



**ROARING FORK VALLEY HORSE COUNCIL**

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2/23/2020

**ROARING FORK VALLEY HORSE COUNCIL Response to 2<sup>nd</sup> DRAFT DATED  
1/28/2020 EAGLE COUNTY MID-VALLEY TRAILS PLAN**

The Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council (RFVHC) is very excited to be included in forming this innovative Mid-Valley Eagle County Trails Plan. We welcome the opportunity to contribute.

The RFVHC mission is to keep horses on trails, facilitate equestrian parking access for trucks and trailers and to educate all users groups about kindness and respect while enjoying our shared lands. Our goal is to plan recreational opportunities incorporating land stewardship, by using science as a foundation to thoughtfully direct trail development and improvements. Because much Eagle County incorporates lower elevations, the wildlife lives and their critical habitat exists in our valley, winter and summer on the land and in the rivers. This fact creates a unique opportunity for residents and visitors to become educated about biodiversity and our supportive co-existence. People seek out and travel around the world to experience this unique opportunity to connect with nature and wildlife. Eagle County can design their recreational trail systems with careful, thoughtful planning and education to support this balance for humans, wildlife and the environment. If managed properly, this type of experience is an economic engine for many communities around the world. Consider making biodiversity and supportive human coexistence the primary goal of this plan. Please makes Eagle County and the Roaring Fork Valley a unique place to live and visit.

**Please see Addendum A - OPEN SPACE BOARD POLICY Protection of Natural Biodiversity and Management of Human Use: (Adopted 8/4/16)**

Please see Addendum B –

**The Roaring Fork Watershed Biodiversity & Connectivity Initiative –**

A New Paradigm for Biodiversity on a Landscape Scale.

Watershed Biodiversity Initiative (WBI) was created as a non-profit organization in March 2018 to support a comprehensive and unprecedented Roaring Fork Watershed Biodiversity and Connectivity Study.

<https://www.watershedbiodiversityinitiative.org/>

## **RFVHC PROPOSED SUGGESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

### **GOALS FOR TRAILS AND SHARED ROADWAYS**

In your current MVTC Draft Document dated 1/28/2020, pages 15 – 16, the Goals of this plan are identified. We suggest that you integrate education, biodiversity and human co-existence adding to the Environmental Sustainability Goals. Also on pages 15 – 16 is the Economic Development Goals. Please add the education, biodiversity and human co-existence goals as well, because this will be of significant economic benefit.

### **NO NEW TRAILS FROM THE VALLEY FLOOR & INSTEAD MAINTAIN AND ENFORCES COMPLIANCE ON EXISTING TRAILS**

We are asking that no new trails be added leading from the Roaring Fork Valley floor thereby giving additional access into any existing BLM, USFS and county open space public lands. (This includes Lake Christine and all new access trails from Valley floor to Basalt Mountain as well Light Hill Trail improvements.)

Our understanding is that Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) states that human recreation is negatively impacting wildlife in our valley's natural environments. The following areas, which are listed in the Eagle County MVTP plan, pages 19 & 20 are at great risk. These fragile areas that are identified in the MVTP for additional mountain bike trail development should be reconsidered for the following reasons. Many of these area trails have historically been used only by horseback riders and hikers and are some of the few remaining trails that are easily accessible from the valley floor without mountain bikes.

Any and all existing recreational trails should retain their current existing uses by keeping hiker and horseback riding trails for their use only.

Trails create a financial responsibility for maintenance and enforcement. The responsible governing entities are already financially struggling with the burden of maintaining existing trails and losing the battle for their enforcement.

The RFVHC stands by the principles for responsible stewardship and care-taking. We value quality over quantity.

## **UNDERSTANDING SINGLE TRACK TRAILS AND EQUESTRIANS**

Horseback riders are our constituents. Soft track trails offer safe and hopefully a predictable experience for our over 400 members of all ages. Riding horses on asphalt, cement paths and hard surface roads is dangerous. The horse's shoes are slick on hard surfaces and horses can fall or slide into a passerby.

This is why we have been working with Roaring Fork Transit Authority (RFTA) to **add more soft track sections along the Rio Grande Trail.**

## **RIO GRANDE TRAIL**

The Rio Grande is the valley corridor trail that provides connections throughout all the trail systems. We are working to improve or re-establish soft track trails safe for horseback riding, as well as adding equestrian parking for trail access. Many hikers, dogwalkers and runners also like soft track, which is easier on feet and legs and will not burn dog's pads like hot asphalt can.



Basalt Mountain Trail - BLM Lands Eagle County

**BASALT MOUNTAIN TRAILS - CURRENTLY NOT IN USE –  
RFVHC REQUESTS TO REINSTATE THESE TRAILS FOR HIKERS AND HORSEBACK  
RIDERS USE ONLY**

**Basalt Mountain USFS Trail #1909.** This trail was earlier a USFS trail that has fallen out of use due to lack of maintenance. Old Trail #1909 departs road FS 509 at the private property gate as a single-track trail then continues parallel to the private property boundary and, after passing the intersection with Basalt Mt Trail (now #1909), returns to Cattle Creek and then climbs gently through forest and meadows to reach Toner Reservoir. Our hope is to restore this decommissioned section of the original USFS Trail #1909 in order to offer an alternative for hikers and horsemen separate from the new #1909, which has become very popular with mtn. bikers as a long, thrilling downhill trail that is incompatible with slower and more vulnerable trail users.

The above is the trail segment that we propose be cleared and restored to use. Additional advantages for restoring this trail are that from Toner Reservoir one can travel either S/downstream on Toner Creek to the Frying Pan Rd (also not maintained) or to the west and connect with the Basalt Mt trail currently popular with mountain bikers. Another connection is NE to the USFS #514, Red Table Mountain Rd. With all these options from Toner Reservoir, having this old #1909 section restored to use would be a great trail asset to hikers and horsemen and allowing them access to the connections just mentioned.

**North Fork Trail - USFS land.** This trail leaves the heavily used single track along Cattle Creek and turns north, closely following the creek and reaching the Red Table Mountain Road. This trail also connects to the more used Lone Tree single track trail to make a loop. Both this trail and the previous #1909 travel through beautiful country and are safe trails once cleared. Both trails provide alternatives to trails heavily used by mechanized and/or motorized travelers. Both trails already have truck and trailer parking.

**THOUGHTFUL IMPROVEMENTS FOR THE OLD STAGE ROAD**

The Old Stage Road leading from Basalt towards Rudi Reservoir should be investigated as to whether the impacts on the wildlife, especially the big horn sheep may be protected. We also have concerns about impacts on private property owners for their peace and privacy by improving the Old Stage Road. We understand that the Old Stage Road is visibly apparent until it reaches the Seven Castles area. It may be best to stop this trail at Seven Castles, which would save impacts on the Frying Pan River, the wildlife habitat and private property owner's rights, past that point. Regardless, the Old Stage Road should remain with the Historical Designation for hikers and horseback riders only. We understand that



signage is being disregarded and violations of existing uses is occurring. It is imperative that compliance be enforced.

### **CONNECTING TOWN OF BASALT TO ARBANEY-KITTLE TRAIL**

The RFVHC suggests that connecting Basalt to the Arboney-Kittle Trail should use existing bike paths and walking trails leading to the current Pitkin County Trail Head. We are advocating for no new trail access points for this trail. We understand that in the future there may be opportunities to develop more trails on the valley floor, giving residents more opportunities for recreation. Our main concern is that there be only one, already existing point of access to this trail from the valley floor. This will help control additional human access, which is now negatively impacting our vanishing wildlife and their climate change, vulnerable fragile habitats.

### **SIGNAGE**

Please consider standardized signage that is consistent across all land areas and trails. Signs need to include education regarding sharing trails, permitted users, closure dates where applicable. Closure dates might detail wildlife issues, alternate user group days, trail etiquette such as kindness among users and pack it in out/pack it out as well as trail preservation closures due to unsuitable weather. We suggest signage to educate trail users about compliance and consequences for violation of rules. The RFVHC has a resource library for equestrian trail signs.



**- Your Public Open Space Trails Sign Promotes User Safety -**

**Look for signs where ever you go. Safe hikers, bikers and horseback riders have more fun. Smile!**

## **LACK OF EQUESTRIAN PARKING TO ACCESS TRAILS**

Truck and trailer parking giving trail access to equestrians is difficult to find. Many parking lots are parked full by recreational user cars. The RFVHC is working with County and BLM organizations to plan and include equestrian parking in their projects going forward. We ask Eagle County to include this parking initiative in this Mid Valley Trail Plan. Without parking horseback riders are unable to access trails.



**Pitkin – Eagle Glassier Parking Lot**

### **Parking Lot Specifications and Data**

An appropriate equestrian parking lot accommodates trucks and trailers as they pull in, swing around in the area, and angle park, facing out. Horse trailers are 7'8" to 8'6" wide. Tow vehicles are 6' to 8'6" wide. Maximum trailer height is 13'6". Legal limit in length of a trailer is 53'. 125 feet is the bare minimum space needed to swing around modern horse trucks and trailers. Shared parking works best, when vehicles have designated parking areas separate from the horse trailers. People unfamiliar with horses may not understand that horsemen and horses need extra space by the trailer for tying, saddling and loading.

Attached to this letter is a comprehensive parking lot document that we have been given permission to use for land managers and trail groups. Please go to [https://www.rfvhorsecouncil.org/uploads/1/1/1/9/11199712/rfvhcequestrianparking-updated .pdf](https://www.rfvhorsecouncil.org/uploads/1/1/1/9/11199712/rfvhcequestrianparking-updated.pdf) for more parking information

## **CONNECTIVITY– Bridges & Tunnels**

Connectivity for crossing highways and rivers with bridges & tunnels should benefit all trail user groups; hikers, horseback riders and bikers, with soft tract footing so that horses and wildlife can use them, where it makes sense. There are guidelines for designing tunnels for equestrian and wildlife use. Prey animals often shy away from narrow, low ceilinged, dark place, because they feel trapped.



### **Wildlife Travels at night video**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GT\\_1LLLmBq8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GT_1LLLmBq8)



## **WILDLIFE CONCERNS**

Our vanishing wildlife is of great concern. We support protecting our biodiverse wildlife habitats from human recreational impacts, especially during the times of seasonal critical winter wildlife closures.

Recently The Aspen Times Weekly, January 30 - February 5, 2020 recently featured a five page spread on “Our disappearing ELK” – on line -

<https://www.aspentimes.com/news/lost-in-the-crowd/?fbclid=IwAR0R4mhS3-dVqDsEWsGGAI1YOwWrLiu7OkDSKjYxcdGwppHHHpAA6uYDc-l>



**Eagle County - late afternoon shadows –  
deer grazing in the shadow of Mt. Sopris & The Crown**



The RRVHC is dedicated to protect and preserve our Open Space Public Lands, our National Parks and Wilderness areas as healthy biodiverse environments for the benefit of the wildlife first. Horseback riders and hikers have historically shared these areas with the wildlife, but the exploding human population and expanding human recreation has negatively impacted our wild creatures. All human recreation disturbs wildlife and this can flush vulnerable animals from their natural calving grounds during a critical time for reproduction.

**There two types of human recreationalists that are unquestionably different in their desires for open space land use.**

- Hikers and horseback riders use has historical traditions of hikers and horseback riders enjoying a usually quiet and peaceful “walk in the woods.”
- The mechanized and motorized recreationalists such as mountain bikes, e bikes, motorcycles, 4 wheelers, snowmobiles and fat tire bikes in the winter are faster moving and create a different energy in the environment. The faster moving recreationalists are seeking a physical achievement by challenging the terrain and their abilities.

**All human recreation negatively impacts the wildlife and their habitats. If more human access is added to the existing, highly impacted areas by the Mid Valley Trail Plan, our wildlife will have no respite.**

- It is imperative that no new trails come from the valley floor leading to Basalt Mountain, Rio Grande to the Crown, Arbaney/Kittle, Lake Christine Trail, and Light Hill.
- The Stage Road - Old Basalt to Toner Creek to Ruedi Reservoir Trail must be kept with the historic use for hikers and horseback riders only. Although signs are posted as such, the mountain bike community is violating their exclusion from this historic Stage Road.

The mountain bikes have many Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA); Sky Mountain Park; Parts of the 9,100 acres of “The Crown” and Red Hill, all with abundant mountain bike trails. Red Hill boasted 55,000 trail users in 2018. Opening day, 2019 brought hundreds of mountain bikers, inundating “The Crown” during that first day and the consumption continues. Large numbers of exercise enthusiasts flock to Sky Mountain Park for their lunch break, daily work outs. The sheer number of mountain bikers is overwhelming. Hikers and horseback riders keep company in small, slow moving groups and can easily stop to appreciate and be respectful to wildlife.

**Please see Addendum C – 2015 Letter to Pitkin BOCC from Kevin Wright, retired DOW District Ranger**

**Please read Addendum D – 2017 letter from Perry Will regarding wildlife decline in our valley and on The Crown specifically.**

Hikers and horseback riders revere our natural habitats by noticing the small precious beauties during the rhythm of footfalls on the trails.



**Hikers and Horseback riders see the small beauties of a trail  
Crown Jewel Horse Trail wildflowers**



**Stopping for lunch – Crown Jewel Horse Trail  
Crown Mountain - BLM**

**THE OUTSIDE OF A HORSE IS GOOD FOR THE INSIDE OF A MAN**  
Winston Churchill



**Basalt Mountain as seen from Glassier - Crown Trail**



## FINANCIAL CONCERNS FOR MANAGEMENT

The Lands identified as “Public Lands” are actually managed and regulated with rules and oversight, enforced by other entities. Counties, states and federal agencies are the responsible parties. Most often, extra financial aid is needed to enforce compliance. New trails would introduce additional threats for “bandit trail” building. Most of the mountain bike trails on The Crown were initially illegal, bandit trails. There were so many trails and users, that the BLM decided it was better to make the area an SRMA. Regulating and enforcing the existing SRMA areas is daunting. Adding more access will create an untenable and dangerous situation.

The Roaring Fork Valley was recently designated a gold-level ride center by the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA). More destination thrill seekers are bound to find our valley. How will BLM, USFS and County entities patrol and enforce user behaviors on the already existing trails?



**Glassier Equestrian trail**

## COMPLIANCE & ENFORCEMENT

Who will oversee and enforce regulations for trespassers, who disregard signage or make bandit trails? We would submit that heavy fines be given to any and all trespassers into prohibited areas, especially during the closed periods. We would recommend cameras recording the illegal persons for prosecution. Trail Rangers



Are a necessary to enforce compliance. In addition. We suggest that Compliance and Enforcement be added as an important Goal for the MVTC Plan.

Rules without compliance and consequences are useless.

### **PERMITS AND USER GROUPS**

Purpose of permits would be to prevent trail overuse. Permit funds could support trail maintenance, infrastructure such as signage and trash removal, wildlife and wildlife habitat and **rule enforcement**.

We humans must assume responsibility to protect certain pockets of our planet from human trespass and degradation.

### **9,100 acres of “The Crown”**



### **THE RFVHC RESPECTFULLY ASKS THE FOLLOWING BE INCLUDED IN THE MVTC FINAL PLAN**

- That there be no new trails leading from the Roaring Fork Valley Floor. This will prevent negative impacts to our wildlife from human recreation.
- That all existing trails maintain their existing uses for hikers and horseback riders.
- That compliance and enforcement be added into the MVTC Plan as an important and necessary goal.
- Please add financial physical responsibility as a goal listed in your MVTC Plan. There should be a coordinated, comprehensive plan using All BLM,

USFS and County partners to insure trail safety for maintenance, compliance and enforcement success.

- That education, biodiversity and human co-existence be added into your list of MVTC Plan goals.
- We ask that you adopt the Pitkin County Open Space and Trails - Protection of Natural Biodiversity and Management of Human Use as a guide for developing your MVTC Plan.
- We propose that you include the findings of The Roaring Fork Watershed Biodiversity & Connectivity Initiative (to be released in 2020) for the scientific foundation to guide decisions for human recreation education and human co-existence in your MVTC Plan.



Thank you for protecting our wildlife habitats for the future of their species. The RFVHC is thankful for the thoughtful considerations of all stakeholders for this Eagle County Mid Valley Trail Plan Initiative. CPW, BLM, USFS and others also stand for preserving and protecting our wildlife and their habitats.

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

Aldo Leopold 1949 sand Count Almanac

Respectfully Submitted,

RFVHC Board of Directors

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**Addendum A - OPEN SPACE BOARD POLICY Protection of Natural Biodiversity and Management of Human Use: (Adopted 8/4/16)**

**Addendum B – <https://www.watershedbiodiversityinitiative.org/>**

**Addendum C – 2015 Letter to Pitkin BOCC from Kevin Wright, retired DOW District Ranger**

**Addendum D – 2017 letter (3 pages) from Perry Will regarding wildlife decline in our valley and on The Crown specifically.**

*The Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization*