines should incorporate or complement the Top of the Rockies SB design guidelines.
2. Exhibitry and its infrastructure should be designed to be flexible and easily updated. This is particularly true for the visitor center interior where it is desired to periodically rotate and rearrange exhibits (seasonally or topically), and update the interactive technology as it continues to evolve.

One method to enhance the flexibility of the exhibits is to surface the two primary display walls with museum-type slat walls that allow for easy and temporary mounting of panels or other artwork.
3. A primary objective of the electronic interface options within the exhibitry is to generate visitor interactions with the Forest Service long after they have left the Aspen RD Visitor Center. By targeting

our audience where many of them hang out (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.) the White River NF can promote online conversations and viewer contributions, and provide visitors with plenty of places to go electronically for more information.

4. Exhibit designs should visually transition from the exterior to the interior to convey a seamless experience.
5. Universal design principles must be followed.
6. Exhibitry should respond to a variety of learning modes, including tactile, visual, auditory, and other modes.

See Figure 1 for a depiction the exhibit layout.

Entry Plaza and Vestibule

Components:

- » Roofed walkway with combination kiosk/bench structure
- » Flat panels along east-facing wall
- » A landscape feature, with or without moving water
- » Interactive electronic trip planning kiosk in vestibule that is available after hours (this space would need to be larger than shown in the 25% draft drawings)
- » Aspen RD Visitor Center and USDA Forest Service agency signs
- » Logo/icon/sign identifying the Aspen RD Visitor Center as a Top of the Rockies Scenic Byway gateway

Narrative:

The entry plaza is dominated by a landscape feature that portrays a small watershed (see Figure 2). Two options for this landscape are offered:

Option A: This option has a moving water component in the landscape, beginning at a kiosk/bench structure (see Figure 3) and flowing south toward the entry. From the kiosk/bench, it visually depicts a degraded watershed that is gradually being restored



to a healthy watershed by the time it reaches the entry door. The kiosk begins the story with an explanation of the importance of national forests to our water quality and quantity, and then discusses the needs and methods for watershed restoration, along with our reliance on water for outdoor recreation (both topics from Theme 2). The kiosk might interpret the ongoing partner restoration project visible on Smuggler Mt. to the northeast. There are two significant considerations with this option:

1. Because of the intent for the new Visitor Center to be a "green building" with low and sustainable operations and maintenance costs, this design would need to show that it could be done without any significant increase to electrical or water usage, and in fact, demonstrate sustainability in its features.
2. The design would need to ensure that snow and ice did not collect in the winter, creating a safety issue.

Option B: This option does not have a water component, but its design still implies that it is a small watershed. The kiosk/bench structure still tells the story of watershed importance and restoration efforts on the national forest.

Figure 1 - Exhibit Layout

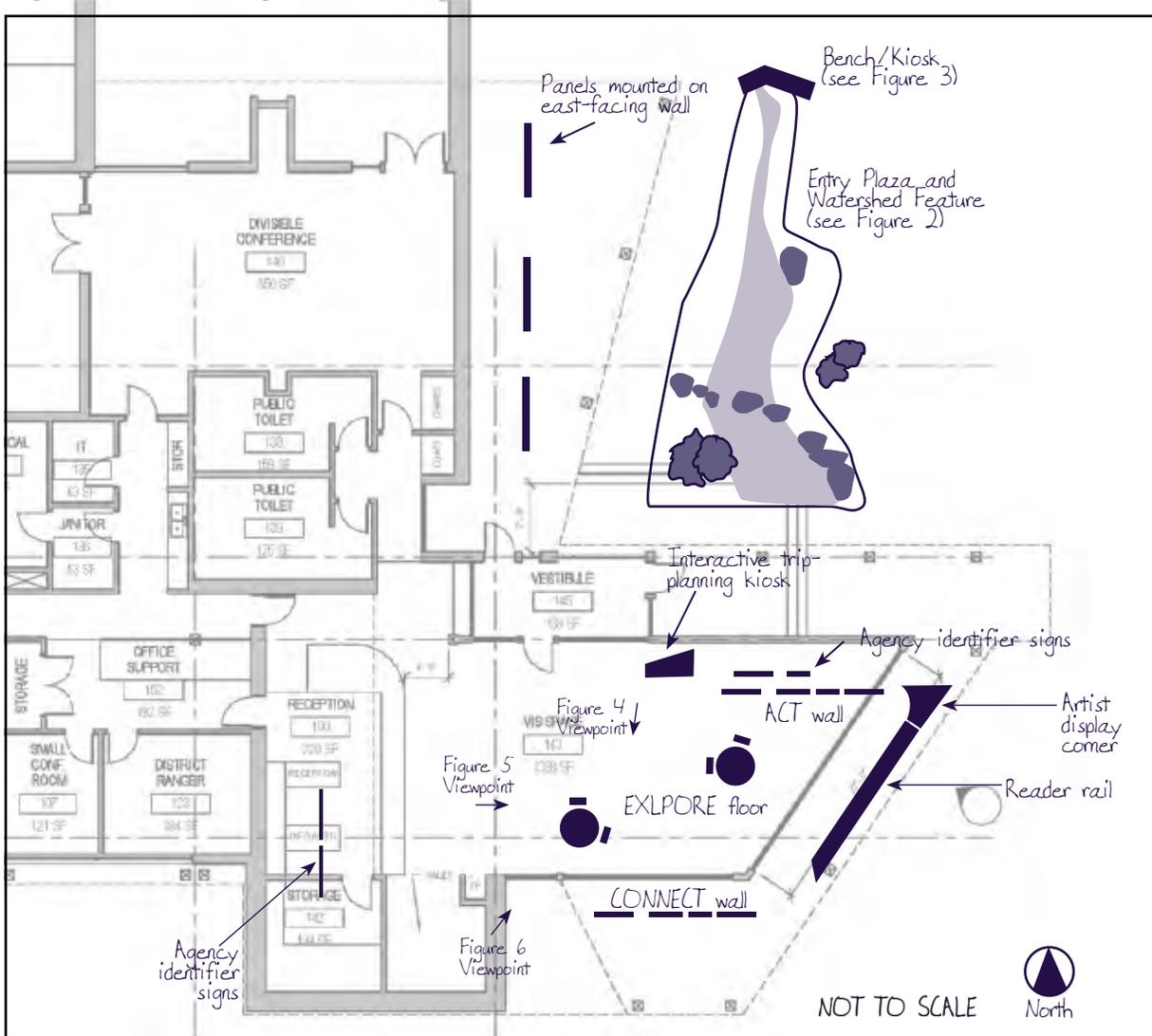


Figure 2 - Entry Plaza and Water Feature

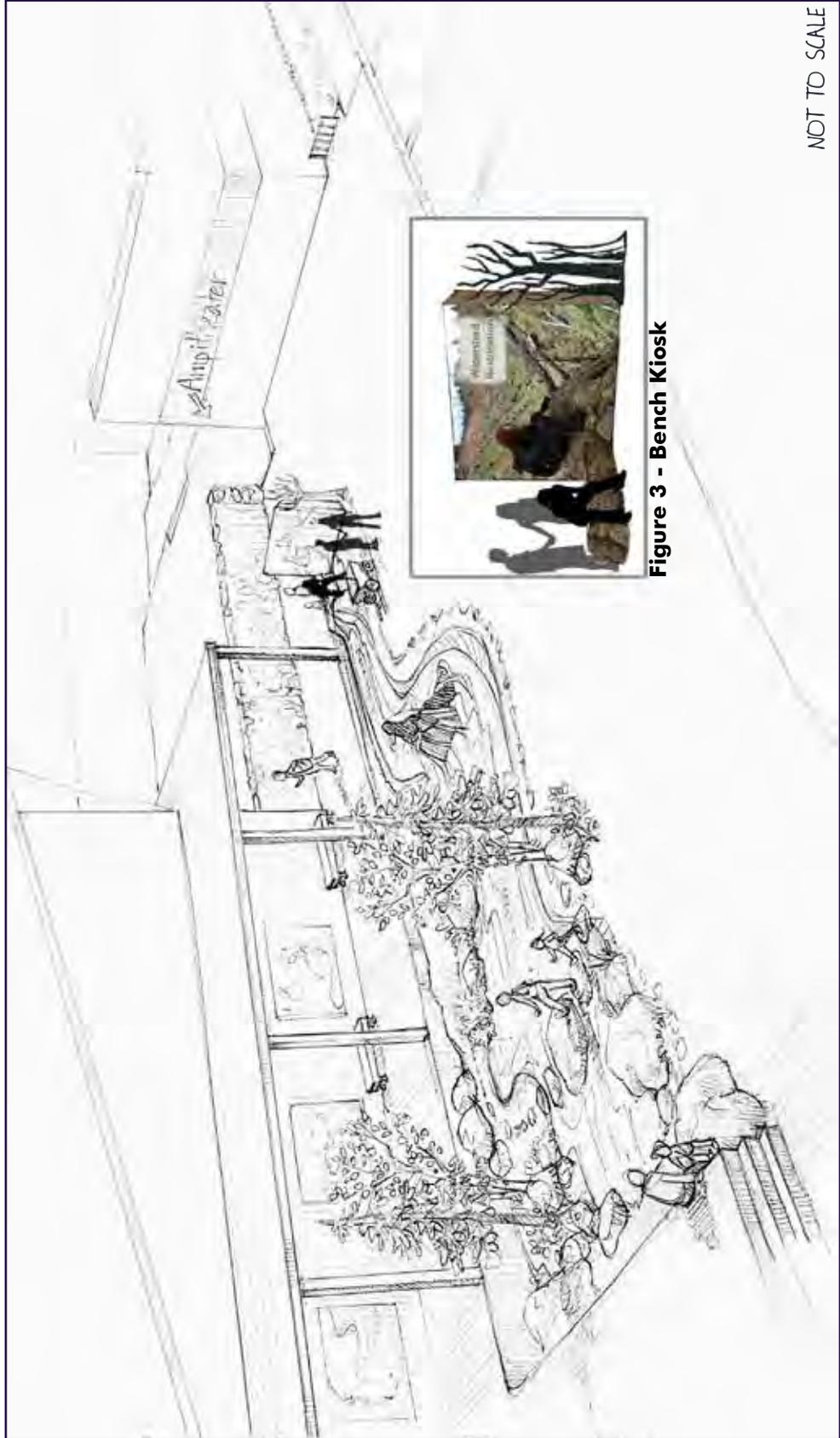


Figure 3 - Bench Kiosk

NOT TO SCALE



The east-facing exterior wall in this area provide an enticing yet concise visual of what the Aspen RD Visitor Center is all about, via a series of flat panels. These panels should have an encompassing and dramatic visual of the Aspen RD and introduce the overall theme, including both the full version ("*The Aspen Ranger District beckons visitors to explore the national forest's mysterious wild beauty, and connect with its lands and waters in a way that inspires stewardship actions.*") and the short tag line ("*Explore-Connect-Act*").

Because this entry plaza is the primary after-hours information dispersal point, it must focus on the most desired and immediate visitor information needs. These needs are captured primary in *Theme 1 - EXPLORE: Where do you want to go today? We can help you find the experience you're looking for.* The wall panels should provide information and orientation to the settings, special places, and values of the district, as identified in the White River NF Recreation Niche Statement:

- ◊ Scenic Road and River Corridors
- ◊ Wildlands, including Wilderness
- ◊ Backcountry/General Forest Area
- ◊ Concentrated recreation

Incorporated into this information are the "Know Before You Go" subthemes with safety, regulatory, and sustainable recreation messages.

Aspen RD Visitor Center and USDA Forest Service agency identifier signs are mounted on the north facing wall of the building, easily visible as you approach the vestibule. These signs reinforce the site identification signs that the visitor has already seen when approaching the site (on the southeast corner of the site and/or facing the parking area). A sign in this area also identifies the Aspen RD Visitor Center as a Top of the Rockies Scenic Byway gateway.

Within the vestibule, visitors can conduct detailed and real-time trip planning via an electronic interactive kiosk. The kiosk is easily

programmed and updated from the Visitor Information Specialist's computer during office hours. Visitors can research recreation opportunity options based on their interest and desired experience, expertise, season, and available time. (Think of it as a beefed-up electronic Recreation Opportunity Guide.)

One component of the kiosk is a flat screen monitor that provides seasonal information, trail conditions, weather updates, bear activities, and other real-time information. The kiosk itself provides links to other critical trip planning sites such as the Colorado Department of Transportation Road Conditions, Colorado Avalanche Center, weather forecasts, and the National Recreation Reservation System. Special alerts are included, such as road closures or elevated fire danger. The Visitor Information Specialists should regularly communicate with Mountain Rescue and others to get accurate road and trail conditions.

Visitor Center Interior

(See Figures 4, 5, and 6.)

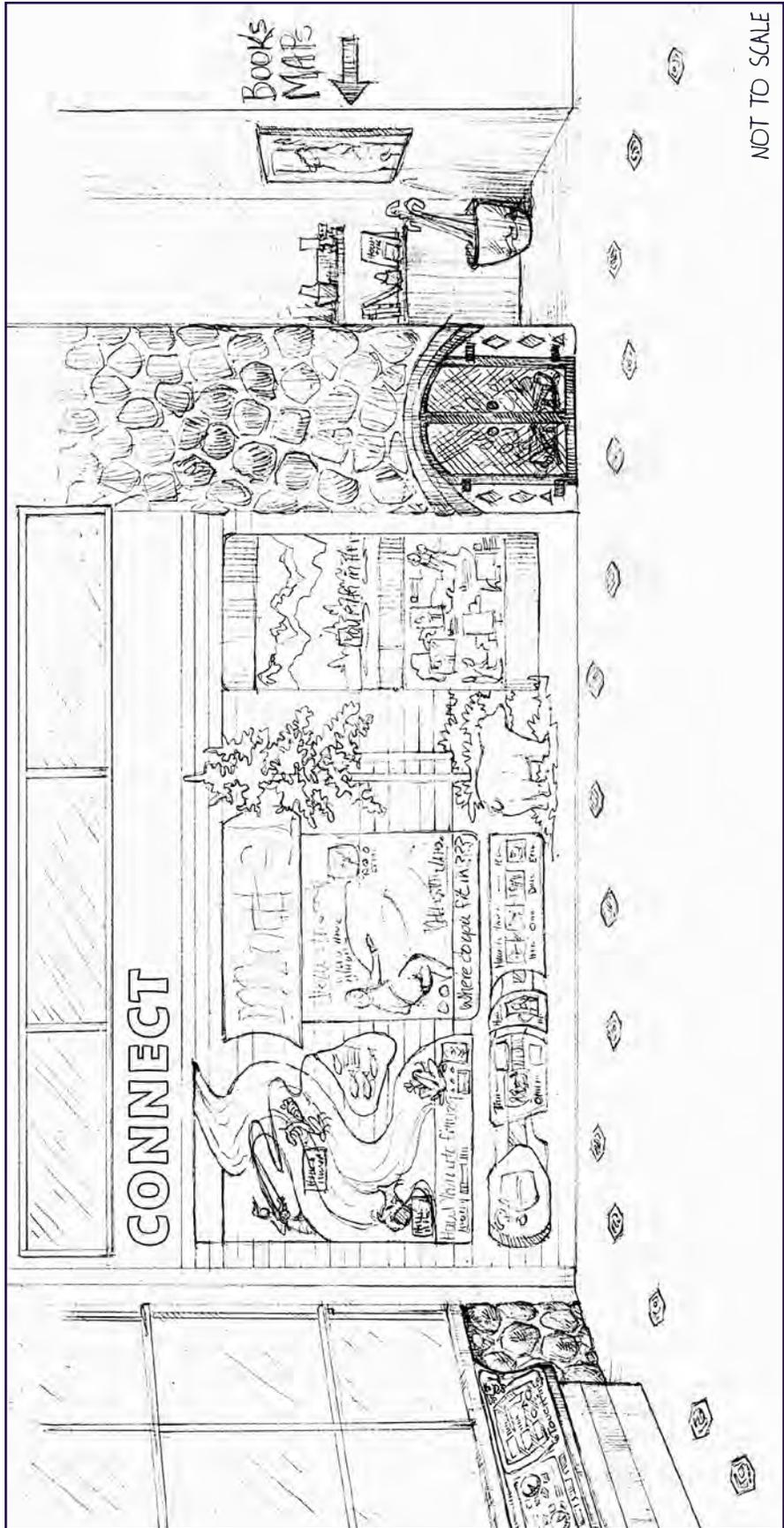
Components:

- » Reception counter
- » Two or three map-topped tables with stools
- » Digitally interactive panels on the south and north walls (see Digital Media Interpretation inset on page 18)
- » Tactile and physically interactive reader rail-type exhibit along southeast glass wall
- » Local artist exhibit space in northeast corner
- » "Stewardship steps" embedded in floor

Narrative:

Visitors entering the interior of the visitor center feel immediately welcomed with the smiling face of a uniformed staff and an attractive reception counter. Secondary welcoming attributes are the tables and stools in the center of the space that invite visitors to linger and relax.

Figure 4 - View of South Wall from Entry





The reception counter is open on both ends to allow easy egress by staff to all areas of the visitor center and sales area. The counter openings have swinging doors or other noticeable barrier. Two stools are available in front of the counter to promote longer staff-visitor interactions.

The wall behind the reception counter displays the agency name and location (White River National Forest, Aspen Ranger District). Adjacent walls and reception counter space are free of clutter, temporary signs or notices, and other unnecessary items.

The tables are topped with a high-pressure digital laminate substrate with recreation-oriented maps (e.g. Rocky Mountains and Aspen/Glenwood/Leadville circle; White River Forest; Maroon Bells Scenic Area; other high-use areas). These tables provide less *Theme 1* information than the outdoor kiosks in order to prevent redundancy. However, smaller scale and more detailed paper maps are available in brochure holders on or underneath the tables.

The digital laminate table tops are relatively easy and inexpensive to fabricate, to allow for maps to be updated over time.

The tables with stools are "bistro" height which tend to encourage use because they are less formal and require less physical commitment than lower "kitchen" height tables and chairs with backs. However, there is one table, or one section in the reception counter accessible to persons using wheelchairs.

Visitor Center staff are encouraged to sit with visitors at the tables not only to answer questions and help plan activities, but also to generate conversations and feedback about the visitors' recent national forest experiences.

"Stewardship Steps" fabricated of tile, high-pressure digital laminate, or stamped concrete are embedded into the floor

Digital Media Interpretation

As *smart phones* replace cell phones in the general public, more options open up for interpretive media. Some applications have site-specific messaging which alerts owners when information is available in the area. Applications could include downloadable audio tours and maps synched to the phone's GPS system, activity maps linked to local road condition reports and avalanche advisories, and music/podcasts that tie to interpretive themes.

Podcast technology is simple and inexpensive, making it one of the most cost-effective interpretive media formats. Feed formats such as RSS (which nearly every website has) make it easy and convenient to automatically update content.



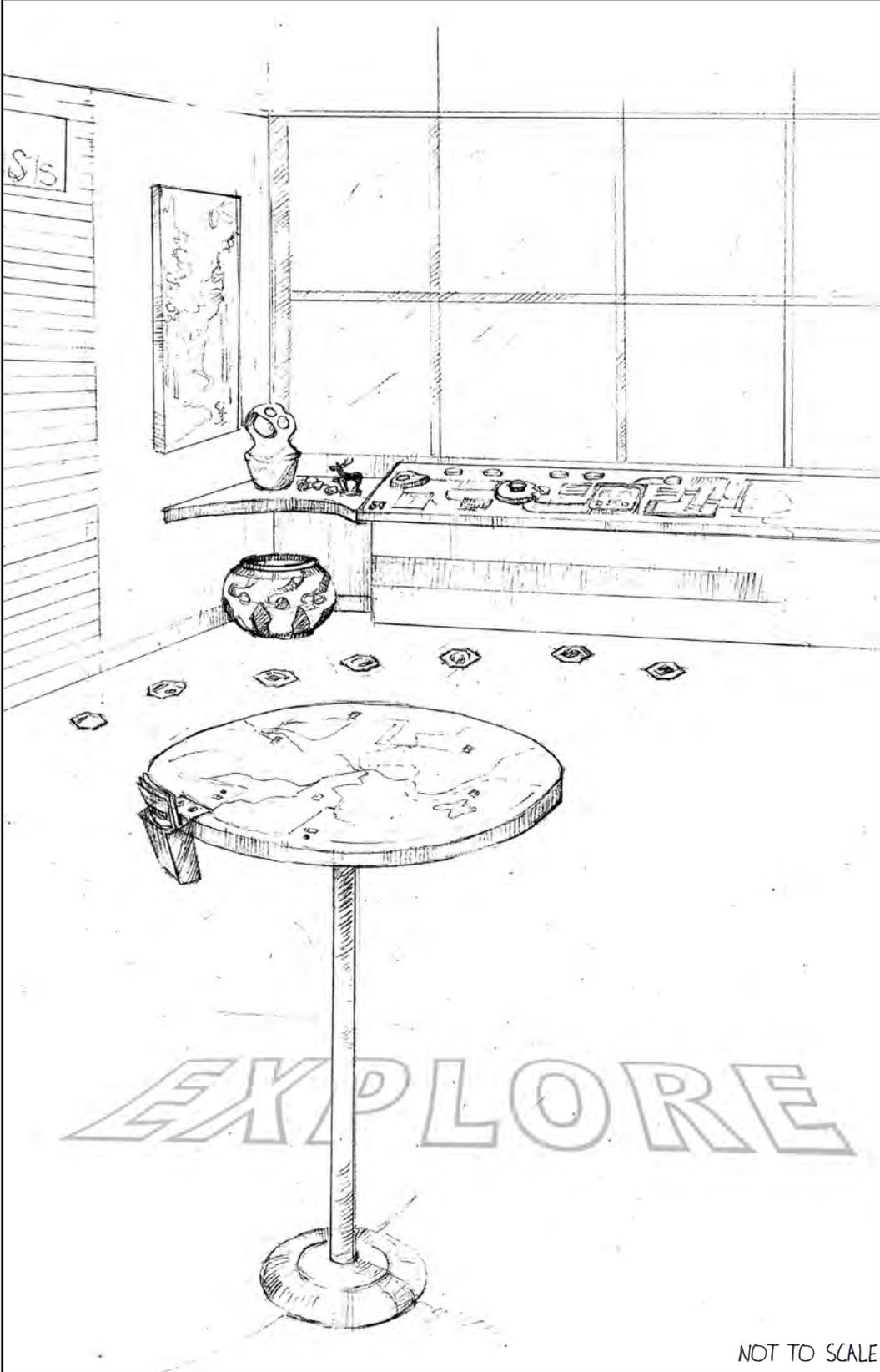
A QR code (Quick Response) is a type of matrix barcode that can be read by smartphones with the appropriate application

(free). The information encoded may be text, a URL, or other data. Users scan the the QR code to display text, connect to a wireless network, or open a web page in the telephone's browser.

Crowdsourcing is a community problem-solving model. Problems are broadcast in an open call for solutions. Users—the "crowd"—typically form themselves into online communities, and the crowd submits solutions. Crowdsourcing may produce solutions from ad hoc combinations of people who may be unknown to each other.

The interactivity of these media allow for easy (and usually free) monitoring and customizable metrics to provide real-time feedback on their use and effectiveness.

**Figure 5 - View of Northeast Corner
(showing the Artist Display Corner and a portion of the Reader Rail)**



NOT TO SCALE



suggesting a counter-clockwise traffic pattern from the door to the reception counter and traveling full-circle back to the exit. The steps are simple graphics with short messages that reinforce the stewardship messages discussed elsewhere both inside and outside the visitor center through *Theme 1* and *Theme 3*. For example, a step might say "Leave No Trace with your fire" along with a graphic of a campstove; or show a graphic of a person planting a tree with the statement "Save the Snow-Plant a Tree;" or they could give an encouraging quote such as *"The vast possibilities of our great future will become realities only if we make ourselves responsible for that future."*

The sales area is located directly adjacent to the reception counter to enable close supervision and assistance to customers. A security gate allows the area to be closed off when the visitor center is open but not staffed. Free items are not included in the sales area to avoid confusion with sale items.

In the center of the floor in between tables, the word "EXPLORE" is embedded using the same method as the Stewardship Steps.

As visitors approach the south wall, their first visual is that of the large word "CONNECT" high on the wall. The wall has a series of flat panels with *Theme 2* messages that are concise and conveyed primarily through visuals rather than text.

An alternative to the typical flat panels are lenticular 3D panels that are flat but appear to be three-dimensional when the viewer moves in relationship to the panel. The viewer gets a sense of motion and/or dimension to the scene (no special glasses required). Examples of lenticular printing can be seen at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenticular_printing.

The wall surface is designed as a horizontal slat wall to allow for easy mounting, arrangement, and rotation of panels.

A key component of these exhibits is their interactivity primarily through electronic means. **QR tags** (or similar technology) are mounted on small panels (4" x 6") adjacent to the larger panels so that smartphone users can scan a bar code to get an immediate connection to more information or a website link. The link could take you to Forest Service YouTube videos, podcasts, and other digital paths to further inquiry.

The QR code panel or attachment is designed to be easily replaced since it is anticipated that as technology continues to evolve, something else will take its place.

A reader rail greets visitors as they progress clockwise to the southeast glass wall. The rail is designed with manipulative parts as visitors investigate the messages in a tactile mode. *Theme 2* transitions to *Theme 3* here.

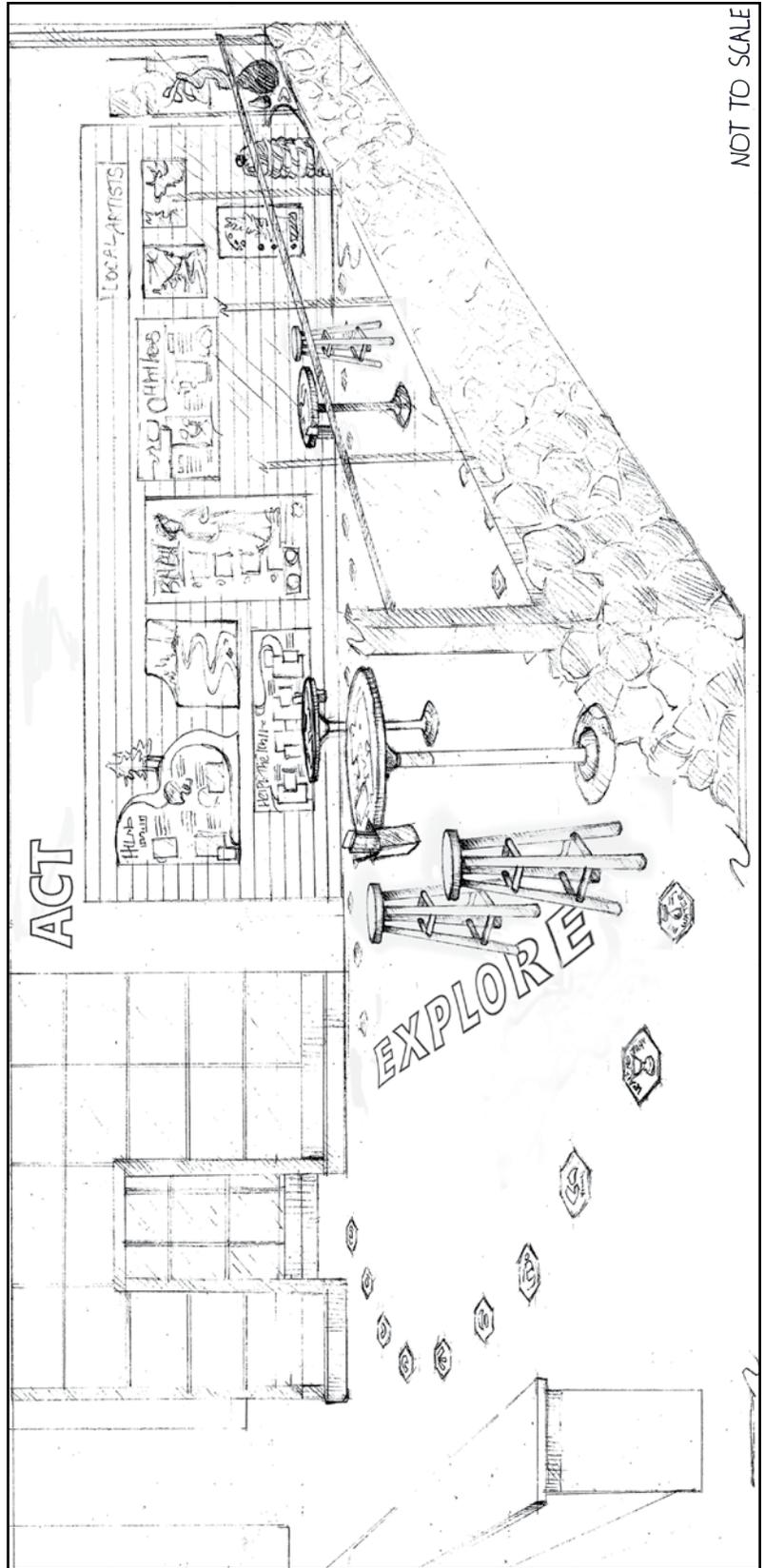
In the northeast corner between the southeast glass wall and the north wall is a display space for a seasonal art show where local artisans can display work related to the three themes of the Visitor Center. Medium could include painting, fiber arts, beads, sculpture, or other types that could be displayed on a corner counter or hung on the north wall.

The north wall is dominated by a large "ACT" visual, introducing *Theme 3*. As with the south wall, the north wall has panels with various aspects of *Theme 3*, but also with opportunities for electronic interaction. QR tags provide avenues for more information, podcasts, website links, or for real-time feedback through Forest Service blogs. Options are given to subscribe to RSS (*Really Simple Syndication*) feeds

RSS Feeds

A feed is frequently updated content published by a website. It can be used for news and blogs, but also for distributing audio or video. When you subscribe, your browser automatically checks the website and downloads new content so you can see what is new since you last visited the feed.

Figure 6 - View of North Wall from Sales Area



NOT TO SCALE



published by the White River NF or partners for items such as news updates, volunteer recruitment, and/or requests for input on planning documents.

Like the south wall, the surface is primarily a slat wall designed to allow for rotation of panels and artwork.

One panel on this wall should be designed for temporary displays that highlight current planning or stewardship projects on the Aspen RD or elsewhere on the White River NF, relevant workshops, forums, or other events sponsored by partners. The objective of this display is to promote the "ACT" theme through participation in a current forest planning project, trail maintenance project, or partnership event. Forest issues could be presented as open-ended problem-solving challenges to encourage a viral buzz and advocacy for **crowdsourcing**-type solutions.

A component of this wall should be a display that acknowledges the district's partnerships with information on how to contribute or volunteer with them. This display should be easily changeable as new partnerships develop or older ones dissolve.

Theme 3 messages are also shown throughout the visitor center, restrooms, and conference room, through a series of small sustainability icon panels (about 5" x 7") that interpret the various LEED construction components around the building (e.g., low-flow faucets or waterless flush toilets in the bathrooms, Low-E glass, low-VOC paints).

It is anticipated that a drinking fountain will be planned for an area near the restrooms. Because of the emphasis on water at this Visitor Center, the fountain itself should be designed as a functional interpretive product. For example, the "Forest to Faucet" concept could be depicted on a wall behind the fountain (via a flat panel or painted mural) showing the path of water from its headwaters to its outlet at the actual faucet head, with

messages on how its quantity and quality are affected by human-caused and natural events. Another possibility would be to face the wall with rock similar to local geology where a spring seeps from the wall through the faucet. A small panel describes how this is a water-saving faucet and offers tips on water conservation at home.

The faucet design should allow for the easy filling of water bottles.

Design guidelines for color in this space should use a palette based on the three primary themes, providing a color-coded key for each. For example:

- » "EXPLORE" could be an earthy, rusty-brown tone that is carried over to the tables and exterior exhibits with all of the *Theme 1* messages
- » "CONNECT" could be a watery cool color on a wall with all of the *Theme 2* messages
- » "ACT" could be a green wall with *Theme 3* messages

Conference Room

The conference room is used primarily by district staff and partners, but can also be available for agency or partner workshops, programs, forums, or other events. As such, it has the necessary accoutrements for meeting work such as a dry erase board, screen, map hanging strips, and other display space. However, these items are attractively arranged within shadow-box style collages of exemplary area photos stretched on canvas or framed, to keep meeting participants somewhat tethered to the resources they are discussing.

Amphitheatre

Development of interpretive concepts for the amphitheatre area is pending further development of architectural and landscape concepts.

Education Programs

Education Program recommendations assume the following:

- » Potential spaces for these programs will include, (a) the entry plaza (b) the interior visitor center, (c) the conference room that can be divided into at least two teaching/meeting spaces, and (d) the amphitheater with lawn seating and a stage.
- » An overarching partner organization will be the developmental and delivery mechanism for educational programs. Their primary liaison within the district will be the VIS and/or Recreation staff. However, all district staff should recognize they are part of the education mission of the District that strives to enhance community and visitor literacy about forest resources, management, and sustainability.
- » All program offerings should be tied to the themes and subthemes in this plan as well as to the mission, goal, or teaching objective of the sponsoring partner.

(Note that education program recommendations are Aspen RD Visitor Center on-site programs only; outreach programs held elsewhere are not included here.)

Adult and Family Programs

This category includes programs for adults and/or family groups that are short-duration, based on pre-determined topics or themes, and presented in an engaging and often interactive manner.

Annual Sustainability Fair – Organize and convene an *Annual Sustainability Fair* on the premises where programs, activities, and walks would be hosted in the meeting room(s), amphitheater and grounds. The goal of this event would be to welcome local residents (and visitors) to the forest offices in an open-house fashion, to showcase community efforts in sustainability, to present recent successes

and/or trends in forest management, and to provide educational resources and informal programs for families.

Sustainability Lecture Series – Organize and host a series of monthly (or bi-monthly) community lectures from local, regional, or national experts on topics related to forest resource management. All presentations should allow for some level of participant questioning and/or interactivity related to the content being presented.

Year-round Recycled Art Show – In collaboration with the Art Museum, coordinate and manage a community recycled art show for the visitor center where community members submit art made from recycled products to a community peer group for review and selection, to be displayed in the visitor center (northeast corner). Eventually, art themes could be developed (e.g., mobiles, sculpture, wearable art, mixed media, jewelry, hood ornament art, refrigerator art). In all cases, the artists would have to include a sustainability statement about materials used and lessons learned about sustainability in the process.

Training Programs

Training programs build capacity, communication, and collaboration among and between area individuals and groups.

Educator/Interpretive Training - In cooperation with local educators (ACES, Aspen School District, Roaring Fork, Walking Mountains, etc.) organize and convene periodic but regular training for educators who work with natural resources. This may include hosting already-developed training sessions offered by Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education (see www.CAEE.org), National Association for Interpretation, Science Teachers Associations (see www.NSTA.org), local



history organizations (see www.AASLH.org), and others.

The goal of these programs would be to build capacity and collaboration among educators of the valley and region but more importantly, to enhance the capabilities of these educators for addressing intermediate- and advanced-level content related to natural resource science and management. Educators and interpreters are overwhelmed with basic or fundamental (101 or novice) curricula, programs, and ideas. What is increasingly needed, is more programming and teaching expertise for 201 (practicing), 301 (specialist), and even 401 (expert) level content. The district has an opportunity to create and sustain this training niche for the central valleys of Colorado.

Content and Methods Training for Educators

- Organize and convene an annual two-day workshop where content experts in forestry, fire, wilderness, recreation, grazing, etc. present current research, issues, and trends in topics relate to forest management. Educators would work in breakout sessions with content experts to develop and/or revise general program ideas and delivery methods for schools and community groups.

A cross-over strategy for encouraging educator training in both areas described above is highly encouraged.

K-12 Formal Education Programs

Programs for public school or home-school students and/or teachers would be designed to correlate with curricula of the formal education system.

Mini-Field Trips - In collaboration with the Aspen School District and other area science/nature educators, ensure that at least one field trip per grade level

each year (total of 12 programs/year) is hosted by the Forest Service at Aspen RD visitor center to provide an age-specific program related to the White River NF, its mission and management as well as its role in resource sustainability. As some students would come to the site 12 times in a 12-year school career, careful attention to building a sequential field trips that meet each grade level's needs. Interactivity and engagement will be essential at each grade, and curriculum-relevance for each grade will be important. Using the environment as an integrating context (see www.seer.org) is highly recommended so that at one grade the mini-field trip might focus on language arts and forests, at another grade math and forests, and still another grade art or physical education and forests.

Partnerships and Funding Options

Reliance on partnerships has been—and will continue to be—crucial for meeting and sustaining the educational desired outcomes of the White River NF. The current partners described below can be tapped as potential resources for implementing the program ideas described above.

Aspen Center for Environmental Studies

(ACES) - The ACES mission is to inspire a life-long commitment to the earth by educating for environmental responsibility, conserving and restoring the balance of natural communities, and advancing the ethic that the Earth must be respected and nurtured. ACES assists the Aspen Ranger District by conducting regular educational programs in the forest, local schools, and daily interpretive programs at the Maroon Bells, Snowmass Ski Area, and Aspen Mountain Ski Area during summer, and at Snowmass Ski Area and Aspen Mountain Ski Area in the winter. For more information: <http://www.aspennature.org>.

Forest Conservancy - The Forest Conservancy mission is to protect and preserve the White River NF for future generations by sponsoring volunteer Wilderness rangers and forest ambassadors that communicate to visitors about forest resources. They assist the Aspen Ranger District by staffing the Maroon Bells Information Center which is the main hub for visitor information and interpretation at the Maroon Bells Scenic Area. For more information: <http://www.forestconservancy.com>.

Aspen Historical Society (AHS) - Since the 1970s AHS has been the steward for Ashcroft and Independence Ghost Towns which are on the National Register of Historic Places. AHS's mission is to enrich the community through preserving and interpreting our remarkable history. The AHS actively preserves and presents our local history in an inspired and provocative manner that will continue to anchor our community and its evolving character. For more information: <http://www.aspenhistorysociety.com>.

Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers (RFOV) - The RFOV mission is to promote stewardship of our public lands by creating volunteer opportunities for trail work and conservation projects. RFOV believes the preservation and enhancement of our natural surroundings is the responsibility of every member of our regional community. The stewardship RFOV promotes helps enhance the preservation of natural surroundings from the high use areas, special places and national historic sites. For more information: <http://www.rfov.org/>.

Colorado 14ers initiative (CFI) - CFI is a partner in education as well as work on the ground. Their mission is to protect the natural integrity of Colorado's 14,000 ft. peaks through active stewardship and public education. Aspen CFI has worked on numerous projects and education opportunities from peak stewards program, trail construction projects on Capital, Maroon, and Pyramid Peaks in the past

decade. For more information: <http://www.14ers.org/>.

Roaring Fork Conservancy - Roaring Fork Conservancy is the watershed conservation organization in the Roaring Fork Valley that brings people together to protect the rivers. They assist the Aspen Ranger District by conducting educational and interpretive programs throughout the valley's watersheds including the Roaring Fork River, Crystal River, Frypan River, headwaters, dams, and other riparian locations of interest. For more information: <http://www.roaringfork.org/>.

The Roaring Fork Environmental Education Network - This group brings together Roaring Fork Valley environmental educators to work on projects with mutual benefits. Participants include the White River NF, local schools, local parks and recreation departments, non-profits, and individuals. For more information: <http://www.caee.org/>.

Rocky Mountain Nature Association (RMNA) - Currently, RMNA is the interpretive association that operates the book store at the Aspen District Office. All commercial products (e.g. maps, books, and souvenirs) are sold through them, mostly in the summer months. A percentage of the revenue generated by RMNA at the Aspen District Office is reinvested in programs and projects that benefit the district.

Other Methods

- » Community foundations are a good source of grant funding for speaker series.
- » Rocky Mountain Nature Association sales fees that return to the forest should be strategically managed to implement programs from this plan.
- » Participant fees for programs should be considered (collected by a partner on behalf of mutually beneficial programs).
- » Grants may be available through the Colorado Alliance for Environmental



Education (CAEE), the EPA (for school-related environmental education), the Colorado Department of Education, or GoCo.

- » Community Office for Resource Efficiency (CORE) works cooperatively with businesses, individuals, utilities and government entities to create measurable improvements in energy and water efficiency in order to benefit the environment and develop a more sustainable economy.

This section of the plan describes a visitor monitoring and evaluation process that may be useful for judging our success at meeting the stated outcomes of this plan (see page 7).

The intent of any visitor monitoring and evaluation is to better understand the visitor experience and the outcomes of that experience—what visitors do, think, or feel as a result of those experiences. For the purposes of this plan, the visitor experience may be an encounter with staff and materials at the District Office or it may be an entire recreation experience with the natural/cultural resources of the area.

In addition, we want to determine the success of our exhibits, services, and other products in producing those desired outcomes.

Recognizing that District staff has limited time, staff, and resources, evaluation recommendations are presented in priority order where,

- » **Priority 1** strategies can be easily implemented with existing VIS staff and volunteers,
- » **Priority 2** could likely be implemented with existing staff and volunteers but where more diligent attention to visitors needs would be needed, and
- » **Priority 3** includes evaluation strategies that require additional effort and perhaps evaluation assistance to design and implement.

Priority 1

The intent of a Priority 1 approach would be to collect information about on-site visits to the Visitor Center building and its exhibits and materials. This approach would not address specific objectives of this plan but would provide visitation data about the use of the Visitor Center, and may provide general information related to some of the plan objectives. An observation form is recommended to answer questions about visitors such as:

- » How do they use the Visitor Center, specifically:
 - ◊ *How much time do they spend at each area?*
 - ◊ *How do they use the map tables?*
 - ◊ *What general and specific comments they have about forests, Aspen, views, or topics of interest?*
- » What bookstore items do they purchase?
- » What questions do they ask?
- » What specific information are they seeking?

A simple observation sheet could be kept on the VIS counter so that any staff or volunteer could record information quickly for each visiting party. Monitoring of some of these questions could be done for phone calls and emails as well as on-site visits. Sample ideas for an observation form are provided in Appendix B.

Observation data would be used to inform decisions such as, (a) what material and information is most useful for answering specific questions or addressing visitor needs; (b) are additional or replacement materials needed; (c) are tables used as intended and are additional planning aids or information needed; (d) do the “Stewardship steps” stimulate discussion among visitors; (e) do the interpretive materials provided provoke questions about natural/cultural resources of the area, and so forth.

Until this information is collected, it is impossible to know what improvements might be needed for the Visitor Center. However, an example might be that based on exhibits and experiences in the Visitor Center, visitors begin talking about specific forest issues, prompting the need for “Issue Briefings” (e.g., Climate Change and Colorado Ski Areas).

Other decisions about interpretive or educational materials should be discussed once this data is collected for approximately six months. Data collection should continue year around (with any needed changes to the observation form) so that decisions about



education and interpretation in the Visitor Center can be refined to best meet visitor needs for all seasons.

Priority 2

The intent of a Priority 2 approach would be to explore the impact of a visitor encounter with the materials, information and staff of the Visitor Center. This approach would address the following outcomes described in this plan.

- ◊ *Objective #1 - at least 90% of visitors will prepare for a safe trip and leave with a positive image of the Forest service, which, in turn means visitors are able to:*
 - *Find appropriate, relevant, current, and accurate information and materials for planning their desired experiences (in the staffed VC or after hours).*
 - *Provide positive feedback about staff interactions.*
- ◊ *Objective #2 - at least 50% of visitors will expand their connection to, and stewardship of public lands and waters by,*
 - *Describing forest benefits.*
 - *Feeling motivated to make decisions consistent with stewardship behaviors.*
- ◊ *Objective #3 - least 15% of visitors will learn something new about the cultural and natural resources of the White River NF by,*
 - *Describing congressionally-designated Wilderness values that are part of public land management.*
 - *Articulating the Forest Service mission.*

A simple self-administered Visitor Response Card is recommended for exploring these outcomes. Sample script for such a card is provided in Appendix B. These cards would be made available to all visitors to the visitor center—inside when staffed, and/or in the 24-hour information area. As they are self-administered, not all visitors will complete them. This influences the generalizability of this information. During hours when the Visitor Center is staffed, personnel could

encourage visitors to complete the card which increases the response rate (and thus the generalizability) somewhat.

It will be important for the staff to recognize that this data should only be used as a guide for responding to visitor information needs and as an exploratory measure of visitor perceptions in this Visitor Center. Additional, more rigorous approaches would have to be used in order to get a fully reliable assessment of these outcomes.

Priority 3

The intent of a Priority 3 approach would be to systematically assess visitor knowledge, attitudes and/or behaviors related to overall experiences with the White River NF including recreation, interpretation, personnel encounters, and perhaps prior life experience with topics of inquiry (e.g., sustainability, stewardship, climate change, forest management). This approach might address the following outcomes of this plan.

- ◊ *Objective #4 - at least 10% of visitors will develop a deeper understanding of emerging environmental issues relevant to the Forest Service mission, such as climate change, integrated resource restoration, and sustainable operation whereby they*
 - *Articulate current cultural or natural resources issues related to forest management and describe their personal relevance.*
 - *Describe personal interest and motivations for involvement with these issues.*
 - *Report personal behaviors aimed at learning about, practicing, and/or otherwise becoming engaged in these issues.*
 - *Recognize the importance of Rocky Mountain Nature Association and its partners to overall forest management.*

An in-depth interview approach and/or field observations with systematically-selected visitors might be used for capturing this type of information. An in-depth survey might

also be used; however, this approach and any respective study instruments should be designed by a trained evaluator or social scientist. Staff time would have to be allocated to help design the study and to help analyze and use the information captured.

Using the approach above, additional questions may be designed specifically for local residents to explore their interest and motivation in “becoming active in local resource issues” as stated in Objective 4.1.

In addition, Priority 3 efforts might involve field work by rangers or volunteers to track and monitor resource impacts as articulated in Objective 2.3. (“White River NF managers see less negative impacts to the natural and cultural resources from inadvertent behaviors (i.e. depreciative actions that result from lack of knowledge or misinformation”). Again, this type of monitoring should be designed by a recreation professional who can develop a systematic resource monitoring program that considers history of depreciative behaviors in particular areas, locations for and percentage of visitors exposed to various information sources, and expected resource conditions for future management.

For **both Priority 2 and 3** approaches, note that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) restricts the amount and type of public surveys conducted by government agencies. For example, the Forest Service cannot, among other things, ask the same question of more than 10 people without first getting OMB approval of the survey instrument.

However, there are other options:

- » Partner with others in the region (e.g. Roaring Fork Conservancy, Keystone Science School) to administer the survey.
- » Recruit university students to conduct surveys as an educational (for credit) experience.
- » Check with the appropriate Forest Service Research Stations for potential assistance.
- » An external entity that serves as a

Partnership/Stewardship Coordinator for many of the ongoing efforts of the Visitor Center could also provide evaluation and monitoring services.



Notes

The next step in the planning of the Aspen RD Visitor Center will be to develop an exhibit design plan based on this Interpretive and Education Plan. The exhibit design plan provides the details and specifications necessary to begin fabrication. The Center for Design and Interpretation can assist with the necessary contracting. In addition, for large projects, Washington Office approval is required for exhibit construction. (Refer to FSM 2390 for more information.)

Figure 5 - Exhibit Approval Process

Approval Process for Exhibits in new FS Visitor or Interpretive Centers Over \$250,000

Action Field Unit	Action RO	Action WO
Step 1 - Waiver		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field prepares request for waiver to Visitor Center moratorium (policy memo, 2000) Submits request RO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RO Recreation, Engineering and Bus Ops review request for waiver Forward waiver request to Chief, WO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WO Recreation, Engineering and Bus Ops review waiver request. WO Recreation prepares memo for Chief to approve or deny waiver request If waived, field then prepares exhibit proposal, as well as expanded operation and maintenance business plan and other documentation.
Step 2 – Exhibit Proposal		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waiver authorizes field to proceed with exhibit and facility proposal which is submitted to RO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RO Recreation, Engineering and Bus Ops review proposal Forward proposal to Chief, WO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WO Recreation, Engineering and Bus Ops review. WO Recreation prepares memo for Chief to approve or deny proposal May consult with USDA Visual Communication Center (DR 1470)
Step 3 – Design Review Process		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With WO approval the field and RO proceed with design review process with WO oversight and involvement CDI may provide oversight on behalf of WO 		



Approval Process for Exhibits or Displays Over \$25,000

Includes exhibits or displays in new or renovated Forest Service administrative sites, as well as temporary or traveling exhibits/displays.

Action Field Unit	Action RO	Action WO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field prepares exhibit proposal Submits proposal to RO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RO reviews proposal Forwards proposal with transmittal letter to WO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WO reviews and prepares memo to approve or deny May consult with USDA Visual Communication Center (DR1470)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With WO approval the field with RO oversight proceeds with design review process (may include WO oversight) 		

Appendix A - Visitor Demographics

Table 1 - Percent of National Forest Visits by race/ethnicity on White River National Forest (National Visitor Use Monitoring FY2002 and FY2007 data)

Race/Ethnicity				
Race/Ethnicity	Number of Survey Respondents		National Forest Visits (%)	
	FY2002	FY2007	FY2002	FY2007
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	11	0.02	1.3
Asian	12	20	0.82	0.9
Black/African American	8	4	1.06	0.1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1	4	0.04	0.2
Other	18	na	1.04	na
White	1662	1306	94.45	98.6
Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino	42	20	2.58	0.7
Total	1744	1345	100.01	101.1

Table 2 - Percent of National Forest Visits by age on White River National Forest (National Visitor Use Monitoring FY2002 and FY2007 data)

Age	National Forest Visits (%)	
	FY2002	FY2007
Under 16	18.9	15.1
16-19	2.6	4.0
20-29	16.7	14.1
30-39	21.7	16.9
40-49	19.3	20.0
50-59	11.0	17.3
60-69	6.5	10.4
70 and over	3.2	2.3
Total	99.9	100.1

**Table 3 - Percent of National Forest Visits by distance traveled to White River National Forest. (FY2007 NVUM data)**

Miles from Respondent's Home to White River NF	National Forest Visits (%)	
	FY2002	FY2007
0 - 25 miles	NA	22.6
26 - 50 miles	NA	3.3
51 - 75 miles	NA	5.2
76 - 100 miles	NA	8.8
101 - 150 miles	NA	8.3
151 - 200 miles	NA	2.4
201 - 500 miles	NA	49.4
Total		100.0

Table 4 - Visit duration on White River National Forest (National Visitor Use Monitoring FY2002 and FY2007 data)

Visit Type	Round 1, FY2002		Round 2, FY2007	
	Average Duration (hours)	Median Duration (hours)	Average Duration (hours)	Median Duration (hours)
Site Visit	5.5	3.6	4.6	2.8
Day Use Developed	4.0	3.8	3.0	2.8
Overnight Use Developed	39.0	40.8	38.3	40.4
Undeveloped Areas	6.5	2.0	9.8	2.4
Designated Wilderness	7.9	2.6	7.4	3.0
National Forest Visit	24.5	4.3	53.8	6.8

For more demographics or other visitor use information refer to the 2008 National Visitor Use Monitoring Results for the White River National Forest: <http://apps.fs.fed.us/nrm/nvum/results/Default.aspx>

Figure 6 - VIS Contacts made at the Aspen Ranger Station during the summer of 2009. Data was collected from Memorial Day weekend through September. (FY2009 Aspen VIS Annual Report data)

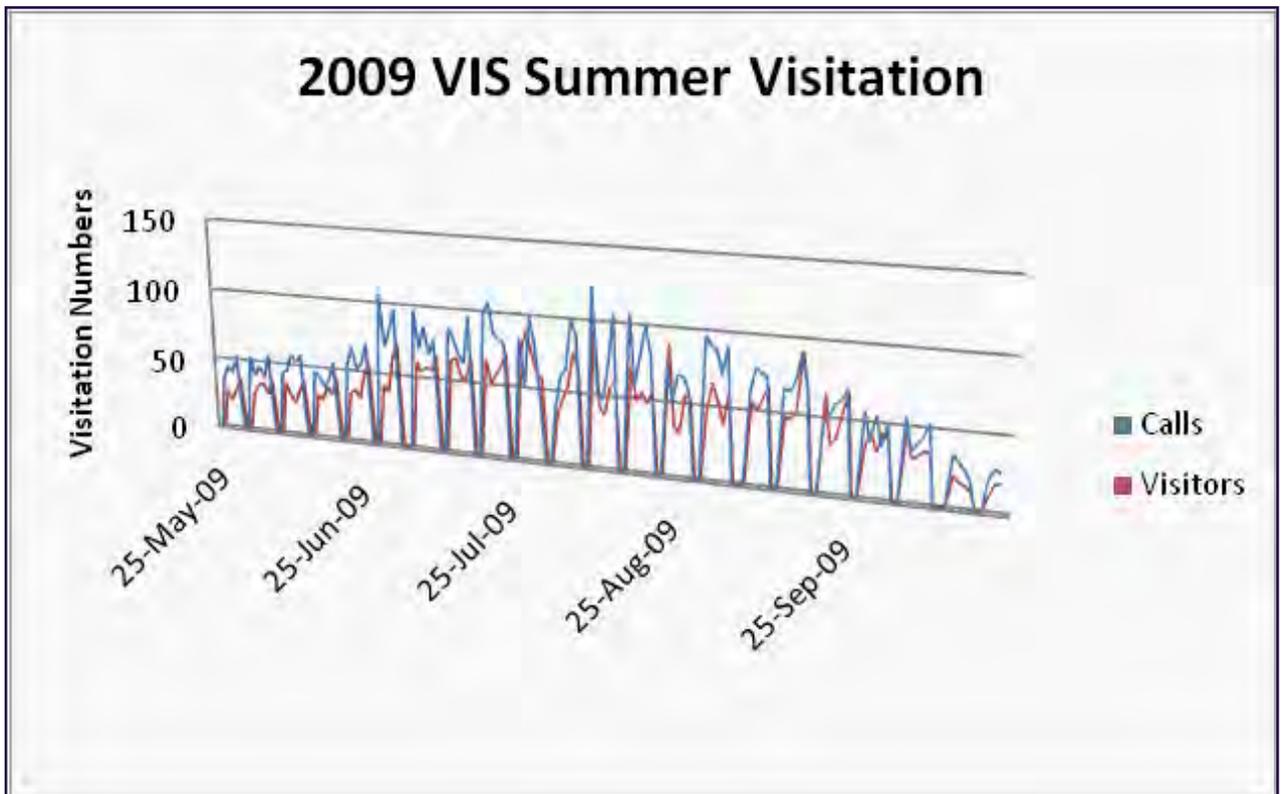




Figure 7 - VIS Contacts made at the Aspen Ranger Station during the summer of 2010. Data was collected from May through December. (FY2010 Aspen VIS Annual Report data)

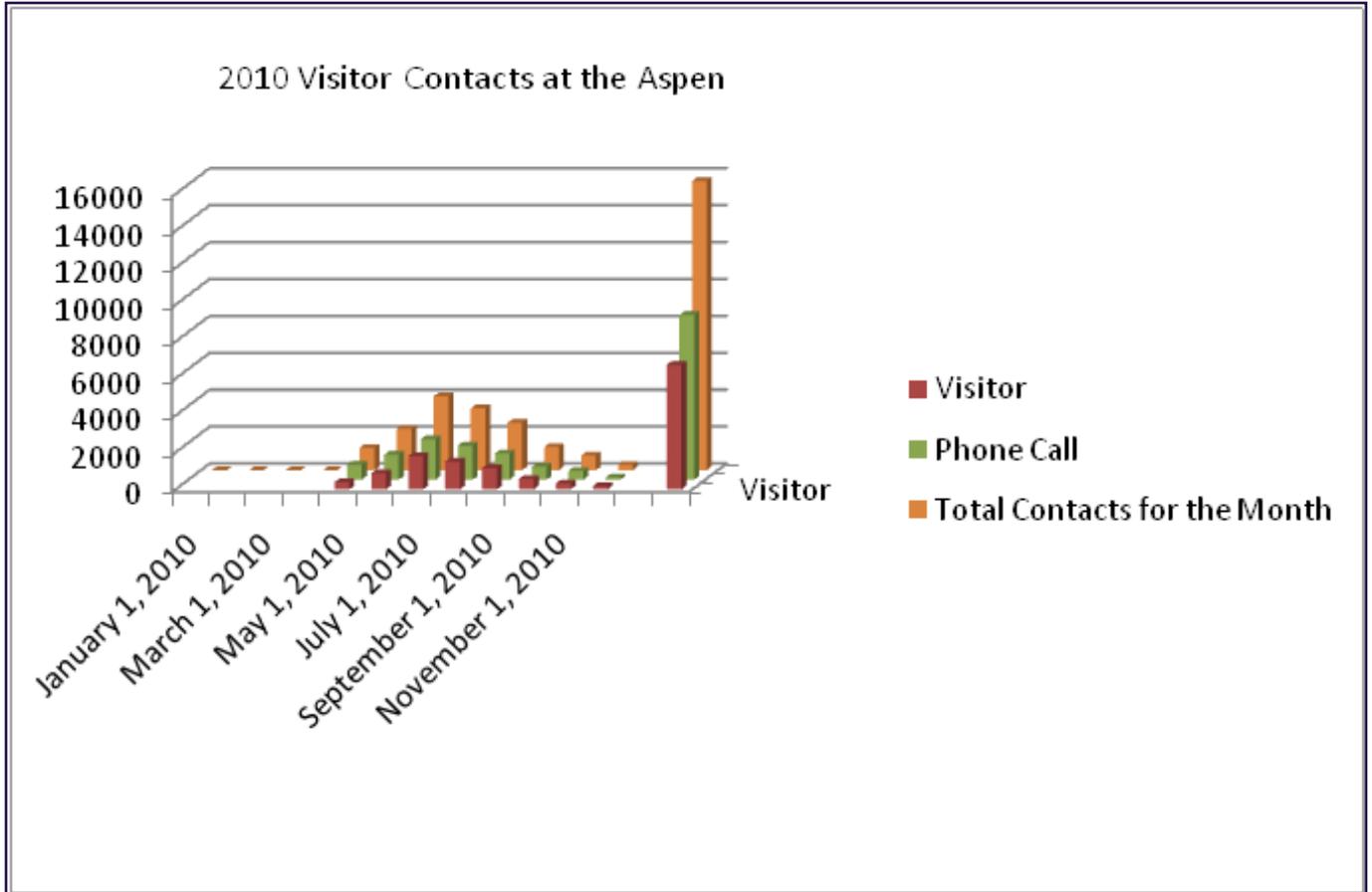


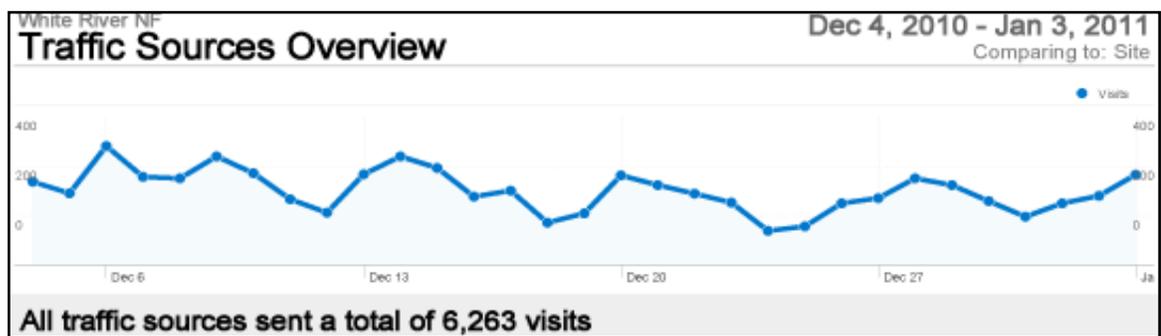
Figure 8 - Total number of visits to the White River National Forest website in December 2010. (January FY2011 Google Analytics Report data)

Traffic Sources is term used by Google to identify how a visitor is directed to a website. Traffic Sources can be from Direct Traffic, Referring Websites, or Search Engines. This graph shows that various traffic sources sent a total of 6,263 visitors to the White River National Forest website in December 2010.



Figure 9 - Total Number of web pages viewed on the White River National Forest Website in December 2010. (January FY2011 Google Analytics Report data)

Content Overview is a term used by Google to record the total number of pages viewed by visitors. Every time a visitor clicks on a link to open a new page, this action is recorded as a pageview. This graph shows a total of 28,560 pageviews on the White River National Forest website in December 2010.





Aspen Chamber Resort Visitor Demographics

Aspen Summer Visitor Profile – Summer 2010

Age*

Under 25	5%
25-34	16%
35-44	20%
45-54	22%
55-65	21%
65+	16%

HHI*

Under \$50k	13%
\$50k- \$99k	22%
\$100k - \$199k	34%
+\$200k	32%

Average Length of Stay* 5.5 nights

87% Stay Overnight / 13% Day Visitors

Of the 83% that Stay Overnight

- 64% = Stay in Aspen
- 2%= Stay at Buttermilk & Highlands base
- 18%= Stay in Snowmass
- 14%= Stay down valley

Marital Status*

Families w/ children at home	35%
Empty-nesters	33%
Singles w/out children	16%
Couples w/out children	16%

Top Feeder Markets*

- Colorado
- Texas
- California
- Florida
- New York
- Illinois

56% Use air travel for at least part of their trip

44% Use ground transportation- primarily private car

Of that 56% who use air travel:

- 37%** Fly into Aspen Sardy Field (ASE)
- 17%** Fly into Denver Int'l Airport (DIA)
- 2%** Fly into Eagle Regional Airport (EGE)
- 1%** Fly into other airports

*based on 2010 Intercept Surveys – Summer Visitor - RRC Associates

Area Population (need this info)

Pop. Year	Area	Total Full Time Population
2008	Aspen	6,671
2008	Snowmass	2,335
2008	Pitkin County*	17,101
2008	Basalt	3,277

Pop. Year	Area	Total Full Time Population
2010	Aspen	6,658
2010	Snowmass	2,826
2010	Pitkin County*	17,148
2010	Basalt	3,857

Source: April 200 U.S. Census Bureau
July 2000 –July 2010 , State Demography Office

Visitor Center Traffic 2001-2009

- January-December 2001: 104,688
- January-December 2003: 141,877
- January-December 2005: 145,134
- January-December 2006: 240,200
- January-December 2007: 144,653 (Airport *CLOSED 18+ months for resurfacing project)
- January-December 2008: 171,591
- January-December 2009: 204,485
- January-December 2010: 196,338

Source: Aspen Chamber Resort Association



Notes

Appendix B - Evaluation and Monitoring Form Examples

Sample Visitor Response Card Script

Professional design and layout for consistency with other district materials is strongly recommended. In addition, compliance with OMB regulations for collecting data from visitors is advised.

Thank you for visiting the Aspen Ranger District Office. Your responses to the following questions to help us better serve all visitors who visit forest lands in this area.

About Today's Visit

What was your main reason for visiting the District Office today (Check all that apply)?

- General information about the area
- Specific information to plan my visit
- Camping information
- Hiking or trails information
- To have my questions answered by a person
- Other (Describe): _____

Did you get what you came for? Yes No Sort of (Explain: _____)

For each statement, check the box that most applies.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Staff were helpful.				
I found useful information here.				
(Other)				

How could we improve your visit to this Visitor Center? _____

About Forest Service Lands

How many times have you visited the public lands around Aspen before?

- None
- 1-5
- 6-10
- over 10

For you, what are the benefits of Forest Service Lands?

In your own words, what does the U.S. Forest Service do? What is their mission?



When you think of “Wilderness” what ideas come to mind?

Was there something you learned about the Forest Service or forest lands today that you did not know before?

About You

Are you: Male Female <20 yrs. 20-35yrs. 36-60 yrs. >60 yrs.

Caucasian Hispanic/Latino Asian Afro-American Other: _____

How many are traveling in your group today? _____ What is your home zip code? _____

Sample Ideas for Visitor Observation Form

(For use in the Visitor Center by Staff and Volunteers)

A simple 1-page form could be developed for the VIS desk that would be copied as needed for continual observation. Summary of data could be done on a by day, week, month, season, or year basis. A final observation form would have to be finalized once the Visitor Center is completed and the locations and information to be observed are clarified.

Time Spent (in minutes):

Interactive Trip Planning Kiosk (Vestibule)

- » ACT Wall
- » Artist display corner
- » Window reader rail
- » CONNECT wall
- » EXPLORE floor
- » Map tables
- » VIS counter
- » RMNA sales area

Use of Tables

- » Looking at information
- » Trip planning
- » Relaxation
- » Discussion with others

Information Used

- » Area maps
- » Brochure racks
- » Other

Information Taken

- » ROG sheets
- » Brochure A
- » Brochure B
- » Brochure X
- » Forest map
- » Other

Question Topics

- » Trails and hiking
- » Camping
- » Transportation
- » Forest uses
- » Christmas tree permits
- » Firewood cutting
- » Other



Notes