

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
220 E Market St
Meeker, CO 81641

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-110-2013-0041-EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER:

PROJECT NAME: Ute Park Connector Trail (Phase 2)

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: T1N, R94W Sections 15 and 22

APPLICANT: Eastern Rio Blanco Metropolitan Recreation and Park District (ERBM)

PURPOSE & NEED FOR THE ACTION:

The purpose of the action is to provide increased recreational opportunities and access to public lands. The need for the action is to provide connectivity between Ute Park, BLM lands, and the Phillip and Dorcas Jensen Memorial Park (Jenson Park) as well as increase developed access to public lands adjacent to the Town of Meeker for passive, non-motorized recreation.

Decision to be Made: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will decide whether or not to approve the construction of the proposed Ute Park Connector Trail (Phase 2), and if so, under what conditions.

SCOPING, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AND ISSUES:

Scoping: Scoping was the primary mechanism used by the BLM to initially identify issues. Internal scoping was initiated when the project was presented to the White River Field Office (WRFO) interdisciplinary team on 1/29/2013. External scoping was conducted by posting this project on the WRFO's on-line National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) register on 2/6/2013. A press release was issued on 2/28/2013. The Proposed Action, map, and press release were posted on the WRFO's home page on 2/28/2013. An article and map about the proposed trail was on the front page of the 3/07/2013 Meeker Herald Times newspaper. A scoping meeting has held on 3/12/2013 at the Meeker Recreation Center's office which was attended by approximately 15 people. The discussion and verbal comments about the proposed project were largely positive. Another scoping meeting was held on 4/2/2013 at a Town of Meeker Board of Trustees meeting which had approximately 15 people in attendance. The discussion and verbal comments about the proposed project were largely positive. The Town of Meeker Board of Trustees voted in full support of the project.

Issues: During public scoping Colorado Parks and Wildlife recommended that dogs be leashed or under verbal control from December 1-April 15 to minimize disturbance to mule deer while in their critical winter range habitat. Wildlife surveys of the western side of the China Wall cliffs revealed former and future potential peregrine falcon nests.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Background/Introduction: A master plan for the new Phillip and Dorcas Jensen Memorial Park (Jenson Park) was approved by the Eastern Rio Blanco Recreation and Park Metropolitan District (ERBM) Board on August 9, 2011. As part of their master plan and the ERBM's goals for providing more system-wide connectivity to park and open space properties in the community, it was determined that providing access to a high point above the park and connecting to the Town of Meeker owned Ute Park, through BLM administered land was a priority.

During the summer of 2012, the ERBM constructed a non-motorized trail from Jenson Park approximately 1 mile across BLM land to the top of China Wall called the Ute Park Connector Trail-Phase 1 (Phase 1 Trail). The trail starts on ERBM land along the mountain bike flow course in Jenson Park and ends at a high point above China Wall on BLM administered land. This trail provides access to a high point above the cliff walls in a safe, sustainable manner, and provides visitors with a clear view of the Town of Meeker below, the upper White River Valley, and Flat Tops Mountains in the distance.

Proposed Action:

Trail Connectivity & Length

The ERBM proposes to construct Ute Park Connector Trail-Phase 2 (Phase 2 Trail) from mid-May through late June or early July of 2013. The Phase 2 Trail is proposed to be constructed heading west starting from the high point terminus of Phase 1 Trail, along the top of China Wall. The trail will then switchback down into Anderson Gulch, contour around the base of the western portion of China Wall and then connect into Ute Park. The trail will terminate at the Ute Park-Hill Street trailhead and parking area (see Figure 1).

From the starting point of the proposed Phase 2 Trail to Ute Park the trail length would be approximately 1.5 miles on BLM administered land, crossing about 900 feet of the Town of Meeker property along the top of China Wall. The vertical drop from the high point of Phase 2 Trail to Ute Park is approximately 800 feet. With the completion of this trail, visitors would be able to complete portions of the trail system as "out-and-back" experiences or connect various trails to make a loop. The loop option would include traveling 3.8 miles on BLM trails, approximately 0.5 miles through Jenson Park on ERBM trails, 0.25 miles through Ute Park on Town of Meeker trails, and then 9 blocks (0.75 miles) through Meeker, CO. The total length of this loop option would be approximately 5.3 miles. With the completion of the Phase 2 Trail, the majority of Meeker residents would be within walking distance of this trail system, consisting of three trailheads and numerous options to vary the length, difficulty, and experience desired.

Use

The trail is proposed and designed for year round non-motorized use, primarily by pedestrians, cross country skiers, and bicyclists. No motorized use of the trail will be permitted.

Trail Design & Construction Technique

The trail is proposed to be built by a professional trail contractor. The construction technique utilized will be the full bench method. The professional contractor will follow the guidelines and techniques for sustainable trail construction set forth in two publications: *USDA Forest Service Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook, 2007 Edition*, and the *International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack, June 2004*. The trail tread will be approximately 36 inches wide with vegetation to be cut back to a width of 6 feet and a height of 10-12 feet. The total trail corridor analyzed for this proposal will be a width of 100 feet (50 feet on either side of the centerline). This total corridor width allows for potential variance in trail siting during construction due to unforeseen obstacles; through areas that may require switchbacks; and areas where there may be a need for other minor realignments due to resource considerations. The 100 foot trail corridor width also allows for the use of available natural features ideal for sustainable trail construction (i.e., benches, boulders, etc.). The height of the corridor will be 10-12 feet to allow for mountain biking, cross country skiing, and snowshoeing use. Equestrian use is not permitted within Dorcas-Jensen Park. As such, equestrian use on the BLM portion of this trail is expected to be minimal, therefore specific techniques for equestrian trail construction will not be employed.

Construction will be completed primarily with the use of mechanical trail building equipment including a small trail dozer and mini-excavator, along with traditional hand tools for finishing and construction of small trail features (i.e., water bars, dips, etc.). Short segments of the trail on more level ground, including the trail wayside, may be constructed entirely by hand. Vegetation may be cut using chainsaws. The trail is proposed to be constructed by mobilizing trail construction equipment (small trail dozer, mini-excavator, and Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs) up to the top of China Wall on the existing Phase 1 Trail. During the expected half day of mobilizing equipment up the Phase 1 Trail, the public will be asked not to use this portion of the trail system to protect public health and safety and signs stating this will be installed on both sides of the project. Also, during construction of the proposed Phase 2 Trail, the contractor will be using OHVs on the existing Phase 1 Trail to access the work site at the beginning and end of their work shift. Signs will be posted at the beginning of the Phase 1 Trail to notify trail users, but use of the trail will not be restricted. Barriers will be installed to prevent unauthorized OHV use of this trail. Upon completion of the Phase 2 Trail, the contractor will then demobilize all equipment back down the Phase 1 Trail and complete any needed work to rehabilitate the Phase 1 Trail to its former condition or better and complete any annual maintenance to this section of trail. During the one day of completing this work the public will again be asked not use this portion of the trail system to protect public health and safety and signs stating this will be installed on both sides of the project.

The proposed trail alignment prioritizes areas that require the least amount of disturbance to existing vegetation and natural features while maximizing the user recreation experience. The

goal is to maximize long-term trail sustainability and minimize maintenance through proper trail design. Disturbed areas beyond the 36 inch trail tread will be reseeded using a BLM recommended standard seed mix.

Maintenance

The ERBM and the BLM WRFO will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding responsibilities for each member such as ongoing maintenance, planning, development, and volunteer recruitment.

Design Features (Applicant Committed Measures):

1. Upon completion of the trail, ERBM will re-seed all disturbed areas used for staging and construction, as well as disturbed areas along the edges of the trail beyond the 36 inch tread width with the seed mix described under the Vegetation Section of this document. ERBM will also implement an integrated weed management plan similar to the BLM Manual 9015-Integrated Weed Management (BLM 1992) in cooperation with the BLM to address any potential invasive species issues.
2. The applicant is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing archaeological sites or for collecting artifacts.
3. If any cultural resource materials are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, activity in the vicinity of the discovery will cease, and the BLM WRFO Archaeologist will be notified immediately. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the AO. The applicant will make every effort to protect the site from further impacts including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage until BLM determines a treatment approach, and the treatment is completed. Unless previously determined in treatment plans or agreements, BLM will evaluate the cultural resources and, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), select the appropriate mitigation option within 48 hours of the discovery. The applicant, under guidance of the BLM, will implement the mitigation in a timely manner. The process will be fully documented in reports, site forms, maps, drawings, and photographs. The BLM will forward documentation to the SHPO for review and concurrence.
4. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g), the applicant must notify the AO, by telephone and written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), the applicant must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the AO.
5. Install, maintain, and remove signs at least 2 days before and the day after operations at the beginning of the Phase 1 Trail (uphill from the beginning of the mountain biking flow course) asking the public not to use the trail during the half day of mobilizing equipment to begin construction and during the full day of demobilizing and maintaining the trail. Install, maintain, and remove signs at least 2 days before and the day after the entire trail

construction period at the beginning of the Phase 1 Trail (uphill from the beginning of the mountain biking flow course) warning the public that OHV's will be used at the beginning and end of each day's shift as well as occasionally during the work shift to access the work site and transport materials to and from the work site. This sign will also include the fact that no other motorized use of this trail is authorized.

6. Slash generated from vegetation removal for trail construction or future maintenance will be lopped and scattered to a depth no greater than 18 inches for wildfire mitigation and visual aesthetics. Stumps will be cut to a height no greater than four inches.
7. In order to protect public land health standards for soils and due to the steep slopes along the trail, erosion features such as rutting and pooling on the trail surface or rilling, gullyng, piping and mass wasting adjacent to the trail as a result of this action will be addressed immediately after observation by developing a plan to assure successful soil stabilization with Best Management Practices (BMPs), or additional trail maintenance to keep the integrity of erosion control measures that disperse flow and allow the normal movement of surface runoff and infiltration.

No Action Alternative: The proposed Phase 2 Trail would not be constructed.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD: A trail open to motorized use was dismissed due to the desire to provide a non-motorized trail experience adjacent to the Town of Meeker. Also, motorized recreation use is prohibited at both the Dorcas Jensen Park and Ute Park, which are the trailheads and primary access points for the Phase 1 and Phase 2 Trails. A trail designed for equestrian use was also dismissed due a prohibition of equestrian use in Dorcas Jensen Park and Ute Park as well.

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: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (White River ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: 2-44

Decision Language: "Develop motorized and non-motorized trails (e.g. mountain bike, hiking, horseback, ATV, 4-wheel drive, snowmobile, etc.) as demand/needs dictate. Trails may include but are not limited to: Rangely Loop, Dinosaur, Ute, Dominguez-Escalante, Scenery Gulch, Cathedral Bluffs, and China Wall/Lion Canyon/Lobo Mountain Trails. Develop links to other trails: Yampa Valley Trail, Kokopelli's Trail, Uinta Railroad into Utah, etc."

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Standards for Public Land Health: In January 1997, the Colorado BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, special status species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis (EA). These findings are located in specific elements listed below.

Cumulative Effects Analysis Assumptions: Cumulative effects are defined in the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1508.7) as "...the impact on the environment that results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions." Table 1 lists the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions within the area that might be affected by the Proposed Action; for this project the area considered was the BLM polygon for which Lobo Mountain and China Wall are located, approximately 1,980 acres. However, the geographic scope used for analysis may vary for each cumulative effects issue and is described in the Affected Environment section for each resource.

Table 1. Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

Action Description	STATUS		
	Past	Present	Future
Livestock Grazing	X	X	X
Wild Horse Gathers	No	No	No
Recreation	X	X	X
Invasive Weed Inventory and Treatments	X	X	X
Range Improvement Projects : Water Developments Fences & Cattleguards	X	X	X
Wildfire and Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation	X	X	X
Wind Energy Met Towers	No	No	No
Oil and Gas Development: Well Pads Access Roads Pipelines Gas Plants Facilities	X	X	X
Power Lines	X	X	X
Oil Shale	No	No	No
Seismic	X	X	X
Vegetation Treatments	X	X	X

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 2 lists the resources considered and the determination as to whether they require additional analysis.

Table 2. Resources and Determination of Need for Further Analysis

Determination ¹	Resource	Rationale for Determination
Physical Resources		
NI	Air Quality	Construction of the trail will result in short term emissions from small engines and dust that are consistent with casual uses of public lands, no adverse impacts from this project are expected with regard to air quality.
NI	Geology and Minerals	Design, construction techniques, and subsequent use of the proposed non –motorized trail would result in minimal to no effect on the associated geologic and mineral resources in the project area.
PI	Soil Resources*	See discussion below.
NI	Surface and Ground Water Quality*	With design features for soils, it is unlikely that impacts will occur to water quality. Sediment generated by the construction is likely to stay on site, within the 50 foot buffer and erosion features will be addressed, should they occur (see Applicant Committed Measure number 7).
Biological Resources		
NP	Wetlands and Riparian Zones*	There are no riparian or wetland areas that would be impacted by the Proposed Action. Sulfur Creek and the White River are the nearest systems with wetland or riparian zone. Sulfur creek, at its closest point to the Proposed Action, is approximately 0.75 miles to the east, and the White River at its closest is 0.5 miles from the Proposed Action.
PI	Vegetation*	See discussion below.
PI	Invasive, Non-native Species	See discussion below.
PI	Special Status Animal Species*	See discussion below.
NP	Special Status Plant Species*	Known occurrences of special status plant species are over 2 km to the west of the Proposed Action. Special status plant species will not be affected by the Proposed Action.
PI	Migratory Birds	See discussion below.
NP	Aquatic Wildlife*	Sulfur Creek is not known to support any higher order aquatic vertebrates. Ponds along Sulfur Creek (approximately 1.5 mile away from the Proposed Action) have been documented to support chorus frogs. However, due to the distance of ponds and extremely small scale of disturbance caused by the Proposed Action effects to chorus frog populations are not anticipated. The White River is located

Determination¹	Resource	Rationale for Determination
		approximately 0.5 miles from the Proposed Action and is known to support several species of aquatic wildlife. However, due to the distance of the Proposed Action from the river, there will be no effect to any aquatic species.
PI	Terrestrial Wildlife*	See discussion below.
NP	Wild Horses	The proposed project is not located within the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area, the North Piceance or the West Douglas Herd Areas.
Heritage Resources and the Human Environment		
PI	Cultural Resources	See discussion below.
PI	Paleontological Resources	See discussion below.
NI	Native American Religious Concerns	There are currently no Native American religious concerns that are known/ that have been identified by tribal officials.
PI	Visual Resources	See discussion below.
PI	Hazardous or Solid Wastes	See discussion below.
NI	Fire Management	The Proposed Action will not affect the implementation of the Northwest Colorado Fire Program Area, Fire Management Plan. Following the applicant committed measures in regards to vegetation removal; the project does not require further analysis.
NI	Social and Economic Conditions	There would not be any substantial changes to local social or economic conditions.
NP	Environmental Justice	According to recent Census Bureau statistics (2000), there are no minority or low income populations within the WRFO.
NP	Lands with Wilderness Characteristics	There are no lands with wilderness characteristics (LWC) identified in or near the project area. The closet potential LWC unit is located over 16 miles away.
Resource Uses		
PI	Forest Management	See discussion below.
PI	Rangeland Management	See discussion below.
NI	Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Rights	Although there is a minor drainage crossing on Anderson Gulch it will not be on BLM administered lands and trail construction is not likely to impact the function of this stream channel during flood event. No water will be used for the construction of this project would not impact existing water rights.
NI	Realty Authorizations	There are rights-of-way for power lines and a telephone cable present. It is unlikely that construction, use, and maintenance of the trail will impact the aerial telephone cable and power lines.
PI	Recreation	See discussion below.

Determination ¹	Resource	Rationale for Determination
PI	Access and Transportation	See discussion below.
NP	Prime and Unique Farmlands	There are no Prime and Unique Farmlands within the project area.
Special Designations		
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	The nearest ACEC is the White River Riparian Area which is 7.7 miles to the southwest of the Proposed Action. There will be no known impacts from the Proposed Action.
NP	Wilderness	There are no designated Wilderness Areas or Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) in the project area. Windy Gulch WSA is the closet WSA and is located approximately 6 miles to the northwest.
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers in the WRFO.
NP	Scenic Byways	There are no Scenic Byways within the 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.

* Public Land Health Standard

SOIL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: The majority of the soils (24 acres) are Blazon, moist-Rentsak complex soils. There are 8.1 acres of natural slopes with greater than 35 percent slopes within 50 feet of the centerline of the trail. Patent loam soils are in the alluvium on the valley bottom of Anderson Gulch and there are 1.3 acres of rock outcrops within 50 feet of the centerline of the trail. The erosion hazard for Blazon soils for road or trail construction is severe as is the soil rutting hazard. The Blazon soils have weathered from shale and therefore will have high clay content, this will make the trail shed water and be more stable, but will make it more susceptible to ponding. The surface texture is a channery loam, meaning there will be large rock fragments in the surface soils. These fragments should be decent material for use in trail construction, but will break down with time.

Table 3. Soils within 50 feet of the Proposed Trail Centerline

Soil Classification	Erosion Hazard for Road/Trail Construction	Soil Rutting Hazard	Surface Texture	Parent Material	Acres within 50ft. of the trail centerline
Blazon, moist-Rentsak complex, 8 to 65 percent slopes	Severe	Severe	channery loam	residuum weathered from shale	24.1
Patent loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	Moderate	Severe	loam	alluvium and/or colluvium and/or thin mantle eolian deposits	6.5
Rock outcrop	Not rated	Not rated	unweathered bedrock	siltstone and/or limestone, sandstone, and shale	1.3

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: Trail construction techniques as described in the Design Features have been developed for steep country with diverse soil types. By using grade reversals, an outslope design, and other techniques the trail construction design should keep water from ponding and running on the trail surface, reducing potential erosion. Due to these design techniques the severe erosion rating is not unusual or insurmountable to develop a successful trail. The most likely impact from the construction and use of this trail would be an unanticipated failure in design. With trails of this type and design, a few years can make the all the difference in identifying where water will concentrate and cause erosion. Part of the design features includes a process to address sections of the trail that may erode in the future. It is likely that any erosion features can be repaired using standard BMPs and trail maintenance if they are identified in time and a process is in place to mitigate them.

Direct effects of the Proposed Action will be to expose soils to rainfall on the trail surface, localized areas of vegetation removal on the cuts and fills along the trail and disruption and interception of shallow hillside groundwater flow. Indirect impacts are concentration of surface and subsurface runoff, reduced infiltration and potential erosion along the trail.

The design features include the seeding of disturbance along the trail with a BLM approved seed mix. As this vegetation becomes established on cut and fill slopes along the trail, the potential for erosion is likely to decrease over time. Trail use, especially during wet conditions, can erode drainage features on trails and periodic maintenance will likely be required to keep the trail functioning properly.

Cumulative Effects: This area likely has dispersed recreation such as hunting, since there is evidence of tree stands in Anderson Gulch. There is also oil and gas development nearby, but likely will be outside of where this trail is being constructed due to the steep topography. A power line crosses Anderson Gulch where the trail comes out and would require periodic maintenance with vehicles. These additional uses may impact soils in a similar manner to the Proposed Action. The increased public use with the trail combined with other activities is unlikely to result in overall changes in soil productivity or cross any thresholds in regard to soil stability and erosion for this hillside.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The trail would not be constructed and additional public use in this area would not occur.

Cumulative Effects: Oil and gas development, power line maintenance and dispersed recreation would likely continue and impacts would be in keeping with the actions as they occur.

Mitigation: See Design Features.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #1 for Upland Soils: With the design features, neither alternative is likely to reduce the productivity of soils on public lands or lead to increased instability of soils.

VEGETATION

Affected Environment: The proposed project would be located in vegetation communities predominately composed of rolling loam and mixed age classes of pinyon/juniper (PJ) woodlands. On top of China Wall, portions of the PJ plant community burned in 2001 and are currently dominated by dense grass shrub cover. Species seeded after this fire include thickspike wheatgrass (*Elymus lanceolatus*), bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*), mountain brome (*Bromus marginatus*), Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), basin wildrye (*Leymus cinereus*), and fourwing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*). The remaining PJ sites includes an understory of Indian ricegrass (*Achnatherum hymenoides*), beardless wheatgrass, serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*) and sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*). The majority of the rolling loam site is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *Wyomingensis*), winterfat (*Krascheninnikovia lanata*), yellow rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus*), bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*), Indian ricegrass, squirreltail (*Elymus elymoides*), Junegrass (*Koeleria macrantha*), and Sandberg bluegrass.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The proposed trail would primarily cross through PJ woodlands and a small portion would additionally traverse through a rolling loam community and rock outcrop. On public land approximately 1 acre of the rolling loam and PJ plant communities would be removed as a result of this project. After successful establishment of seeded species only the three foot tread portion of the trail would remain devoid of vegetation.

Direct impacts of vegetation removal include short-term loss of vegetation and the modification of plant community structure, species composition, and a short-term reduction of basal and aerial vegetative cover. Removal of vegetation also results in increased soil exposure, reduced plant diversity, and loss of forage for wildlife and livestock. Indirect impacts include the increased potential for non-native/noxious plant establishment and introduction, accelerated wind and water erosion, changes in water runoff due to trail construction, soil impacts that affect plant growth (soil erosion or siltation), shifts in species composition and/or changes in vegetative density away from desirable conditions. Environmental conditions could prevent initial reseeding efforts from being successful, resulting in an extended recovery period for native plant communities.

Cumulative Effects: The proposed project, when added to other projects and developments, in and near the project area, would result in an increase in short-term removal of existing vegetation on private and public land. Long-term changes in plant community composition and structure would also occur on the project site and on a broader scale from activities such as livestock grazing. Of the total potential vegetation removal near the project area, the proposed project would not result in a noteworthy increase in vegetation disturbance or long-term changes in plant community.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under this alternative there would be no construction of the Ute Park Connector Trail-Phase 2 and no removal of vegetation would occur. However,

continued public use of the eroding, non-sustainable social trails would negatively affect vegetation where erosion is accelerated.

Cumulative Effects: No construction of the trail would have very little impact to vegetation communities in the China Wall area.

Mitigation: The following mitigation will be required.

1. Consistent with the Proposed Action, ERBM committed to using a BLM recommended seed mix. Between September 1 and March 15 seed all areas of disturbance, except the tread portion of the trail, will be seeded with the following seed mix:

Cultivar	Common Name	Scientific Name	Application Rate (lbs. PLS/acre)*
Rosana	Western Wheatgrass	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	4
Whitmar	Bluebunch Wheatgrass	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata ssp. inermis</i>	3.5
Rimrock	Indian Ricegrass	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	3
Bromar	Mountain Brome	<i>Brumus marginatus</i>	2
Maple Grove	Lewis Flax	<i>Linum lewisii</i>	1
Bandera	Rocky Mountain Penstemon	<i>Penstemon strictus</i>	0.5

* Seeding rate is for drilled seeding; for broadcast seeding the rate should be doubled

2. A reclamation success rate equal to a minimum cover and composition of 80 percent of the Desired Plant Community (as defined by the ecological site, in an early seral state) or in relation to the seed mix applied within three growing seasons after the application of seed will be achieved. This community must be capable of persisting on the site without intervention and allow for successional processes consistent with achieving the seral stage on the site prior to surface disturbance.
3. Reclamation achievement will be evaluated using the Public Land Health Standards that include Indicators of Rangeland Health. If BLM determines that reclamation success is below an acceptable level, reclamation efforts must be repeated at ERBM's expense until vegetation is successfully established.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #3 for Plant and Animal Communities: With implementation of mitigation measures and successful re-vegetation, the Proposed Action would have no effect on the status of Land Health Standard 3 in the project area or at a landscape scale.

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: The proposed trail (one and a half miles on public land) was surveyed for the presence of any noxious or invasive weeds during Oct 2012. Colorado State listed weeds found within the general project area were: leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*), cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), and houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officianale*). Of these state listed weeds, leafy spurge, common mullein, and houndstongue are on the Rio

Blanco County weed list. Other common weeds known to occur in the general area of the project include spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*), diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*), musk thistle (*Carduus acanthoides*), bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), kochia (*Kochia scoparia*), and Russian thistle (*Salsola australis*).

Cheatgrass was observed on disturbed areas scattered along the length of the project. Common mullein and houndstongue were observed as scattered occurrences. Leafy spurge occurs in several isolated patches in the general project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The disturbance associated with the Proposed Action could create or intensify a noxious weed problem by importing weed seed on equipment, humans or by creating suitable conditions in the form of non-vegetated disturbed areas. Construction activities associated with all phases of the project could spread noxious weed species to other areas of the project, some of which have no invasive or noxious weeds at this time, by carrying seeds or plant parts (rhizomes) on construction equipment. When in use, there is opportunity for spread of weeds from trail user use. Cheatgrass occurrences are scattered throughout the understory of the proposed route for most of its length and cheatgrass invasion is very likely if the surface is not reclaimed following the disturbance.

Cumulative Effects: The proposed trail could contribute to the noxious and invasive plant species present in the surrounding areas. However, existing roads through the area are common sources of invasive and noxious weeds, so elimination of these species from the general area is unlikely.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: Noxious and invasive plants would continue to be present within the vicinity of the project area and, depending on the aggressiveness of weed treatment activities, may continue to spread.

Cumulative Effects: Noxious and invasive plants would continue to be present within the vicinity of the project area and, depending on the aggressiveness of weed treatment activities, may continue to spread.

Mitigation:

1. ERBM will implement an integrated weed management plan similar to the BLM Manual 9015-Integrated Weed Management in cooperation with BLM. ERBM should have employees trained for appropriate timing of weed treatment and certified for the use of appropriate herbicides for control/eradication of the known and possible noxious and invasive nonnative species along the proposed trail.
2. Any noxious plants will be eliminated before seed production has occurred. The BLM recommends that treatment of noxious and nonnative species on adjacent private lands be performed in a manner similar to procedures described in BLM Manual

9015. Contractors will clean all off-road and trail construction equipment to remove seed and soil prior to commencing operations on public lands within the project area.

SPECIAL STATUS ANIMAL SPECIES

Affected Environment: There are no threatened, endangered or candidate animal species that are known to inhabit or derive important use from the project area. The only known special status animal species that are known to or have potential to be located within the project area are peregrine falcons and sensitive bat species. The Proposed Action is located along the ridgeline and hillside of China Wall and the valley bottom of Anderson Gulch (elevation ranging from approximately 6200 ft. to 7,100 ft.) in a community predominantly composed of a mixed age class of pinyon/juniper woodland and sagebrush. Portions of the PJ burned along the ridgeline of China Wall in 2001 and are currently dominated by dense perennial grasses and mountain shrub.

Peregrine falcons prefer to nest on cliffs surrounded by pinyon-juniper woodlands that are found at higher elevations (4000 ft. – 9000 ft.). Peregrine falcons return to the area in early March and begin nesting in April. Nestlings are normally fledged and independent of the nest by mid-August. A peregrine falcon nest has been documented on a cliff face of China Wall which the trail passes on the ridgeline above. The cliff face of China Wall represents one of probably four or fewer peregrine nest territories in the WRFO. Although removed from Endangered Species List in 1999, peregrine falcons are considered and remain on the BLM sensitive species list, leaving management emphasis, by policy, on par with Endangered Species Act candidates.

Although the distribution of bats in the vicinity of the project area is incompletely understood, Townsend's big-eared and big free-tailed bats are known to be found in the field office, especially along larger perennial waterways. These bats typically use caves, mines, bridges, and unoccupied buildings for night, nursery, and hibernation roosts, but in western Colorado, single or small groups of bats use rock crevices and tree cavities. There are no underground mines or known caves or unoccupied buildings in the vicinity of the project area. Birthing and rearing of young for these bats occur in May and June, and young are capable of flight by the end of July. The big free-tailed bat is not known to breed in Colorado.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The Proposed Action will permanently disturb less than one acre of habitat as the trail is approximately 2.45 mile in length and 36 inches in width. There is potential for the Proposed Action to temporarily disturb up to 32 acres (the area within the 100ft construction corridor). Trail construction is slated to take place from May 15 to the end of June. The majority of the trail passes through dense mountain shrub, perennial grass and sagebrush habitats. These habitats do not provided suitable roosting or nursery areas for sensitive bat species. Parts of the trail will pass through pinyon-juniper habitat which can provided roosting and nursery areas. However, the result of a combination of factors including the distance of the project area from the White River (foraging ground), removal of trees only when necessary and availability of habitat adjacent to the project area, impacts from construction or trail users is highly unlikely.

There is potential for the Proposed Action to temporarily disturb up to 32 acres (the area within the 100ft construction corridor) which includes the ridgeline above cliffs that provided suitable nesting substrate for peregrine falcons. The BLM information suggests that these birds began occupying this cliff site in 2010 and at a minimum were successful in fledging young in 2011. The nest site is about 250 meters from the northwest corner of Meeker and the pair are presumed to be accustomed to residential and agricultural activity at the base of the outcrop. The birds are thought to have nested successfully at a nearby alternate location above the northeast corner of Meeker in 2012. Recent surveys by BLM biologists indicated attendance of the western site by falcons in early April 2013. The falcons are likely accustomed to periodic activity beneath the nest site, trail construction at the base of China Wall likely poses little threat of nest disruption or site abandonment. However, the appearance of humans on the cliff above the eyrie would likely elicit a strong alarm response from birds and risk current year reproductive outcome as well as abandonment of the site for future nesting. There are mitigation measures that can be implemented such as moving the trail back from the cliff face and keeping it northeast of the tree line to create a visual buffer and discourage day users from walking along the edge of the cliff. Trail re-routing in combination with factors including the low intensity of construction associated with the Proposed Action, ephemeral use of the trail by users and nest proximity to the City of Meeker, it is highly unlikely the Proposed Action would have any negative long term effect on nesting peregrine falcons. WRFO biologists will continue to monitor the cliff face yearly for nesting and roosting falcons and ask that any incidental reports of bird interactions with trail users be noted to WRFO biologists.

Cumulative Effects: The Proposed Action is not expected to add substantially to existing or proposed disturbances.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no direct or indirect impacts to special status animal species or associated habitats under the No Action Alternative.

Cumulative Effects: There would be no contribution to previous or existing disturbances that would potentially impact special status animal species or habitats under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation:

1. The trail will be re-routed at the forth switch back (from the top of the trail) to stay northeast of the tree line (within the 100 foot survey buffer) to create a visual buffer limiting impacts to nesting and roosting the BLM sensitive species peregrine falcons on the cliff face of China Wall.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #4 for Special Status Species: The Land Health Standards for special status animal communities are currently being met in the project area. Neither the Proposed nor No Action Alternatives are expected to detract from continued meeting of these standards.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The Proposed Action is located along the ridgeline and hill side of China Wall and extends onto the valley bottom of Anderson Gulch (elevation ranging from approximately 6200 ft. to 7,100 ft.) in a community predominantly composed of a mixed age class of pinyon/juniper woodland and sagebrush. Portions of the PJ burned along the ridgeline of China Wall in 2001 and are currently dominated by dense perennial grasses and mountain shrub. There are several species of migratory birds that nest in the PJ woodland, mountain shrub, grassland and sagebrush communities during the migratory bird nesting season (typically May 15 – July 15th). Currently, there are several primitive unofficial trails used by hikers along the slope and ridgeline of China Wall.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The Proposed Action will permanently disturb less than one acre of habitat as the trail is approximately 2.45 mile in length and 36 inches in width. There is potential for the Proposed Action to temporarily disturb up to 32 acres (the area within the 100ft construction corridor). Trail construction is slated to take place from May 15 to June 30 which is the beginning of the migratory bird nesting season. Loss of nests due to activities from construction (i.e., disruption to nesting adults or destruction of nest) is possible. However, due to the daily linear movement of construction along the trail and small amount of habitat removal, losses of nests will be minimal and would not have population wide effects. The creation of an official trail up China Wall will create increased human use of the area. However, recreation is currently dispersed across the majority of China Wall and disruptions to nesting migratory birds and habitat are most likely already occurring. The construction of the trail will concentrate disruptions to the trail and a small area of influence adjacent to the trail. Therefore, over the long term, the Proposed Action will likely reduce disturbances to nesting migratory birds.

Cumulative Effects: Due to the location of the Proposed Action, it is not expected to add substantially to existing or proposed disturbances.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no direct or indirect impacts to migratory bird species or associated habitats under the No Action Alternative.

Cumulative Effects: There would be no contribution to previous or existing disturbances that would potentially impact migratory bird species or habitats under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation: None.

TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE

Affected Environment: The Proposed Action is located along the ridgeline and hillside of China Wall and the valley bottom of Anderson Gulch (elevation ranging from approximately 6200 ft. to 7,100 ft.) in a community predominantly composed of a mixed age class of pinyon-juniper woodland and sagebrush. Portions of the pinyon-juniper habitat burned along the ridgeline of China Wall in 2001 and are currently dominated by dense perennial grasses and

mountain shrub. The lower elevation sagebrush areas in Anderson Gulch are categorized by Colorado Parks and Wildlife as mule deer critical winter range, a specialized component of winter range that supports virtually an entire herd during the most severe winters (low temperature, high snowfall amounts). These ranges typically receive the most concentrated use from January through April.

Much of the mature component of pinyon-juniper woodlands encompassing the Proposed Action varies in height from 5 to 25 feet in height and provides suitable nesting substrate for woodland raptors (accipitrine and buteo species, long-eared, and saw-whet owls). The distribution and abundance of small mammal populations is poorly documented within the Resource Area. There are no small mammal species narrowly endemic or highly specialized small mammal species known to inhabit the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The Proposed Action will permanently disturb less than one acre of habitat as the trail is approximately 2.45 mile in length and only 36 inches in width. There is potential for the Proposed Action to temporarily disturb up to 32 acres (the area within the 100ft construction corridor) during construction which is scheduled to last from May 15 through the end of June. Because trail construction activities are scheduled to take place during mid-spring, there will be no effect to deer that reside in the area during this time frame. However, in the long term, increased use of the area, as the result of improved access during the winter months, has the potential to displace local wildlife. However, activity levels are expected to be infrequent and impacts to deer will most likely be minimal. There are also concerns that opportunities for dogs to harass wildlife may increase with the new trail. It is recommended that dogs are leashed or under verbal control by their owners from December 1 through April 15 to minimize these impacts.

Suitable pinyon-juniper woodlands and rock outcrops that are within 300 meters of the project area were surveyed for raptor use on April 3 and April 4, 2013. No active nests or birds were located within the project area (falcons were heard calling on a cliff structure that is further than 300 meters from the project area on the opposite side of Anderson Gulch). Two inactive nests were observed during surveys; a dilapidated nest of unknown species and a possible accipiter nest with no signs of recent use (i.e., within the last two years) although still functional. Both nests were located approximately 30 meters upslope of the trail and within 20 meters of each other. This area is located approximately 150 meters north of where the ridgeline of China Wall intersects with Anderson Gulch. Although trail construction is scheduled to take place during the raptor nesting season (February 1 through August 15), surveys failed to detect any active nests or birds and therefore there will be very little potential to directly influence raptor nesting activities or outcomes this year. Indirectly, there is potential for the Proposed Action to cause long term avoidance of the area by nesting raptors due to increased activity and use of the area by trail users. However, there is suitable and available habitat in the surrounding woodlands and nesting raptors would more than likely select nest sites in those locations.

Cumulative Effects: The Proposed Action is not expected to add substantially to existing or proposed disturbances in the area. The loss of approximately one acre is not expected to have

any measurable influence on local big game and nongame species populations as there is considerable suitable habitat adjacent to the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no direct or indirect influence on terrestrial wildlife or important habitats under the No Action Alternative.

Cumulative Effects: There would be no contribution to previous or existing disturbances under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation: Recommend that signs are installed at the trailheads in Jenson Park and Ute Park that recommend dogs be leashed or under verbal control by their owners December 1 through April 15 to minimize impacts to deer and other wildlife.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #3 for Plant and Animal Communities: The project area is generally considered to be meeting the Land Health Standards. Neither the Proposed nor No Action Alternatives are expected to detract from the continued meeting of these standards.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: The proposed Phase 2 Trail was inventoried at the Class III, 100 percent pedestrian, level by WRFO archaeologists and paraarchaeologists in 2012 (Ramirez and Bowen 2013). One cultural resource potentially eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) was recorded in the Area of Potential Effect (APE) during the course of this survey, site 5RB7265. During the cultural inventory it was found that portions of the proposed trail followed an existing non-constructed, unmarked trail. 5RB7265 shows zero impacts from the recreation traffic it is currently subjected to despite the existing unmarked trail, leading directly by it.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The actual proposed trail construction itself would not directly impact any historic properties. Indirect impacts that have the potential to occur to cultural resources are human impacts such as unlawful collection of artifacts, inadvertent damage, and intentional vandalism. While a marked and publicized trail would subject 5RB7265 to an increase in recreational traffic, the site's pristine condition suggests that continued use in accordance should present no danger to the site's integrity. That the site has remained completely untouched while being located so close to a city and in a location receiving a significant amount of recreational use already, suggests that with proper signage the site can be shared with the general public, and remain in excellent condition.

An Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) sign needs to be installed at the site prior to the trail construction. The BLM will monitor the site for effects after more public begins using

the constructed trail. The BLM recommends further research be conducted on the site to see if any other information can be located regarding its history. After this we propose an interpretive sign be installed by the trail, discussing the potential history of the site and the early history of the local area. The Colorado State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has concurred that the proposed project will have no adverse effect to any cultural resources potentially eligible to the NRHP if these measures are followed.

Cumulative Effects: Past and present land uses such as recreation and livestock grazing are expected to continue to occur in the future. Increased wind and water erosion, as well as human impacts will continue.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under this alternative there would be no surface disturbance, however people may continue to use the unofficial/non-constructed trail that is currently evident, near the historic property in the APE, potentially impacting it.

Cumulative Effects: Past and present land uses such as recreation and livestock grazing are expected to continue to occur in the future, even if this trail construction does not occur. The normally occurring wind and water erosion, as well as human impacts will most likely continue.

Mitigation: An ARPA sign has to be installed at site 5RB7265 to inform the public about cultural resource protection laws.

PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: The proposed trail is located in an area that has been mapped showing two formations, the Mancos Shale and the Iles Formation (Tweto 1979). The majority of the project is located in the Mancos Shale while only a few of the most northwestern portions are located in the Iles Formation.

The BLM, WRFO has classified the Mancos Shale as a Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) 3 formation indicating that its scientifically noteworthy fossil bearing potential is not well understood in this area whereas in some areas it is well known for producing vertebrate fossils (c.f. Armstrong and Wolny 1989).

The BLM, WRFO has classified the Iles formation as a PFYC 4 formation indicating that it is known to produce scientifically noteworthy fossil resources (c. f. Armstrong and Wolny 1989)

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: Excavations into the underlying sedimentary Mancos Shale on the majority of the trail project has a potential to impact fossil resources. It is not known whether the fossils impacted are going to include scientifically noteworthy vertebrate fossils or noteworthy invertebrates. Most invertebrates are usually fairly common and not necessarily noteworthy. The loss of common invertebrates fossils such as those found in the Mancos Shale do not necessarily constitute a major loss of data to the regional paleontological database.

Impacts to the Iles formation due to excavations for the trail could potentially impact scientifically noteworthy fossil resources. There are numerous vertebrate fossils known from the Iles formation (c. f. Armstrong and Wolny 1989). Any surface exposures could also contain fossils of various types and sizes. The surface exposures could be vulnerable to crushing or other erosion as the trail is used if not identified and mitigated during trail construction. The Iles Formation constitutes a fairly small portion of the overall trail design therefore impacts could potentially be limited, depending on the amount of trenching and leveling to complete the trail.

Cumulative Effects: Impacts to fossil resources on the Mancos shale would be cumulative and an incremental loss of data for the regional paleontological database if invertebrate fossils are impacted. The impact would not be serious or particularly noteworthy in the regional database overall though it would constitute an irreversible and irretrievable loss. In the unlikely event that a vertebrate fossil is encountered the loss would be noteworthy and a potentially serious loss of scientific data from the regional paleontological database. This loss would be irreversible and irretrievable.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no new construction related impacts to fossil resources under the No Action Alternative. The normally occurring erosion process that ever so slowly exposes fossils would continue as it has for centuries. Fossils are potentially exposed during this process with the smaller, more fragile ones being lost to erosion and possible crushing. Any larger fossil that might be present would also be exposed and slowly weathered and potentially lost if not identified and recovered.

Cumulative Effects: There would be a very slow irreversible and irretrievable loss of fossils and scientific data from the regional paleontological database under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation:

1. The applicant is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for disturbing or collecting vertebrate fossils, collecting large amounts of petrified wood (over 25lbs./day, up to 250lbs./year), or collecting fossils for commercial purposes on public lands.
2. If any paleontological resources are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, the applicant or any of his agents must stop work immediately at that site, immediately contact the BLM Paleontology Coordinator, and make every effort to protect the site from further impacts, including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the AO. The BLM or designated paleontologist will evaluate the discovery and take action to protect or remove the resource within 10 working days. Within 10 days, the operator will be allowed to continue construction through the site, or will be given the choice of either (a) following the Paleontology Coordinator's instructions for stabilizing the fossil resource in place and avoiding further disturbance to the fossil resource, or (b) following the Paleontology

Coordinator's instructions for mitigating impacts to the fossil resource prior to continuing construction through the project area.

3. Any excavations into the underlying native sedimentary stone must be monitored by a permitted paleontologist. The monitoring paleontologist must be present before the start of excavations that may impact bedrock.

VISUAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: Visual resources are the visible physical features of a landscape that convey scenic value. Scenic values in the BLM White River Resource Area have been classified according to the Visual Resource Management (VRM) system, and VRM objectives were established in the 1997 White River ROD/RMP. Visual resource management provides a way to inventory and classify visual resources, describe characteristic landscapes, determine contrasts from Proposed Actions, and present mitigation for scenic value impacts. The visual resource objective in the White River ROD/RMP is to manage BLM land to maintain the quality of scenic and visual resources.

The Proposed Action would be located in a BLM-designated VRM Class II area. The objective of Class II lands is to retain the existing character of the landscape and the level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. Most BLM lands within the view shed of the town of Meeker fall within the VRM Class II category.

The Proposed Action is to be located along the top of China Wall which is an 800 foot high dramatic cliff or bluff extending for approximately 2 miles and located adjacent to the northwest side of the Town of Meeker, CO. China Wall can be viewed from almost anywhere in the Town of Meeker, which is the primary viewpoint for this proposal. The China Wall landform provides the most immediate natural back ground scenery for the Town of Meeker. Of the entire 1.5 miles of proposed trail, only a 300 foot portion and a 600 foot portion of trail are proposed to be constructed near the top of the China Wall ridge. Line of sight from the center of Meeker to the proposed portions of trail located near the top of China Wall is approximately 1 mile. The rest of the trail will be located away from the top of the ridge along slopes with a northern aspect or western aspects near Anderson Gulch. A small portion of the trail is proposed to be located along the western base or bottom of China Wall which is relatively flat and then south into Ute Park.

From the top of China Wall and along the proposed Phase 2 Trail there are outstanding views of the Town of Meeker, Lobo Mountain, Anderson Gulch, the surrounding White River Valley, and over 30 miles to the Flat Top Mountains. Visitors to this area of BLM administered lands have consistently been seeking this experience and view for many years as evidenced by the numerous user trails that have been created in the area of the proposed Phase 2 Trail.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: During the proposed construction period of mid-May through June residents of Meeker probably will not notice trail construction equipment along the two portions of trail proposed to be constructed near the top of China Wall and along the base of China Wall. This will be a short-term temporary impact. Once this trail is completed it is possible that trail users may be visible to residents of Meeker in certain areas closer to China Wall. The casual observer will not notice these trail users because most observers will be viewing this trail area from over 1 mile away, and the silhouette of the top of the China Wall ridge line is broken with fairly continuous vegetation that is taller than trail users. None of the actual proposed trail tread or areas where vegetation is removed can be viewed from the Town of Meeker. Therefore the visual elements of form, line, texture, and color will not be affected by the Proposed Action and the VRM Class II objectives will be retained.

Cumulative Effects: The proposed Phase 2 Trail connects with Phase 1 Trail. This trail connectivity should cause an increase in the number of trail users along the top of China Wall. The cumulative effect of this increase trail users combined with the actual trail tread and areas where vegetation has been removed should not attract any additional attention to this area by the casual observer in Meeker. VRM Class II objectives will be retained.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: By not constructing this trail, there would be no impacts to visual resources.

Cumulative Effects: None identified.

Mitigation: None.

HAZARDOUS OR SOLID WASTES

Affected Environment: There are no known hazardous or solid wastes within the area of analysis for the Proposed Action. No hazardous materials or solid wastes are known to have been used, stored, or disposed of within the vicinity of the proposed trail.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The current proposal does not propose the use, storage, or disposal of any listed or extremely hazardous materials. The use of mechanized equipment in association with the project indicates that fuels and lubricants will be brought to the site and may result in small leaks and spills of these chemicals. Commercially available fuels and lubricants may contain some hazardous constituents, however, they are anticipated to be in de-minimus quantities and will be used, stored, disposed of, and transported in a manner which is consistent with applicable laws rules and regulations. The generation of hazardous wastes is not anticipated. The proposed trail construction would not generate solid waste. All storage, use, disposal, and transport of any pesticides in association with the future maintenance of the trail will be in compliance with all state, federal and local standards.

Cumulative Effects: None identified.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: By not constructing the trail there would be no mechanical equipment in utilized and the trail would not be constructed. The current level of hazardous and solid wastes within the area would be maintained.

Cumulative Effects: None identified.

Mitigation:

1. The applicant will have absorbent spill/drip rags at the time that any refueling of equipment is completed in association with the proposed project.
2. The applicant shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by the Proposed Action. If any hazardous chemicals, fuels, oils, lubricants, and/or noxious fluids are spilled during field activities, they shall be cleaned up immediately and disposed of at an approved waste disposal facility.
3. A release of any chemical, oil, petroleum product, or sewage, etc., (regardless of quantity) must be reported to the Bureau of Land Management – WRFO Hazardous Materials Coordinator at (970) 878-3800. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) should also be notified, if applicable, through the 24-hour spill reporting line at 1 (877) 518-5608.
4. The applicant is requested to notify the BLM of any historical or recent trash dumping sites identified during construction, so that BLM can identify, prioritize, and perform cleanup activities at these locations.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The Proposed Action is located within a productive exposure stand class of pinyon/juniper woodlands as defined by a survey performed by White River Field Office personnel from 2003-2005. Productive exposure types occur on primarily lower gradient slopes and on north and east aspects. Growth rates are higher in these areas due to soil features which allow for effective use of precipitation. This habitat type is further broken down based on the age class of the stand. In this case the affected stand is predominately mature. Mature pinyon/juniper trees on productive exposures establish themselves as the dominant plant community on the site. Mature stands are valuable locally as a source of firewood.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The estimated loss of woodland acres as a result of the Proposed Action is .5 acres, totaling to approximately 3 cords of wood. Following disturbance and re-vegetation of the disturbed corridor along the trail, it is expected that pinyon and juniper will invade the disturbed corridor along the trail within 50-70 years and would develop a mature stand within 200-300 years. The loss of juniper woodland would adversely affect wildlife and nesting habitat. Impacts would be long-term until woodlands regenerate successfully.

Cumulative Effects: Removal of mature and middle-aged juniper trees would reduce the potential for outbreak of woodland diseases and pest infestations. Erosion potential would

increase with the removal of vegetation, especially at sites where tree density and canopy cover has naturally decreased the understory component of grasses, shrubs, and forbs.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under this alternative there would be no construction of the Ute Park Connector Trail-Phase 2 and no removal of pinyon and juniper woodlands would occur.

Cumulative Effects: The proposed area would continue to develop from a mature stand into an old growth stand. The area would increase in cover and density causing sagebrush to be smothered out over a period of time. With the increase to cover and density the area could potentially burn in a stand replacing wildfire with the likely loss of the current mature pinyon/juniper stands.

Mitigation:

1. During removal consideration will be given to maintaining old-growth trees in their entirety. Old-growth trees are individuals of age greater than 300 years and having old-growth stature and development.
2. Limbed material shall be scattered across reclaimed areas in a manner that avoids the development of a mulch layer that suppresses growth or reproduction of desirable vegetation. Woody material will be distributed in such a way to avoid large concentrations of heavy fuels.
3. Trees that must be removed for construction shall be cut down to a stump height of 6 inches or less prior to other heavy equipment operation. These trees shall be cut in four foot lengths (down to 4 inch diameter) and made available to the public.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The majority of the project is on public land located in the Lion Canyon pasture of the Smith Crawford allotment (#06625). This pasture is permitted for use in the spring (5/15-6/30) one year and in the fall (10/1-10/31) the other year. The total disturbance on public land within the pasture would be one acre. Permitted use in the Lion Canyon pasture (4,503 acres) is 126 Animal Unit Months (AUM) or 36 acres/AUM (an AUM equals the amount of forage required by one mature cow and one calf for one month) (BLM 1997). The total permitted livestock use of the 23,178 acre Smith Crawford allotment is 1,681 AUMs, or 13.8 acres/AUM (BLM 2005). There are no rangeland improvement projects that would be affected by this project. The closest livestock water source is approximately one mile from the proposed trail.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: Livestock do not generally graze in this portion of the Lion Canyon pasture because water is limited. It is possible that in the future some livestock may discover the trail and due to ease of travel use it to access forage in the area. Generally the cattle would trail back up to known water sources but it is possible that some cattle may trail down into the outskirts of town. In the future if livestock discover and begin using the trail it may be necessary to install drift fences at appropriate points to prevent cattle from trailing down into town. Until disturbance associated with construction is successfully revegetated there would be a short-term loss of herbaceous production but overall there would be no effect to livestock grazing use.

Cumulative Effects: Agriculture, road development, and oil and gas development in the county which have the potential to impact rangeland management would continue to occur. The Proposed Action would remove forage temporarily in the Lion Canyon pasture of the Smith Crawford allotment. After trail construction has been completed and seeded grass/forb communities would return to most of the disturbed soils.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no direct and/or indirect effects to rangeland management under the No Action Alternative.

Cumulative Effects: Activities associated with agriculture, road development, and oil and gas development would continue to occur in the county, which has the potential to impact rangeland management by removal of forage, impacts to range improvements, etc.

Mitigation: In the future if livestock discover and begin using the trail it may be necessary to install drift fences at appropriate points to prevent cattle from trailing down into town.

Require that signs are installed at the trailheads in Jensen Park and Ute Park that recommend dogs are leashed or under verbal control by their owners at all times to minimize impacts to wildlife, livestock and other trail users.

RECREATION

Affected Environment: The Proposed Action occurs in an urban interface area with the Town of Meeker. Within the Town of Meeker there is a community recreation center, approximately five city parks, as well as Ute Park and the newly developed Jensen Park which are located adjacent to the Proposed Action. Dispersed outdoor recreation is very popular on public lands in the region surrounding Meeker, notably on United States Forest Service (USFS) lands on the White River National Forest to the east of Meeker, and on the BLM lands west of Meeker. While hiking along trails is popular and common in the White River National Forest, it is approximately a one-hour drive from Meeker. There are also very few opportunities for mountain biking in close proximity, or adjacent to, Meeker. A new trail system and mountain bike flow course was constructed in Jensen Park in the spring of 2012 along with the construction of the BLM Phase 1 Trail.

Currently the area where the Phase 1 Trail terminates at a high point along the top of China Wall there is an informal user trail that parallels the top of the China Wall ridge line. This trail becomes branded and difficult to follow as it descends into Anderson Gulch. There is a user trail or old road bed in the bottom of Anderson Gulch that travels through a portion of private property. Visitors to this area in the past have traditionally been using this old road bed and then the existing user trails to access BLM administered land along the top of China Wall to obtain an excellent view of the Town of Meeker and the surrounding White River Valley.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The Proposed Action is consistent with, and meets specific recreational objectives for development of non-motorized trails to the top of Lobo Mountain/China Wall, as defined in the 1997 White River ROD/RMP. Construction of the Proposed Action would create a positive recreational impact for the community. Implementation of the Proposed Action would provide safe and sustainable access to the top of China Wall from Ute Park via Anderson Gulch. The Proposed Action will also provide excellent trail connectivity between Ute Park, Jenson Park, and community of Meeker. The trail will offer a needed amenity for non-motorized recreation to the local community, provide other health and wellness benefits, engage youth in more outdoor activities, and provide a sustainable route to an outstanding view of the Town of Meeker and the surrounding White River Valley.

The increase in trail users could have an effect on wildlife and other trail users in the area. Trail users that have unleashed dogs which are not under verbal control during the winter could have an impact on mule deer. The Proposed Action is located within mule deer critical winter range. See the Wildlife section for additional information. Also, unrestrained dogs have the potential to negatively affect other trails users experience. It is therefore recommended that trail users have their dogs under physical or verbal control at all times when using this trail system.

Cumulative Effects: Implementation of the Proposed Action may result in increased trail use of the connected trail system between Ute Park, Jenson Park, and the Town of Meeker, CO. Reasonably foreseeable projects that would positively impact recreational experiences include development of additions connected trails which may include a trail system on Lobo Mountain and potential applications for Special Recreation Permits for competitive events such as running and mountain biking races.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: Implementation of the No Action alternative would result in no trail being constructed and no additional recreation amenities, opportunities or benefits provided to the community.

Cumulative Effects: None have been identified.

Mitigation: Recommend that signs are installed at the trailheads in Jenson Park and Ute Park that recommend dogs be leashed or under verbal control by their owners at all times to minimize impacts to wildlife and other trail users.

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

Affected Environment: Access to the start of the proposed Phase 2 Trail is limited due to the fact that there are no roads that access this area and topography is rugged and steep. The Proposed Action includes using the existing Phase 1 Trail to access the area where trail construction activities would begin. The trail is proposed to be constructed by mobilizing trail construction equipment (small trail dozer, mini-excavator, and OHVs) up to the top of China Wall using the existing Phase 1 Trail. During the expected half day of mobilizing equipment up the Phase 1 Trail, the public will be asked not to use this portion of the trail system to protect public health and safety. Also, during the anticipated 4-8 week construction period for the proposed Phase 2 Trail, the contractor will be using OHVs on the existing Phase 1 Trail to access the work site at the beginning and end of their work shift. The contractor or applicant will install, maintain, and remove signs at least 2 days before and the day after operations at the beginning of the Phase 1 Trail (uphill from the beginning of the mountain biking flow course) asking the public not to use the trail during the half day of mobilizing equipment to begin construction and during the full day of demobilizing and maintaining the trail. The contractor or applicant will also install, maintain, and remove signs at least 2 days before and the day after entire trail construction period at the beginning of the Phase 1 Trail (uphill from the beginning of the mountain biking flow course) warning the public that OHVs will be used at the beginning and end of each day's shift as well as occasionally during the work shift to access the work site and transport materials to and from the work site. This sign should also include the fact that no other motorized use of this trail is authorized.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The Proposed Action will impede access on the existing Phase 1 Trail during the half day of initial mobilization and then during the full day of demobilization and maintenance of existing Phase 1 Trail. The trail user's experience may also be temporarily affected by the use of OHV's by the contractor during the entire 4-8 week construction period. These impacts will be temporary in short-term in duration. In the long term trail users and recreationalists will benefit by the Proposed Action by gaining new access to public lands. The Proposed Action includes adding 1.5 miles of new trail to an existing trail system which will provide connectivity between Ute Park, Jenson Park, and BLM administered lands. With appropriate design features this trail should be sustainable to low maintenance resulting a limited long term impact to maintenance costs. The Proposed Action overall provides new access to a portion of public lands that was previously not available.

Cumulative Effects: The Proposed Action will connect with the existing Phase 1 Trail, Ute Park, and indirectly Jenson Park and the Town of Meeker. Cumulatively these trails combine to create a variety of non-motorized trail experiences that vary in length and difficulty. These trails provide new access to public lands that was previously unavailable.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: Implementation of the No Action Alternative would result in the trail not being constructed and limiting access to the top of Lobo Mountain and China Wall and preventing the connectivity between existing parks and public lands. It is likely that users will continue to access these areas on their own via user created social trails, contributing to ongoing safety and soil erosion concerns.

Cumulative Effects: Implementing the No Action Alternative would likely result in users navigating their own way into Anderson Gulch and to the top of Lobo Mountain and China Wall via various user created routes. This may result in a series of unsustainable routes prone to erosion, in addition to presenting potential unknown safety hazards.

Mitigation: All activity shall cease when soils or trail surfaces become saturated to a depth of three inches unless otherwise approved by the Authorized Officer.

REFERENCES CITED:

Armstrong, Harley J., and David G. Wolny
1989 Paleontological Resources of Northwest Colorado: A Regional Analysis. Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Junction, Colorado.

Davies, Mary Ann, Hesselbarth, Woody, and Vachowski, Brian.
2007 Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook, United States, Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Missoula, Montana

International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack, June 2004.

Ramirez, Joseph, and Kristin Bowen
2013 A Class III Cultural Resource Inventory of the Dorcas Jensen-Ute Park Connector Trail (Phase 2), in Rio Blanco County, CO (WRFO # 12-10-25). Bureau of Land Management, White River Field Office, Meeker, Colorado.

Tweto, Ogden
1979 Geologic Map of Colorado. United States Geologic Survey, Department of the Interior, Reston, Virginia

TRIBES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED:

Native American tribes were notified of this project in 2012 as part of the annual scoping letter to inform the tribes of the proposed projects in the field office area which will be subject to NEPA analysis and implemented that year. The following tribes were notified: Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Southern Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, and the Eastern Shoshone Tribe. No concerns were ever identified with this project.

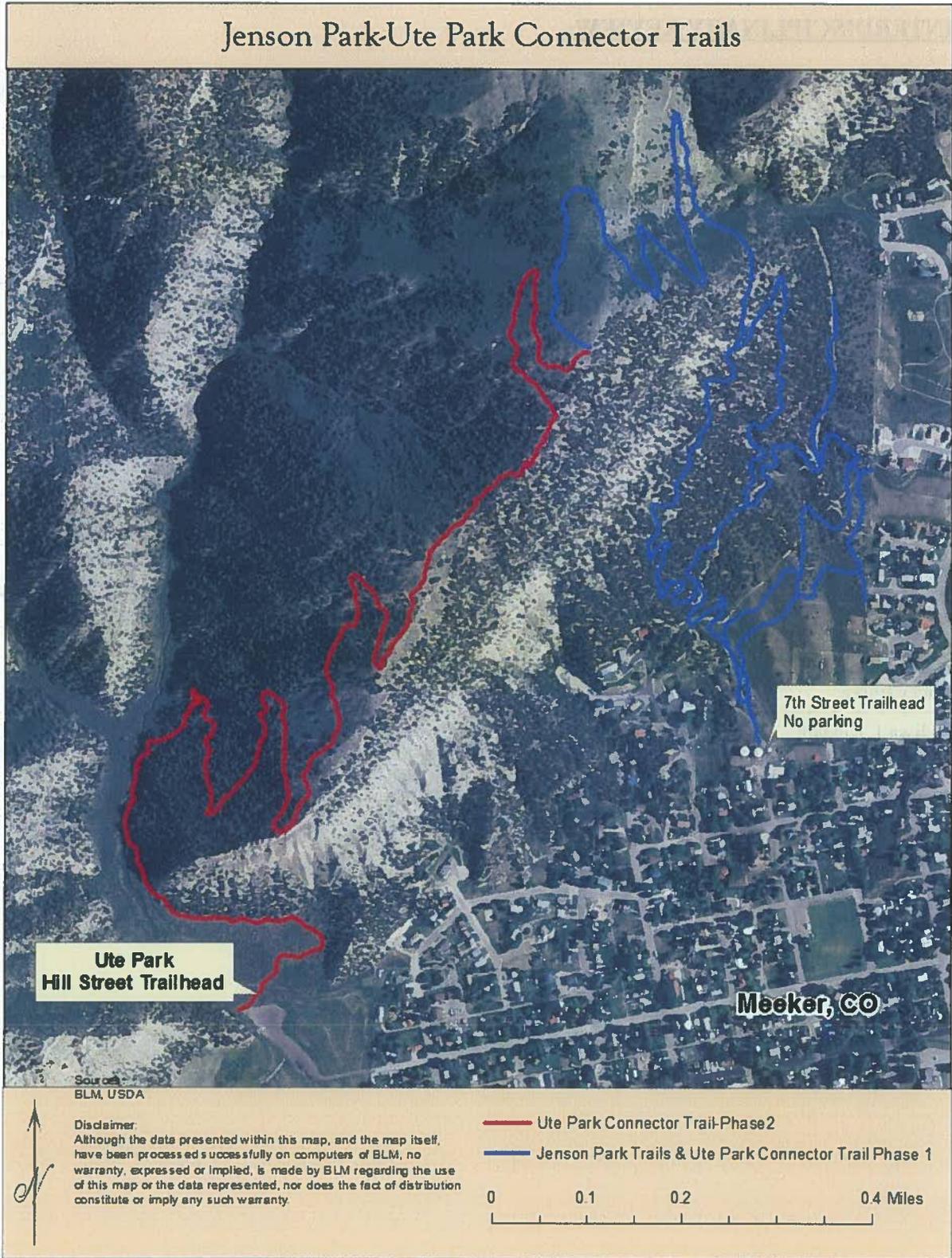
The Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) was consulted with for this project under the terms of consultation requirements stipulated in the State Protocol Agreement. SHPO concurrence was received on 4/25/2013.

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility	Date Signed
Bob Lange	Hydrologist	Air Quality; Surface and Ground Water Quality; Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Rights; Soils	4/29/2013
Baili Foster	Ecologist Intern	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; Special Status Plant Species	1/29/2013
Heather Woodruff	Rangeland Management Specialist	Forest Management	4/18/2013
Kristin Bowen	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources; Native American Religious Concerns	4/26/2013
Michael Selle	Archaeologist	Paleontological Resources	4/15/2013
Heather Woodruff	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-Native Species; Vegetation; Rangeland Management	4/18/2013
Laura Dixon	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds; Special Status Animal Species; Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife; Wetlands and Riparian Zones	4/17/2013
James Roberts	Natural Resource Specialist	Hazardous or Solid Wastes	4/30/2013
Aaron Grimes	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness; Visual Resources; Access and Transportation; Recreation,	4/11/2013
Scott Nilson	Fuels Specialist	Fire Management	4/17/2013
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals	4/21/2013
Stacey Burke	Realty Specialist	Realty	4/24/2013
Melissa J. Kindall	Range Technician	Wild Horse Management	4/26/2013
Aaron Grimes	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Project Lead – Document Preparer	5/01/2013
Heather Sauls	Planning & Environmental Coordinator	NEPA Compliance	5/06/2013

ATTACHMENTS:

Figure 1: Ute Park Connector Trail (Phase 2)



**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
220 E Market St
Meeker, CO 81641**

**Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
DOI-BLM-CO-110-2013-0041-EA**

BACKGROUND

A master plan for the new Phillip and Dorcas Jensen Memorial Park (Jenson Park) was approved by the Eastern Rio Blanco Recreation and Park Metropolitan District (ERBM) Board on August 9, 2011. As part of their master plan and the ERBM's goals for providing more system-wide connectivity to park and open space properties in the community, it was determined that providing access to a high point above the park and connecting to the Town of Meeker owned Ute Park, through BLM land was a priority.

During the summer of 2012, the ERBM constructed a non-motorized trail from Jensen Park approximately 1 mile across BLM land to the top of China Wall (Ute Park Connector Trail-Phase 1). The trail starts on ERBM land along the mountain bike flow course in Jensen Park and ends at a high point above China Wall on the BLM land. This new trail provides access to a high point above the cliff walls in a safe, sustainable manner, and provides visitors with a clear view of the Town of Meeker below, the upper White River Valley, and Flat Tops Mountains in the distance.

Proposed Action:

Trail Connectivity & Length

The ERBM proposes to construct Ute Park Connector Trail-Phase 2 from mid-May through late June or early July of 2013. This trail is proposed to be constructed heading west starting from the high point terminus of Ute Park Connector Trail-Phase 1, along the top of China Wall. The trail will then switchback down into Anderson Gulch and then be constructed around the base of the western portion of China Wall to connect into Ute Park. The trail will terminate at the Hill Street trailhead and parking area (see Figure 1).

From the starting point to Ute Park the trail length would be approximately 1.5 miles on BLM property. The vertical drop from the high point to Ute Park is approximately 800 feet. With the completion of this trail, visitors would be able to complete portions of the trail as "out-and-back" experiences or travel the entire trail as a loop. The loop option would include traveling 3.8 miles on BLM trails, approximately 0.5 miles through Jenson Park, and then 9 blocks (0.75 miles) through Meeker, CO. The total length of this loop option would be approximately 5 miles. The majority of Meeker residents would then be within walking distance of this trail system, consisting of three trailheads with numerous options to vary the length, difficulty, and experience desired.

Use

The trail is proposed for non-motorized use, primarily by pedestrians and bicyclists. No motorized use of the trail will be permitted.

Trail Design & Construction Technique

The trail is proposed to be built through a combination of work by a professional trail contractor. The construction technique utilized will be the full bench method. The professional contractor will follow the guidelines and techniques for sustainable trail construction set forth in two publications: USDA Forest Service Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook, 2007 Edition, and the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack, June 2004. The trail tread will be approximately 36 inches, with a total trail corridor width of 100 feet (50 feet on either side of the centerline). The total corridor width allows for potential variance in trail siting due to unforeseen obstacles; through areas that may require switchbacks; and areas where there may be a need for other minor realignments due to resource considerations. The corridor width also allows for the use of available natural features ideal for sustainable trail construction (i.e., benches, boulders, etc.). The height of the corridor will be 10-12 feet to allow for mountain bike and winter skiing and snowshoeing use. Equestrian use is not permitted within Dorcas-Jensen Park. As such, equestrian use on the BLM portion of this trail is expected to be minimal, therefore specific techniques for equestrian trail construction will not be employed.

Construction will be completed primarily with the use of mechanical trail building equipment including a trail dozer and ditch witch, along with traditional hand tools for finishing and construction of small trail features (i.e., water bars, dips, etc.). Short segments of the trail on more level ground, including the trail wayside, may be constructed entirely by hand. The proposed trail alignment prioritizes areas that require the least amount of disturbance to existing vegetation and natural features while maximizing the user recreation experience. The goal is to maximize long-term trail sustainability and minimize maintenance. Disturbed areas beyond the 36 inch trail tread will be reseeded using a BLM recommended standard seed mix.

Maintenance

The ERBM and the BLM WRFO will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding responsibilities for each member such as ongoing maintenance, planning, development, and volunteer recruitment.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined at 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects as described in the White River Resource Area Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (1996). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context

The project is a site-specific action directly involving BLM administered public lands that do not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

Intensity

The following discussion is organized around the 10 Significance Criteria described at 40 CFR 1508.27. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this Proposed Action:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. Construction of the trail would present potential impacts to soils including compaction, increased susceptibility to erosion, and loss of topsoil productivity. Construction would also involve short-term loss of vegetation and the modification of plant community structure, species composition, and a short-term reduction of basal and aerial vegetative cover. Beneficial impacts from construction of the trail involve the provision of a needed non-motorized recreational amenity adjacent to the Town of Meeker; concentration of use on a constructed trail as opposed to the use of un-sustainable social trails; and improved access for the community to the top of Lobo Mountain and China Wall.

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.

The Proposed Action would overall improve public health and safety by providing a safe and sustainable route to the top of China Wall. The half day trail construction equipment mobilization and de-mobilization and the daily motorized OHV access to the work site during trail construction could affect public safety. The Phase 1 Trail will be signed recommending the public not use the trail during these times and the contractor will be made aware of the potential that the public may be using the trail at those times.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. Primary access to the proposed trail is through the adjacent Ute Park and Dorcas-Jensen Park both of which provide a nature-based, non-motorized recreation experience to the community. The trail provides access to a high point and overlook above the Town of Meeker with an outstanding view of the White River Valley.

4. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. There are no known effects on the quality of the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial. Internal scoping was initiated when the project was presented to the White River Field Office (WRFO) interdisciplinary team on 1/29/2013. External scoping was conducted by posting this project on the WRFO's on-line National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) register on 2/06/2013. A press release was issued on 2/28/2013. The Proposed Action, map, and press release were posted on the WRFO's home page on February 28, 2013. An article and map about the proposed trail was on the front page of the 3/07/2013 Meeker Herald Times newspaper. A scoping meeting has held on 3/12/2013 at the Meeker Recreation Center's office which was attended by approximately 15 people. The discussion and verbal comments about the proposed project were largely positive. Another scoping meeting was held on 4/02/2013 at a Town of Meeker Board of Trustees meeting which had approximately 15 people in attendance. The discussion and verbal comments about the proposed project were largely positive. The Town of Meeker Board of Trustees voted in full support of the project.

5. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk. No highly uncertain or unknown risks to the human environment were identified during analysis of the Proposed Action.

6. Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The Proposed Action neither establishes a precedent for future BLM actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. The Proposed Action is Phase 2 of an anticipated two phase project. Phase 2, when planned and designed, would extend the trail from the high point above China Wall and connect to Ute Park. If need, demand, and funding permits in the future, additional connected trails may also be proposed and planned which could provide a loop systems on top of or near Lobo Mountain.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The Proposed Action will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Cultural surveys were completed and there are no cultural issues or concerns associated with the Proposed Action. One cultural resource potentially eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) was recorded in the Area of Potential Effect (APE) during the course of this survey, site 5RB7265. To mitigate any potential impacts an ARPA sign will be installed at site 5RB7265 to inform the public about cultural resource protection laws. The Colorado State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has concurred that the proposed project will have no adverse effect to any cultural resources potentially eligible to the NRHP if these measures are followed.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. The Proposed Action will not adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat. There are no threatened, endangered or candidate animal species that are known to inhabit or derive important use from the project area and there are also no special status plant species issues or concerns associated with the Proposed Action. Peregrine falcon nest were identified during a wildlife survey of the China Wall area. Although removed from Endangered Spices List in 1999, peregrine falcons are considered and remain on the BLM sensitive species list, leaving management emphasis, by policy, on par with ESA candidates. The trail will be re-routed at the forth switch back (from the top of the trail) to stay northeast of the tree line (within the 100 foot survey buffer) to create a visual buffer limiting impacts to nesting and roosting the BLM sensitive species peregrine falcons on the cliff face of China Wall.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Neither the Proposed Action nor impacts associated with it violate any laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

Kent E. Walker

Field Manager

DATE SIGNED:

05/07/13

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
220 E Market St
Meeker, CO 81641**

DECISION RECORD

PROJECT NAME: Ute Park Connector Trail (Phase 2)

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-110-2013-0041-EA

DECISION

It is my decision to implement the Proposed Action, as mitigated in DOI-BLM-CO-110-2013-0041-EA, authorizing the construction and maintenance of the proposed non-motorized Ute Park Connector Trail (Phase 2) from the terminus of the existing Phase 1 on the top of China Wall down into Anderson Gulch and connect with and terminate in Ute Park.

Applicant Committed Measures:

1. Upon completion of the trail, ERBM will re-seed all disturbed areas used for staging and construction, as well as disturbed areas along the edges of the trail beyond the 36 inch tread width with the seed mix described under the Vegetation Section of this document. ERBM will also implement an integrated weed management plan similar to the BLM Manual 9015-Integrated Weed Management in cooperation with the BLM to address any potential invasive species issues.
2. The applicant is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing archaeological sites or for collecting artifacts.
3. If any cultural resource materials are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, activity in the vicinity of the discovery will cease, and the BLM WRFO Archaeologist will be notified immediately. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the AO. The applicant will make every effort to protect the site from further impacts including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage until BLM determines a treatment approach, and the treatment is completed. Unless previously determined in treatment plans or agreements, BLM will evaluate the cultural resources and, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), select the appropriate mitigation option within 48 hours of the discovery. The applicant, under guidance of the BLM, will implement the mitigation in a timely manner. The process will be fully documented in reports, site forms, maps, drawings, and photographs. The BLM will forward documentation to the SHPO for review and concurrence.

4. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g), the applicant must notify the AO, by telephone and written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), the applicant must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the AO.
5. Install, maintain, and remove signs at least 2 days before and the day after operations at the beginning of the Phase 1 Trail (uphill from the beginning of the mountain biking flow course) asking the public not to use the trail during the half day of mobilizing equipment to begin construction and during the full day of demobilizing and maintaining the trail. Install, maintain, and remove signs at least 2 days before and the day after the entire trail construction period at the beginning of the Phase 1 Trail (uphill from the beginning of the mountain biking flow course) warning the public that OHV's will be used at the beginning and end of each day's shift as well as occasionally during the work shift to access the work site and transport materials to and from the work site. This sign will also include the fact that no other motorized use of this trail is authorized.
6. Slash generated from vegetation removal for trail construction or future maintenance will be lopped and scattered to a depth no greater than 18 inches for wildfire mitigation and visual aesthetics. Stumps will be cut to a height no greater than four inches.
7. In order to protect public land health standards for soils and do to the steep slopes along the trail, erosion features such as rutting and pooling on the trail surface or rilling, gullyng, piping and mass wasting adjacent to the trail as a result of this action will be addressed immediately after observation by developing a plan to assure successful soil stabilization with Best Management Practices (BMPs), or additional trail maintenance to keep the integrity of erosion control measures that disperse flow and allow the normal movement of surface runoff and infiltration.

In addition to the Applicant Committed Measures, the following mitigation measures also apply to this project.

Mitigation Measures

1. The trail will be re-routed at the forth switch back (from the top of the trail) to stay northeast of the tree line (within the 100 foot survey buffer) to create a visual buffer limiting impacts to nesting and roosting the BLM sensitive species peregrine falcons on the cliff face of China Wall.
2. Require that signs are installed at the trailheads in Jensen Park and Ute Park that recommend dogs are leashed or under verbal control by their owners at all times to minimize impacts to wildlife, livestock and other trail users.
3. Consistent with the Proposed Action, ERBM committed to using a BLM recommended seed mix. Between September 1 and March 15 seed all areas of disturbance, except the tread portion of the trail, will be seeded with the following seed mix (BLM 2011):

immediately contact the BLM Paleontology Coordinator, and make every effort to protect the site from further impacts, including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the AO. The BLM or designated paleontologist will evaluate the discovery and take action to protect or remove the resource within 10 working days. Within 10 days, the operator will be allowed to continue construction through the site, or will be given the choice of either (a) following the Paleontology Coordinator's instructions for stabilizing the fossil resource in place and avoiding further disturbance to the fossil resource, or (b) following the Paleontology Coordinator's instructions for mitigating impacts to the fossil resource prior to continuing construction through the project area.

11. Any excavations into the underlying native sedimentary stone must be monitored by a permitted paleontologist. The monitoring paleontologist must be present before the start of excavations that may impact bedrock.
12. During removal consideration will be given to maintaining old-growth trees in their entirety. Old-growth trees are individuals of age greater than 300 years and having old-growth stature and development.
13. Limbed material shall be scattered across reclaimed areas in a manner that avoids the development of a mulch layer that suppresses growth or reproduction of desirable vegetation. Woody material will be distributed in such a way to avoid large concentrations of heavy fuels.
14. All activity shall cease when soils or trail surfaces become saturated to a depth of three inches unless otherwise approved by the authorized officer.
15. In the future if livestock discover and begin using the trail it may be necessary to install drift fences at appropriate points to prevent cattle from trailing down into town.
16. The applicant will have absorbent spill/drip rags at the time that any refueling of equipment is completed in association with the proposed project.
17. The applicant shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by the Proposed Action. If any hazardous chemicals, fuels, oils, lubricants, and/or noxious fluids are spilled during field activities, they shall be cleaned up immediately and disposed of at an approved waste disposal facility.
18. A release of any chemical, oil, petroleum product, or sewage, etc., (regardless of quantity) must be reported to the Bureau of Land Management – WRFO Hazardous Materials Coordinator at (970) 878-3800. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) should also be notified, if applicable, through the 24-hour spill reporting line at (877) 518-5608.
19. The applicant is requested to notify the BLM of any historical or recent trash dumping sites identified during construction, so that BLM can identify, prioritize, and perform cleanup activities at these locations.

COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS & CONFORMANCE WITH THE LAND USE PLAN

This decision is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act. It is also in conformance with the 1997 White River Record of Decision/Approved Resource Management Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The Proposed Action was analyzed in DOI-BLM-CO-110-2013-0041-EA and it was found to have no significant impacts, thus an EIS is not required.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping was the primary mechanism used by the BLM to initially identify issues. Internal scoping was initiated when the project was presented to the White River Field Office (WRFO) interdisciplinary team on 1/29/2013. External scoping was conducted by posting this project on the WRFO's on-line National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) register on 2/06/2013. A press release was issued on 2/28/2013. The Proposed Action, map, and press release were posted on the WRFO's home page on 2/28/2013. An article and map about the proposed trail was on the front page of the 3/07/2013 Meeker Herald Times newspaper. A scoping meeting has held on 3/12/2013 at the Meeker Recreation Center's office which was attended by approximately 15 people. The discussion and verbal comments about the proposed project were largely positive. Another scoping meeting was held on 4/02/2013 at a Town of Meeker Board of Trustees meeting which had approximately 15 people in attendance. The discussion and verbal comments about the proposed project were largely positive. The Town of Meeker Board of Trustees voted in full support of the project.

RATIONALE

Analysis of the Proposed Action has concluded that there are no significant negative impacts and that it meets Colorado Standards for Public Land Health. The project itself is expected to have several beneficial impacts to the community, including the provision of a needed non-motorized recreational amenity adjacent to the Town of Meeker; connectivity between open space recreational parks of Jensen park and Ute Park, concentration of use on a constructed trail as opposed to the use of un-sustainable social trails; and improved access for the community to the top of China Wall.

ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

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 White River Field Office, 220 East Market St., Meeker, CO 81641 with copies sent to the Regional Solicitor, Rocky Mountain Region, 755 Parfet St., Suite 151, Lakewood, CO 80215, and to the Department of the Interior, Board of Land Appeals, 801 North Quincy St., MS300-QC, Arlington, VA, 22203. 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 at the above address within 30 days after the Notice of Appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: *Ken F. Walter*
Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: *05/07/13*

