

INTRODUCTION

National Recreation Trails - This is a designation given to existing trails in the United States that contribute to health, conservation, and recreation goals. Approximately 1,000 trails in all 50 states (which are available for public use), ranging from less than a mile to 485 miles in length, have been designated on local, State, Federal, and privately owned lands. Trails may be nominated for designation each year.

The USFS and the National Park Service (NPS) jointly administer the National Recreation Trails Program, with help from a number of other Federal (including the BLM) and non-profit partners.

National Scenic Trails - This is a designation designed to protect trails within areas of special natural beauty. National Scenic Trails are authorized under the National Trails Systems Act of 1968, along with National Historic Trails and National Recreation Trails. National Scenic Trails and National Historic Trails may only be designated by an act of Congress.

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK

LAWS

- **The National Trails System Act of 1968:** This act authorized the creation of a national trail system composed of National Recreation Trails, National Scenic Trails, and National Historic Trails. Although National Scenic Trails and National Historic Trails may only be designated by an act of Congress, National Recreation Trails may be designated by the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture, in order to recognize exemplary trails of local and regional significance (in response to an application from the trail's managing agency or organization). Through designation, these trails are recognized as part of America's national system of trails.

DESIGN CRITERIA

Management guidelines and design criteria describe the environmental protection measures that would be applied to all of the alternatives at the project level in order to protect, enhance, and, where appropriate, improve resources related to national recreation and scenic trails. Guidelines and design criteria are presented in Part 3 of Volume 2 of the DLMP/DEIS.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Existing Conditions and Trends

The Calico National Recreation Trail and the Highline Loop National Recreation Trail cross the planning area, typically within areas that are managed for Semi-Primitive recreation (ROS) opportunities. Currently, neither of these trails is considered to be used at, or beyond, capacity.

The 22-mile Calico National Recreation Trail is a multi-use trail that stays above 8,500 feet in elevation; traveling along ridgelines and through forested areas. Mountain bikers and hikers share the trail with horseback riders and motorcycle riders. Consistent with its multi-use management, this trail has sufficient access from developed roads and trailheads.

The non-motorized Highline Loop National Recreation Trail crosses the planning area for approximately 17 miles, hitting a minimum elevation of 9,000 feet. Within the planning area, this trail is also includes a portion of the Colorado Trail, and follows a spectacular mountain ridgeline with long-distance views. Consistent with its primitive character, this trail has sufficient access from primitive four-wheel drive roads.

Acting upon a vision of a 3,100-mile primitive and challenging backcountry trail that would travel from Canada to Mexico along the backbone of America, the U.S. Congress designated the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) in 1978. The CDNST Comprehensive Plan was completed in 1985, outlining management priorities and guidelines.

A long section of the CDNST crosses the planning area, traversing the spectacular and remote high country of the San Juan Mountains within the Weminuche and South San Juan Wilderness Areas. From the Weminuche Wilderness Area, the CDNST travels north onto BLM-administered lands near Silverton, Colorado. Most of this section of the CDNST meanders between the San Juan and the Rio Grande National Forests, necessitating shared management responsibility for many miles of this significant trail.

A CDNST management plan has been completed, identifying specific goals and objectives for trail segments (including trailhead developments). Current trailhead access and development is consistent with CDNST Comprehensive Plan direction. Issues related to trail alignment are nearly all resolved for SJPLC-managed sections.

The Colorado Trail is Colorado's premier long-distance non-motorized trail. Stretching almost 500 miles from Denver to Durango, it travels through the spectacular Rocky Mountains (including 6 wilderness areas, and 8 mountain ranges), topping out at 13,334 feet. Within the planning area, some of the Colorado Trail follows the same route as the CDNST. Portions of the Colorado Trail within the planning area follows the Highline Loop National Recreation Trail.

Within the planning area, most of the Colorado Trail travels within remote backcountry, Wilderness Areas, and other lightly traveled areas. Issues resulting from conflicts with motor vehicle use are few. The final southern most section of the Colorado Trail (as it nears Durango and the Junction Creek Trailhead) is heavily used by the community for day-use hiking and biking.

In 2002, Congress formally designated the Old Spanish Trail as the nation's 15th National Historic Trail. The "Main Branch" trail route is now under Highway 184, directly in front of the Dolores Public Lands Office. Between 1829 and 1848, the Old Spanish Trail was used by immigrants and traders on yearly pack-train expeditions between Santa Fe and the Pueblo of Los Angeles (San Gabriel Mission.) The trail was used by trappers, travelers, and military expeditions. Some of the travelers on the Old Spanish Trail (in whole, or in part) include Gunnison, Wheeler, Kit Carson, Rowland, Workman, Antoine Rubidium, Howard Ruffed, Pablo Vigil, and Antonio Amigo, to name but a few. This trail offers outstanding cultural tourism and interpretive opportunities.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS

In relation to the “action” alternatives, Alternative A would not propose the same viewshed protection for these trails that Alternatives B, C, and D would offer. Alternative A would impose a varying degree of protection, depending upon the Management Area (MA) emphasis of the lands within which the routes travel. Alternatives B, C, and D establish these trails as important viewer locations, and incorporate standards, guidelines and stipulations designed to protect the foreground viewshed along these routes. Other issues, including trail access, shared-use, way-finding, and maintenance, would not differ between the alternatives. If no new oil and gas leases were made available, the impacts to the National Recreation and Scenic Trails would be similar to the impacts under all alternatives because most of the development will occur on existing leases.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The main cumulative impact for the future of these routes would be related to the development of non-public lands visible from, or adjacent to, these routes. This impact would be outside the scope of this DLMP/DEIS. Over the next decade, private parcels will be developed for residential and commercial use. Some of this development may result in cumulative impacts to these scenic, historic, and recreational routes. Changes in the character of the visible viewshed from these routes is likely to occur, especially as lands become more industrial and urbanized. Under a no leasing scenario none of the National Recreation and Scenic Trails would have any potential for oil and gas exploration.