United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Environmental Assessment for Emerald Mountain SRMA Wild Rose Connector Trail Construction

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ATTACHMENT A: Wild Rose Trail Map

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

PROJECT NAME: Emerald Mountain SRMA Wild Rose Connector Trail Construction

PROPONENT: Bureau of Land Management

1.2 PROJECT LOCATION AND LEGAL DESCRIPTION

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: T6N R85W Sec. 24. See map in Attachment A.

1.3 BACKGROUND

The Little Snake Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision (RMP/ROD October 2011), identified the Emerald Mountain Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) as two Resource Management Zones (RMZs); Zone 1 – managed for strenuous activities and Zone 2 – managed for a nature experience.

The proposed project is located in Zone 1 where under the activity-planning framework, management is geared towards enhancing recreation opportunities for visitors to the Steamboat Springs area that includes strenuous mountain biking and Nordic skiing, and similar activities on primitive designated roads and trails.

1.4 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed trail is to provide public access and multiple-use recreation opportunities of public lands within the Emerald Mountain SRMA through the construction of a 1.5 mile trail. This connector trail would provide access to the Beall and Ridge Trail systems from the adjoining City of Steamboat Springs' Stairway to Heaven Trail.

In addition to providing a connecting trail from City property to BLM public lands, the Wild Rose Trail was proposed to eliminate a section of the Stairway to Heaven Trail that is too steep and is eroding. The Wild Rose trail will provide a more sustainable trail system.
The Proposed Action has been developed to meet the following objectives:

- To avoid damage to sensitive natural and cultural resources on and around the trail system.
- To provide for user safety.
- To provide convenient access to and usage of the trail system.
- To provide for increased enjoyment of recreational opportunities.

1.5 PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW

The proposed action was reviewed for conformance (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM MS 1617.03) with the following plans:

Name of Plan: Little Snake Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (RMP)

Date Approved: October 2011

Results: The proposed action is consistent with the Little Snake Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan, Recreation Management goals to:

- Provide a diversity of outdoor recreational opportunities, activities, and experiences for various user groups, unorganized visitors and affected communities, their residences, economies, and the environment.
- Provide visitor services including interpretive and educational information.
- Support tourism efforts for local economic diversification associated with public and resources.

Section/Page: Section 2.15 Recreation/page RMP-42-43

Name of Plan: Emerald Mountain Special Recreation Management Area Implementation Plan Amendment

Date Approved: December 2008

Results: The proposed action is consistent with the plan amendment goals to:

- Diversify the overall recreation opportunities that can be accessed from the City.
- Enhance destination visitor marketing and add to the diversity of recreational and trail use and enjoyment by the residing and visiting public to the Steamboat Springs area.

Section/Page: Section IV. Trail and Facility Development, page 6

1.6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1.6.1 Scoping: NEPA regulations (40 CFR §1500-1508) require that the BLM use a scoping process to identify potential significant issues in preparation for impact analysis. The principal goals of scoping are to allow public participation to identify issues, concerns, and potential impacts that require detailed analysis.

External Scoping Summary: The action in this EA is included in the NEPA log posted on the LSFO web site: http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Information/nepa/lsfo.html.

The Wild Rose Trail was initially presented at a public meeting held at the Bud Werner Library in November 2011. Representatives from a horse group, ranchers, Colorado Parks & Wildlife

(CPW), mountain bikers, and other attended the meeting. No opposition to the proposed trail was expressed.

Issues Identified: Two external scoping issues were presented to the BLM concerning the proposed project. These issues/concerns are present below along with the BLM response:

Issue 1: What management actions would be applied concerning the increased amount of trails and use of new trails being built within the SRMA so that wintering and calving elk will not be further impacted?

BLM Response: In 2008, the amended Emerald Mountain SRMA plan was approved and identified 6 trails for construction. To date, all trails have been completed except Moose Draw Loop Trail in Zone 2, which there are no plans to build at this time.

Two new trails were proposed for construction within the SRMA. It was suggested that the Wild Rose Trail would have the least impact on wildlife since it was not in the general corridor of elk, is shorter, is a connector trail, and would eliminate a section of trail that is not sustainable.

Issue 2: What management actions are being taken to accommodate for more beginner-friendly trails?

BLM Response: The proposed Wild Rose Trail is a 1.5 mile multiple-use connector trail that is relatively easy and short, and will connect City of Steamboat trail(s) to the BLM public lands, and eliminate a section of the City's Stairway to Heaven Trail that is not environmentally nor economically sustainable. See also Issue 1.

Internal Scoping Summary: The proposed action was presented to the interdisciplinary NEPA team an LSFO priorities meeting in June 2013. No issues were identified by the team at that time. In October 2012, a site visit was taken to the proposed Wild Rose Trail with Routt County Riders Club (RCR), CPW, and BLM staff.

PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED: Uintah and Ouray Tribal Council, Colorado Native American Commission, Colorado State Historic Preservation Office.

CHAPTER 2 - PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on the Proposed Action and Alternatives.

2.2 ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN DETAIL

2.2.1 Proposed Action

The proposed action is to build the Wild Rose Trail; the proposed project would encompass approximately 1.5 miles (.73 acres) of new trail within the Emerald Mountain SRMA as outlined below.

1. Trail Construction

The Wild Rose Trail has been identified for designation and implementation with the Emerald Mountain SRMA Management Plan. This trail would be designated and available for foot, horseback and mechanized (i.e. mountain bikes) use only unless otherwise marked. Motorized (i.e., ATVs, motorcycles, etc.) use would not be allowed. The proposed trail is located in Zone 1 of the SRMA, which is identified as managed for strenuous activities.

BLM staff and authorized contractors/cooperators would provide trail flagging, GPS/GIS records, and cultural clearances. Trail construction would be performed by the RCR and volunteers. BLM would provide oversight and direction on all phases of the trail construction. The trails would meet or exceed all applicable BLM trail construction standards. The standards include minimum 3-foot width cleared to dirt or surface vegetation, follows land contours at or below 10% grade, side slanted surface or water dips for drainage where needed. Trail drainage design would take advantage of rocky areas and natural drainage areas to minimize erosion and maintenance requirements. Constructed splash guards or other energy dissipaters would be utilized as required where natural features do not occur. The vegetation canopy would be cleared to minimum 4 foot width and 9 foot height. Drainage crossings would be natural or improved with rocks and gravel where needed. No bridges would be required.

Trail construction would be by hand tools (e.g., shovels, rakes, pulaskis) only. Any brush and tree clearing would be by personnel certified to operate electric equipment or through hand tools.

2. Standard operating procedures and project design features employed in project implementation:

Several operating procedures would be employed during project implementation to protect a variety of resources at the Emerald Mountain SRMA. These procedures are:

Impacts to cultural resources would be mitigated through a range of practices as necessary from project avoidance to research design guided cultural data recovery excavations.

Any cultural and/or paleontological resource (historic or prehistoric site or object) discovered during trail construction shall be immediately reported to the authorized officer. Construction operations shall be suspended in the immediate area of such discovery until written authorization to proceed is issued by the authorized officer. An evaluation of the discovery will be made by the authorized officer to determine appropriate actions to prevent the loss of significant cultural or scientific values.

Project activities which remove migratory bird nesting and sage grouse habitat will not be permitted during the months of May 15 through July 15 to prevent disturbance to nesting migratory birds.

Spring and seep sources will be avoided during construction of new trail segments. New trail segments will be located to avoid all wetland areas if possible. Site specific mitigation will be developed for areas that cannot be avoided.

3. Compliance Plan(s):

Compliance Schedule: Compliance would be conducted during the construction phase and maintenance phase to ensure that all terms and conditions are followed. This would be done on a five-year compliance schedule after completion of the project.

Monitoring Plan: The SRMA use and condition of the trail would be monitored during the life of the project for compliance with all stipulations and pertinent regulations as well as achievement of identified recreation objectives within each zone. The trail would be monitored for noxious/invasive weeds during the growing season.

Corrective action such as mechanical or chemical treatments would be identified and implemented. Mechanical treatment and/or hand pulling of noxious/invasive weeds would be implemented by RCR and volunteers during trail maintenance, and all noxious/invasive weeds would be removed from the area at that time. If chemical treatments are implemented, appropriate application permits would be obtained. BLM would consider the availability of staffing and funding and pursue additional funding and/or partnerships with Routt County or the City of Steamboat Springs to actively assist in weed abatement.

Assignment of Responsibility: Responsibility for implementation of the compliance schedule and monitoring plan will be assigned to the recreation staff in the Little Snake Field Office. The primary inspector will be the recreation specialist.

2.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Wild Rose Trial would not be constructed. A portion of the recreation and travel management objectives identified in the RMP would not be achieved. In addition a non-sustainable section of the Stairway to Heaven Trail would continue to be used to connect to the Emerald Mountain SRMA and environmental impacts to the surrounding terrain would continue.

CHAPTER 3 – AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Affected Resources:

The CEQ Regulations state that NEPA documents "must concentrate on the issues that are truly significant to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail" (40 CFR 1500.1(b)).

While many issues may arise during scoping, not all of the issues raised warrant analysis in an environmental assessment (EA). Issues will be analyzed if: 1) an analysis of the issue is necessary to make a reasoned choice between alternatives, or 2) if the issue is associated with a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact, or where analysis is necessary to determine the significance of the impacts. Table 1 lists the resources considered and the determination as to whether they require additional analysis.

Table 1. Resources and Determination of Need for Further Analysis

Determination[1]	Resource	Rationale for Determination
Physical Resources		
NI	Air Quality	Activities associated with trail development that may affect air quality, namely dust and exhaust from non-motorized and motorized trail building tools, fall below EPA emission standards for the six criteria pollutants of concern (sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, ground-level ozone, carbon monoxide, particulate matter [both PM2.5 and PM10], and lead). Furthermore, non-motorized recreation is not a source of these pollutant emissions that do occur in Routt County. Impacts to air quality caused by either alternative are therefore considered negligible.
NP	Floodplains	There are no FEMA-identified 100-year floodplains present within the proposed project area.
NI	Hydrology, Ground	There would be no impact to ground water hydrology with implementation of either alternative.
PI	Hydrology, Surface	See Soils discussion and analysis in Chapter 3.
NI	Minerals, Fluid	There would be no impact fluid minerals from either alternative.
NI	Minerals, Solid	There would be no impact to solid minerals from either alternative.
PI	Soils	See Chapter 3 for analysis.
NI	Water Quality, Ground	There would be no impact to groundwater quality with implementation of either alternative.
NP	Water Quality, Surface	There are no surface water sources present within or immediately adjacent to the proposed project area.
Biological Resources		
PI	Invasive, Non-native Species	See Chapter 3
PI	Migratory Birds	See Chapter 3
NP	Special Status Animal Species	The proposed trail area does not provide habitat for any T&E or BLM sensitive species.
NP	Special Status Plant Species	There are no federally listed threatened, endangered, or BLM sensitive plant species populations identified within the proposed project area.
PI	Upland Vegetation	See Chapter 3
NP	Wetlands and Riparian Zones	There are no riparian resources (wetlands, streams, etc.) identified on public lands within or immediately adjacent to the proposed project

Determination[1]	Resource	Rationale for Determination
		area.
NP	Wildlife, Aquatic	There are no aquatic wildlife resources located in the project area.
PI	Wildlife, Terrestrial	See Chapter 3
NP	Wild Horses	This area is not within a Herd Management Area (HMA).
Heritage Resources and the Human Environment		
NP	Cultural Resources	The proposed trail alignment was subject to a Class 3 cultural resources inventory. No cultural resources were identified within the Area of Potential Effect. Therefore, the undertaking may proceed with a project effect determination of *no historic properties affected*.
NP	Environmental Justice	According to the most recent Census Bureau statistics (2000), there are no minority or low income populations within the LSFO.
NP	Hazardous or Solid Wastes	There are no known Hazardous or Solid Waste issues within the allotments under the Proposed Action.
NP	Lands with Wilderness Characteristics	Subject to WO-IM 2011-154 and in accordance with BLM policy, the Emerald Mountain SRMA was evaluated for suitability as lands with wilderness characteristics and did not meet the size criteria for an area greater than 5,000 acres.
NP	Native American Religious Concerns	There are no known items, sites, or landscapes determined as culturally significant to the tribes within or immediately adjacent to the project area. The proposed action does not prevent access to any known sacred sites, prevent the possession of sacred objects, or interfere with the performance of traditional ceremonies and/or rituals.
PI	Paleontological Resources	See Chapter 3
NI	Social and Economic Conditions	There would not be any significant changes to local social or economic conditions.
NI	Visual Resources	Proposed project area is located in Recreation Management Zone 2, which is designated as VRM Class II where low change to the characteristic landscape would be allowed as long as any changes repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.
NI	Access and Transportation	The only impacts resulting from the proposed action would be positive in nature. Additional trails provide alternate access thus minimizing multiple use and user conflicts.
NI	Fire Management	The Proposed Action would have no impact to fire management.
NP	Forest Management	There are no forest resources that would be impacted by either alternative.
NI	Livestock Operations	The project lies within the Emerald Mountain Allotment and livestock use occurs within the area throughout the frost-free months, but there would be no impact to grazing operations from the proposed action.
NP	Prime and Unique Farmlands	There are no special status farmlands present within the project area.

Determination[1]	Resource	Rationale for Determination
NP	Realty Authorizations, Land Tenure	There are no realty authorizations in the proposed project area. There are no land tenure projects planned.
NI	Recreation	FLPMA provides for recreational use of public land as an integral part of multiple use management. Dispersed unstructured activities typify the recreational use occurring on most public land. Policy guidelines in BLM Manual 8320 direct BLM to identify administrative units known as SRMAs when there is a distinct, primary recreation-tourism market as well as a corresponding and distinguishing recreation management strategy. Emerald Mountain is managed as a Special Recreation Management Area for multiple uses.
Special Designations		
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	There are no ACECs within the proposed project area.
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	There are no WSRs within the proposed project area.
NP	Wilderness Study Areas	There are no WSAs within the proposed project area.

[1] NP = Not present in the area impacted by the Proposed Action or Alternatives. NI = Present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required. PI = Present with potential for impact analyzed in detail in the EA.

3.2 PHYSICAL RESOURCES

3.2.1 Soils

Affected Environment: The proposed trail alignment occurs across loam-dominated soils on slopes greater than 35%. During a July 2013 site assessment of the alignment, soils were found to be stable despite the steeper slopes and native plant production, density, and species diversity are high. Few invasive plant species are present. There are no fragile soils in the immediate project area. The alignment mostly parallels slope contours.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: The proposed trail has a maintained soil disturbance footprint totaling around 0.5 acre. Soil compaction would occur along the trail corridor as a result of user activities and routine maintenance. Based on the high use other trails receive on Emerald Mountain, anticipated use of the Wild Rose trail once completed is also high, though any impacts would be focused to a relatively small linear area and would not extend too far away from the trail.

After construction, some localized erosion may occur at first given the steeper topography. This is expected to minimize as the trail becomes hardened with use and as vegetation naturally fills back in. High vegetative cover on either side of the trail would capture and retain any soil movement and prevent large scale erosion. While the alignment does not cross any perennial or ephemeral drainages, it does cross a couple of lower spots where surface runoff may confluence during especially heavy rain events. During the site assessment, the trail designer/developer indicated through consistent use of the trail once developed, any sign of damage or erosion as a result of surface runoff is constantly monitored and will be fixed immediately using soft engineering techniques or, in extreme cases, a small culvert.

Any surface disturbance has the potential to invite invasive plant introductions and spread, especially given the anticipated high use from non-motorized vehicles and pack and/or domestic livestock. Invasive plants have the potential to change native plant communities through competition. If left unchecked, monocultures of invasive species can develop and lead to an increase in runoff-induced erosion and detrimentally impact the amount and type of soil microbe communities that underlie native plant communities. The invasive plant management strategy outlined in this assessment should help to prevent and/or mitigate existing and new weed infestations as they are discovered.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: No additional surface disturbance would occur if the trail is not built.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: Existing soil/surface disturbance on Emerald Mountain primarily consists of two-tracks (powerline) and single-track routes that provide access for recreational and grazing activities. The addition of the proposed trail intended primarily for non-motorized use would have a small additive impact to overall surface disturbance in the region. Routine trail maintenance and weed management should also act to minimize erosion potential. In some cases, the development of a trail system may act to focus existing non-motorized uses, thereby minimizing dispersed activities across the landscape.

Mitigation: None

3.3 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

3.3.1 Invasive/Non-Native Species

Affected Environment: Invasive and noxious weeds are present in the vicinity of the project area. Invasive annuals such as cheatgrass, and allysum commonly occur within the project area. Additional noxious weed species of concern in the vicinity include white top, Canada thistle, knapweeds, hound's tongue, Dalmatian toadflax, yellow toadflax, leafy spurge and biennial thistles. Additional noxious weeds may also be present in the area. Principals of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) are employed to control noxious weeds on BLM lands in the Little Snake Field Office through the Little Snake Field Office Noxious Weed Prevention Plan.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: Access to public lands for dispersed recreation, hunting, livestock grazing management, livestock and wildlife movement, as well as wind and water, can cause weeds to spread. The mechanical methods for trail construction under this alternative would cause disturbance to the herbaceous plant community. The disturbed trail construction areas would be vulnerable to weed infestation. Weed infestation is likely and would be mitigated through the monitoring plan included in this alternative.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: No new opportunities for invasive species establishment would occur under this alternative. Other recreational trail use, livestock grazing, wildlife and natural influences would still be present.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Effects: The proposed project would increase the risk for establishment and spread of noxious and invasive species increasing the occurrence of weeds within the landscape. The total disturbed area covers a potential approximately 1.5 miles (.73 acres) for infestations to establish and spread from. If noxious weeds establish in these plant communities the health of upland plant communities and associated ecological function would decline. The monitoring plan included in the proposed action provides mitigation which would decrease long term establishment and spread of invasive species. Under the No Action Alternative there would be no quantitative increase to current weed infestations.

Mitigation: The compliance and monitoring plan would provide necessary mitigation for the proposed action.

3.3.2 Migratory Birds

Affected Environment: BLM guidance emphasizes management of habitat for migratory bird species of conservation concern by avoiding or minimizing negative impacts and restoring and enhancing habitat quality. The LSFO provides both foraging and nesting habitat for a variety of migratory bird species. Several species on the USFWS's Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) List occupy these habitats within the LSFO.

Native plant communities along the proposed trail are comprised primarily of aspen and coniferous woodlands with some shrub (oakbrush and mountain shrubs) dominated areas. A variety of migratory birds may utilize these vegetation communities within the project area during the nesting period (May through July) or during spring and fall migrations. Birds potentially nesting in the project area include: flammulated owl, Lewis's woodpecker, pygmy nuthatch, red-naped sapsucker, Virginia's warbler and Williamson's sapsucker,

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: The Proposed Action has a low potential to result in the 'take' of any migratory bird since the trail would be constructed outside the nesting season. Once construction of the trail is complete, there would be no further potential to interfere materially with nest substrate. It is anticipated that the trail will receive a relatively high amount of use by mountain bikers during the spring, summer and fall months. Use of the trail may lead to impacts such as nest abandonment, displacement and a change in species composition. Although it is likely that birds will be displaced from the trail area, this would only impact about 100 acres of the 4000+ acres on Emerald Mountain. Birds would likely be displaced into Zone 2, which doesn't allow mountain biking and there would be amble habitat for migratory bird species in this Zone, since it occupies about half of the SRMA. Overall, impacts are expected to be isolated and would not influence populations of migratory birds on a landscape level.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to migratory bird species from this alternative.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: The proposed action would not add substantially to disturbances already occurring on Emerald Mountain. Currently, recreation and grazing are the primary land uses in the area. Hunting and recreational use are likely the

activities most impacting wildlife at this time. The hiking trail would have minor impacts to migratory birds after initial construction and is not expected to add substantially to disturbances already occurring on Emerald Mountain.

Mitigation: None

3.3.4 Upland Vegetation

Affected Environment: The proposed trail would be located within aspen/lodgepole pine, subalpine fir plant communities. The northerly and easterly aspect of the project location results in a more mesic site that collects and holds winter snow to a greater degree than on southerly slopes in the same area. The area also receives less direct solar exposure, resulting in a plant community that benefits from much wetter conditions.

Aspen *(Populus tremuloides)* Forest. Several different aspen forest types are present including aspen/bracken fern, aspen/snowberry, aspen/serviceberry, and aspen/mixed herbaceous communities which are described below. In addition to the native species which dominate these communities, agricultural grasses and weeds are prevalent in some areas. These commonly include the noxious weed houndstongue, the weedy annual tarweed and the pasture grasses timothy and Kentucky bluegrass.

Aspen/Bracken Fern. Aspen forests with a dense understory of bracken fern occur on moist hillsides, drainages, and on poorly drained sites. Widely scattered serviceberry, chokecherry, Woods' rose, and snowberry occur in the shrub layer, often near gaps in the aspen canopy. At higher elevations, mountain maple and juvenile subalpine fir occur in the understory. Thick growth of bracken fern is the dominant feature of the understory. Where the density of bracken is reduced, a variety of native graminoids and forbs occur. These include graminoids such as Letterman needlegrass, alpine timothy, blue wildrye, and elk sedge. Common native forbs include nettleleaf giant hyssop, yampa, northern bedstraw, goldenglow, false hellebore, Fendler meadowrue, Geyer's larkspur, and stinging nettle. In wetter areas, bluejoint reedgrass and monkshood also occur. In some areas, particularly along one of the ephemeral drainages east of Cow Creek, the aspen density is reduced and there are large stands of bracken fern without trees.
Aspen/Snowberry. On drier sites, generally on south and southwest-facing slopes, stands of aspen are characterized by a shrubby understory dominated by snowberry. Other important shrubs in this community include serviceberry, mountain big sagebrush, Woods' rose, and chokecherry. The herbaceous understory is a diverse mixture of graminoids and forbs. Common native graminoids include blue wildrye, fringed brome, and spiked false oat. Common forbs include nettleleaf giant hyssop, yarrow, silvery lupine, western sweet cicely, showy goldeneye, American vetch, harebell, aspen fleabane, yampa, and Geyer's larkspur.

Aspen/Serviceberry. The aspen/serviceberry community occurs in more mesic sites than aspen/snowberry, but it generally supports a similar composition of herbaceous species. The distinguishing characteristic is a dominance of serviceberry in the understory which may reach ten to twelve feet in height. The herbaceous layer commonly includes blue wildrye, fringed brome, little sunflower, yampa, yarrow, American vetch, strawberry, nettleleaf giant hyssop, nettle, bedstraw, and Woods' rose. Big sagebrush, snowberry, and chokecherry are other shrubs

that may occur as well. In general, the aspen/serviceberry is not as common as the aspen/snowberry community.

Aspen/Mixed Herbaceous. The understory is mainly composed of blue wildrye, goldenglow, butterweed groundsel, baneberry, bluntseed sweet cicely, and Richardson's geranium *(Geranium richardsonii)*. In wet microsites, cow parsnip, monkshood, false hellebore, American speedwell *(Veronica americana)*, and northern willowherb may occur.

Lodgepole Pine *(Pinus contorta ssp. latifolia)* Forest. These forests occur at the higher elevations often intermixed with aspen or subalpine fir. The stands observed contain sticky laurel *(Ceanothus velutinus)* as well as other common associates such as elk sedge, fringed brome, heartleaf arnica, mountain goldenbanner, American vetch, blueberry *(Vaccinium myrtillus ssp. oreophilus)*, and Woods' rose.

Subalpine Fir *(Abies bifolia)* Forest. Subalpine fir forests occur on the cooler and wetter north and east-facing slopes of Emerald Mountain and generally occur with aspen as a co-dominant. Some Engelmann spruce, blue spruce, and Douglas fir may occur in these forests as well. Ponderosa pine is infrequently present, but may occur on dry south-facing slopes. In subalpine fir stands, the understory is sparse with Oregon grape, bluntseed sweet cicely, bedstraw, Fendler meadowrue, blueberry, heartleaf arnica, and elk sedge predominating. In more open stands mixed with aspen, the understory is generally comprised of a thicker layer of herbaceous species including blue wild rye, bracken fern, bluntseed sweet cicely, and butterweed groundsel.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: The proposed trail would result in the direct removal of plants, particularly herbaceous species with a lesser removal of trees, of approximately 0.55 acres over the length of the trail. Overall this disturbance would have a negligible impact on the overall plant community. Impacts adjacent to the trail would include the potential for weed establishment and community impacts due to erosion and altered drainage patterns, particularly at waterbars. Herbivory on plants may also increase adjacent to the proposed trail as ungulate, wild and domestic, utilize the trail to pass through the area. Modern trail building techniques and design features would greatly minimize any potential adverse effects to the plant communities via erosion or drainage alteration and weed establishment would be addressed through the monitoring plan. For a further discussion of the impacts of invasive weeds, see Section 3.3.1. Overall the impact within the larger plant community would be minimal.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: Not constructing the trail would result in no impacts to the plant communities.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: Upland vegetation in the area of proposed action has been impacted by historic and current grazing practices. Hunting is the recreational activity that has occurred over time but never with developed facilities. Introduction of developed recreation has the potential to be neutral to negative depending on amount of use, number of users, and management practices in maintaining developed recreation facilities. Any future land uses that remove or alter native vegetation or alter ecosystem function would have

detrimental cumulative impacts to the overall area, thus challenging the continuation of current land use.

Mitigation: None.

3.3.5 Wildlife, Terrestrial

Affected Environment: Native plant communities along the proposed trail are comprised primarily of aspen and coniferous woodlands with some shrub (oakbrush and mountain shrubs) dominated areas. Emerald Mountain provides habitat for mule deer, elk, blue grouse, bear and a variety of small mammals and migratory bird species. The entire BLM portion of the mountain provides calving habitat for elk.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: Trail construction would impact a small amount of wildlife habitat. Wildlife species may be displaced from the project area during trail construction due to noise and an increase in human presence. It is anticipated that the trail will receive a relatively high amount of use by mountain bikers during the spring, summer and fall months, so impacts from noise and human presence would remain after the trail is constructed. It is plausible that some wildlife in the area is already habituated to human presence as there are numerous mountain biking trails on city land adjacent to the new trail. Other wildlife would likely be displaced into Zone 2 of the SRMA, which is closed to the public December 1 to June 30th. This area provides a large amount of undisturbed habitat during the winter and spring and would provide wildlife with isolation from humans during these critical periods. Overall disturbances from the biking trail would be isolated and impacts to wildlife species would not be substantial.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to terrestrial wildlife species from this alternative.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: The proposed action would not add substantially to disturbances already occurring on Emerald Mountain. Currently, recreation and grazing are the primary land uses in the area. Hunting and recreational use are likely the activities most impacting wildlife at this time. The hiking trail would have minor impacts to wildlife species after initial construction and is not expected to add substantially to disturbances already occurring on Emerald Mountain.

Mitigation: None

3.4 HERITAGE RESOURCES AND THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

3.4.1 Cultural Resources

Affected Environment: The BLM's designation and development of a recreational trail is considered an undertaking subject to compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The BLM has the legal responsibility to consider the effects of its

actions on cultural resources located on federal land. BLM Manual 8100 Series; the Colorado State Protocol; and BLM Colorado Handbook of Guidelines and Procedures for Identification, Evaluation, and Mitigation of Cultural Resources provide guidance on Section 106 compliance requirements to meet appropriate cultural resource standards. Section 106 of NHPA requires federal agencies to: 1) inventory cultural resources within federal undertaking Areas of Potential Effect (APEs), 2) evaluate the significance of cultural resources by determining National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility and, 3) consult with applicable federal, state, and tribal entities regarding inventory results, NRHP eligibility determinations, and proposed methods to avoid or mitigate potential impacts to eligible sites.

In Colorado, the BLM's NHPA obligations are carried out under a Programmatic Agreement (PA) among the BLM, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). Should an undertaking be determined to have "no effect" or "no adverse effect" by the BLM-LSFO archaeologist, the undertaking may proceed under the terms and conditions of the PA. If the undertaking is determined to have "adverse effects," project-specific consultation is then initiated with the SHPO.

The culture history of northwestern Colorado is presented among several recent context studies. Reed and Metcalf's (1999) study of the Northern Colorado River Basin provides applicable prehistoric and historic overviews as compiled by Frederic J. Athearn (1982) and Michael B. Husband (1984). A historical archaeology context also was prepared for the State of Colorado by Church et al. (2007). Furthermore, significant cultural resources administered by the BLM-LSFO are provided in a Class 1 (archival) overview (McDonald and Metcalf 2006), in addition to valuable contextual data provided by synthesis reports of archaeological investigations conducted for a series of large pipeline projects in the BLM-LSFO management area (Metcalf and Reed 2011; Rhode and others 2010; Reed and Metcalf 2009).

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: Cultural resources evaluated as NRHP-eligible or "needs data" (i.e., *historic properties* as defined by the NHPA) can be directly or indirectly affected by recreational activities. Direct impacts may include littering, "social trailing" beyond the designated trail corridor, artifact collection, and/or vandalism as a result of increased public use/access. Indirect impacts may include increased erosion, improved access to a previously isolated location, and public use/reuse of the general area for purposes unrelated to the proposed action (e.g., dispersed camping, hunting, etc.).

The proposed trail alignment was subject to a Class 3 cultural resources inventory as reported in the following:

Collins, Gary D.
2013 *Class III Cultural Resource Survey of the Wild Rose Trail Segment on Emerald Mountain, Routt County, Colorado*. BLM LSFO# 10.45.2013. Bureau of Land Management Little Snake Field Office, Craig, CO.

As a result of the survey, no cultural resources were identified within the proposed trail alignment. Because no cultural resources are located within the project APE, the undertaking may proceed with a project effect determination of *no historic properties affected*. No further work or consultation is currently required.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: While a no action alternative alleviates potential damage from recreational activities, cultural resources are constantly subject to site formation processes or events after creation (Binford 1981; Schiffer 1987). These processes can be both cultural and natural, and may occur instantly or over thousands of years. Cultural formation processes include activities directly or indirectly caused by humans. Natural processes include chemical, physical, and biological processes of the natural environment that impinge upon and/or modify cultural materials.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: The cumulative impacts to historic properties may occur within or adjacent to the project area. The current project proposes development of an additional trail (i.e., "connector trail") within an existing trail network in an area where public recreational activities (e.g., hiking, mountain biking, etc.) have occurred for 30+ years. New trail development will increase access to a previously undeveloped area. Increased access and public use may result in the discovery and/or exposure of cultural resources that would otherwise remain obscured or buried, thereby raising the potential for illegal collection of cultural materials. Furthermore, casual public use of the general area may cause increased littering and "social trailing" that could result in general degradation of the environmental/historical setting of nearby historic properties.

Mitigation: Because no cultural resources were identified within the project area, no mitigation measures are currently required. The *Standard Discovery Stipulations* apply. Should the BLM-LSFO identify previously undocumented historic properties and/or that historic properties are being impacted as a result of recreational activities, mitigation will be developed in coordination with the SHPO.

References

Athearn, Frederic J.
1982 *An Isolated Empire: A History of Northwest Colorado*. Cultural Resource Series No. 2. Colorado Bureau of Land Management, Denver.

Binford, Lewis R.
1981 Behavioral archaeology and the "Pompeii Premise". *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37(3):195-208.

Broadhead, Wade
2001 *Brief Synopsis of Experiments Concerning Effects of Grazing on Archaeological Sites*. Bureau of Land Management-Gunnison Field Office, Gunnison, Colorado.

Church, Minette C ., Steven G. Baker, Bonnie J. Clark, Richard f. Carrillo, Jonathan C. Horn, Carl D. Spath, David R. Guilfoyle, and E. Steve Cassells
2007 *Colorado History: A Context for Historical Archaeology*. Colorado Council of Professional Archaeologists, Denver.

Husband, Michael B.
1984 *Plateau Country Historic Context*. Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado State Historic Preservation Office, Denver.

Metcalf, Michael D and Aland D. Reed

2011 *Synthesis of Archaeological Data Compiled for The Piceance Basin Expansion, Rockies Express Pipeline, and Uinta Basin Lateral Projects Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties, Colorado and Sweetwater County, Wyoming.* Volume 2. Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc., Eagle, Colorado.

McDonald Kae and Michael Metcalf
2006 *Regional Class I Overview of Cultural Resources for the BLM Little Snake Field Office*. Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc. Eagle, Colorado.

Reed, Alan D. and Michael Metcalf
1999 *Colorado Prehistory: A Context for the Northern Colorado River Basin*. Colorado Council of Professional Archaeologists, Denver.

2009 *Synthesis of Archaeological Data Compiled for The Piceance Basin Expansion, Rockies Express Pipeline, and Uinta Basin Lateral Projects Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties, Colorado and Sweetwater County, Wyoming*. Volume 1. Alpine Archaeological Consultants, Inc., Montrose, Colorado.

Rhode, David, Lisbeth A. Louderback, David Madsen, and Michael D. Metcalf
2010 *Synthesis of Archaeological Data Compiled for The Piceance Basin Expansion, Rockies Express Pipeline, and Uinta Basin Lateral Projects Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties, Colorado and Sweetwater County, Wyoming.* Volume 3. Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc., Eagle, Colorado.

Schiffer, Michael B.
1987 *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

3.4.2 Native American Religious Concerns

Affected Environment: Four Native American tribes have cultural and historical ties to lands administered by the BLM-LSFO. These tribes include the Eastern Shoshone, Ute Mountain Ute, Uinta and Ouray Agency Ute, and the Southern Ute.

American Indian religious concerns are legislatively considered under several acts and Executive Orders including the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, the Native American Graves Environmental Assessment Protection and Repatriation Act, and Executive Order 13007 (Indian Sacred Sites). In sum, and in concert with other provisions such as those found in the NHPA and Archaeological Resources Protection Act, these acts and orders require the federal government to carefully and proactively consider the traditional and religious values of Native American culture and lifeways to ensure, to the greatest degree possible, that access to sacred sites, treatment of human remains, the possession of sacred items, conduct of traditional religious practices, and the preservation of important cultural properties are not unduly infringed upon. In some cases, these concerns are directly related to "historic properties" and "archaeological resources." Likewise, elements of the landscape without archaeological or human material remains also may be involved. Identification of Native American concerns is normally completed during land-use planning efforts, reference to existing studies, or through direct consultation with tribes.

Consultation for the type of proposed undertaking is consulted on annually with the aforementioned tribes. Letters were sent to the tribes in the spring of 2012 describing general recreation permits and projects as planned for the 2013 fiscal year. No comments were received. Project-specific consultation is typically not conducted unless activities are proposed within a previously identified area of tribal concern or if an undertaking may involve culturally significant items, sites and/or landscapes.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: Items, sites, or landscapes determined as culturally significant to the tribes can be directly or indirectly impacted. Direct impacts may include, but are not limited to, physical damage, removal of objects or items, and activities construed as disrespectful (e.g., installation of portable toilets near a sacred site). Indirect impacts may include, but are not limited to, prevention of access (hindering the performance of traditional ceremonies and rituals), increased visitation of an area, and potential loss of integrity related to religious feelings and associations.

There are no known items, sites, or landscapes determined as culturally significant to the tribes within or immediately adjacent to the project area. The proposed action does not prevent access to any known sacred sites, prevent the possession of sacred objects, or interfere with the performance of traditional ceremonies and/or rituals.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: None.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: Continued recreational use has the additive effect of altering the landscape from that ancestrally known by the tribes. Although specific, culturally sensitive sites have not been identified within the project area or immediate vicinity, the overarching concern is for cumulative effects that modern culture and/or developments cause upon the landscape.

Mitigation: There are no known adverse impacts to any culturally significant items, sites, or landscapes. If new information is provided by consulting tribes, additional or edited terms and conditions for mitigation may be required to protect resource values.

3.4.3 Paleontological Resources

Affected Environment: The Wild Rose Trail construction would occur on the Tertiary Brown's Park geologic formation. The Brown's park formation is classified as Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) Class 5. PFYC Class 5 has very high potential to predictably produce vertebrate fossils or scientifically significant invertebrate or plant fossils.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: Construction of the trail would cause surface disturbance which could damage or degrade paleontological resources if encountered. The potential for discovery of significant fossils within this formation is considered to be very high. If any such fossils are located here, construction activities could damage the fossils and the information that could have been gained from them would be lost. The significance of this impact would depend upon the significance of the fossil. The proposed action could also constitute a beneficial impact to paleontological resources by increasing the chances for discovery of scientifically significant fossils. The surface of the proposed trail is covered by soil. There is no exposed bedrock

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: None.

Mitigation: Areas that contain geologic formations that are PFYC 3, 4, and 5, for which new surface disturbance is proposed on or adjacent to bedrock (native sedimentary stone), including disturbance that may penetrate protective soil cover and disturb bedrock, may be subject to an inventory that shall be performed by a BLM permitted paleontologist and approved by the appropriate LSFO specialist. Surface disturbing activities in many areas including PFYC 4 and 5 may also require monitoring by a permitted paleontologist. The risks of damage or degradation by human-caused impacts could be lowered if the area of the proposed action is covered by extensive soil and vegetative cover. The surface of the proposed trail is covered by extensive soils and thick vegetation cover. There is no exposed bedrock. It is unlikely that the trail construction would penetrate to bedrock.

Any paleontological resource discovered during trail construction shall be immediately reported to the BLM Authorized Officer. Construction operations shall be suspended in the immediate area of such discovery until written authorization to proceed is issued by the Authorized Officer and the discovery shall be protected from damage or looting. Activities may not be required to be suspended if activities can be adjusted to avoid further impact to a discovered locality or be continued elsewhere. The Authorized Officer would evaluate or would have evaluated, such discoveries as soon as possible, but not later than 10 working days after being notified. Appropriate measures to mitigate adverse effects to significant paleontological resources will be determined by the Authorized Officer after consulting with the operator. Within 10 days, the operator would be allowed to continue construction through the site, or would be given the choice of either (1) following the Authorized Officer's instructions for stabilizing the fossil resource in place and avoiding further disturbance to the fossil resource, or (2) following the Authorized Officer's instructions for mitigating impacts to the fossil resource prior to continuing construction through the project area.. An evaluation of the discovery will be made by the Authorized Officer to determine appropriate actions to prevent the loss of significant paleontological or scientific values.

Reference:

Armstrong, Harley J. and Wolny, David G., 1989, Paleontological Resources of Northwest Colorado: A Regional Analysis, Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Junction, CO, prepared for Bur. Land Management, Vol. I of V.

Miller, A.E., 1977, Geology of Moffat County, Colorado, Colo. Geol. Surv. Map Series 3, 1:126,720.

CHAPTER 4 – PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARDS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In January 1997, the Colorado State Office of the BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health and amended all RMPs in the State. Standards describe the conditions needed to sustain public land health and apply to all uses of public lands. The Emerald Mountain SRMA Project Area was assessed for compliance with the Colorado Standards of Public Land Health by an interdisciplinary team.

4.2 COLORADO PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARDS

4.2.1 Standard 1: Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, land form, and geologic processes.

Finding of most recent assessment: The most recent assessment in 2007 finds that surface soil characteristics are stable and show little to no signs of surface movement. Biological soils crusts are present and intact where expected. Plant density and production on the site is high to promote water infiltration and permeability as well as minimize surface runoff.

Proposed Action: The Proposed Action would not meet the public land health standard for upland soils where the trail occurs, however the standard would likely continue to be met within the greater project area since use would be focused and limited mostly to the trail.

No Action Alternative: No surface disturbance would occur under this alternative. This standard would continue to be met.

4.2.2 Standard 2: Riparian systems associated with both running and standing water function properly and have the ability to recover from major disturbance such as fire, severe grazing, or 100-year floods.

There are no riparian systems within or immediately adjacent to the project area. This standard does not apply.

4..2.3 Standard 3: Healthy, productive plant and animal communities of native and other desirable species are maintained at viable population levels commensurate with the species and habitat's potential.

Proposed Action: The area of the Proposed Action is partially meeting land health standards. The construction and use of trails facilitates an increase in weed infestations. Combined with the potential removal of .7 acre of vegetation the Proposed Action would contribute to this standard not being met.

No Action Alternative: The area is partially meeting land health standards and this trend would continue under the No Action Alterative.

4.2.4 Standard 4: Special status, threatened and endangered species (federal and state), and other plants and animals officially designated by the BLM, and their habitats are maintained or enhanced by sustaining healthy, native plant and animal communities.

Proposed Action: There are no federally listed threatened or endangered or BLM sensitive species present within or in the vicinity of the proposed project. For plants, this standard does not apply.

The area of the Proposed Action is partially meeting land health standards. The construction of the trail could lead to a slight increase in weed infestations, but overall, the Proposed Action would not preclude this standard from being meet.

No Action Alternative: The area is partially meeting land health standards and this trend would continue under the No Action Alterative.

4.2.5 Standard 5: The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water where applicable, located on or influenced by BLM lands will achieve or exceed the Water Quality Standards established by the State of Colorado.

There are no perennial surface waters within or immediately adjacent to the project area. This standard does not apply.

SIGNATURE OF PREPARER:

SIGNATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWER:

DATE SIGNED:

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
DOI-BLM-CO-N010-2012-0027-EA

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the EA and all other available information, I have determined that the proposal and the alternatives analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would adversely impact the quality of the human environment. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Beneficial, adverse, direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts have been disclosed in the EA. Analysis indicated no significant impacts on society as a whole, the affected region, the affected interests or the locality. The physical and biological effects are limited to the Little Snake Resource Area and adjacent land.

2. Public health and safety would not be adversely impacted. There are no known or anticipated concerns with project waste or hazardous materials.

3. There would be no adverse impacts to regional or local air quality, prime or unique farmlands, known paleontological resources on public land within the area, wetlands, floodplain, areas with unique characteristics, ecologically critical areas or designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.

4. There are no highly controversial effects on the environment.

5. There are no effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk. Sufficient information on risk is available based on information in the EA and other past actions of a similar nature.

6. This alternative does not set a precedent for other actions that may be implemented in the future to meet the goals and objectives of adopted Federal, State or local natural resource related plans, policies or programs.

7. No cumulative impacts related to other actions that would have a significant adverse impact were identified or are anticipated.

8. Based on previous and ongoing cultural surveys and through mitigation by avoidance, no adverse impacts to cultural resources were identified or anticipated. There are no known American Indian religious concerns or persons or groups who might be disproportionately and adversely affected as anticipated by the Environmental Justice Policy.

9. No adverse impacts to any threatened or endangered species or their habitat that was determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act were identified. If, at a future time, there could be the potential for adverse impacts, treatments would be modified or mitigated not to have an adverse effect or new analysis would be conducted.

10. This alternative is in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements for the protection of the environment.
I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed activities documented in EA No. DOI-BLM-N010-2012-0028 EA. I have also reviewed the project record for this analysis and the impacts of the Proposed Action and alternatives as disclosed in the Alternatives and Environmental Impacts sections of the EA. Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. Because there would not be any significant impact, an environmental impact statement is not required.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

DATE SIGNED:

Decision Record

DOI-BLM-CO-N010-2013-0057-EA

DECISION AND RATIONALE:

I have determined that approving this project is in conformance with the approved land use plan. It is my decision to implement the project with the specified mitigation measures. The project will be monitored as stated in the Compliance Plan outlined below.

MITIGATION MEASURES: The mitigation measures for this project are described in the environmental impacts section of the environmental analysis for cultural resources, paleontology, hazardous materials, and realty authorizations.

Compliance Schedule

Compliance will be conducted during the construction phases and maintenance phase to ensure that all specifications and mitigative measures outlined in EA No. DOI-BLM-N010-2013-0057 EA are followed.

Monitoring Plan

Following implementation, the SRMA use and condition of the trail will be monitored during the life of the project for compliance with all stipulations and pertinent regulations as well as achievement of identified recreation objectives for Zone 2. The trail will be monitored for noxious/invasive weeds during the growing season. Corrective action will be identified and implemented.

Assignment of Responsibility

Responsibility for implementation of the compliance schedule and monitoring plan will be assigned to the Recreation Staff in the Little Snake Field Office. The primary inspector will be the Recreation Specialist.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision shall take effect immediately upon the date it is signed by the Authorized Officer, and shall remain in effect while any appeal is pending unless the Interior Board of Land Appeals issues a stay (43 CFR 2801.10(b)). Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4.

Within 30 days of the decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at the Little Snake Field Office, 455 Emerson St., Craig, CO 81625. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.

Contact Person

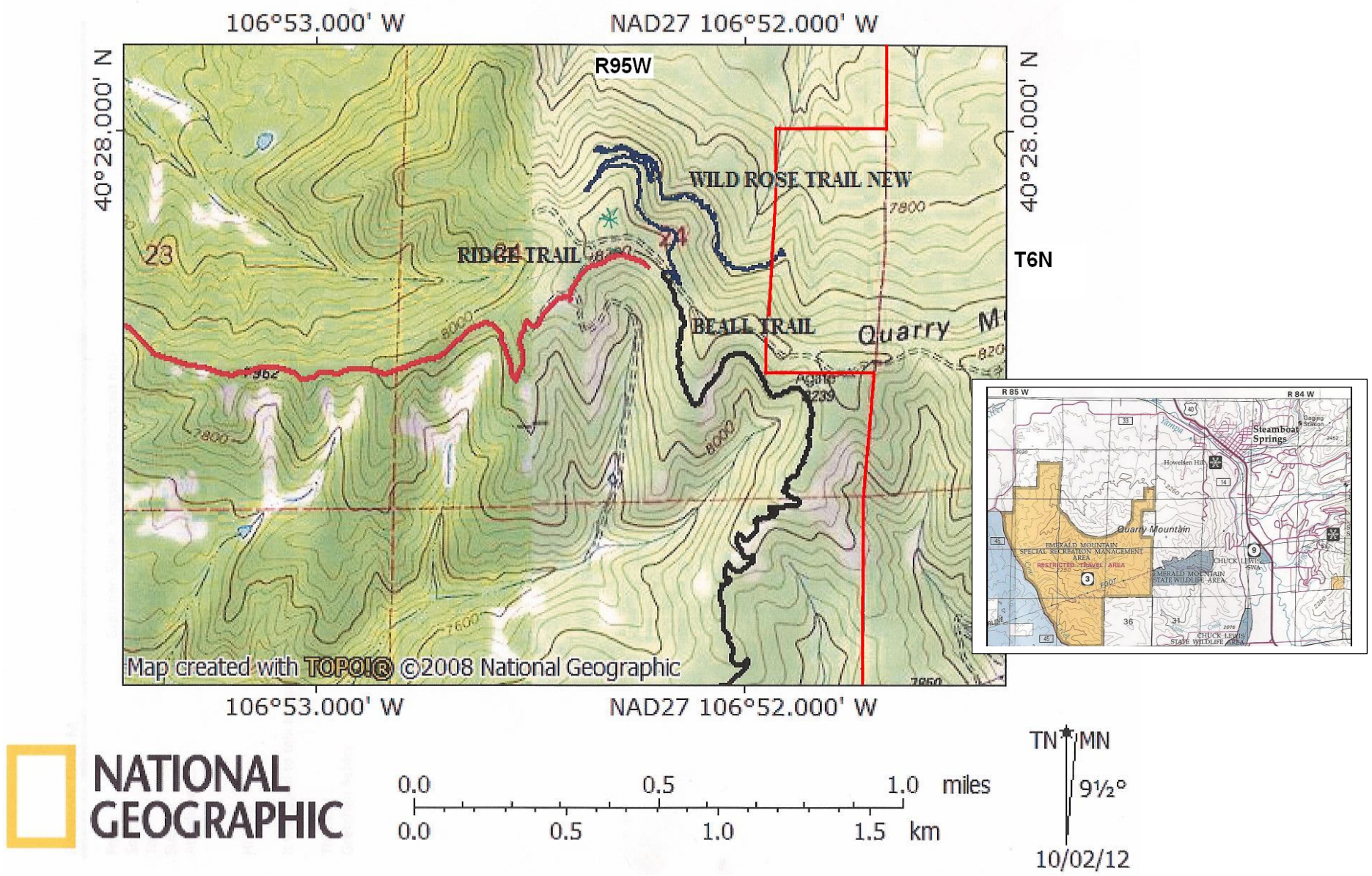
For additional information concerning this decision, contact Gina Robison, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Little Snake Field Office, 455 Emerson Street, Craig, CO 81625, Phone (970) 826-5083.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: /s/ Wendy Reynolds

DATE SIGNED: 8/30/13

Attachment A:

Project Area
Wild Rose Trail Map



Map 1: Proposed Wild Rose Trail