

Mid-Valley Trails Plan Executive Summary

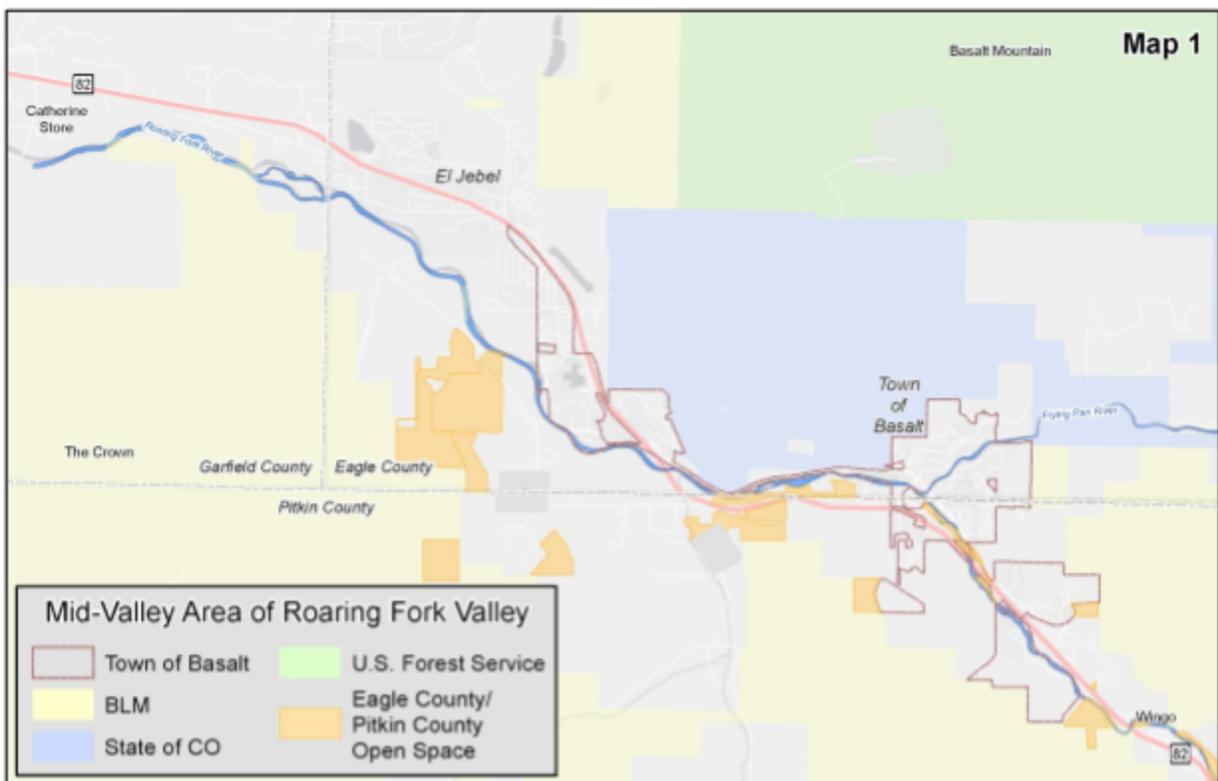


September 2020



Introduction:

Trails matter to our community. They help preserve nature and wildlife by designating and designing areas for recreation that guide human use, rather than supporting haphazard recreation which can adversely impact the environment. Trails support the Roaring Fork's tourist economy by attracting recreationally inclined visitors who frequent hotels, restaurants, and shops. Trails boost health, both emotionally and physically, by providing access to the outdoors and opportunities for exercise. They provide ways to recreate or commute to work, school, and events, creating a deeper connection to the landscape and helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Trails make communities more livable and viable. For all these reasons, planning for trails is an important process that requires input from a host of local stakeholders.



Map 1. The "Mid-Valley" Area of the Roaring Fork Valley

The Mid-Valley geographic area represents approximately 13% of Eagle County and is home to about 17% of the county's population. The area is located in the southwestern corner of the county near the Town of Basalt and communities of El Jebel and Missouri Heights. Totalling 245 square miles, it is bordered by two counties, Garfield County to the west, and Pitkin County to the East. It comprises different types of public lands and

multiple drainage areas. The unique nature and community of the Mid-Valley area requires coordination between multiple agencies to identify existing trails and future needs. The Mid-Valley trails system currently contains approximately 22 miles of paved trails and 75 miles of unpaved trails.



The Rio Grande Trail in Eagle County. Photo: Eagle County

The Mid-Valley area is unique in terms of its convergence of several managing jurisdictions including Eagle County, Pitkin County, Garfield County, Town of Basalt, Crown Mountain Park Recreation District, Mid-Valley Metropolitan District and many homeowner and property owner associations. Additionally, the regional and state-managed transportation facilities of the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) and the Colorado Department of Transportation

(CDOT) form the backbone of the local transportation system, while federally managed Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and United States Forest Service (USFS) lands surround the more inhabited area. Residents and visitors routinely cross jurisdictional boundaries along roads and trails within the Mid-Valley during their daily activities.

It is the responsibility of the Roaring Fork Valley Regional Planning Commission (the "RFVRPC") to review and adopt community plans. One of those community plans is the Mid-Valley Trails Plan (the "Plan"). Though the Plan is adopted by the RFVRPC, the Mid-Valley Trails Committee (the "MVTC") plays a role in recommending and ultimately implementing trail projects. The MVTC is a volunteer organization created to administer a portion of the Eagle County half-cent transportation tax dedicated to trails for the Roaring Fork Valley. The MVTC works on trail planning, grant requests, trail development and construction, trail referrals to public entities, and community education. To acknowledge and include the significant expertise and broad public input that has been gathered to date, this Plan relies strongly on prior community planning work in the Mid-Valley area and public involvement in those processes. The extensive collaboration and coordination process creates a Plan reflecting the desires of multiple stakeholders in the community.

Mid-Valley Trails Plan Purpose:

The Plan is an inventory of priority programs, existing and proposed trails and roadway infrastructure, both paved and unpaved. The Plan outlines opportunities and challenges for each proposed alignment and documents input from stakeholders of all types such as trail users, non-profit organizations, private developers, and public agencies. Additionally, the Plan includes guidelines for trail design and maintenance best practices. The Plan will serve multiple purposes to benefit residents, visitors, businesses and public entities, in the following ways:



Rio Grande Trail near Basalt High School. Photo: Laurel Smith/Sopris Media

1. **Guidance for Land Use Application Review:** The Plan will serve as a guiding document for Eagle County's review of land use applications and the related need for pedestrian and bicycle facilities to serve the community. Conformance with the policies of the Eagle County Comprehensive Plan and Mid-Valley Area Community Plan is a standard required for most land use applications located in the Roaring Fork Valley. In some cases, the addition or connection to an existing trail facility will be required while in other cases it may be recommended or voluntarily provided by the applicant based on a verified nexus to the land use application.
2. **Infrastructure Inventory:** The Plan provides an alphabetical inventory and maps of the existing paved and unpaved trails network and shared roadways used by people who walk, bike, run, horseback ride or travel with other power driven mobility devices in the Mid-Valley area.
3. **Suggested Trail and Roadway Improvements:** The Plan includes recommendations and suggestions for future trail and shared roadway projects that are either already included in adopted local jurisdiction documents, or were suggested through the referral agency and public comment process. The majority of suggested or proposed improvement projects listed are expressed as concepts and will require further evaluation to determine feasibility and assure compliance with the guiding policies and regulations of the underlying jurisdiction, such as Eagle County, Town of Basalt, BLM or USFS.
4. **Standards:** The Plan provides standards for constructing and maintaining safe and enjoyable shared-use paved and unpaved trails and roadways and references required and recommended specifications.

Background and Community Outreach:



Town of Basalt Directional Signage. Photo: Eagle County

The 2006 Plan update began in 2017, with Eagle County Community Development (ECCD) and the MVTC guiding the effort. In May 2017 approximately 30 people attended a public meeting hosted by the MVTC and ECCD at the El Jebel Community Center to gather trail and shared roadway input from the community and various stakeholders.

In 2018, Basalt Park Open Space and Trails Committee (POST) hosted a joint meeting to review trail and shared roadways priorities and a USFS Basalt Mountain forest salvage project. MVTC, Roaring Fork Outdoors Volunteers (RFOV), Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association (RFMBA) and Pitkin County Open Space & Trails (PCOST) participated, with meeting findings incorporated into this Plan. The input collected during this meeting indicated a strong interest in singletrack trail completions and

enhancements, as well as completing and upgrading paved trail connections and improving shared roadways. Also in 2018, the Mid-Valley Area Community Plan (the “Community Plan”) was updated with a focus on the descriptions of the character areas. The character area descriptions, which were part of an extensive public process, are incorporated into this Plan.

In 2019, phone interviews and email exchanges with Mid-Valley jurisdictional and organizational stakeholders took place to further inform the Plan. In early 2020, Eagle County staff met with the MVTC during a work session at their regular meeting in January to discuss the first draft of the Plan, draft maps, and the proposed project schedule. Parties attending included ECCD, Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers (RFOV), RFMBA and Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council (RFVHC). Based on input from these stakeholders, ECCD staff with support from VeraCity LLC and MVTC staff developed a public draft which was referred out to 70 public agencies, property associations, and organizations in January 2020. The draft Plan was advertised in local papers and public radio as available for public comment with a 30-day review period. Also, multiple work sessions were held with the RFVRPC which included public comment sessions and an open house which was held on February 6, 2020. During the 30-day public comment period, 35 responses were submitted by the February 28 deadline.

Due to Eagle County and state public health orders prohibiting public gatherings, all public hearings were postponed. In the March through May period, staff advanced Plan edits related to formatting, exhibits, new or updated project details and other information to improve the Plan. At the RFVRPC June 4 meeting, referral comments and related revisions for the final draft Plan were reviewed and the RFVRPC directed staff to further update the Plan to include additional discussion on regulatory reviews, compliance with pertinent plans and environmental sustainability.

The revised Plan was presented to the RFVRPC and the public on July 2 for adoption consideration. A second and final public hearing was tabled on July 16, 2020 to provide staff additional time to comprehensively address the comments from the RFVRPC and the public received during the July 2, 2020 adoption hearing. The second and final hearing was held on August 20, 2020 to formally adopt the Plan under Resolution No. 2020-01.

Vision for Trails and Shared Roadways in the Roaring Fork Mid-Valley:

The vision for the Mid-Valley trails and shared roadway network is to seamlessly connect the community's residential, commercial and civic destinations safely and provide a wide range of enjoyable, sustainable, and appropriately located recreational routes on the valley floor and surrounding public lands.

Goals for Trails and Shared Roadways:

- **PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE NETWORK**
Continue to provide and maintain, and improve safe, connected and enjoyable transportation and recreation routes for Roaring Fork Valley residents and visitors for non-motorized uses such as walking, running, hiking, road biking, paved trail biking, mountain biking (including electrical assist bicycles where permitted), Other Power Driven Mobility Devices, cross-country skiing and horseback riding.
- **EVALUATE LAND USE APPLICATIONS FOR ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION AND RECREATION NEEDS**
Support Eagle County, Town of Basalt, Garfield and Pitkin County land use review processes and adopted comprehensive planning documents to ensure connected walking and bicycling facilities to and within proposed developments.

- **ENSURE ALIGNMENT WITH COMMUNITY VALUES**

Review suggested trail and shared roadway improvements for conformance to adopted community master plan and sub-area plan goals, policies and strategies, and continued compliance through the life of the project.

- **MEET DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS**

Support the provision of facilities that meet national standards for pedestrian, bicycling, accessibility and shared roadways. Properly designed infrastructure also promotes ease of maintenance and sustainability of the community asset. A well-designed and well-built trail should require less resources to maintain, and is sustainable or “manageable” compared to the budget and staffing available and tasks required.

- **ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Support trail projects that adhere to local, state and federal government environmental sustainability and stewardship policies to protect and preserve wildlife habitat, sensitive lands and other natural resources. Sustainability refers to the study and careful use of a resource (such as public lands) so that the environmental resources are not depleted or permanently damaged. Eagle County is a place where natural ecosystems are preserved and maintained to assure the health and well-being of local wildlife populations. Trail projects must provide analysis and evidence the wildlife surrounding the trail will not be impacted or unduly affected, and that Colorado Parks and Wildlife approved mitigation measures can be utilized and enforced.

- **CLOSE PAVED TRAIL NETWORK GAPS**

Support closing all gaps in the paved trail network and prioritize gaps where safety is an issue due to adjacent roadways and deficient facilities. The RFTA Regional Bicycle, Pedestrian and Transit Access Plan included stakeholder input from all communities of the Roaring Fork Valley and found that the top factors that discourage biking and walking include gaps in the system, substandard or poorly maintained facilities, dangerous intersections and crossing busy roads.

- **SUPPORT SINGLETRACK FOR MULTIPLE USER GROUPS**

Work with public land managers on improved and additional singletrack trail opportunities, located where appropriate and in compliance with pertinent regulations and management plans, for walking, bicycling and horseback riding on the Roaring Fork Valley floor as well as connections to surrounding public lands such as on Basalt Mountain and The Crown.

- **IMPROVE TRAILS AND ROADWAYS FOR SHARED USE**

Support the consistent improvement of roads and trails to enable safe sharing by people walking, biking, and riding through widening, additional striping, safety and wayfinding signage, educational information and consistent maintenance, where appropriate.

- **CONSISTENTLY MAINTAIN INFRASTRUCTURE**

Support consistent and enhanced maintenance of existing trail networks and shared roadways.

- **SUPPORT TRANSPORTATION CLIMATE ACTION GOALS**

Support programs and infrastructure, such as bike-share programs, that in combination with improved trail and shared road infrastructure advance Eagle County, Town of Basalt and regional climate action goals.

- **ENCOURAGE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

When considering or prioritizing trail project additions or improvements, the economic development impacts should be considered. The economic benefits of recreational trails have been studied nationwide by advocacy groups including American Trails, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and others, verifying that trails can spur economic development through construction and maintenance, equipment sales and rentals, services, restaurants, lodging and increased property values.

- **COLLABORATE THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS**

Support public and private partnerships essential for trail and shared roadway construction or maintenance including collaboration with landowners, incorporated communities, adjacent counties, local, state and federal agencies and advocacy organizations.



The Roaring Fork Mid-Valley as viewed from Missouri Heights. Photo: Eagle County

The Planning Process:

For the projects to be investigated for compatibility and ultimately become a reality, an overall plan helps frame the goals and metrics that should be considered prior to moving a project forward. There is a delicate balance between serving many different user types, the environment, and ensuring all stakeholder concerns are addressed.

When new or proposed trails are considered, it is with the understanding that in-depth analysis, as is required for all development projects, may bring to light unmitigatable impacts that make the project unfeasible for implementation. If a trail is identified in this Plan, it is not a guarantee that the proposed project can or will be implemented. The majority of proposed projects or upgrades described in the Plan are in the concept stage. Inclusion in the Plan is not intended to imply Eagle County Government's approval, but to capture conceptual proposals that may or may not be investigated for further action by the lead proponents. It is also possible that some of the proposed projects that may have merit may not proceed past the planning and feasibility stage if the challenges outweigh potential benefit such as if impacts to sensitive lands, wildlife or neighborhoods are unavoidable or unmitigatable, or if the project otherwise cannot comply with government policies or regulatory requirements.

Any entity who desires to create or expand a trail requires approval from the appropriate government and environmental agencies before proceeding. It is with these safeguards in place that Eagle County endorses the investigation of the trails included in the Plan and to use this Plan as a guiding document during the review of applicable land use proposals.

Getting a trail implemented is a multi-step process. Below is an example illustration of how the process could proceed for a new trail.

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Proposed Trails, Shared Roadway Improvements, Existing Trails, and Programs:

The following table lists the proposed projects in no particular order. Many of the proposals are in the concept stage and therefore have not been fully evaluated for feasibility. With partnerships, studies, public outreach, budget planning and permit approvals by applicable jurisdictions, some projects may move forward to completion. Others may not move past the concept or the feasibility stage due to issues ranging from inability to comply with agency regulation or policy, mitigate impact, respond to public concerns, or due to budget constraints or insurmountable constructability or environmental issues.

There are multiple new projects proposed in the Plan. The tables below details the name of the proposed alignment, the proponent (the agency or entity interested in moving the project forward), the decision-making authority or the landowner, the entity that processes the project review, Eagle County's role in the process, and the feasibility considerations that should be investigated as part of the analysis for implementation.



SH 82 Frontage Road between Valley Road and Catherine Store Road. Photo: Laurel Smith/Sopris Media

Table 1. List of Proposed New or Expanded Projects

Project Name	Proponent	Decision Authority (Landowner)	Eagle County Role	Feasibility Considerations
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY ROUTE PAVED TRAILS				
Emma Trail Relocation and Bridge	Basalt	Basalt	Referral	The project is supported by the Town of Basalt's 2020 Master Plan and memorialized in their Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan and received limited comment during review.
Hooks Lane Trail Bridge	MVTC	Private Eagle County	Full review and permitting for the Eagle County portion	Multiple entities identify this section of trail as a safety and maintenance concern. There is support from these entities to improve this section. Public comment supported this project.
Rio Grande - Crown Mountain Park Bridge	MVCA Plan RFTA Plan	Eagle County USFS Private	Full review and permitting for the Eagle County portion	Included in multiple jurisdictional plans. Implementation challenges include potential impacts on sensitive natural areas and wildlife habitat and private property owner support. Extensive public comment received.
Rio Grande Equestrian	RFVHC	RFTA	Referral	Request made by local nonprofit to implement or improve this trail. Limited public and referral comments received on this expansion.
SH 82 Frontage Road Trail	MVTC	Eagle County Garfield County CDOT	Referral / Possible Partner	Supported by MVTC and the public. A partnership of Eagle County, Garfield County and CDOT is required to study and construct, with support from MVTC, private property owners and other agencies.
Two Rivers Road to downtown Basalt	Basalt	Basalt	Referral	Supported by the Town of Basalt's Two Rivers Greenway Master Plan and Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan. No public comment was received.
Two Rivers Road to Tree Farm - East side of SH 82	MVTC Basalt	Basalt CDOT Eagle County HOA PUD	Full review and permitting for the Eagle County portion/Possible Partner	The trail connection is recognized as a necessary improvement by multiple jurisdictions to improve walking, bicycling and transit connectivity within the Mid-Valley SH 82 corridor. It may be necessary to request right-of-way from adjacent private properties to complete the connection to the Tree Farm PUD if the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) will not permit construction of the trail within the SH 82 primary right of way. No public comment was received.

Table 1 Continued. List of Proposed New or Expanded Projects

Project Name	Proponent	Decision Authority (Landowner)	Eagle County Role	Feasibility Considerations
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY ROUTE PAVED TRAILS				
West side of SH 82 Trail	MVTC Basalt	CDOT	Full review and permitting for the Eagle County portion /Possible Partner	The project is supported by the Town of Basalt and the Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan and the 2020 Basalt Master Plan. A partnership with CDOT is necessary for this project. No public comment was received regarding this segment of trail.
Willits Connections	Basalt	Basalt Eagle County	Full review and permitting for the Eagle County portion or a referral if located in Basalt	The project is supported by the Town of Basalt and memorialized in their Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan. Project would reduce safety concerns along Willits Lane. Limited comments were received.



View of Mid-Valley in winter from Missouri Heights. Photo: Laurel Smith/Sopris Media

Table 2. List of Proposed New or Expanded Projects

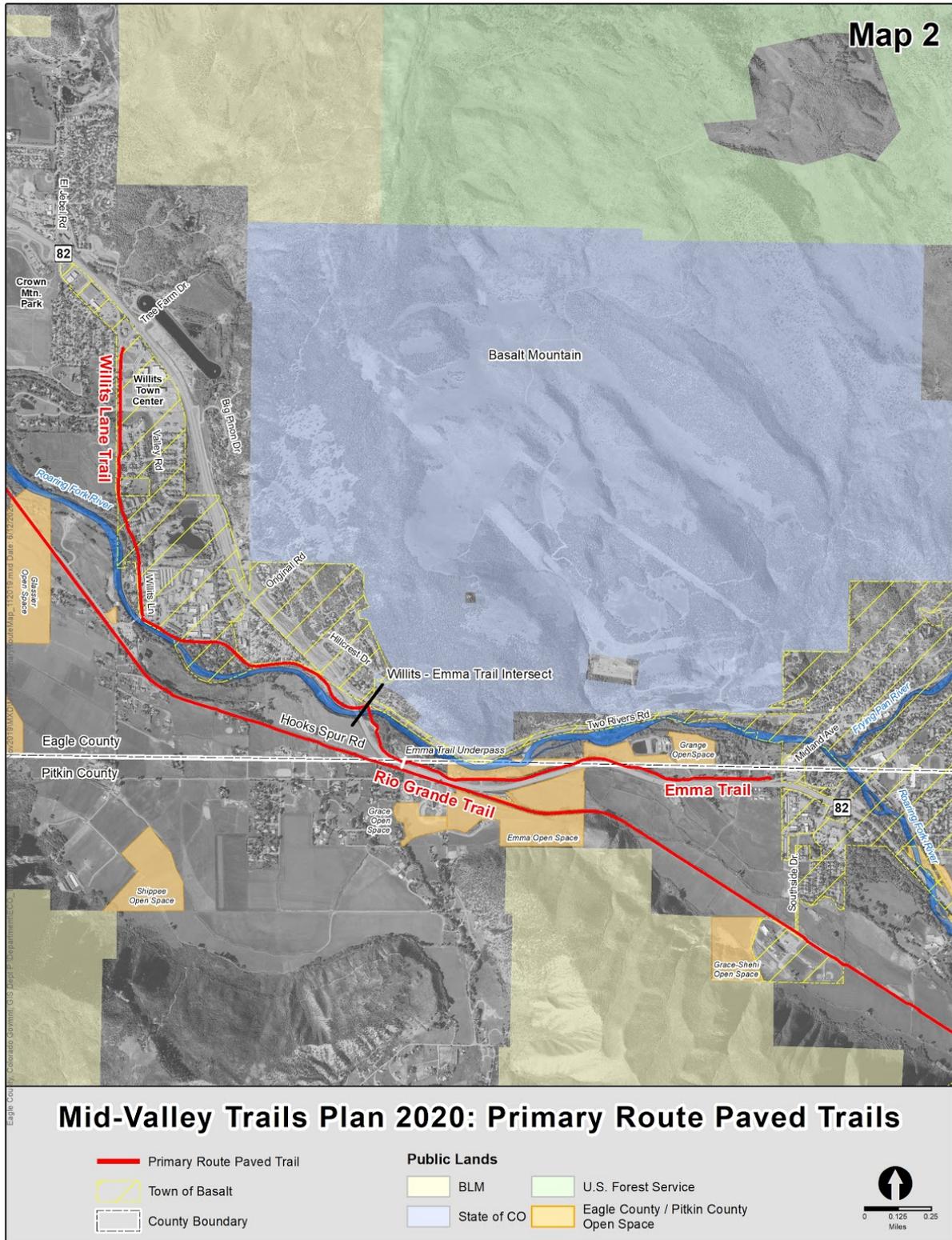
Project Name	Proponent	Decision Authority (Landowner)	Eagle County Role	Feasibility Considerations
SINGLETRACK TRAILS				
Arbaney Kittle connection	Basalt	Private BLM	Referral from Basalt or BLM	Supported by the Town of Basalt and identified as a connection in the Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan and the 2020 Basalt Master Plan. Would require a partnership among multiple agencies and a NEPA review is required since the project is located on federal lands.
Basalt Mountain top and Basalt State Wildlife Area	RFMBA RFVHC Basalt	BLM USFS CPW	Referral from BLM, USFS, CPW	Supported by the Town of Basalt and identified as a connection in the Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan and the 2020 Basalt Master Plan. It is unclear if appropriate routes are possible to connect with the upper reaches of Basalt Mountain, with minimal impact on the wildlife habitat area and a NEPA process is required.
Blue Lake to Missouri Heights	RFMBA	Private HOA	Referral from HOA	A nonprofit proposes a singletrack trail connection to Missouri Heights through Blue Lake Open Space. The connection would require access across private property. Due to lack of public comment on the project, it is unclear if the property owners impacted are in support of the connection.
Crown SRMA Crown Royale	RFMBA	BLM RFTA	Referral from RFTA or BLM	Proposed by the RFMBA. Public comments were concerned about the amount of trails already located on the Crown Special Recreation Management Area and the impacts on wildlife.
Crown SRMA Monte Carlo	RFMBA	BLM	Referral from Pitkin County or BLM	Proposed by the RFMBA. Public comments were concerned about the amount of trails already located on the Crown Special Recreation Management Area and the impacts on wildlife.
Shadowrock Trail	MVTC	Private HOA BLM	Referral from BLM	MVTC supports investigation of a potential trail easement with Shadowrock HOA, Tree Farm PUD, Eagle County, BLM, CPW and USFS to allow access to singletrack trails on BLM and USFS lands on Basalt Mountain. No public comment was received.

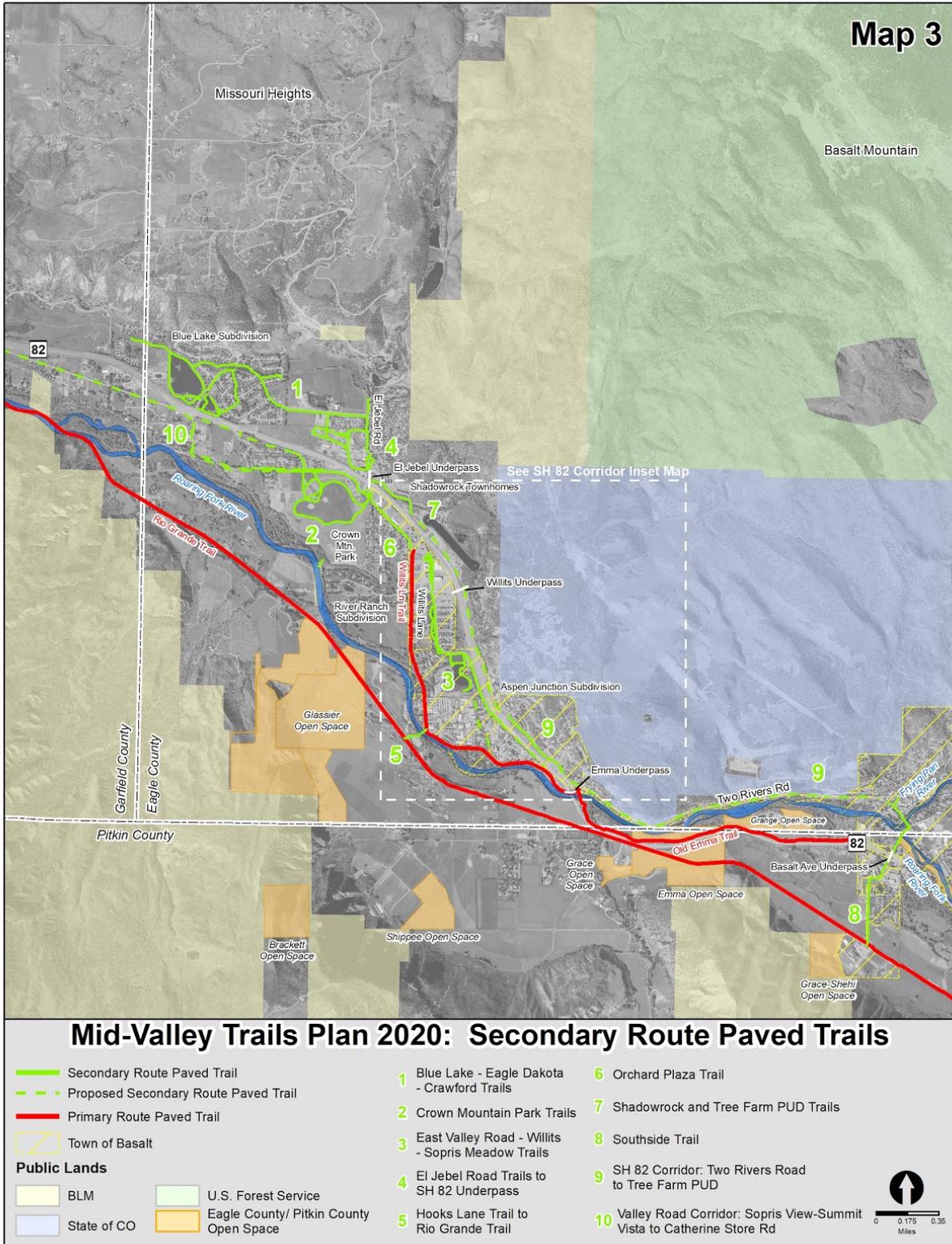
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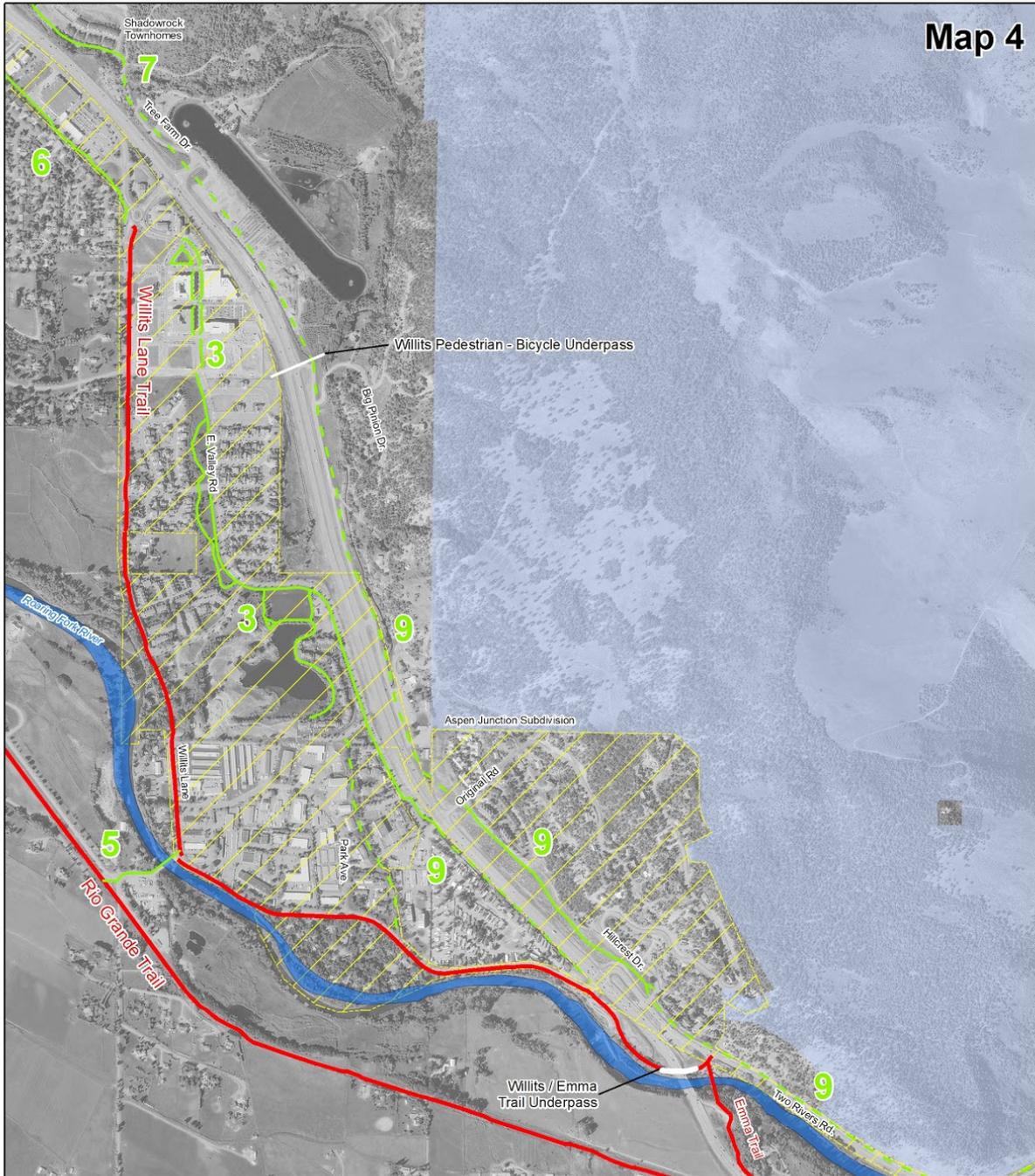
Project Name	Proponent	Decision Authority (Landowner)	Eagle County Role	Feasibility Considerations
SINGLETRACK TRAILS				
Valley Floor to Basalt Mtn	MVTC RFMBA Basalt	Private HOA BLM USFS CPW	Referral from BLM, USFS or CPW	Supported by multiple agencies and included in multiple jurisdictional plans. Collaboration is required with private property owners and homeowner associations, BLM, USFS and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to identify and study appropriate routes that might allow this connection to travel from the valley floor in El Jebel and downtown Basalt to access established trails higher up on Basalt Mountain. A new trail connection on federal lands would require a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review and a public input process. Per BLM, wildlife habitat needs are an issue of critical concern to CPW and BLM. Public comment received supported the concerns of the CPW and BLM regarding wildlife habitat protection.



Horseback riders on the Arbaney Kittle trail. Photo: RFVHC







Map 4

Inset Map: Secondary Route Paved Trails in SH 82 Corridor

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|--|---|
| Secondary Route Paved Trail | Town of Basalt | 3 East Valley Road - Willits - Sopris Meadow Trails | 7 Shadowrock and Tree Farm PUD Trails |
| Proposed Secondary Route Paved Trail | Public Lands | 5 Hooks Lane Trail to Rio Grande Trail | 9 SH 82 Corridor: Two Rivers Road to Tree Farm PUD |
| Primary Route Paved Trail | State of CO | 6 Orchard Plaza Trail | |



Performance Measures:



Frying Pan Road. Photo: Eagle County

There are a variety of different performance measure types and purposes. Performance measures can be used to assess the effectiveness of this Plan, how the trail system is functioning, or as a test to determine if or how a project should move towards implementation. Clear performance measures can inform decision-making and support efficient and effective program implementation. All performance measures should be linked to a Plan goal and help to bring the vision of the Plan to fruition.

Performance measures normally have a benchmark that the performance measure is measured against. The 2006 Mid-Valley Trails Plan which is fully replaced by this Plan, did not include performance measures. Therefore, the performance measure targets of this Plan establish the performance measure benchmarks for the future update in 2025.

Below is a summary of performance measures established with the adoption of the Plan. The tables detailing the frameworks for performance measures for Plan Effectiveness, Project and Program Implementation, and System Function are located in Chapter 9 of the Plan. The tables describe the Plan goal for each metric, the target to achieve the metric, the measure used to evaluate, and the method of data collection.



Cross country skiers at Crown Mountain Park. Photo: Laurel Smith/Sopris Media

Plan Effectiveness: The effectiveness of the Plan should be monitored and analyzed prior to an update to this Plan. Areas noted to be deficient should be focused on for improvement in the future updates.

Project and Program Implementation: Implementation of projects and programs will be led by the jurisdiction, management agency or advocacy group whose interests or mandates the project will serve, as well as through a collaboration formed of supporting partners. When a proponent is interested in moving a project or program forward, the proposal should be analyzed against the project and program performance measure framework.

System Function: The County does not monitor active transportation and recreational use. However, County Departments such as the Road and Bridge or Transportation Department, and partnering agencies should consider the creation and implementation of a monitoring program. A monitoring program that collects relevant information can help inform future plan goals, project and program needs, and help to accelerate implementation.

Project Implementation:

There are essentially two methods through which projects and programs will be implemented:

1. Initiated by a public or advocacy entity: Local government, management agencies or advocacy groups, with support from the MVTC act as the general coordinating agency to facilitate collaboration and investigation between all appropriate parties. Effort may include design coordination, public outreach, environmental analysis, grant application submission, construction management, and long-term maintenance agreements.
2. Initiated by private land development, either voluntarily or as part of an approved development project: The specific requirement for trails shall be determined by the approving jurisdiction based on the criteria in their land use regulations and linked to the scale of the development and its associated impacts. Either a trail easement or trail easement and construction may be required as part of a development approval.

Next Steps:

The Plan is the result of a three-year process to update the 2006 Mid-Valley Trails Plan and is the culmination of an extended effort involving many participants, with valuable input gained through the referral and public comment process. The comment process provided essential information and input creating a comprehensive and balanced Plan. The Plan documents the vision created by multiple agencies, nonprofits, and community members. Desiring to connect a well-maintained network of paved and unpaved trails and shared roadways is at the heart of the Mid-Valley trail users.

Moving forward, the Plan should be utilized as part of the referral review process for land use applications within the Roaring Fork Valley. All the work completed to date and

incorporated into the Plan positions the Mid-Valley area to plan and create trails, shared roadway networks, and supportive programs that directly contribute to community health, economic vitality, inclusive accessibility and environmental sustainability.



The Roaring Fork Mid-Valley as viewed from Missouri Heights. Photo: Eagle County

Recognizing the Plan is a snapshot in time documenting the inventory of existing trails, proposed projects and programs as well as the desires of the community members engaged in the process of developing the Plan; an update is expected to occur in 2025. Part of the update should examine at what point the Mid-Valley Trail System is at buildout to ensure a balance of recreation and environmental preservation. There are a finite amount of natural resources within the Mid-Valley and analysis is needed if future trail expansion is proposed beyond what is outlined in the Plan.

The Plan is a living document and significant changes within the Mid-Valley may necessitate an update sooner than 2025. It is up to RFVRPC and the MVTC to make the determination that changes within the Mid-Valley require a thoughtful and intentional update to the Plan.