

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Royal Gorge Field Office
3028 E. Main Street
Cañon City, CO 81212**

Environmental Assessment

Oil Well Flats – New Trail Construction

DOI-BLM-CO-F02-2014-0027 EA

January, 2014



INTRODUCTION

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional):

PROJECT TITLE: Oil Well Flats – New Trail Construction

PLANNING UNIT: Garden Park

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: 6th P.M. T. 17 S., R.70 W. Sections 27, 34, and 35, T. 18 S., R. 70 W., Section 3

APPLICANT: Bureau of Land Management

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

BACKGROUND: This EA has been prepared by the BLM to analyze the impacts of adding approximately 4.5 miles of new non-motorized trails to the Oil Well Flats Trail system. The decision record of the 2004 Gold Belt Travel Management Plan called for designating several roads as non-motorized trails and also constructing new trails to create a trail system. The 2009 Shaws Park/Garden Park Travel Management Plan expanded on the concept of non-motorized trails in relation to the acquisition of the Dilley Property allowing for more trail connections. Over the past four years the BLM in conjunction with a variety of volunteer groups and youth corps crews have been slowly implementing the concepts outlined in these plans. In several instances it was determined that the existing route identified in the plan did not provide an adequate trail experience or was eroding due to steep grades. In these instances a trail was constructed and the route was abandoned and rehabilitated.

Recreation use in this area has continued to increase as the mileage of available trails has grown to provide adequate opportunities that users are looking for. From 2009 to 2013 average annual daily traffic increased from 8 to 12. This demand is anticipated to increase as awareness of the trail network expands. Feedback provided to the BLM includes requests for more loop opportunities including beginner options and closer opportunities to town. The grazing operator in the area has also requested that more be done to separate grazing from recreation use to avoid conflicts. The original plans are 60% implemented with approximately 4 more miles of trail slated for construction in the upcoming year that would partially respond to this feedback.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The overall recreation management goal for the trail network is to provide local and regional trail based opportunities providing mileage sufficient for diversity in difficulty, length, and routes while at the same time mitigating impacts to other resources. The purpose of the action is to better meet the trail network goal providing more opportunities including beginner/intermediate loop options and connections closer to Canon City. Another purpose of the action is to implement strategies that attempt to reduce conflicts between recreation and grazing by separating the uses as much as possible.

DECISION TO BE MADE

The BLM will decide whether to implement the proposed Oil Well Flats – New Trail Construction project based on the analysis contained in this Environmental Assessment (EA). This EA will analyze the impacts of adding additional trails to the Oil Well Flats trail network. The BLM may choose to: a) implement the project as proposed, b) implement the project with modifications/mitigation, c) implement an alternative to the proposed action, or d) not implement the project at this time.

1.5 PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: 05/13/1996

Decision Number/Page: 5-86, 5-87, 5-90

Decision Language:

5-86: Recreation will be managed to provide for a variety of recreational opportunities and settings; additional opportunities for mountain biking, hiking, off-highway vehicle use, interpretation, and horseback riding; facility development will be accomplished to reduce user conflicts and to improve visitor health and safety.

5-87: Recreation on the larger part of this sub-region will be managed intensively in a special recreation management area.

5-90: Various actions will occur to enhance recreation: upland recreation opportunities emphasizing a balance between resource protection and tourism; coordination with various volunteer and user groups; monitoring and visitor contacts to ensure visitor safety, resource protection, and visitor information availability; provide for acquisitions or easements to enhance water based recreation, mountain biking, off-highway vehicle use, hiking horseback riding, hunting, and natural/cultural resource interpretation.

Name of Plan: Gold Belt Travel Management Plan

Date Approved: 06/02/2004

Decision Number/Page: 23, 28

Decision Language:

Garden Park Sub-unit (#5) - The desired future condition for the Garden Park sub-unit is to enhance and protect the area's special plant, fossil resources, and scenic geological features, while allowing compatible recreation uses. Management objectives for this sub-unit include:

- Protect fossil resources
- Protect sensitive plant species
- Protect the unusual and highly scenic geologic features
- Resolve target shooting conflicts with other uses
- Eliminate parallel and duplicate routes
- Reduce conflicts between motorized, mechanized, and non-motorized users
- Provide recreational opportunities that are compatible with the special resources
- Resolve the road maintenance issue with Fremont County
- Protect erosive soils

PROPOSED ACTION

The BLM in cooperation with local groups and clubs propose to construct three new trails in the Oil Well Flats system in order to provide additional beginner/intermediate opportunities and a connection closer to Canon City. It is also proposed to extend one trail to avoid travel through the livestock watering area to separate grazing and recreation use. Total mileage added to the trail system would be approximately 4.5 miles. Each trail is broken out in detail below.

Trail 1 – Approximately 1 mile in length this trail would travel from the horse trailer parking area to trail # T5941B (Ms. Spike) providing a loop opportunity of moderate grade through fairly gentle terrain with a minimal rise in elevation. The trail management objective for this trail would be a beginner/intermediate trail to provide some challenge and obstacles without major climbs.

Trail 2 – At 0.5 miles in length this trail would parallel road #5941 allowing users to travel along a trail instead of the road to complete a loop increasing available ‘saddle time’ of the trail system. An intermediate/advanced trail with optional obstacles to add difficulty and adventure would be the primary management objectives. This trail would also locate users into treed areas avoiding meadows near the existing road where cattle tend to congregate

Trail 3 – Starting at the mouth of Red Canyon off of County Road 9 (Shelf Road) this trail would climb approximately 2.5 miles and connect with trail #T5940B. This is the closest possible connection to Canon City on public land and is entirely south facing providing a long season of

use. An easement through a corner of private land is required before this trail could be approved. This is intended to be an intermediate/advanced trail that, while two-way traffic is allowed, would be designed and built with downhill traffic in mind including incorporating alternate lines with ledges, drops, and long sections on bedrock. This trail would also require the construction of a small trailhead to provide parking. This would be coordinated with the county and details of the size and location would be determined at a later date. Additional NEPA may be required.

T5940G Extension – This trail would be extended by approximately .5 miles to cross road #5941 and connect to trail #T5941B and a parking area. This would reduce the distance of recreation travel on roads providing a longer trail experience and also reduce the amount of recreation travel through the livestock watering area.

All trail construction would follow International Mountain Biking Association's (IMBA) trail guidelines and standards to provide a sustainable high quality trail recreation opportunity. These include but are not limited to:

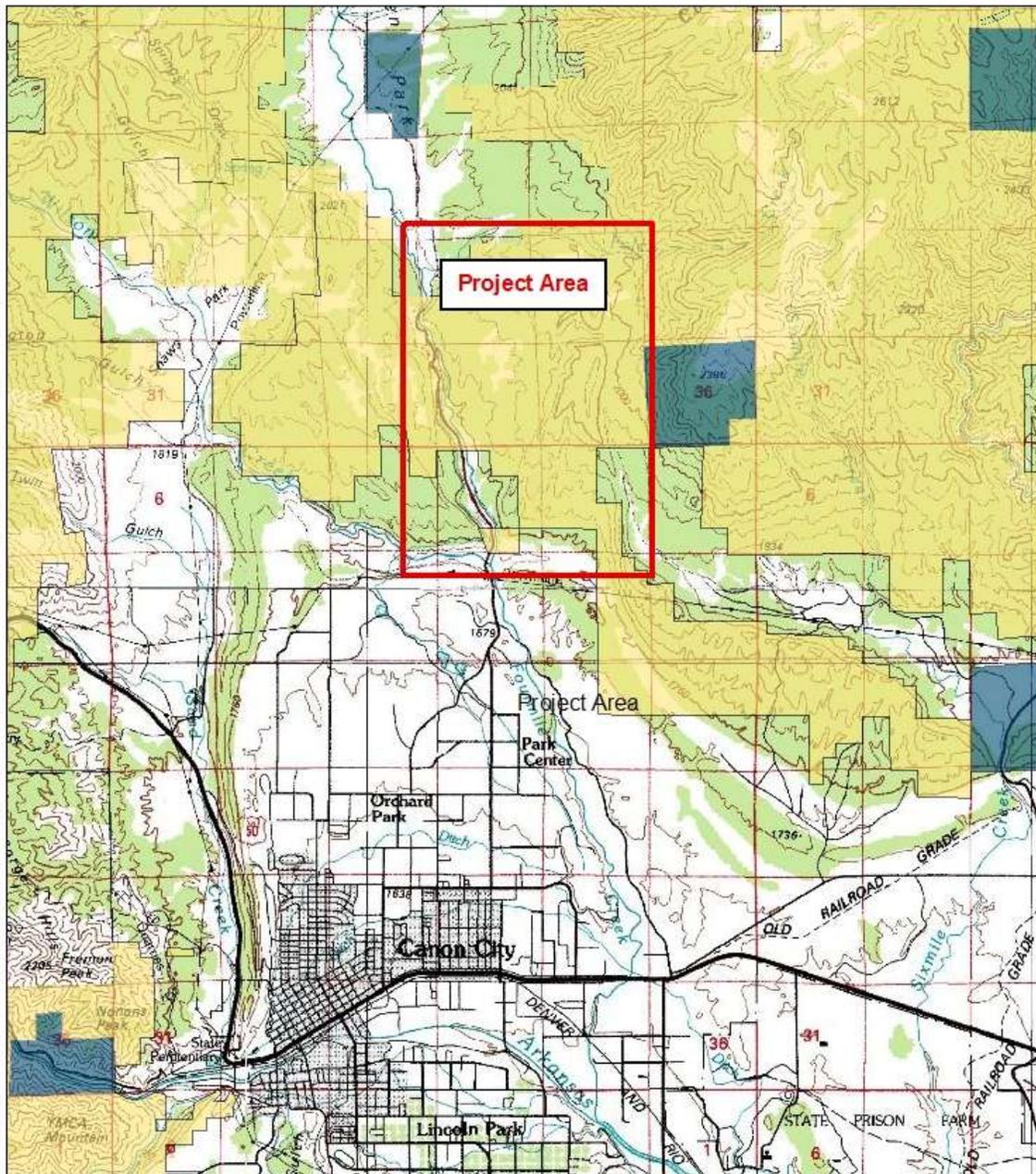
1. A trail's grade should not exceed half the grade of the hillside or side slope where it is located unless located on a suitable surface (i.e. bedrock);
2. An average trail grade of 10 percent or less is most sustainable;
3. Maximum trail grade should not exceed 10-20 percent and should be based on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

Trails would be approximately 2 feet wide and would be constructed using a combination of hand tools, chainsaws, equipment and 'ridden in' as appropriate. Any equipment used for construction would be washed prior to being brought onto site to minimize the spread of noxious weed species. Seeds used for restoration would be certified weed-free. The location of the trail would be located and designed to avoid highly erosive soils and sensitive plant species. If fossil resources are discovered during construction all construction activities would cease and BLM specialists would be brought in to advise and supervise. Construction of the trails could begin as early as winter 2014 and continue until completed pending funding and personnel.

The trail will be monitored by a paleontologist, qualified to hold a Paleontological Resource Use Permit on a cyclic basis of every 5 years to minimize any impact to protected fossil resources. The purpose of monitoring would be to identify and remove any exposed fossil resources from the trail corridor to reduce the chances of fossil theft. A qualified paleontologist shall also be present during any trail construction or trail maintenance that would encounter bedrock.

Seasonal restriction that requires vegetation disturbance would be avoided from May 15 through July 15. This is the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds. Any action that results in a measurable impact to a species' population will not be allowed.

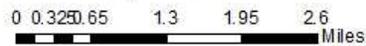
If gasoline powered equipment is used for construction, an adequate spill kit and shovels would be onsite during project implementation.



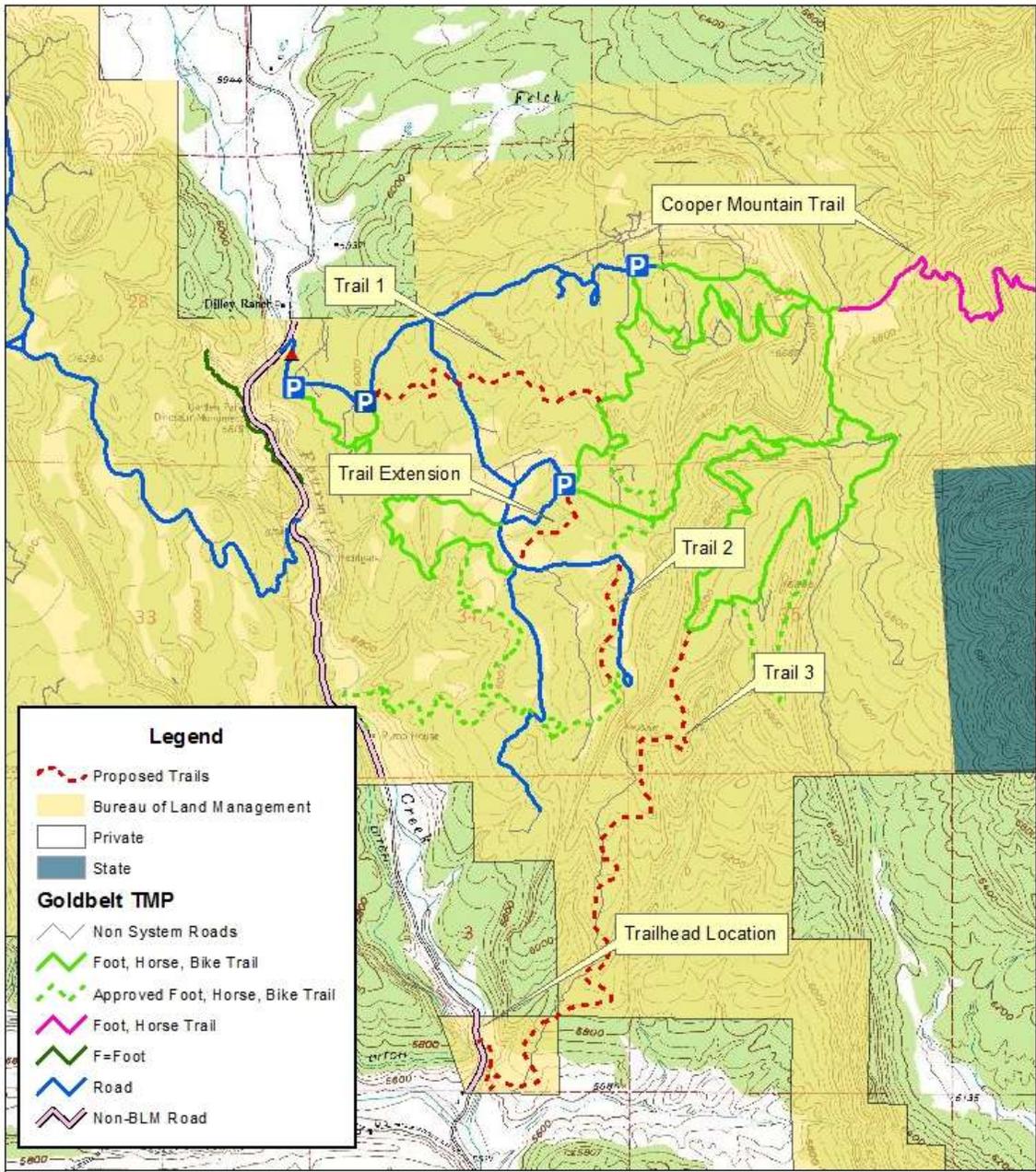
Oil Well Flat; New Trail Construction

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**6th PM, T17S, R70W Sections 27, 34, 35
T18S, R70W Section 3**

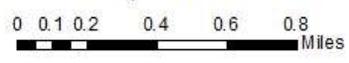


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