

File Code: 2720
Date: October 16, 2018

Dear Interested Party,

The Dillon Ranger District of the White River National Forest is soliciting comments on a proposal at Arapahoe Basin Ski Area (A-Basin) to construct trails for hiking and mountain biking and via ferratas at two locations within the A-Basin Special Use Permit (SUP) area (refer to Figure 1). The proposed projects are consistent with goals and objectives identified in A-Basin's Master Development Plan (MDP). For more information visit the project website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54841>.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed action is to meet the demand for recreational opportunities that complement the unique attributes of A-Basin's SUP area during the summer season. The hiking and mountain biking trails and via ferratas would be designed to highlight A-Basin's unique National Forest setting which includes the East Wall, a distinctive natural feature among Colorado's developed ski areas. Currently, summer hiking and mountain biking opportunities at A-Basin are limited to the mountain access road and one summer trail which runs between the base area and Black Mountain Lodge at mid-mountain. The proposed action would better meet the expectations of summer visitors by diversifying the difficulty, variety, and spatial extent of trails available for hiking and mountain biking; the proposed action would provide summer visitors with opportunities for adventurous, nature-based activities.

The 2011 Ski Area Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Act specifically provides the Forest Service with authority to review and consider other seasonal or year-round natural resource-based recreational activities and associated facilities in addition to skiing and snow-sports on National Forest System lands that are subject to ski area permits.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action includes approximately ten miles of trails for hiking and mountain biking throughout the SUP area at a variety of difficulty levels, and via ferratas within two zones on the mountain: a lower zone and an upper zone (refer to Figure 1).

Summer Trails

The proposed trails would integrate with A-Basin's existing trail/road network, disperse guests more effectively throughout the SUP area, and provide loop opportunities and a feeling of exploration in what guests perceive as a relatively secluded environment. Many of the proposed trails would be routed above treeline or across existing ski runs, offering scenic vistas of the surrounding area. Trails would be designed for hiking only, mountain biking only, or for multiple uses. Mountain bike-specific trails could include banked turns and other manmade features to reduce the frequency of pedaling and braking required during descents.



The proposed trails would be designed using established guidelines for sustainability and routed to avoid sensitive resources such as rare plants and wetlands. If wetlands could not be avoided entirely, they would be spanned with bridges to avoid impacts.

Via Ferrata

A via ferrata (Italian for “iron path”) is a protected climbing and hiking route found throughout the mountains of Europe and in several locations in the United States such as Jackson Hole Mountain Resort. The essence of a modern via ferrata is a steel cable periodically attached to the rock that is used as a safety line for climbers and hikers as they traverse and/or ascend steep terrain. It is common to also install aids such as iron rungs, pegs, ladders or bridges to assist guests in traversing these routes. In some cases, aerial walkways can be used to span gaps in steep terrain. Guests would wear harnesses and helmets and navigate the via ferratas under supervision of a guide, allowing them to experience high alpine, exposed areas in a unique and safe fashion. A temporary awning and/or toilet may be installed during the summer at both via ferrata zones.

The lower via ferrata zone would contain routes traversing an approximately 200 foot cliff band in the Steep Gullies area, near the Gauthier and Janitors Only chutes. Via ferrata routes in this zone would be targeted for entry-level guests. Between 20 and 50 guests would be expected to navigate the via ferratas in this zone each day, with each tour taking three to four hours to complete. Guests would access the lower zone via a 0.7 mile hiking trail from the base area that would be open to hiking only.

The upper via ferrata zone would contain more difficult routes than the lower zone along an approximately 700 foot cliff band on the East Wall in the vicinity of the North Pole Couloir. Via ferrata options in this zone would be entirely above treeline, providing a unique, high-alpine experience with opportunities to summit the East Wall ridge. Between 10 and 25 of A-Basin’s more adventurous guests would be expected to navigate the via ferrata each day, with each 5 person tour taking four to five hours to complete. Guests would access the upper zone by riding the Black Mountain Express chairlift, at which point they would be transported by vehicle up the existing mountain access road to a 0.4 mile hiking trail. Having completed the via ferrata, guests would return along the same route.

The installation of the via ferrata would require drilling and anchoring hardware (iron rungs, safety cable, aerial walkway anchors, etc.) into the rock face of the chosen route and removing loose or hazardous rock within an approximately 4-foot corridor. Once routes are constructed, guests would be connected to the safety line and will be required to stay on the established routes at all times.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

Based on resource information gathered to date, I believe these projects fall within a Forest Service category of actions under 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 220.6 that may be excluded from documentation in either an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement, and that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude its use. Scoping comments along with a complete resource analysis, will determine whether these projects can be

categorically excluded. The proposed are consistent with category 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1) – “Construction and reconstruction of trails.”

HOW TO COMMENT AND TIMEFRAME

This comment period is intended to provide those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to comment on the Proposed Action before the Responsible Official makes a decision.

If you wish to comment, please submit your written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments concerning this action by Sunday, November 4, 2018. Please reference Arapahoe Basin Trails and Via Ferrata project. Written comments must be submitted to: Scott Fitzwilliams, Forest Supervisor, c/o Sam Massman, Dillon Ranger District, PO Box 620, Silverthorne, CO 80498-0620. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments including attachments can be submitted to: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//CommentInput?Project=54841>.

Persons commenting should include: 1) name, address, telephone number, organization represented, if any; 2) name of the proposal on which the comment is being submitted; and 3) specific facts and supporting reasons for me to consider. Copies of the decision document will be sent to those people who have submitted comments and to those who request a copy.

For more information about these projects, contact Forest Service project manager Sam Massman at (970) 262-3484. Thank you for your interest in the management of your public lands. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

15/  (for)

SCOTT G. FITZWILLIAMS
Forest Supervisor

cc: William Jackson, Sam Massman, Rich Doak

