



# 2018 OPEN LANDS PLAN UPDATE

A PLAN FOR OPEN SPACE, TRAILS AND THE USE OF TOWN LANDS



TOWN OF VAIL

An element of the Vail Comprehensive Plan  
Adopted on October 16th, 2018  
Resolution #37, Series 2018

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The 1994 Comprehensive Open Lands Plan was adopted to “identify and develop strategies for acquiring or protecting key remaining open lands in Vail that would be valuable for recreation, protecting sensitive environmental resources, extending or connecting trails, providing adequate neighborhood open space, and creating a small amount of contingency land for unforeseen needs (e.g. employee housing, public nfacilities)”. This update process was initiated by the Vail Town Council due to the age of the ‘94 Plan and in response to many conditions that have changed over the past twenty-four years.

The broad objectives of this planning process were to:

- Confirm the community’s goals for the Plan,
- Evaluate Action Items from the ‘94 Plan and identify new Action Items to further goals for protecting environmentally sensitive lands and addressing other goals of the Plan,
- Provide better direction regarding recreation trails,
- Evaluate how Town-owned lands can be used to address community needs, and
- Define management strategies for Town-owned lands.

## Community Planning Process

Community input was an integral part of this planning process and involved the following:

- Three community scoping sessions
- Two community input sessions
- Trail-specific small group meetings and a community-wide meeting
- A wildlife forum

- Use of the Town’s web-based portal to obtain community input, and
- Public hearings with the Planning and Environmental Commission and Town Council.

## Environmentally Sensitive Lands

The acquisition and protection of environmentally sensitive and other lands was a major focus of the ‘94 Plan. During this update process community input was clear that the protection of sensitive lands remains a very high priority. In 1994, an evaluation of all privately-owned lands was completed that identified thirty environmentally sensitive parcels to be acquired and protected by the Town. A similar process was done as a part of this update process. The updated Plan identifies fifteen such parcels (some of which were also recommend in the ‘94 Plan). The Plan also recommends establishing a task force to further study techniques for the protection of environmentally sensitive lands that could include increased use of the Town’s Designated Open Space process and the use of conservation easements.

## Town-owned Lands and Use of Lands

The ‘94 Plan identified land needs for Town facilities and uses and provided recommendations for the use of eight Town-owned parcels. Many of these needs and recommendations have been implemented. This update process included the evaluation of all Town-owned lands to identify any parcels that may be suitable for Town use. None of the Town’s vacant parcels are suitable for the development of public uses or community-



oriented facilities. It is possible, however, that public facility needs could be provided by the redevelopment of currently developed parcels (e.g. the east end of the Lionshead Parking Structure or the Vail Municipal Building site). Four privately-owned parcels are identified for potential acquisition by the Town for future public use or community-oriented facilities.

### **Trails**

Improving the trail and bike system was listed as one of the top three priorities for open space and recreation from the '94 Plan. Many trail and trailhead improvements have been completed since 1994. Trails remain a community priority and this Plan identifies a number of potential new trail ideas.

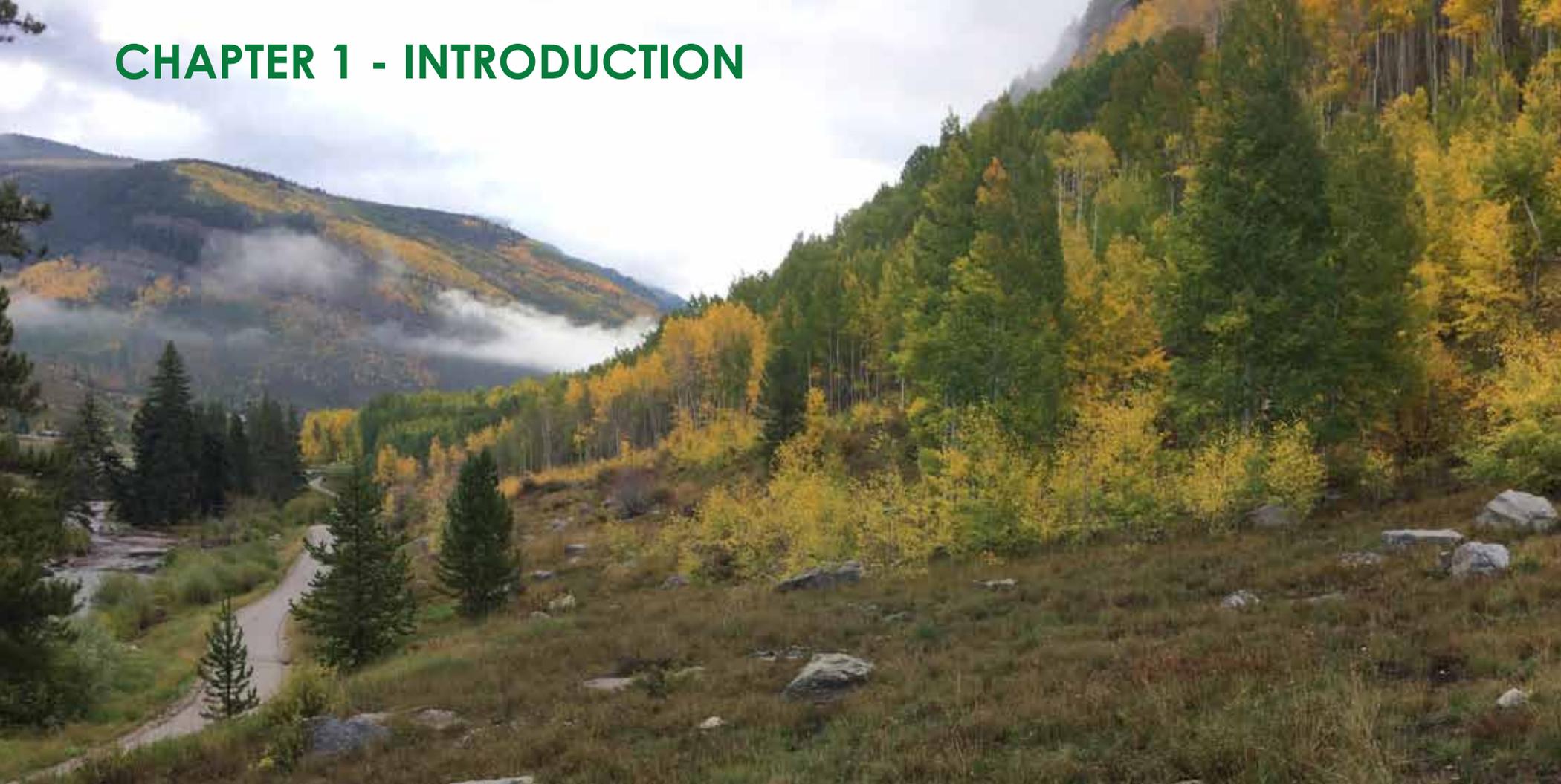
Wildlife resources in and around Vail have been significantly impacted by changes in the Gore Valley that have occurred since the early 1960's. The use of recreational trails can add to these impacts. For this reason, this update recommends that a number of steps be taken to improve wildlife resources prior to the development of any new trails. These steps include community education regarding how trail use affects wildlife, enforcement of seasonal trail closures, and enhancement of wildlife habitat. Further, it is recommended that prior to any new trail development a comprehensive, site-specific analysis of how existing trails, social trails and new trail ideas could impact environmental and wildlife resources be completed. This analysis will be used in making decisions on closing or formalizing social trails and on the development of any new trails. The objective of this analysis is that any new

trails must balance the community's recreational needs with sensitivity to wildlife and environmental considerations by minimizing, mitigating, or eliminating potential impacts from trails.

### **Implementation of the Plan**

Steps to implement the goals of this Plan are provided in two chapters. Chapter 5 - Action Plan provides a summary of all Action Items - recommended land and easement acquisitions for the protection of environmentally sensitive lands, for the potential future development of recreation trails and for Town uses. Chapter 6 - Implementation provides a summary of follow-up studies and of other programs and tasks recommended to implement the goals of this Plan.

# CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION



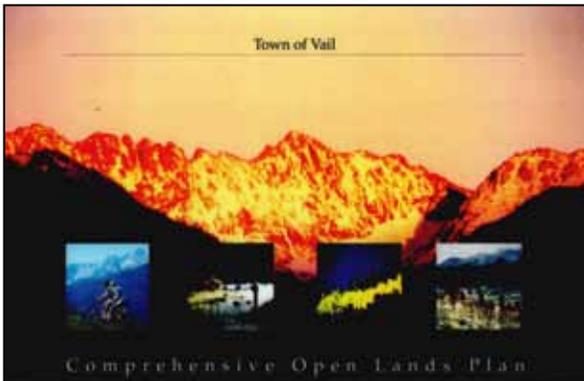
The Town of Vail has a long history of acquiring lands to preserve as open space and to develop park facilities. Over the years the Town has also been diligent in developing a recreational trail system and in the development of necessary public facilities. Toward that end, the 1994 Comprehensive Open Lands Plan (the '94 Plan) was adopted for the stated purpose:

*“to identify and develop strategies for acquiring or protecting key remaining open lands in Vail that would be valuable for recreation, protecting sensitive environmental resources, extending or connecting trails, providing adequate neighborhood open space, and creating a small amount of contingency land for unforeseen needs (e.g. employee housing, public facilities).”*

In the spring of 2016 the Vail Town Council initiated a process to update the '94 Plan.

The '94 Plan was developed over a period of two years with involvement of the Open Lands Steering Committee and after numerous community meetings. The five objectives of the '94 Plan were to:

- Identify a comprehensive system of open space uses such as parks, recreation, protection of environmental resources, trails and to reserve lands for public uses,
- Prioritize available open lands for acquisition or protection,
- Identify creative strategies to implement the acquisition and protection program,
- Define a management system to appropriately manage Town-owned open lands, and
- Buffer neighborhoods with open space.



1994 Comprehensive Open Lands Plan.

During the development of the '94 Plan the Town was involved in a number of related activities. These included inventorying all Town lands, revisiting open space zone districts, working on a Land Ownership Adjustment Plan (LOA) with the United States Forest Service,

developing an inventory of environmentally sensitive open lands (with the Colorado Natural Heritage Program) and proposing zone changes for public and private parcels. The 1994 Comprehensive Open Lands Plan served to integrate these efforts and to provide a framework for these and other actions related to open lands.

The main elements of the '94 Plan included an Action Plan for the acquisition of land or easements and other steps to protect sensitive lands and further the goals of the Plan, a conceptual trails plan, identification of public facility needs and recommended uses for some Town lands.

## NEED TO UPDATE THE 1994 OPEN LANDS PLAN

The Vail Town Council directed Town staff to update the '94 Plan in the Fall of 2016. Discussion of the potential re-development of the Vail Trail was the catalyst that prompted this update. Notwithstanding why the Town Council initiated this process, an update of the '94 Plan was needed if for no other reason than twenty-four years have passed since its adoption.

There has been a great deal of change in Vail and Eagle County over the past twenty-four years and much of this change is directly or indirectly related to specific recommendations of the '94 Plan:

- Significant population growth in Vail and Eagle County,
- Increased summer visitation,
- Gore Creek is now listed as Impaired,
- Ever increasing challenges with establishing workforce housing in Vail,
- The development of regionally-oriented recreation facilities in down-valley communities,

- On-going redevelopment in Vail that has increased the density and intensity of use on many properties,
- A dramatic increase in the level of use and types of use on recreational trails,
- Significant declines in wildlife populations and resources, and
- In 2018 Vail was recognized as the first sustainable mountain resort destination in the world and the first Certified Sustainable Destination in the United States certified by a Global Sustainable Tourism Council-Accredited body, Green Destinations.

Each of these considerations reinforce the need to re-visit the '94 Plan.



Gore Creek is now listed as Impaired.

## GOALS FOR UPDATING THE 1994 OPEN LANDS PLAN

The Town Council specifically asked for an update to the '94 Plan, and not an entirely new open lands plan. As an update, it has been assumed that the basic format and topics addressed by the '94 Plan are valid today. As such, the focus of this planning process was to



Existing section of the Vail Trail.

revisit all elements of the '94 Plan and evaluate how they can be refined to better respond to conditions in Vail today and into the future. In essence, the goal of this planning process was to update the Plan to provide a framework for effectively implementing actions to achieve Vail's goals for the preservation of open space, the development of trails and the use of Town lands.

The process for updating the '94 Plan was designed to address the following broad objectives:

- Confirm the community's overall goals and priorities for the Plan,
- Evaluate the Action Plan and identify any new Action Items to protect environmentally sensitive lands or other action to implement the goals of the Plan,
- Provide better direction for the potential development of recreation trails,
- Evaluate Town-owned lands for how they can be used to meet community needs,
- Define management strategies for Town-owned lands, and
- Protect environmentally sensitive lands and wildlife.

## APPROACH TO THIS UPDATE PROCESS

The major steps in updating the '94 Plan included:

### Evaluation of the '94 Plan

A critical review of the '94 Plan was completed to understand the strengths of the Plan and elements of the Plan that could be improved.

### Community Scoping Sessions

At the outset of the project three community scoping meetings were held. Information about Vail's Comprehensive Plan, the '94 Plan and related topics were presented. Participants were encouraged to provide questions and comments at these meetings and a portal was established on the Town's web page as another means for the community to offer comments on the Plan.

### Technical Advisors

Throughout the planning process, technical experts, agencies and potential partners who are involved in topics addressed by the Plan were engaged. Examples of these include Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Vail Resorts trails staff, Eagle County and the Eagle Valley Land Trust.

### Evaluation of Lands

Extensive evaluations of Town-owned and privately-owned lands were completed to gain a comprehensive understanding of these lands and to identify the role they could play in implementing the goals of this Plan.

## Community Meetings

Two community meetings were held during the planning process. These meetings focused on various aspects of the update and allowed for community interaction and conversation about the Plan.

## Recreation Trails

A series of small group scoping meetings specific to trails and a community-wide trails workshop were held to better understand perspectives regarding existing trails and potential improvements to the Town's trail system.

## Review Process

Following preparation of a draft plan, the proposed update was reviewed by the Vail Planning and Environmental Commission and the Vail Town Council.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community involvement played a significant role in this update process. Input was obtained during three scoping meetings, two community meetings, a series of small group meetings and a community-wide workshop dedicated to trails.



*Small group discussion at second community meeting.*

A portal dedicated to open lands was provided on the Town's web page and input was obtained by written questionnaires that were provided during meetings. Community input was also obtained during the formal review of the Plan by the Planning and Environmental Commission and the Town Council.

Input from the community during the planning process was a major influence in the development of the updated Plan. Trails are a good example of how community input influenced the planning process. During scoping and community meetings, many passionate opinions were expressed about Vail's existing trails, the need for new trails and the potential impact from trail use on wildlife. To better understand how the community felt about trails and to bring those with divergent viewpoints together for discussion, small group sessions specific to trails and a community-wide trails workshop were held. The SE Group, a design firm that specializes in trail design and planning, was engaged to facilitate these efforts. A wildlife forum was then held to discuss the state of wildlife in the Gore Valley. The effort put towards trails was considerably greater than originally anticipated and this effort was taken in direct response to input from the community.

As with any community planning process, it is often difficult to draw consensus from input that is provided from the community. This is because in most cases community members will have a variety of different viewpoints and while some conclusions can be drawn from opinions provided by those who participate in a planning process, the opinions of those who do not participate are not heard. For many reasons, finding a clear consensus on community goals is a challenging task.

Subsequent chapters of this Plan provide a summary of comments that were heard from the community during this update process. In most cases a wide range of divergent comments were heard. These summaries are not scientific and are not intended to suggest community consensus. Rather, the summaries of community input provided in the following chapters are intended to convey general themes of what was expressed by the community

## ORGANIZATION OF THIS PLAN

The 2018 Open Lands Plan Update includes the following chapters:

### 1. Introduction

This chapter provides background on the '94 Plan, the need, goals for and approach to this update.

### 2. Environmentally Sensitive Lands

This chapter summarizes how the '94 Plan addressed environmentally sensitive lands and community input during this update process, defines environmentally sensitive lands, outlines measures that have been taken to protect such lands and identifies additional lands that may warrant protection.

### 3. Town-Owned Lands and Use of Lands

A summary of how the '94 Plan addressed Town-owned lands, community input during this update process, an evaluation of all Town-owned lands and privately-owned lands (that could further the goals of this Plan) are provided in this chapter.

#### 4. Trails

Goals and accomplishments relating to trails from the '94 Plan, community input during this update process, a vision for trails, a conceptual trails plan and subsequent steps in the planning and approval processes for any new trail development are provided in this chapter.

#### 5. Action Plan

The '94 Plan includes an Action Plan that identified fifty-one Action Items to acquire easements or land necessary to implement the goals of the Plan. Many of these action items have been accomplished. An updated Action Plan is provided in this chapter.

#### 6. Implementation

This chapter outlines implementation steps and follow-up tasks.

#### 7. Appendix

The '94 Plan and other supplemental information are found in the appendix.

The 2018 Open Lands Plan Update provides a framework for actions the Town can implement for the protection of lands, trails and the use of Town lands. The 2018 Open Lands Plan Update was adopted by Resolution No. 37, Series 2018 by the Vail Town Council after recommendation from the Vail Planning and Environmental Commission. This Plan is an element of the Town's Comprehensive Plan.

## TERMS USED IN THIS PLAN

Below are definitions for terms used throughout this Plan:

Conservation Easement – A voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land

trust (or other qualified organization) in which the land owner places restrictions on the use of his or her land in order to protect its conservation values.

Designated Open Space - Property owned by the Town of Vail which has been dedicated by ordinance as designated open space.

Easement - A legal right to use another's land for a specifically defined purpose.

Environmentally Sensitive Lands – Lands that include natural features such as wetland or riparian habitat, water courses, wildlife habitat, native plant or other unique vegetation, steep slopes or other geologic hazards.

Land Trust - A charitable organization that acquires land or conservation easements, or that stewards land or easements, for conservation purposes.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - A federal environmental law in the United States that promotes the enhancement of the environment and established the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). NEPA requires Federal Agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions.

Open Lands – Vacant, undeveloped land that may be owned by the Town of Vail or privately-owned.

Open Space – Lands owned by the Town of Vail that have been assigned as Designated Open Space, or Town-owned land or privately-owned lands that are zoned for open space or have a conservation easement.

Pump Track - A soft surface cycling trail consisting of a circuit of banked turns and features designed to be ridden completely by riders creating momentum by "pumping" the bicycle.

Social Trail - An unofficial or non-designated soft surface trail that has not been formally approved by the land owner or applicable review authority. Social trails are typically not constructed based on design plans, rather they develop overtime from hiking or biking activity.

Task Force – A small group of people appointed to a special committee formed expressly for the purpose of studying a particular problem for a limited timeframe.



# CHAPTER 2 - ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS

While the '94 Plan addressed recreational trails, Town facilities and the use and management of Town lands, the identification of environmentally sensitive lands and recommendations for their acquisition and protection was the primary focus of the Plan. The '94 Plan's focus on environmentally sensitive lands is evident a number of ways. Two of the five objectives of the '94 Plan were to "prioritize available open lands for acquisition or protection" and to "identify creative strategies to implement the acquisition and protection program". The number one priority for recreation and open space is to "acquire, preserve and protect natural open space" and the top priority for land acquisitions is to "protect sensitive natural habitat areas, riparian areas and hazard areas". Thirty of the fifty-one Action Items from the '94 Action Plan involve the acquisition and protection of environmentally sensitive lands and over half of the Action Items that have been implemented have resulted in the acquisition and preservation of such lands.

Since its adoption, the '94 Plan has been regarded by some as an "open space plan". While the '94 Plan is far more than just an open space plan, the emphasis of the '94 Plan is clearly on the preservation of environmentally sensitive and other open space lands.

The terms "open lands" and "open space" are used throughout this Plan. When used, open lands refer to vacant, undeveloped land that may be owned by the Town or privately-owned. Open lands are generally discussed in the context of how they could be used by the Town to address the need for public

uses or facilities or how the lands could be protected as open space. Open space generally refers to lands owned by the Town that have been assigned as Designated Open Space, or Town-owned or privately-owned lands that are zoned for open space or have a conservation easement. Open space is also used to refer to lands recommended by this Plan for acquisition by the Town for protection as open space, or privately-owned lands that may be appropriate for conservation easements or other protection measures.

This chapter summarizes community input on environmentally sensitive lands and provides an explanation of the type of lands that are considered environmentally sensitive. Explanation of how potentially environmentally sensitive, privately-owned lands were evaluated and recommendations for lands to be acquired by the Town are provided. Finally, techniques to be used for the protection of these lands are addressed.

## COMMUNITY INPUT

There was very broad support among those who participated in scoping sessions and community meetings for the Town to continue efforts to acquire and protect environmentally sensitive lands. Most felt that the '94 Plan and the Town's previous efforts to acquire lands for open space (and for park and trail development) have been very beneficial. Reasons for continuing these efforts varied. For many, the need to protect our environmentally sensitive

lands and wildlife resources were the most compelling reasons for the Town to acquire lands. For others, the benefit of acquiring lands was to prevent them from being developed. Acquiring lands to create buffers between neighborhoods and to establish open space that would offset the impacts from the ongoing redevelopment of Vail was also mentioned.

There was a noticeable emphasis in public input regarding the water quality of Gore Creek and the potential benefits of land acquisitions that could contribute to improving the health of this creek and its tributaries.

The Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT) has been the Town's primary funding source for the purchase of lands for open space or recreational purposes. There were many comments regarding RETT, ranging from a suggestion to expire the tax due to the lack of lands available for purchase, to refocusing the use of RETT funds on land purchases as opposed to maintenance and other purposes. There were a number of comments that land purchased with RETT funds should only be used for open space or park purposes. A summary of how the RETT ordinance has been amended over the years is found in the appendix.

## **ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS**

In the '94 Plan, the primary reason for the Town to acquire open lands was to protect environmentally sensitive land resources. The protection of the Gore Creek corridor and its importance as a wildlife, riparian and wetland resource and recreation amenity was also

mentioned, as were open space acquisitions that would preserve the "mountain experience and the natural character of the Vail Valley".

While these reasons provided some guidance in identifying potential parcels for acquisition, they are broadly stated and do not provide specifics with regards to what is meant by environmentally sensitive lands. Considerations below define environmentally sensitive lands:



*Wetland / Riparian area along Gore Creek.*

### **Wetland and Riparian Areas**

Wetlands and riparian areas provide flood control, filtration of storm water run-off and important habitat for a myriad of wildlife and plant species. These areas are particularly important to Gore Creek for two reasons. Gore Creek has been listed as Impaired by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment due to lack of aquatic life and the lower stretch of the creek is designated Gold Medal Water by Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The Town has responded to this situation a number of ways, most notably by the adoption of Restore the Gore, a Gore Creek Strategic Plan for

improving the health of this water course. The acquisition and protection of parcels along Gore Creek and its tributaries that could help improve water quality and benefit the aquatic health of this water course should be considered.

### **Wildlife Corridors and Habitat**

The abundance and variety of wildlife that can be seen in and around Vail are resources valued by both residents and guests. Population declines of key species such as elk, mule deer and bighorn sheep over the past two decades have been attributed to habitat fragmentation and increased trail and recreational use. Acquisition of parcels which could establish habitat connectivity, potential wildlife corridors and areas known to contain seasonal habitat for species should be considered.

### **Native Plant Habitat**

Lands that support sensitive or native plant species and other notable vegetation cover that contributes to the Town's scenic and natural qualities.

### **Geologically Sensitive Lands**

Lands that include geologically sensitive areas such as avalanche, debris flow, rockfall, steep slope and floodplain hazards.

The considerations above have been used to identify lands that if acquired and protected would further the goals of this Plan.

## EVALUATION OF UNDEVELOPED PRIVATELY-OWNED LANDS

The major focus of the '94 Plan was to identify environmentally sensitive lands and to outline strategies for the Town to acquire and protect them. A comprehensive evaluation of all undeveloped lands not owned by the Town was completed. The purpose of this evaluation was to identify specific parcels that if acquired or protected could further the goal of protecting sensitive environmental resources. This evaluation resulted in thirty parcels that were recommended for acquisition and protection.

As a part of this update process, an evaluation similar to that done in 1994 was completed for all privately-owned, undeveloped lands within the Town. The purpose of this evaluation was twofold - to identify any lands that may have been overlooked by the '94 Plan and to see if changed conditions warrant the inclusion of lands that were not addressed by the '94 Plan. One hundred and six parcels were evaluated relative to the considerations described above.

The Privately-Owned Lands/Parcels for Acquisition and/or Protection Plan on the following page depicts all undeveloped, privately owned parcels within the Town of Vail and the fifteen parcels recommended for acquisition or protection (note that privately owned also includes land owned by agencies such as the Eagle River Water and Sanitation District and the Colorado Department of Transportation).

Properties identified on the Privately-Owned Lands/Parcels for Acquisition and/or Protection Plan include parcels that:

- Are located adjacent to Gore Creek or one of its tributaries,
- Benefit wildlife habitat by providing movement corridors or other benefits,
- Are inaccessible due to terrain or ownership or where access would have negative impact on the land,
- Include steep slopes or other environmental hazards.

Not all parcels that met the parameters above are recommended for acquisition or protection. For example, a two-acre parcel in East Vail was originally recommended for acquisition or protection. After discussion with landowners (Bighorn Mutual Sanitation and Recreation Company) of their intentions to maintain the parcel as open space, it was determined by Council to not recommended this parcel for acquisition or protection.

Acquisition of parcels would involve the Town approaching the land owner to gauge their interest in selling their land to the Town. Subject to agreeing on terms, the Town would acquire the land and then take steps to ensure it is protected from development. In lieu of outright acquisition, the protection of lands could also be achieved by the Town working with land owners to protect the land from development. This could be accomplished by placing a conservation easement on the land that would restrict or limit its development. In certain cases, the conservation easement could involve compensation to the land owner for development rights that would be relinquished by

the conservation easement. Another alternative could be to work with land owners to rezone property to limit its development potential or to define no-build areas that would prevent development of environmentally sensitive portions of a parcel.

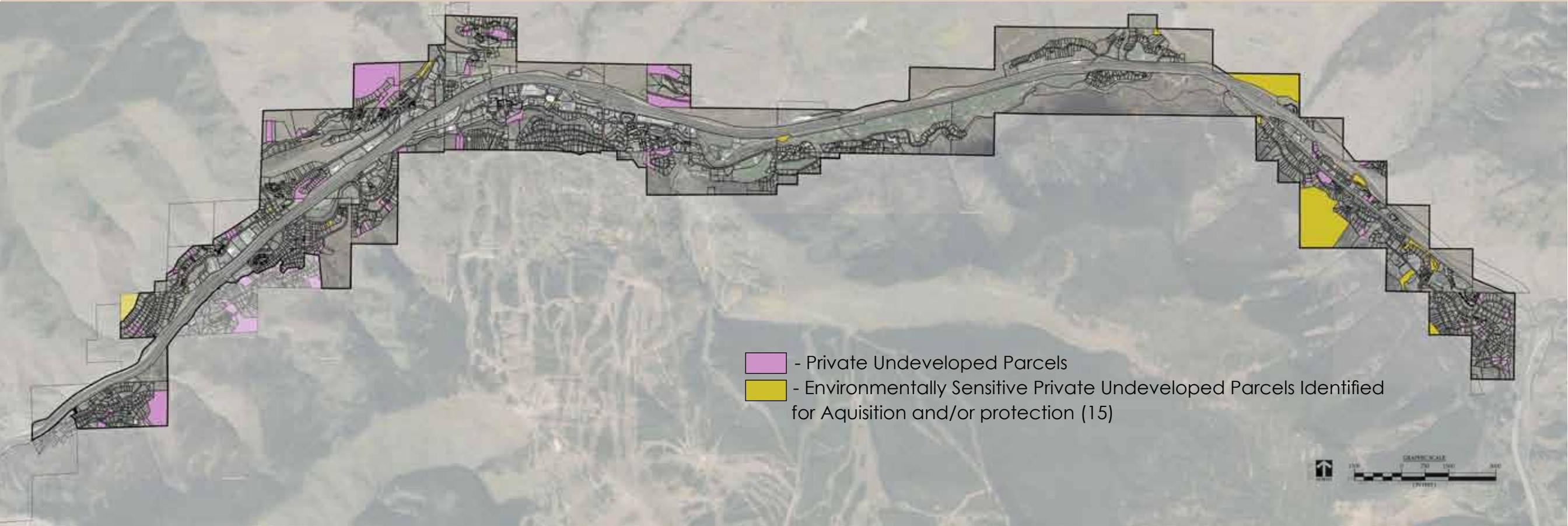


*Rockfall and steep slope hazards in the Lionsridge neighborhood.*

Each of the fifteen parcels identified for acquisition or protection are more specifically discussed in Chapter 5 - Action Plan. Information provided in Chapter 5 includes the parcel size, zoning and ownership, the benefits for acquisition and protection of the land, and recommendations for acquisition of the land or other protection strategies.

## PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS

The '94 Plan addressed the importance of the Town protecting environmentally sensitive lands from future development or changes of use.



## PRIVATELY-OWNED LANDS/PARCELS FOR ACQUISITION AND/OR PROTECTION PLAN

This was prompted in part by community input during the development of the '94 Plan:

*“one of the concerns frequently expressed at the public meetings was the need to ensure that once lands are acquired for open space, parks and trails that they be protected from conversion to other uses in the future”*

*From 1994 Open Lands Plan*

In response, the '94 Plan suggested two approaches for protecting lands – the use of conservation easements or a referendum process that would require voter approval to change the zoning and use of Town-owned lands.

### **Conservation Easements**

Conservation easements permanently protect the conservation values of land by limiting the use or development of the land. Establishing a conservation easement is the decision of the land owner and involves working in partnership with an independent land trust, such as the Eagle Valley Land Trust, which would hold the easement. The easement is legally enforceable and is recorded with the property deed. Subject to the goals of the land owner and negotiations with the land trust, an easement may allow for limited uses (such as trails or utilities) that do not compromise the conservation values of the land and may also specify management practices for the land. Once an easement is in place the land owner retains ownership of the land while the land trust is responsible for monitoring the land to ensure its use is consistent with the terms of the easement. Conservation easements

are considered to be unchangeable and establish permanent protection of the land's conservation values.

The role conservation easements can play in the Town's goals for protection of environmentally sensitive lands is discussed in Chapter 6 Implementation.

### **Referendum/Voter Approval**

A common approach for communities to protect publicly-owned lands from future development or changes of use is to zone the property so that development potential is very limited and then require a vote of the public to change such zoning. Voter approval to change zoning eliminates concerns with future councils changing the decisions of previous councils. This approach is considered to be an effective means for protecting lands but is less permanent than a conservation easement.

While a handful of conservation easements are in place on Town-owned lands, the Town Council amended the Town Charter in 1995 to establish Designated Open Space. Designated Open Space is an overlay designation that can be applied by the Town Council to any Town-owned parcel that satisfies certain criteria. The open space designation cannot be changed, nor can a parcel that has been dedicated Designated Open Space be sold, without a three-fourths vote of the Town Council and then a vote of the public. Specific procedures for Designated Open Space as prescribed by the Town Charter are found in the appendix of this Plan.

### **Community Input on the Protection of Lands**

The protection of Town-owned lands was discussed throughout this update process. This discussion focused on the need for lands to be protected

and more specifically the methods used for protection. Two common themes, or questions, were heard:

Are there additional environmentally sensitive lands owned by the Town that warrant being dedicated Designated Open Space?

While the process to change a parcel that has been dedicated Designated Open Space may be challenging, are there lands owned by the Town that warrant further protection via a conservation easement?

In response to these questions, an evaluation of Town-owned lands that could qualify to be Designated Open Space and Town-owned lands that could be considered for conservation easement protection was completed.

## **DESIGNATED OPEN SPACE LANDS**

Since 1995, the Town has applied the Designated Open Space overlay to fifty-seven Town-owned parcels that comprise 533 acres. The process for applying this designation involves a recommendation from the Open Space Board of Trustees (comprised of the Town manager, one member from the Town Council and one member from the Planning and Environmental Commission) that is presented to the Town Council. The Open Space Board of Trustees recommendation must be unanimous. A three-fourths vote of the entire Town Council is then required to apply the open space designation on a parcel of land.

To be considered for dedication as Designation Open Space, a parcel must be owned by the

Town of Vail and zoned either Natural Area Preservation, Outdoor Recreation or Agricultural Open Space. In addition, the parcel must be either:

1. Environmentally sensitive lands (wetlands, riparian areas, critical habitat identified by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, or the Natural Heritage Program);
2. High natural hazard areas including the 100-year flood plain, red avalanche hazard area, high rock fall hazard area, and high debris flow hazard area; or
3. Town of Vail parks that provide passive outdoor recreation opportunities.

A map depicting the Town's Open Space Zoned Lands, Designated Open Space, and Conservation Easements is found on the following page. This Plan depicts:

- Town-owned parcels that are Designated Open Space,
- Town-owned parcels that are zoned Natural Area Preservation, Outdoor Recreation or Agricultural Open Space but **do not** meet one of the three criteria listed above,
- Town-owned parcels that are zoned Natural Area Preservation, Outdoor Recreation or Agricultural Open Space that **do** meet one of the other three criteria, and
- Town-owned lands with a conservation easement

A total of twenty-six Town-owned parcels are appropriately zoned and satisfy one or more of the criteria pertaining to environmental sensitivity, natural hazards or passive recreation,

but are not Designated Open Space. Each of these parcels could potentially be Designated Open Space.

While Designated Open Space parcels can be changed, once a parcel is dedicated as Designated Open Space it is arguably locked up as park or open space land, due to the steps necessary to change such designation. As such, dedicating a parcel Designated Open Space should only be done after thorough consideration of all relevant factors. The Town must be certain of their commitment and understand that any future or unforeseen land needs that may arise could only be developed on designated parcels if such uses conformed to the limited range of uses permitted by these three open space zone districts.

In depth study of these twenty-six parcels is necessary in order to determine which, if any warrant being dedicated as Designated Open Space. Factors to be studied include site characteristics, zoning and potential opportunities for future Town use. This effort should be initiated by Town Staff and supported by a citizen's task force to ensure there is broad community involvement in this process.

As a part of the staff and task force efforts described above, all Town-owned lands should be evaluated to identify any parcels that are currently not zoned Natural Area Preservation, Outdoor Recreation or Agricultural Open Space, but may otherwise be appropriate for Designated Open Space. In such cases, consideration could be given to re-zoning such lands to one of the three open space districts so that they would be eligible to be Designated Open Space. The Designated Open Space process as outlined in the Town Charter should also be evaluated to determine if changes could be made to



A conservation easement has been established on the Town's waterfall parcel in East Vail.

Potato Patch

Matchline

Main Vail Interchange

West Vail Interchange

Intermountain

Matchline

Booth Falls

East Vail Interchange

Ford Park

### Legend

- Zoned OR, NAP or AOS, not currently eligible
- Zoned OR, NAP or AOS, eligible for Designated Open Space Overlay
- Zoned OR, NAP or AOS and has Designated Open Space Overlay
- Conservation Easement

# OPEN SPACE ZONED LANDS DESIGNATED OPEN SPACE AND CONSERVATION EASEMENTS



increase the flexibility of how Designated Open Space can be established. Such decisions would ultimately be made by the Town Council after recommendation from the staff and task force.

Refer to Chapter 6 – Implementation for more information.

## CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

The Town's Designated Open Space process provides very strong assurances that designated lands will be protected by limiting uses and preventing the sale of such lands. It is very difficult to change Designated Open Space once it has been established. That said, community input has suggested the use of conservation easements to provide stronger protection of the Town's open spaces.

Conservation easements are held in perpetuity by a land trust which in essence means the land is protected forever. Conservation easements are widely considered the most effective means of protecting lands from development or changes in use that could otherwise affect the conservation values of the land.

The benefit of applying a conservation easement to Town-owned land is that the land would be protected in perpetuity, and in doing so would provide lasting protection of environmentally sensitive lands or lands with other characteristics that are valued by the community for preservation. The potential detriment of applying a conservation easement to Town-owned land is that the Town would be committing to limitations on the use of such lands and giving up the control of the land to the land trust. A conservation easement would

limit land uses and in doing so limit the Town's flexibility in using land to meet future, unforeseen land needs.

In response to community sentiment and the value held by many for the importance of the Town to protect key open space parcels in perpetuity, the task force efforts described above should also include the evaluation of Town-owned lands that may warrant protection by a conservation easement. Establishing an additional layer of protection afforded by a conservation easement may be beneficial on lands that could otherwise have some level of development potential or where unique site characteristics may warrant additional protection. The key questions when considering the implementation of a conservation easement is whether the value of the land as open space is such that it should always and forever be protected and maintained as open space and whether the Town is prepared to relinquish control of the land to a third party. By placing a conservation easement on Town-owned land, the Town would be making a statement about its commitment to the environment and leaving a legacy of conservation for future generations.

The Town Council has the authority to establish easements on Town-owned lands and this authority includes conservation easements. If the Town Council initiates a staff/task force effort to study conservation easements, it is anticipated that this will involve a comprehensive evaluation of the pros and cons of conservation easements, identification of parcels that may be appropriate for protection by a conservation easement and recommendations on a formal process for establishing such easements.

## Town Parcels to Consider for Conservation Easement

The four areas of Town described below are dedicated as Designated Open Space and each provides open space that is highly valued by the community for the scenic qualities, neighborhood buffers or sensitive lands they contain. These parcels are suggested for further evaluation to understand the potential benefits of protecting these lands with a conservation easement. This evaluation should also consider other Town-owned parcels that may warrant protection by a conservation easement.



### Gore Creek Corridor

The Town owns the majority of the Gore Creek corridor between Ford Park and Donovan Park. These parcels total approximately 37 acres and approximately half of these parcels are Designated Open Space. These parcels include Gore Creek and associated floodplain, wetlands and riparian areas. With the exception of trails or passive recreation improvements such as benches, these parcels are not buildable. Establishing a conservation easement on these lands would be a strong statement as to the

importance of Gore Creeks' aquatic health. Any conservation easement would need to acknowledge the limited existing (and future) improvements such as trails, bridges, utilities and drainage improvements, etc.



### **Katsos Ranch**

The 144 acre Katsos Ranch is arguably Vail's most renowned open space parcel. The land includes wetlands, Gore Creek and associated floodplain and riparian habitat, high and moderate severity debris flow, high severity rock fall and avalanche hazards. For many years a peregrine falcon nest has been located on rock outcrops several hundred feet above and adjacent to this parcel. The site provides an important buffer between East Vail and the Aspen Lane neighborhood and coupled with its scenic qualities and environmentally sensitive features, this parcel warrants consideration for a conservation easement. If a conservation easement is pursued, reserved rights for trails and the Memorial Garden should be retained.



### **Booth Falls Parcels**

Two parcels located around the Booth Falls neighborhood are both zoned Natural Area Preservation. The easterly parcel is 30.2 acres and is impacted by steep slopes and high severity rockfall hazard. The westerly parcel is 93 acres and is impacted by debris flow hazards. Both parcels are considered critical bighorn sheep range/habitat. The bighorn sheep habitat on these parcels make them unique and this warrants consideration of a conservation easement. If a conservation easement is pursued, reserved rights for trails and maintenance of rockfall mitigation should be established.



### **Upper Bench of Donovan Park**

The +/-35 acre Upper Bench parcel is zoned Outdoor Recreation and was purchased with RETT funds. The parcel is impacted by high hazard debris flow and steep slopes. The parcel provides an open space buffer within the Matterhorn neighborhood. The property has good access and subject to mitigation of hazards, could have development potential and for this reason this parcel warrants consideration of a conservation easement. If a conservation easement is pursued, rights should be reserved for trails, passive recreation use and temporary uses such as staging areas for timber removal.



# CHAPTER 3 - TOWN-OWNED LANDS AND USE OF LANDS

One of the five objectives of the '94 Plan was to:

*“Identify a comprehensive system of open space uses such as parks, recreation, protection of environmental resources, trails and to reserve lands for public use”*

One of the stated purposes of the '94 Plan was to “create a small amount of contingency land for unforeseen needs (e.g. employee housing, public facilities)” and an objective of the Plan was to “identify, to the extent possible, future public needs (or needs not currently being met) that will require land”. The Action Plan included recommendations for the use or acquisition of “parcels intended for other community needs such as an additional fire station”.

The '94 Plan identified five Town of Vail issues and needs for community-oriented projects that would require land:

1. Expansion of the Public Works facility
2. New West Vail Fire Station
3. Vail Police Department firing range
4. Expanded play areas at Red Sandstone Elementary School
5. Workforce housing projects at Vail Commons and the Mountain Bell site

With the exception of the Police Department firing range, each of the projects listed above have been implemented. The Public Works expansion and the Chamonix housing project are located on land that was identified for acquisition by the '94 Action Plan.

The '94 Plan also provided recommendations for the use of eight Town-owned parcels. Three of these recommendations involved the development of workforce housing on the Vail Commons parcel, on four lots located on Garmish Drive and on the Mountain Bell site. Each of these recommendations has been implemented. While the Berry Creek parcel located in Edwards was ultimately sold to Eagle County, the Plan's recommendations for recreational and housing development on this parcel have been implemented by others.

The purpose of this chapter is to understand the Town's land resources and how they can address the Town's future land needs. Below is a summary of community input on the use of Town-owned lands and the need for new or expanded community facilities. An evaluation of whether Town-owned lands can accommodate future community-oriented uses, input from Town staff on the need for new or expanded community facilities and an evaluation of all vacant, privately-owned land that could potentially address future public needs is also provided.

## **COMMUNITY INPUT ON THE USE OF TOWN LANDS**

A variety of opinions were expressed by the community regarding Town facilities, the need for expanded or new facilities, the use of Town-owned lands and if or under what circumstances the Town should acquire land for public facilities and community-oriented uses.

As a relatively mature community, Vail operates a wide variety of public facilities and there was a general level of satisfaction with facilities provided by the Town and how they are managed. By way of example, during the preparation of the '94 Plan there was considerable community support for the development of additional neighborhood parks and the '94 Plan identified a number of park improvements. Likely due to the development of Donovan Park, Sunbird Park, Booth Creek Park, Ellefson Park and major improvements to other Town parks since 1994, there were no comments or requests to expand the Town's park facilities during this update process.

The circumstances under which the Town should pursue the acquisition of land for public facilities or community-oriented uses prompted many diverse opinions. There was a preponderance of opinions that land acquisitions should first and foremost be to acquire land for open space to protect environmentally sensitive lands and that any parcel acquired for community uses should only occur if that parcel does not have environmental values that should be protected.

There were also divergent opinions on what constitutes a public facility or a community-oriented use. Many felt that workforce housing is neither a public facility nor a community-oriented use. By the same token, many others felt that workforce housing is a valid community-oriented use, that projects like the Chamonix development are beneficial and that it is appropriate for this Plan to identify lands that may be suitable for housing development. Of those in support of Town-initiated housing

projects, there was a preference that they be on land that is zoned for development, is located within an established neighborhood and is proximate to public transit.

A Policy Statement from the Vail Housing 2027 Plan establishes the Town's position that workforce housing is critical to maintaining Vail's sense of community.

*"We acknowledge that the acquisition of deed restrictions on homes for Vail residents is critical to maintaining community. Therefore, we ensure an adequate supply and availability of homes for residents and recognize housing as infrastructure in the Town of Vail; a community support system not unlike roads, bridges, water and sewer systems, fire, police, and other services of the municipal government."*

*Policy Statement on Residential Housing as Infrastructure - Vail Housing 2027*

While a wide spectrum of comments were heard, written comments provided by the community were near evenly split as to whether the Open Lands Plan should address housing with 38% of comments in support and 41% opposed.

## OVERVIEW OF TOWN-OWNED LANDS

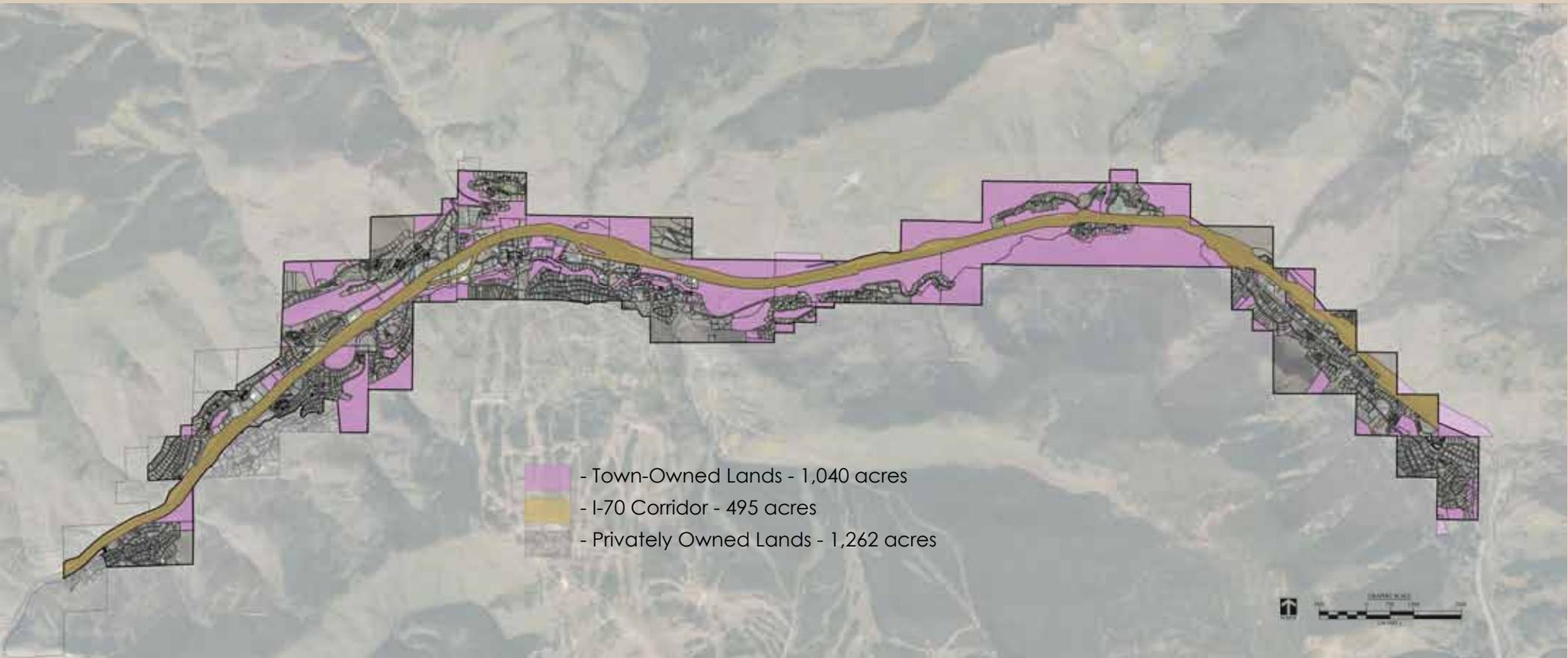
There are approximately 2,904 acres of land located within the Town's boundary and the Town of Vail owns 161 parcels that total 1,040 acres, or 35.8% of all land within the Town. Rights-of-way for Interstate 70 and the Frontage Roads comprise approximately 495 acres and approximately 1,262 acres of land are privately-owned or owned by other governmental entities. With the exception of the Highland Meadows subdivision, all lands immediately surrounding the Town's boundary are owned by the

United States Forest Service. A plan depicting Town-owned lands is found on the following page.

The Town of Vail has three open space-oriented zone districts – the Agricultural and Open Space District, the Outdoor Recreation District and the Natural Area Preservation District. While the purpose of the Agricultural and Open Space District and Outdoor Recreation District is to preserve open space lands, these districts allow for a limited range of land uses. The Natural Area Preservation District is intended to protect sensitive lands from development and land uses in this district are very limited. 758 acres, or 72.8% of all Town-owned lands are zoned one of these three open space districts. The 57 Town-owned parcels that are Designated Open Space total 533 acres.



Ford Park athletic fields.



## TOWN OF VAIL OWNED LANDS AND I-70 R.O.W. LANDS

## LAND NEEDS FOR PUBLIC USES AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

While there were suggestions from the community for expanding the supply of public parking, the development of more workforce housing, the development of conference performing art and recreation centers and a disc golf course, there was no single use that generated a significant number of requests from the community.

Town department directors were consulted for their input on the need for new or additional facilities. The Fire Department is interested in a one-acre site for a training facility. The Human Resources Department supported workforce housing to assist in recruitment and retention of employees. The Public Works Department would like to expand the existing snow dump, establish a solar farm and increase public parking, and the Economic Development Department supports the development of conference facilities, a theater and other event areas.

The feasibility of conference, performing art and recreation centers has been discussed and studied over the past few decades. Original plans for Ford Park included an aquatics/recreation center and on more than one occasion a convention center has been proposed, most recently at the east end of the Lionshead Parking Structure. For various reasons none of these facilities have been constructed. The development of additional public parking has been a priority of the Town for many years. A lack of available land and

the cost to construct parking are the two primary challenges to developing additional parking.

## EVALUATION OF TOWN-OWNED LANDS

All 161 Town-owned parcels were evaluated to determine if any of these parcels can accommodate the Town's future needs for public or community-oriented facilities. A fundamental assumption in this evaluation was that existing uses will be maintained and no existing uses would be displaced in order to accommodate other uses.

The initial step in this evaluation considered the existing use and site characteristics of all Town-owned lands. Lands that are currently used for other purposes and lands with site characteristics that would preclude their development were eliminated from consideration. Lands were categorized one of four ways - developed lands such as the Vail Municipal Building, park and recreational lands such as Ford Park and the Vail Golf Club, environmentally constrained lands, and Designated Open Space parcels and conservation easement lands.

After eliminating parcels from the four categories listed above, only eight Town-owned parcels remained. These eight parcels were evaluated based on size, terrain and site characteristics, site context and relationship with surrounding lands, access and covenants restrictions. These eight parcels include:

**Parcel #1** - Commonly referred to as the Middle Bench of Donovan Park, this 2.1 acre parcel is zoned Agricultural and Open Space and is located on Matterhorn Circle in the Matterhorn neighborhood. Based on site characteristics such as terrain and

access, this parcel is considered buildable. However, this parcel was purchased with RETT funds and as such land uses are currently limited to parks, recreation, open space and similar purposes. The Town Council has by resolution designated this parcel as a "park".

**Parcel #2** – This 3.1 acre parcel located in the Glen Lyon neighborhood is zoned Special Development District. While the parcel is buildable based on site characteristics, use of the parcel is restricted by protective covenants.

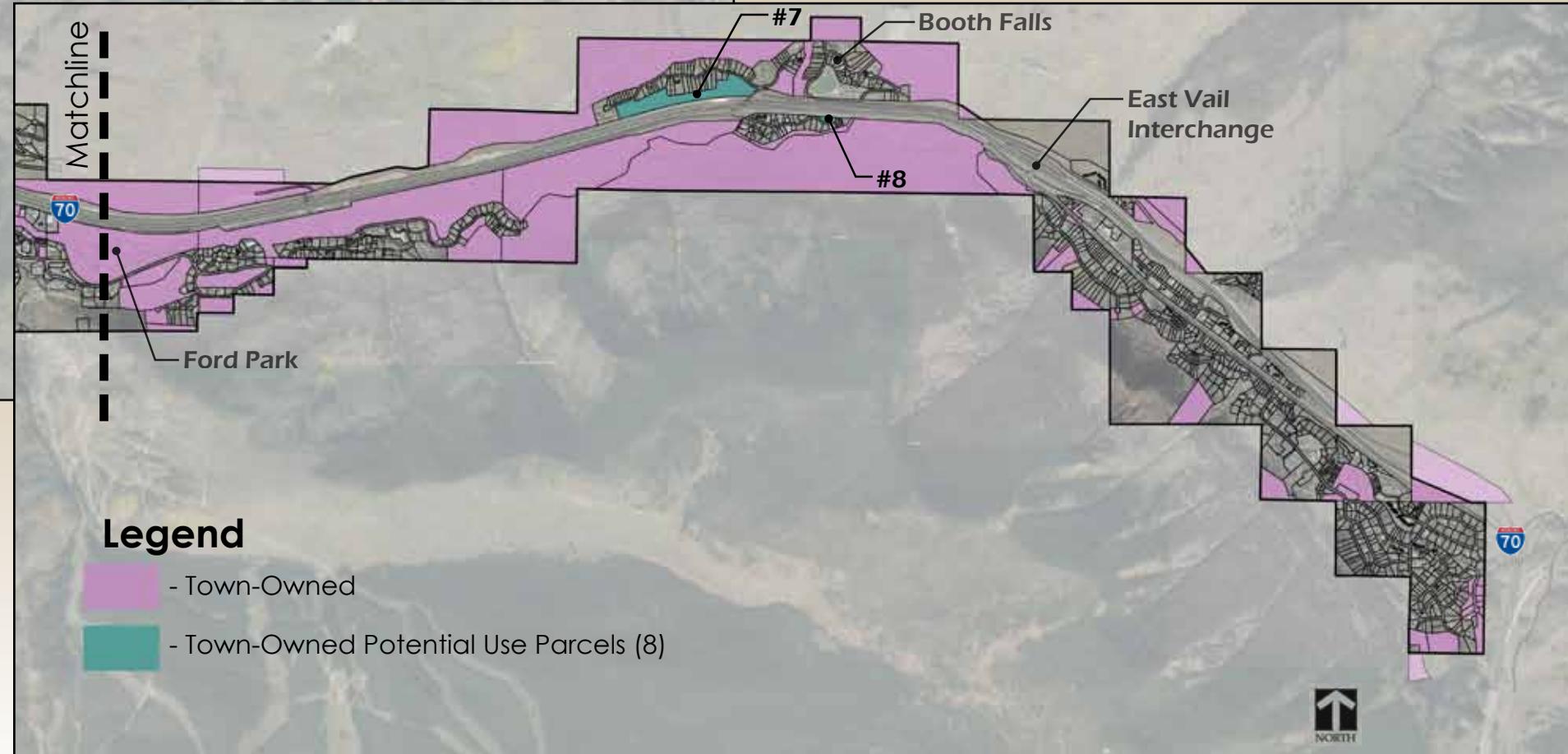
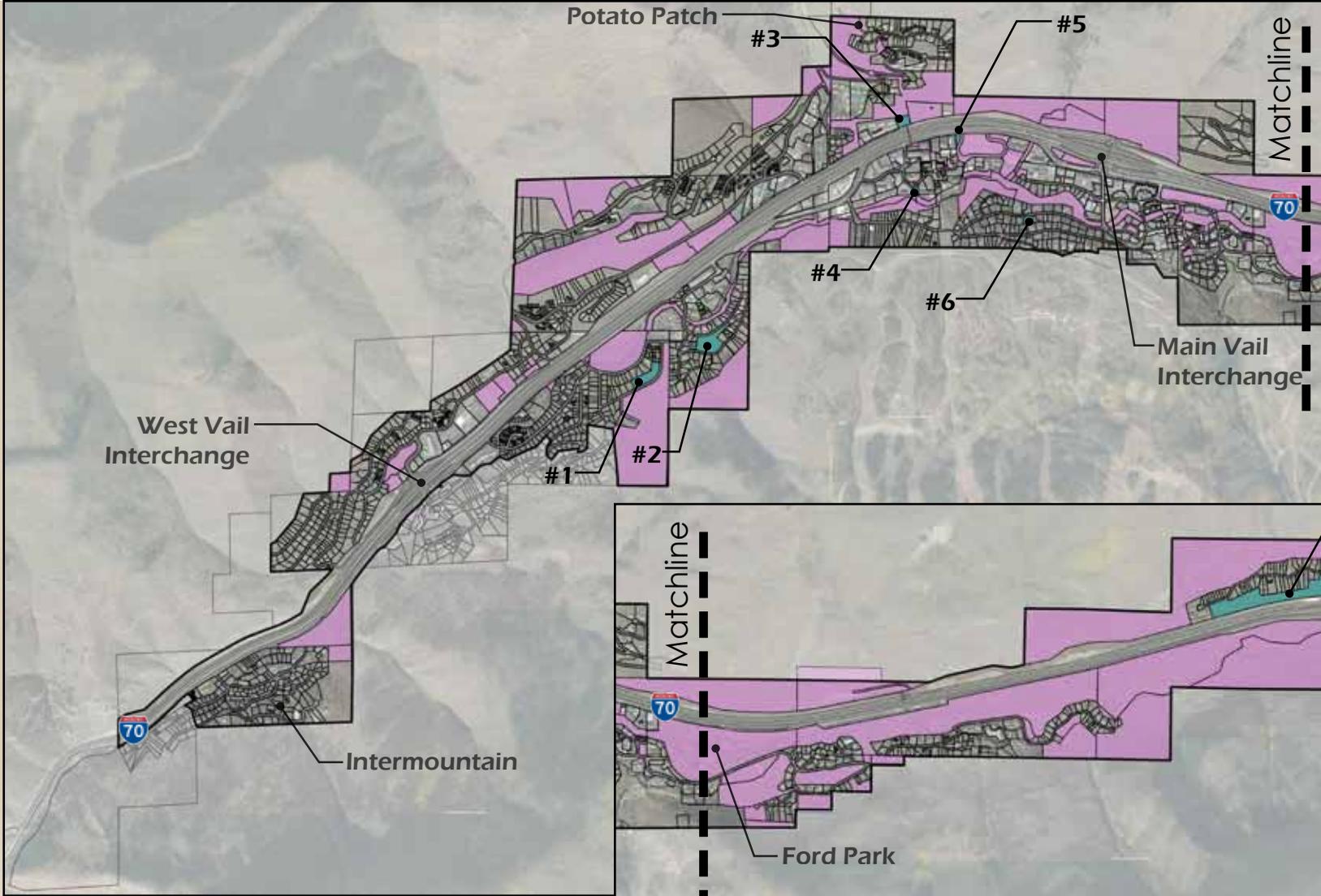
**Parcel #3** – This 1 acre parcel is located at the north portal of the I-70 pedestrian bridge. Use of the parcel is restricted by protective covenants

**Parcel #4** – This .3 acre parcel is zoned Lionshead Mixed Use 1 and currently provides a pedestrian connection between Lionshead Place and the Gore Creek bike path. Use of the parcel is also restricted by protective covenants.

**Parcel #5** – This .3 acre parcel located along East Lionshead Circle is zoned General Use. The size of this parcel limits its development potential.

**Parcel #6** – This .5 acre parcel located on Beaver Dam Road is zoned Natural Area Preservation. The presence of wetlands would render this site to be unbuildable.

**Parcel #7** – This 13 acre parcel is located along Bald Mountain Road. It is zoned Outdoor Recreation and the use of the parcel is restricted by protective covenants.



# EVALUATION OF TOWN-OWNED LANDS

**Parcel #8** – This .3 acre parcel is located between the I-70 corridor and Booth Creek Road. The size of this parcel limits its development potential.

Due to parcel size, access constraints, and restrictions due to covenants or land being purchased with RETT funds, none of these eight parcels are currently viable for the development of public uses or community-oriented facilities.

While the Town does not currently own vacant land capable of accommodating new uses, some Town-owned parcels that are currently developed may be capable of accommodating new or expanded uses. An example of this is the shared parking structure with Eagle County Schools, planned for Red Sandstone Elementary. Other examples could include the Public Works Facility, the Vail Municipal Building and the east end of the Lionshead Parking Structure. The Town owns additional lands adjacent to the Public Works facility that could accommodate expansion of the existing snow dump. The east end of the Lionshead Parking Structure has been studied multiple times for the potential development of a conference facility.



*Development at the East end of Lionshead Parking Structure has been studied in the past.*

In 2005 voters rejected a second tax increase to fund a Conference Center. The redevelopment of the Municipal Building has been studied for concepts that included additional community uses. Each of these possibilities would require additional study to fully understand the feasibility of accommodating other uses.

## EVALUATION OF PRIVATELY-OWNED LANDS

The '94 Plan recommended a number of vacant, privately owned parcels to be acquired for the future development of public facilities and community-oriented uses. Examples of these are land acquired from Vail Resorts for expansion of the Public Works facility and land in West Vail that now includes the Chamonix work force housing project. Currently there are approximately 106 privately owned, undeveloped parcels in the Town of Vail. Each of these parcels was evaluated to understand if any could potentially accommodate public facilities and community-oriented uses.

Evaluation of these lands considered parcel size, existing zoning, site characteristics, the context of the site, covenant restrictions and its relationship to surrounding uses. The majority of these 106 parcels were deemed to not be viable for Town use for these reasons:

- Over half of the 106 parcels evaluated were isolated, low density zoned parcels in established neighborhoods. These were considered to most appropriately be developed in accordance with existing zoning,
- Environmentally sensitive parcels were not considered viable development sites (these

parcels are addressed in Chapter 2 – Environmentally Sensitive Lands),

- Parcel size, site context and covenant restrictions limited the viability of many sites.

Remaining parcels were then considered relative to their ability to potentially accommodate the broad list of public facilities and community-oriented uses suggested by the community and Town staff. Due to parcel locations, site context and the land area requirements, none of the remaining parcels are feasible for the development of parking, conference, performing arts or recreation. There are four sites that could potentially accommodate workforce housing, one of which could accommodate expansion to a town park.



### West Vail Parcels along Chamonix Lane

If assembled, these three contiguous parcels could accommodate a small housing development. These parcels are zoned Two-Family Primary/Secondary Residential and located next to multi-family and commercial

development. While the parcels total 1.59 acres, development potential will be limited as over half the land area exceeds 40% slope. Refer to Action Item #4 in Chapter 5.



### **Old Roost Lodge**

This 1.9 acre site previously accommodated the Roost Lodge. The site is now vacant and development approvals have been granted for a hotel/workforce housing development. If the approved development does not proceed, the site could be viable for the development of a workforce housing project or other community use. Refer to Action Item #7 in Chapter 5.



### **CDOT/Bighorn Parcel**

This 1.8 acre site is owned by CDOT. The primary purpose of this acquisition is to protect the Bighorn Creek corridor. Limited residential development may also be feasible.

Development on both sides of Bighorn Creek may be feasible but in all cases ample setbacks from the creek should be maintained and impacts to mature spruce trees west of the creek should be minimized. Refer to Action Item #23 in Chapter 5.



### **Talisa Tennis Courts**

Tennis courts for the Talisa Hotel are located on this 3 acre site. The site is located immediately adjacent to Donovan Park. If in the future the hotel is interested disposal of this land, the Town could consider acquisition for a low to medium density workforce housing. The design of a housing project must be sensitive to the Gore Valley Trail and the Gore Creek corridor. Refer to Action Item #9 in Chapter 5.

## **MANAGEMENT OF VAIL'S OPEN LANDS**

The '94 Plan included two approaches for the management of open lands. The first was to establish a cooperative management system with both the USFS and Vail Resorts. The second was to develop a management system to provide appropriate stewardship and maintenance for the Town's open lands. These concepts remain valid today. Community input during this update process echoed these concepts. Suggestions involved managing lands to promote biodiversity, attending to routine maintenance such as weed control and managing

erosion or other issues and maintaining trails to ensure they remain sustainable. Below are management actions for open lands to be addressed by the Town. A number of these steps involve follow-up actions or the preparation of plans that will be completed after the adoption of this Plan. Some of these tasks are further discussed in Chapter 6 – Implementation.

### **Periodic Maintenance of Open Lands**

All open lands will need periodic inspection and routine maintenance. Maintenance actions may include, but not be limited to, vegetation management and weed control, cleaning of litter or debris, resolving any erosion or drainage issues and repair or replace any improvements such as signs or seating. Town staff should establish seasonal inspections of all open lands to identify any maintenance needs. Appropriate staff and budget should be established to implement this management program.

### **Wildfire and Safety Considerations**

The Vail Fire & Emergency Services is involved in ongoing efforts to manage vegetation to minimize the potential threat of wildfire in and around Vail. Wildfires do not recognize Town or property boundaries and the Department's mitigation efforts are not limited to Town-owned lands. That said, any decisions regarding management of the Town's open lands should be coordinated with the Department's wildfire mitigation efforts.

Any new recreation trails, whether located on Town land or on USFS lands, should also involve coordination with Vail Fire and

Emergency Services. Considerations to be addressed include emergency provider access to trails and mitigation of hazards that may be presented by standing-dead lodgepole located proximate to any new trails.

### **Managing Lands for Biodiversity**

At its most basic level, biodiversity refers to the variety of plant and animal species found in a particular habitat. All plant and animal life is interconnected and ultimately dependent on one another. A habitat with healthy, diverse and vibrant biodiversity is essential to how an ecosystem functions with respect to cycling of nutrients and water, soil formation and retention, resistance to invasive species and the pollination of plants. Healthy biodiversity will benefit plant and animal life. The protection and preservation of the natural environment and wildlife resources of Vail's open space lands is a high priority of the community. The Town's open space lands could benefit from management programs designed to improve biodiversity.

*“Biodiversity as a whole forms a shield protecting each of the species that together compose it, ourselves included.”*

— E.O. Wilson

During the preparation of the '94 Plan the Town engaged the Colorado Nature Heritage Program to complete a Natural Heritage Inventory of the Town of Vail. The goal of this study was to identify “the localities of rare, threatened, or endangered

species and the locations of significant natural communities.” This effort evaluated thirteen parcels in and around Vail and the findings of this inventory provided a basis for some of the recommended Action Items in the '94 Plan.

While the '94 Plan provided valuable information on the natural resources found on open lands in and around Vail, a current evaluation or inventory of existing conditions and the relative health of these resources should be completed as a first step to preparing a management plan for Town open spaces. Understanding the natural landscape and vegetation, habitat sub-types, hydrologic systems, wildlife resources and other characteristics found on these lands is critical to establishing a “baseline” of existing conditions. This effort should be completed by an ecological-oriented consulting firm and the scope of this effort may include land beyond Town Boundaries and include lands not owned by the Town. Chapter 4 – Trails, stipulates that prior to any new trail development, a comprehensive environmental and wildlife analysis be completed to understand potential impacts from trails. The inventory described above should be coordinated with the evaluation of new trail development.

Establishing a baseline of existing conditions will be useful for two reasons. Understanding existing conditions may identify the need to implement programs to enhance these natural resources. The baseline will also provide a valuable point of reference for the ongoing monitoring of these lands. The identification of potential habitat enhancements and a defined, systematic program for the monitoring of town open spaces should be elements of this effort.

The Vail community values the protection and preservation of environmental resources on the Town's open space lands. The community also values the recreational uses that occur on these lands. How open space lands are managed and the level of human activity they experience will directly affect biodiversity. Decisions on how these lands are managed and used should be made to balance these two community priorities. Recommendations for the management and use of open space lands should also be an element of this effort.

# CHAPTER 4 -TRAILS



Improving the trail and bike path system in and around Vail was listed as one of the top three priorities of the '94 Plan for open space and recreation needs and four of the five top "priorities for action" involved improvements to the Town's recreational trails and paths. These four improvements from the '94 Plan included:

- Extend the Vail Trail to East Vail and add several trailheads to access the trail,
- Add a new trail on the north side and western half of Town to connect existing trailheads and neighborhoods,
- Add three trailheads in the core area to access Vail Mountain trails and inform visitors of trail opportunities and provide better access to Gore Creek,
- Add bike lanes to the north and south frontage roads (the entire length of Town) and add paved shoulders to Vail Valley Drive.

Of these five priority improvements, the North Trail has been constructed and bike lanes along the North and South Frontage Roads have been completed. The '94 Plan included a total of twenty-four other trail system improvements. Many of these improvements have been addressed, most notable among them are wayfinding and trailhead signage and new or improved trailheads at the Buffehr Creek, Davos, Middle Creek and Booth Falls trails.

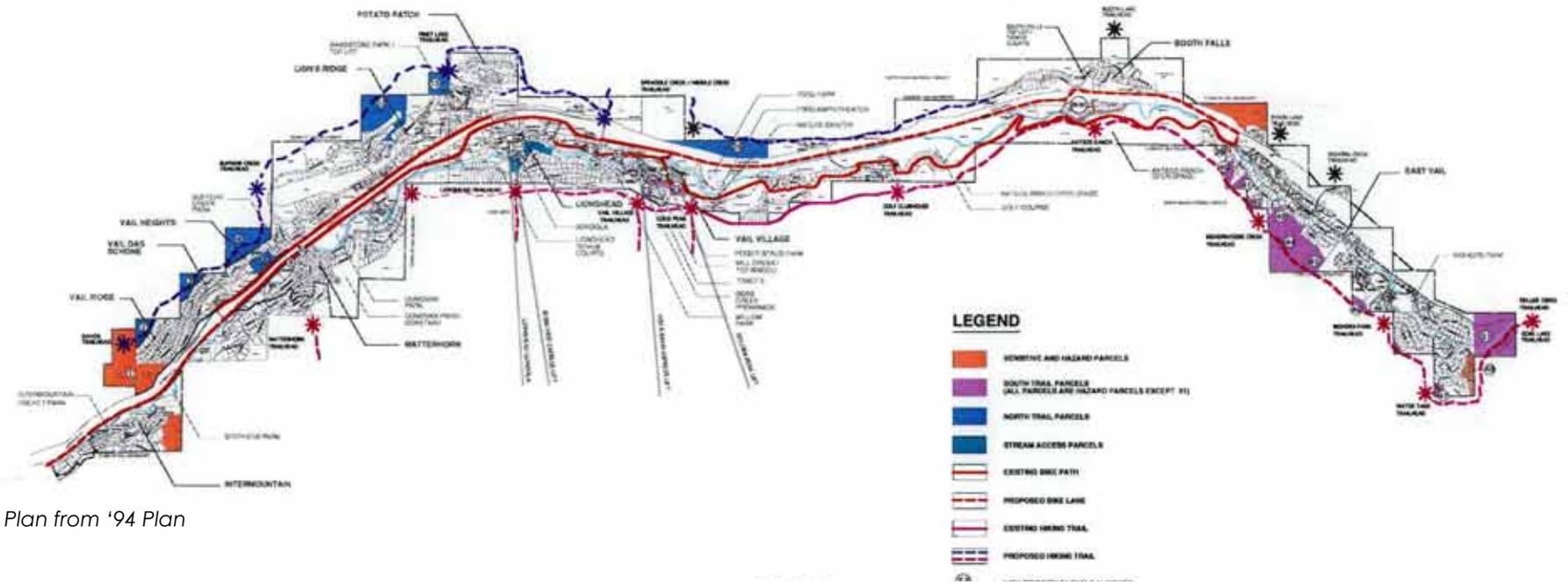
The '94 Plan included a Trails Plan that identified specific improvements to Vail's trail system and a Concept Plan. The Concept Plan was diagrammatic in nature and included the idea of a soft surface trail system that looped the perimeter of Town to provide connections between all of Vail's neighborhoods. This concept was compared to trail systems in the Alps where interconnected trails allow hikers to access surrounding villages. The Trails Plan and Concept Plan from the '94 Plan are found on the following pages.

Trails were a significant element of the '94 Plan. In some cases, however, the '94 Plan lacked detail on future trail development with respect to the purpose for new trails, design standards or user groups to be served by the trails. One of the objectives of this update is to provide more clarity with respect to Vail's vision for recreation trails.

This chapter includes a summary of community input and a broad vision statement for Vail's trail system. Existing trails, including unofficial or social trails were inventoried, trail use on key trails was measured and an overall assessment of Vail's existing trail system has been completed. A conceptual trails plan provides ideas for new trails that could be developed in the future and a process for evaluating and making decision on new trail development is also provided.



**SECURITY PLAN**  
**Comprehensive Open Lands Plan**  
 TOWN OF VAIL VAIL, COLORADO



Trails Plan from '94 Plan

ACTION PLAN

## COMMUNITY INPUT ON TRAILS

Recreational trails were a focal point of discussion at community meetings held during this update process. Input was obtained during scoping sessions, community meetings, small group trail meetings and a Town-wide trails workshop.

### Scoping Sessions and Community Meetings

Wide spread support and appreciation for Vail's trail system and for surrounding regional trails was expressed by the community. When asked "do you see trails providing a benefit to the community" during the Scoping Sessions, the overwhelming majority of respondents answered "yes". Trails are viewed as an important resource for living a healthy and active lifestyle, for providing alternative modes of transportation and for contributing to Vail's tourism-based economy. The need for trail maintenance, improved signage, expanded parking at trailheads and trail management to address user conflicts were also cited. A summary of community input on trails is found in the appendix.

The community was divided on the need for expansion of the existing trail system. While many thought Vail's system of trails was sufficient and the expansion of trails was not necessary, many others saw potential benefits from the development of new trails. In written community feedback obtained during the Scoping Sessions, when asked "what steps could be taken to improve the Town's existing trail system" a majority of those who responded were in support of more trails. When asked about the Concept Plan idea of a trail system linking Vail neighborhoods from the '94 Plan, a

clear majority of those who responded thought this was a good idea. Notwithstanding the input above, there was a clear consensus that if any new trails are developed, that they be designed and constructed in a sensitive and sustainable manner and that any new trails not result in adverse impacts on the natural environment or wildlife resources. Impacts on wildlife that may result from the use of trails was clearly a community concern and in response a Wildlife Forum was held during the preparation of this Plan. The forum included four wildlife biologists and discussion focused on the state of wildlife resources in the Gore Creek Valley and how human activity affects wildlife. Information from the wildlife forum and the importance of wildlife considerations being an integral part of any discussion on future recreation trail development is further addressed in this chapter.

Community input on trails was diverse and whether expressed by trail proponents or those not interested in new trail development, opinions about trails were conveyed with great passion. Community input from these meetings highlighted the complexity and challenges associated with defining community goals for trails. In response, the SE Group, a consulting firm with expertise in trail design and planning was engaged to facilitate additional community involvement, to evaluate Vail's existing trail system, to identify social trails, to define a broad vision for Vail's trails and develop a conceptual trails plan.

**Comments below were made during the community input process and are representative of the wide range of perspectives on trails:**

*"Vail can't be all things to all people"*

*"Vail should be a mountain biking mecca"*

*"Build a loop trail around the valley for world-class connectivity"*

*"Make the Vail Trail hiking-only"*

*"We have an amazing place - let's work with our existing trails with better signage and maintenance"*

*"Natural trails as Vail's signature"*

*"Vail may not be a trails destination but we need a trails update to meet existing demand"*

*"Vail should be a place where kids can ride a bike safely"*

## SMALL GROUP MEETINGS ON TRAILS

Five small group meetings were held to discuss the Town's recreational trail system. The purpose of these meetings was to bring divergent opinions together in small group settings to explore in greater detail issues and opportunities with trails. The goal of these meetings was to find common ground for how the Town's trail system can be improved. Approximately 25 people participated in these

meetings. Below are five themes with respect to trails that were drawn from these discussions along with notable comments from these meetings:

### **Safety**

- Work to minimize user conflict through signage and education
- Safety concerns for all users in certain areas of Town especially in the roundabout
- Complete paved trails segments where possible to provide more off-roadway opportunities (for example, Vail Mountain School to the East Vail Interchange)
- Prepare for the increasing prevalence of electric assisted bikes or e-bike riders
- Improve wayfinding

### **Sustainability**

- Limited trail expansion and coordinate with neighboring communities instead of duplicating all trail types. “We can’t be all things, to all people”
- Wildlife concerns – ensure protection of important habitats and wildlife populations
- Make improvements to existing trails to make them more sustainable to reduce maintenance costs and preserve the environment
- Repair, improve, adopt and better utilize existing trails and connections before building new trails
- Consider maintenance options such as volunteer groups, youth corps and trail maintenance crews
- Vail’s trails should continue to provide a nature experience for locals and guests

### **Accessibility**

- It is difficult to follow the Gore Valley Trail especially through East Vail (need better

signage or icon to follow)

- A soft surface trail parallel to Gore Valley Trail could function as a commuting route for locals and a beginner trail for guests (some oppose parallel trails).
- Overcrowding on existing soft surface trails (especially Booth Falls trail) is an existing concern – can these users be dispersed to other trails?
- Improve public access to trail information and push it to hotels and businesses – maps, online information, etc. which could help disperse hikers and bikers
- The adoption of social trails could alleviate congestion on existing trails
- Bus service and connector paths to trailheads could make trails accessible without a vehicle

### **Diversity**

- Reduce user conflict by providing a variety of trail types
- Protect the existing Vail Trail as a small footprint, meandering, hiking trail and provide other similar trail types where possible
- Provide beginner to intermediate mountain biking trails
- Provide easier walking trails for children, elderly, and inexperienced hikers
- Vail’s topography is challenging for trail diversity
- Currently other jurisdictions provide a wider range of trail opportunities (particularly for mountain biking)
- Consider other trail activities when developing trails such as fat bikes, e-bikes, snowshoes, etc
- A pump track and beginner loop in Town could provide mountain biking experience for children

### **Connectivity**

- Improve connectivity of both hard and soft surface trails
- Additional connector trails to Forest Service trails may help mitigate trailhead parking problems

- Additional short connector trails between neighborhoods (making it easier for kids to ride to school or a friend’s house)
- Convenient neighborhood access points for hiking, biking, and local trips
- Improve connectivity to Vail Resorts’ trails
- Build a trail connecting Vail to nearby Towns (i.e. Minturn and Avon)

## **TRAILS COMMUNITY WORKSHOP**

A trails specific workshop was held to continue the community’s conversation about trails. The workshop was an open house format and was attended by approximately 40 people. Information presented included an overview of the planning and approval process for trails, the five trail themes that came out of the small group meetings, an inventory of user-created social trails, trail usage on both social and sanctioned trails, and design considerations for trails. A Conceptual Trails Plan identifying possible ideas for new trail segments was also presented and additional trail ideas were identified by community members during the workshop.



*Interaction during the trails specific community workshop.*

## A VISION FOR VAIL'S TRAILS

Based on input from the community throughout this update process, the vision for Vail's system of trails and pathways is:

**A system of paved and soft-surface trails that is safe for all users. Through best practices in design, signage and education, trail users with diverse needs and ability levels can safely recreate on trails in the Vail area. Educational and informational programs with an emphasis on safety, awareness and respect for others are provided to trail users.**

**Trails are maintained to meet the highest standards for sustainability. Managing existing trails to maintain high standards takes priority over expanding the trail network.**

**All trails are designed and constructed to respect and protect sensitive wildlife habitat and terrain while providing opportunities for both residents and visitors to connect with and experience nature.**

**A variety of soft and hard-surface trails of varying difficulty levels are available to provide accessibility to all user groups.**

**Connectivity is key. Trails provide safe, non-vehicular connections between neighborhoods and important destinations in Town. Proper signage will make trails easy to find and follow.**

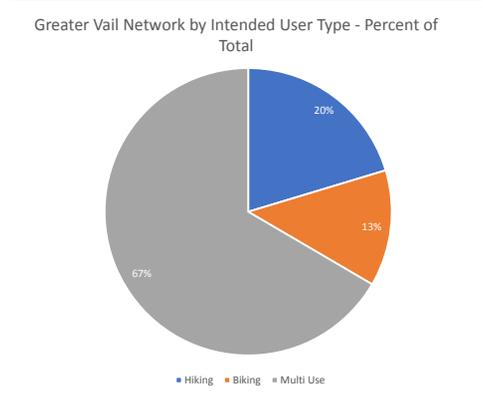
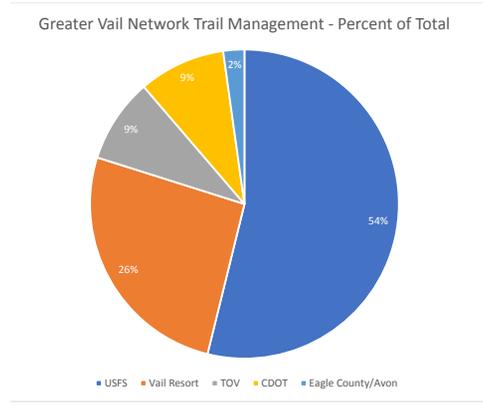
**Trails in the Vail area are planned in concert with trails in the surrounding area. Continued collaboration with neighboring towns, Eagle County, and the USFS is essential for a successful trail network.**

# EVALUATION OF EXISTING TRAILS

The location and alignment of trails are typically defined by terrain, site constraints and opportunities, and objectives for creating trail linkages or connecting trails to specific destinations. Trail systems are not necessarily bound by property ownership or political boundaries. As such, the evaluation of existing trails involve trails that are located or start within Vail’s boundary and trails in the surrounding area. Factors considered in the evaluation of existing trails included the number and length of existing trails, agencies responsible for trail management, type of trail (paved or soft surface), trail user groups (multi-use, hiking only, biking only) and trail ability level.

A total of 90 hard and soft surface trails totaling nearly 200 miles were inventoried. While the vast majority of these trails are located outside of the Town’s boundary, they are considered part of Vail’s trail system given their connectivity and proximity to Vail. For example, only short segments of East Vail trails (such as Booth Falls and Bighorn), are located within the Town’s boundary, yet the entire length of these trails are included in this inventory. The Two Elk trail is well outside the Town’s boundaries, but given its connectivity to trails on Vail Mountain it is included in this inventory. Charts and tables below provide general information on existing trails in the greater Vail area.

Throughout the greater Vail area there is a relatively even distribution of easy, moderate and difficult ability level trails. There is a high percentage of easy ability multi-use trails, however this percentage is skewed by the large amount of paved trails, all of which are considered easy ability level. The percentage



Greater Vail Network by Intended User Type, and Ability Level		
<b>Hiking</b>		
Easy – 8%	Moderate – 35%	Difficult – 56%
<b>Biking</b>		
Easy – 8%	Moderate – 72%	Difficult – 20%
<b>Multi-Use</b>		
Easy – 42%	Moderate – 32%	Difficult – 26%

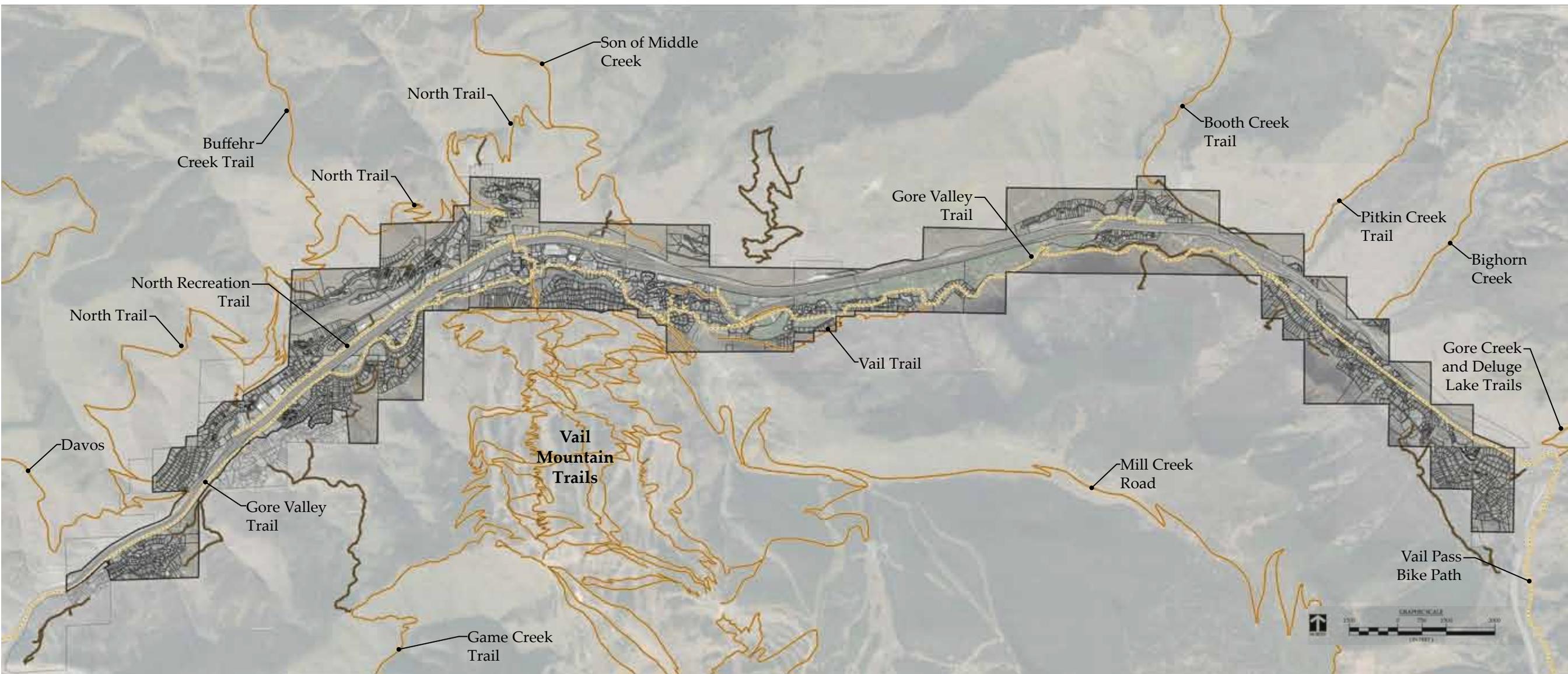
Note: Numbers may not total due to rounding

of hiking only and biking only trails is relatively low. This is largely a function of most USFS trails being multi-use. Hiking only trails are primarily located in wilderness areas and biking only trails are primarily located on Vail Mountain.

The Town of Vail manages 19 miles of trails. Approximately 17 miles of these are hard surface trails and just 2 miles are soft surface trails. Examples of soft surface trails include the Village Streamwalk and the Vail Nature Center Trail. All trails managed by the Town are easy ability level trails. There are many other trail opportunities within and proximate to Vail that are managed by others. Vail Mountain includes a system of interpretive, hiking, biking and freeride biking trails, many of which are directly accessible from Town. Eight USFS trailheads providing access to multi-use and hiking trails are located in Vail. Most Vail Mountain and USFS trails are in the moderate and difficult ability level.

The trail inventory process employed trail-use counters and identified more than 14 miles of unsanctioned social trails. As expected, trail-use counts revealed the highest level of use on the paved paths, with up to 3,000 users per week on sections of the Gore Valley Trail. As for soft-surface trails, it is interesting to note that, while lower, the use-level on non-sanctioned social trails is significant when compared to sanctioned trails. For example, the trail counters estimate approximately 300-400 users per week on sections of the sanctioned North Trail, while some social trails see between 100-200 weekly users. Social trails are typically found in areas where sanctioned trails do not exist, often providing neighborhood access to a soft-surface trail. This indicates the desire for people to access trails from their homes, regardless of proximity to official trails.

The map on the following page depicts existing hard and soft surface trails and social trails in and around the Town of Vail.



-  Existing Hard Surface Trails
-  Existing Soft Surface Trails
-  Existing Social Trails

## EXISTING TRAILS

## WILDLIFE IN THE GORE VALLEY

Input from the community was quite clear that any new trail development be located, designed, constructed and managed in a sensitive and sustainable manner and that any new trails not have adverse impacts on the natural environment or wildlife resources. The community clearly values recreation trails and clearly values our natural environment and wildlife. This raises the question – what is the current state of wildlife in and around Vail?

The Gore Creek Valley has changed dramatically since Vail was established in the early 1960's and these changes, be it from the growth of the Town and the population the Gore Valley now supports, the size and level of activity on Vail Mountain, Interstate 70, or the increased year-around recreational activity in and around Vail, there have been significant impacts on wildlife habitat. A 2017 letter from Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) documented significant declines in the population of many species, particularly deer, elk and bighorn sheep, and that the long-term sustainability of these species is in question. Many factors could be attributable to these declining populations, among them weather, disease, population management, loss of habitat, development and human disturbance. While the current level of development in and around Vail is a major factor, there is no question that human activity from recreation trails directly impact wildlife and its habitat. The 2017 CPW letter is found in the appendix of this Plan.

The Wildlife Forum held in January of 2018 involved a panel discussion of wildlife in and around the Gore Valley. Presentations were made by two independent wildlife biologists

and wildlife biologists from the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the CPW. Presentations addressed the current state of wildlife in the Gore Creek Valley, potential reasons for the decline of some species, the importance of quality habitat to the health of wildlife, how human activity can impact wildlife and the potential for implementing measures for minimizing, mitigating, or eliminating impacts on wildlife. A video of the Wildlife Forum is available for viewing at <http://www.vailgov.com/wildlifeforum>. A summary of the Wildlife Forum is found in the appendix of this Plan.

## WILDLIFE AND RECREATION TRAILS

Recreation trails can impact wildlife and wildlife habitat many ways. The mere presence of human activity from a hiker or biker will affect wildlife by causing stress, affecting foraging time and generally disrupting typical behavioral patterns and how habitat is utilized. These impacts affect an animal's overall level of health and fitness, its reproductive success and winter survival rates. These impacts are particularly adverse in critical wildlife habitat such as calving areas, migration corridors and winter range areas. One thing is clear – any discussion of recreation trails cannot take place without a parallel discussion of wildlife.

The CPW has prepared wildlife maps that can be used to gauge potential impacts from trails and human activity on wildlife. These maps are based on data and findings from various wildlife studies, they are not based on site-specific analysis. That said, these maps do provide a general indication of factors to consider when studying how recreation trails could affect wildlife.

### Area of Influence Maps

The CPW has mapped “areas of influence” for various species. Areas of influence are

defined by horizontal distances measured from a trail, within which wildlife could be affected. Distances are based on data from wildlife studies and as such do not take into consideration terrain, vegetation or other site-specific considerations that could influence how a trail may affect wildlife. The distances used to define the area of influence vary by species.

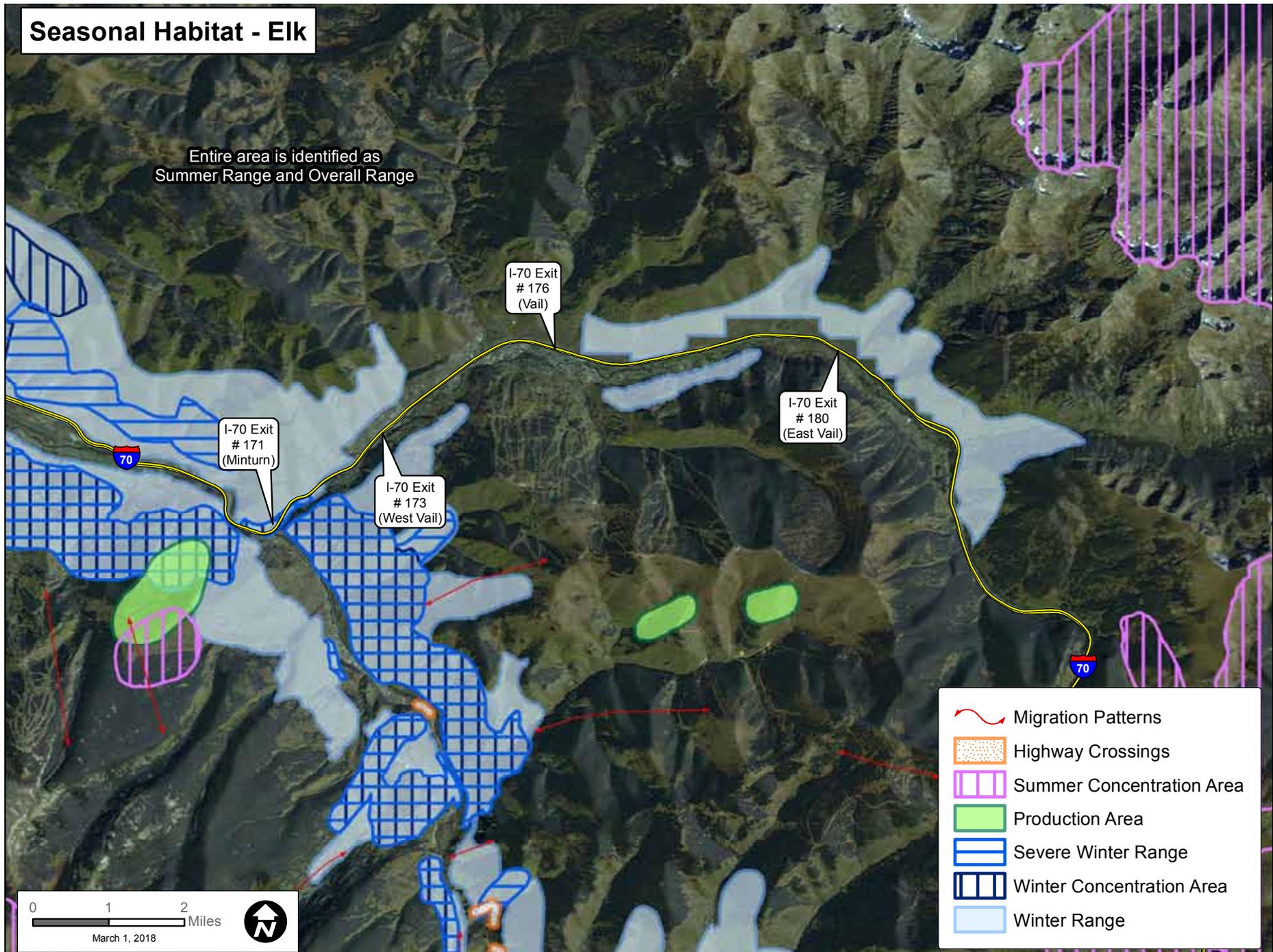
CPW generated Area of Influence maps for elk, mule deer, bighorn sheep and peregrine falcon based on conceptual trail ideas from early in this planning process. While general in nature, this mapping provides a starting point for understanding potential impacts from trails. Copies of these maps are found in the appendix. Note that the maps generated by CPW are based on trail ideas that are different from what is now presented in this Plan. Nonetheless, they do provide some context for understanding the information provided by these maps.

### Wildlife Resource Maps

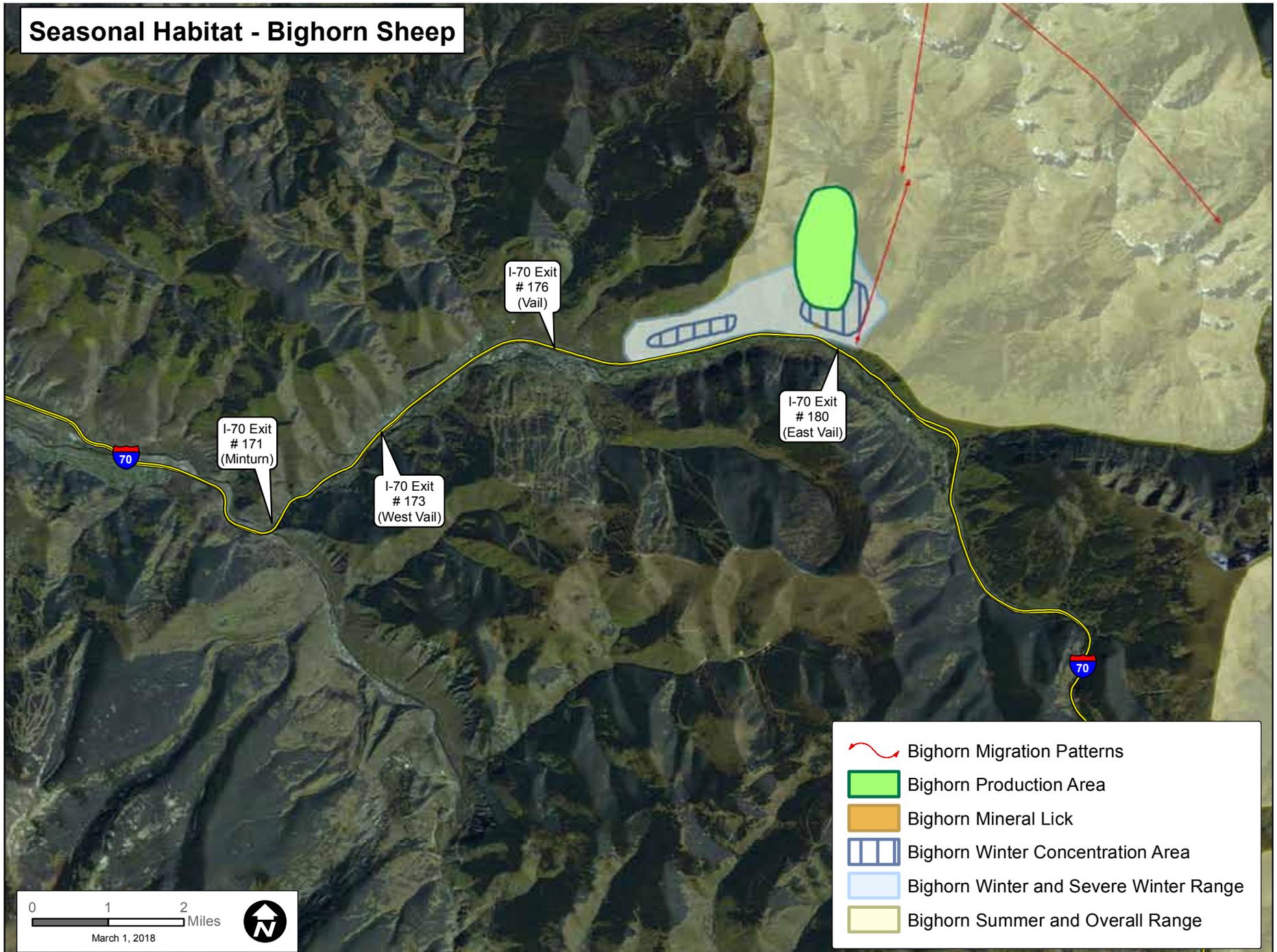
CPW has mapped wildlife resources for many different species. These maps indicate the general location of winter range, severe winter range, calving areas, migration corridors and other types of wildlife habitat. The maps on the following pages depict the type of data provided by CPW mapping.

# Seasonal Habitat - Elk

Entire area is identified as Summer Range and Overall Range

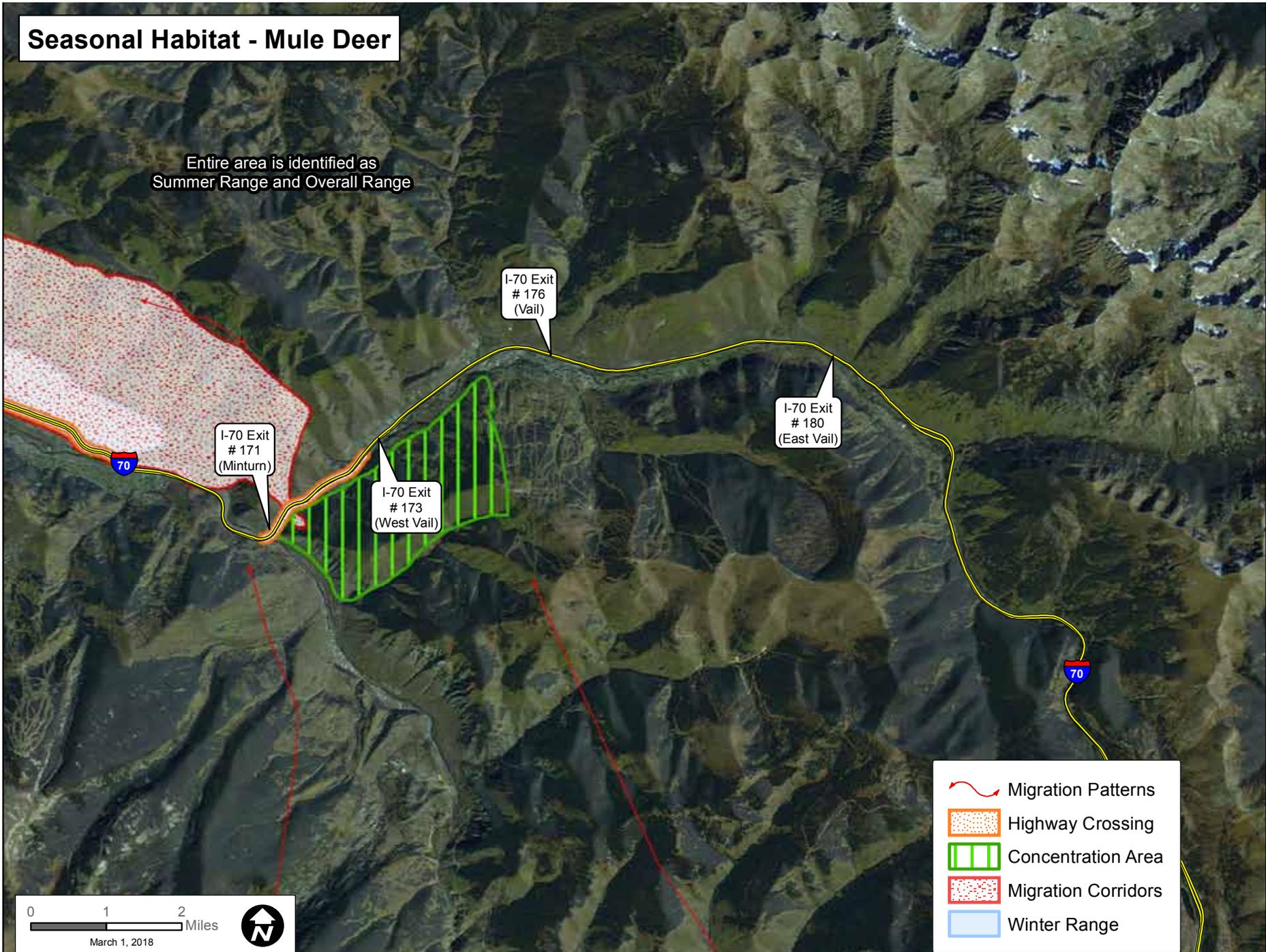


# Seasonal Habitat - Bighorn Sheep



# Seasonal Habitat - Mule Deer

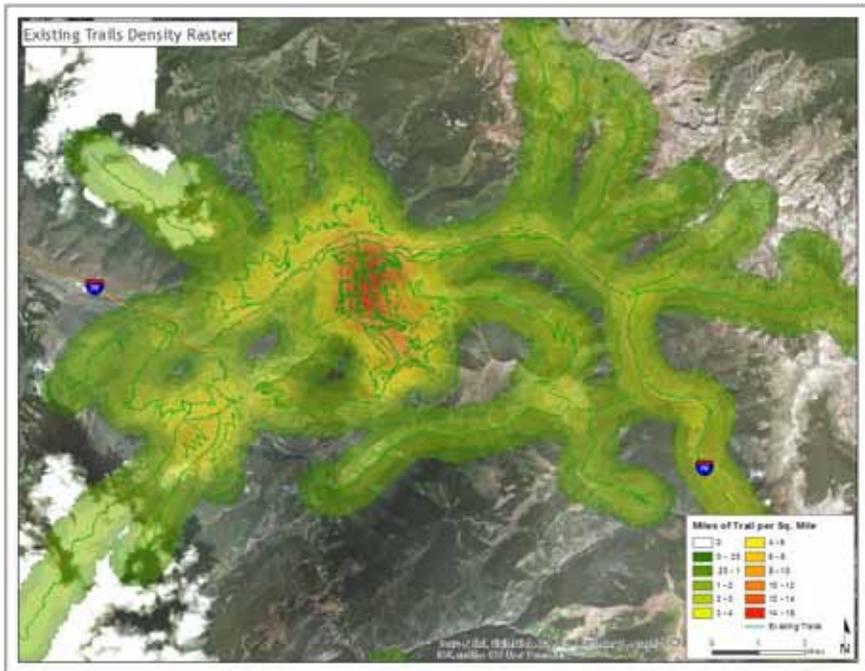
Entire area is identified as Summer Range and Overall Range



### Trail Density Maps

Trail density maps depict miles of trails per square mile. This data provides a general indication of the intensity of trail activity within a region. Below is a density map prepared by CPW of existing trails within the Gore Valley and surrounding area. Green indicates areas with fewer existing trails per square mile, while red areas indicate more trails per square mile. A basic premise when planning recreation trails that are sensitive to wildlife is to locate new trails within areas already influenced by human activity. The Trail Density Map provides information helpful to this effort. It should be noted that the density maps depict trail density only, they do not depict the impact of roads, homes or other development or the amount of use on any existing trail.

These maps and feedback from CPW during the planning process were significant considerations in defining suggestions for new trail ideas.



## MITIGATING MEASURES PRIOR TO THE STUDY OF POTENTIAL NEW TRAILS

The CPW has documented significant declines in certain wildlife populations in the Gore Valley and the surrounding region and there is near universal agreement that activity from recreation trails can adversely impact wildlife populations and its habitats. In response to the existing condition of wildlife resources in the Gore Valley and value the Vail community places on wildlife, it is recommended that prior to the development of new recreation trails that the following steps be taken in an attempt to improve wildlife resources:

### Trail-Free Zones

Areas that are free of trails generally have very little human activity and these areas serve as wildlife sanctuaries where animals benefit from solitude and the lack of disruption from humans. Defining trail-free zones could be a great benefit to wildlife resources. Trail-free zones are depicted on the Conceptual Trails Plan. These zones are located on USFS land and coordination with the USFS would be necessary to implement these zones. Areas depicted are conceptual in nature and will need further study and refinement during subsequent evaluation of trails and wildlife.

### Public Education

Educating the public on how trail use can affect wildlife can be very effective in fostering behavior that is sensitive to wildlife. Respecting

trail closures, having dogs on leash and not walking off trails are examples of behavior that will help minimize the impacts of trail use. If people understand the importance of being respectful and sensitive to wildlife resources, they will be more likely to behave in a respectful and sensitive manner. Educational programs targeted to both locals and guests should be implemented.

### Seasonal Trail Closures

CPW has indicated that by and large, most people comply with seasonal wildlife trail closures. That said, using video cameras the USFS has documented extensive violations of a trail closure with the Town. The impacts to wildlife can be significant when closures are violated. Steps to improve compliance with seasonal closures could include active monitoring of trailheads, taking enforcement action against violators and constructing gates at trails with seasonal closures. These measures will require coordination with CPW and USFS.

### Habitat Enhancement

Wildlife habitat has been impacted by development, fragmentation and overall declining health. Options for improving habitat by enhancing vegetation include: controlled burns, fertilization and manual manipulation of vegetation. Coordination with CPW and USFS should be initiated to define how the Town could assist in programs to enhance habitat in and around Vail.

## CONCEPTUAL TRAILS PLAN

The Conceptual Trails Plan identifies twelve soft surface trails and trail connections in and around the Vail area that warrant further study

and community discussion. Referred to as “trail ideas”, each is described in detail below and each is depicted on the Conceptual Trails Plan. Trail ideas discussed below include both the possibility of new trail development and possibility of closing existing trails.

Trail ideas were derived from the analysis of Vail’s existing trail system, input received during community scoping sessions and with input from technical experts, agencies and other stakeholders. A summary of community input on trails is found in the appendix. The purpose of the Conceptual Trails Plan is to provide a vision for improvements to Vail’s trail system. A great deal of additional evaluation, planning and design is necessary before final decisions can be made on which, if any, of these trail ideas are constructed. It is very likely that with further study some trails depicted on the Conceptual Trails Plan will be dropped from consideration due to design challenges, environmental or wildlife impacts, cost, public input or other factors. A matrix summarizing each of these trail ideas is found below.

### Parameters for defining the Conceptual Trails Plan

Trail ideas evolved throughout this planning process. Initially twenty-one new trail ideas were identified. Each of these were evaluated based on the vision for Vail’s Trails and key themes that came out of the small group meetings and the trails workshop. The following parameters were used to determine the trail ideas to be included in the Conceptual Trails Plan:

- The trail is located such that it may be feasible through design, construction, or management to minimize, mitigate, or eliminate adverse impacts on wildlife.
- The trail be designed and constructed to be safe for all intended uses or the trail improves the safety of the trail system.
- The trail improves or expands recreational opportunities for one or more user group.
- The trail improves neighborhood connectivity or provides beneficial linkages between existing trails.

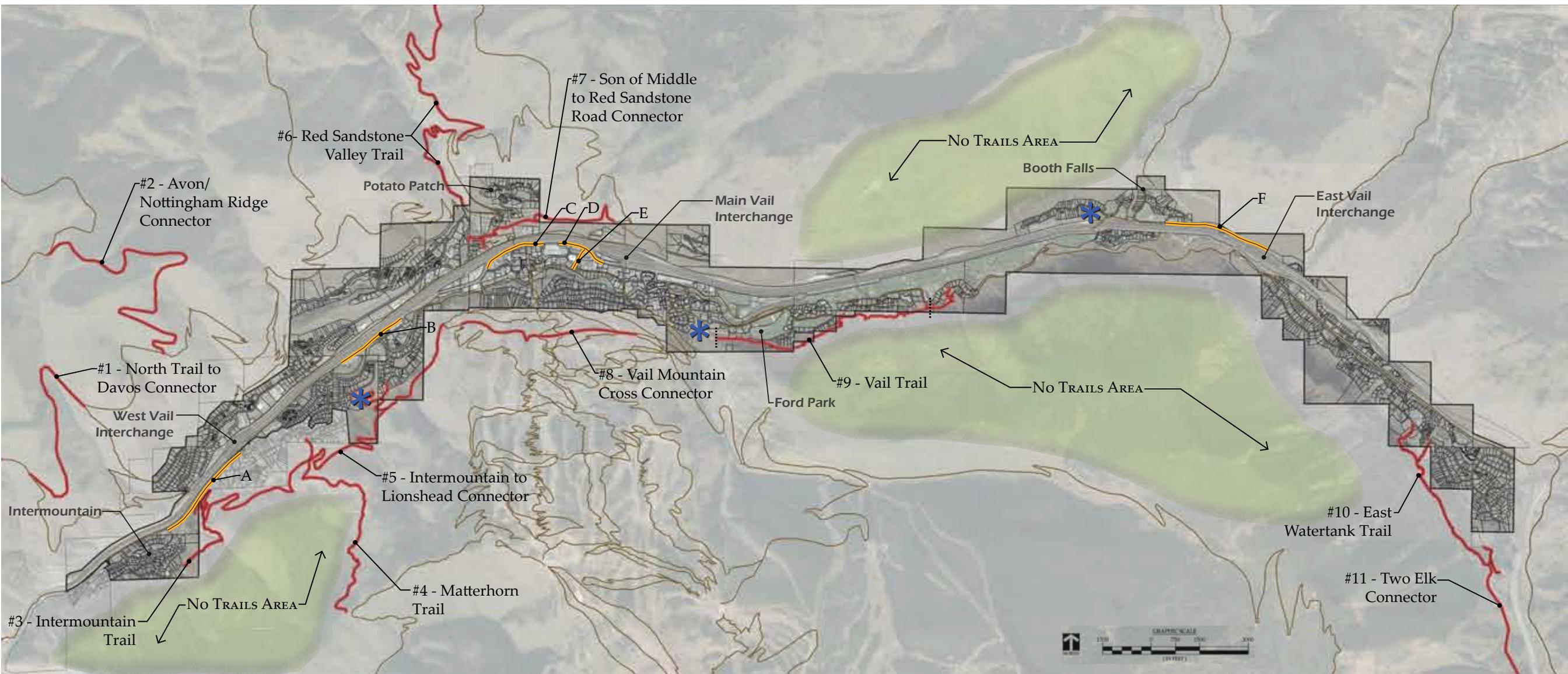
When considering these parameters, ten trails were eliminated from consideration. In most cases trails were eliminated due to their potential for wildlife impacts. The removal of these trails is not intended to suggest that other trail ideas will not affect

wildlife resources. Wildlife and environmental analysis for all trail ideas shall be completed as an element of making final decisions on any new trail development. Wildlife considerations relative to trail ideas are discussed further in the Description of Trail Ideas and Opportunity and Process for Evaluation of New Trails sections below.

A plan depicting all trails originally considered and trails dropped from consideration is found in the Appendix. The Conceptual Trails Plan is found on the following page. Each of the eleven trail ideas are discussed below. Follow-up actions necessary for the Town to address prior to the future development of any new trail are described in Chapter 5 Action Plan and Chapter 6 Implementation.

It should be noted that this planning effort did not attempt to identify all minor trail improvements that could establish other pedestrian connections to improve walkability throughout the Town. An example of this could be a new trail along Middle Creek done in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Evergreen Hotel. These types of improvements, while not identified in this Plan, may over time be implemented by the Town.

2018 Open Lands Plan Update -Summary of Trail Ideas					
#	Trail Name	Suggested User Group	Suggested Ability Level	Supports Trail Vision	Issues/Concerns
1	North Trail to Davos Connector	Multi-use	Intermediate	Diversity, Connectivity	Wildlife
2	Avon/Nottingham Ridge Connector	Multi-use	Intermediate/Difficult	Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity	Wildlife, Easements
3	Intermountain Trail	Hiking-only	Intermediate	Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity	Wildlife
4	Matterhorn Trail	Hiking, Mountain Biking	More Difficult	Sustainability, Connectivity, Diversity	Wildlife, Safety, Sustainability
5	Intermountain to Lionshead Connector	Multi-use	Intermediate	Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity	Wildlife, Easements
6	Red Sandstone Valley Trail	Multi-use	Intermediate	Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity	Wildlife
7	Son of Middle Creek to Red Sandstone Road Conne	Multi-use	Intermediate	Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity	Wildlife, Easements, Terrain
8	Vail Mountain Cross Connector	Multi-use	Beginner/Intermediate	Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity, Sustainability	Wildlife, Easements
9	Vail Trail	Hiking-only	Intermediate	Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity, Sustainability	Wildlife, Easements, Terrain, Hazard Areas
10	East Water Tank Trail	Hiking, Limited Mountain Biking	More Difficult	Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity, Sustainability	Wildlife, Terrain
11	Two Elk Connector	Multi-use	Intermediate	Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity, Safety	Wildlife, Terrain, Easements



-  Existing Trails
-  Trail Ideas and Suggestions
-  New Paved Paths
-  Potential Children's Bike Facilities

# CONCEPTUAL TRAILS PLAN

## DESCRIPTION OF TRAIL IDEAS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Below are descriptions of the eleven trail ideas depicted on the Conceptual Trails Plan. When relevant, factors unique to these trails ideas to be considered in the subsequent study of these trail ideas are also provided. Trails are numbered sequentially from west to east, numbering does not reflect trail priorities.

### #1. North Trail to Davos Connector:

Proposed multi-use trail to connect segments of the North Trail to the Davos Trail to create a moderate loop trail from West Vail.

- User groups: Multi-use
- Ability Level: Intermediate
- Supports Vision Goals: Diversity, Connectivity
- Issues/Concerns/Process: wildlife analysis, USFS approval

### #2. Avon/Nottingham Ridge Connector:

Proposed multi-use trail to connect the North Trail to the existing Nottingham Ridge Trail and future Traer Creek development in Avon. This connection is identified in the current White River National Forest Travel Management Plan.

- User groups: Multi-use
- Ability Level: Intermediate/Difficult
- Supports Vision Goals: Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity
- Issues/Concerns/Process: Wildlife analysis, coordination with Traer Creek Development Company, Town of Avon, USFS approval

### #3. Intermountain Trail:

Existing social trail provides intermediate soft-surface hiking opportunity for the Intermountain neighborhood. The upper reaches could be adopted/improved as a hiking-only trail while the lower reach could provide hiking/biking access to Trail Opportunity #5.

- User groups: Hiking-only
- Ability Level: Intermediate
- Supports Vision Goals: Accessibility, Connectivity, Diversity
- Issues/Concerns/Process: Steep terrain, safety, wildlife analysis, USFS approval

### #4. Matterhorn Trail:

Existing social trail connects Eagles Nest/Game Creek Trail down to the Matterhorn neighborhood. If formally approved by USFS, trail should

be realigned in sections to improve sustainability and connected to Trail #5. Potential wildlife impacts from this trail need to be evaluated comprehensively with Trails #3 and #5. An outcome of this analysis could be to take steps to close the Matterhorn Trail.

- User groups: Hiking, mountain biking
- Ability Level: More difficult
- Supports Vision Goals: Sustainability, Connectivity, Diversity
- Issues/Concerns/Process: Steep grades, safety, wildlife analysis, USFS approval

### #5. Intermountain to Lionshead Connector:

Proposed multi-use trail to connect the Intermountain Trail (#3) to Hank's Hideaway on Vail Mountain with several neighborhood trailheads to provide access. The alignment could pass through recent timber cuts as a way of reducing environmental impacts.

- User groups: Multi-use
- Ability Level: Intermediate
- Supports Vision Goals: Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity,
- Issues/Concerns/Process: Wildlife analysis, evaluate private property impacts, USFS approval

### #6. Red Sandstone Valley Trail:

Proposed multi-use trail connecting Vail to existing and proposed trails in the forest north of Vail. This soft-surface trail parallels Red Sandstone Road and Piney Lake Road to provide a much safer alternative by providing trail users an alternative to Red Sandstone Road. This trail, if deemed feasible from a design and wildlife impact standpoint, will need to be "tight" to Red Sandstone Road in order to minimize habitat fragmentation and impacts from trail use.

- User groups: Multi-use
- Ability Level: Intermediate
- Supports Vision Goals: Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity,
- Issues/Concerns/Process: Wildlife analysis, USFS approval

### #7. Son of Middle Creek to Red Sandstone Road Connector:

This trail connects the Son of Middle Creek trail to Red Sandstone Road through Town of Vail and USFS land above Red Sandstone School. This connector creates an intermediate loop with the North Trail and provides a loop alternative between Lionshead and Vail Village on the north side of I-70.

- User groups: Multi-use
- Ability Level: Intermediate
- Supports Vision Goals: Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity
- Issues/Concerns/Process: Terrain, private property impacts, wildlife analysis, Town of Vail approvals, USFS approval

**#8. Vail Mountain Cross Connector:**

Potential soft-surface trail across the lower reaches of Vail Mountain utilizing existing trail where feasible. Requires planning process and approvals with Vail Resorts and USFS.

- User groups: Multi-use
- Ability Level: Beginner/Intermediate
- Supports Vision Goals: Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity, Sustainability
- Issues/Concerns/Process: Wildlife analysis, evaluate private property impacts, USFS approval

**#9. Vail Trail:**

Existing social trail provides intermediate soft-surface hiking and limited biking between Vail Village and the Golf Course Clubhouse. The trail currently crosses into USFS and private property and should be formalized with the property owners. Trail improvements are needed to address sustainability and accessibility. This trail is recommended to be a hiking-only trail. Any work to improve this trail should maintain the width and informal, organic character of the existing trail.

- User groups: Hiking-only
- Ability Level: Intermediate
- Supports Vision Goals: Accessibility, Sustainability, Connectivity, Diversity
- Issues/Concerns/Process: Steep terrain, hazard areas, private property, wildlife analysis, USFS approval

**#10. East Water Tank Trail:**

Existing social trail provides intermediate soft-surface hiking and limited biking for the East Vail neighborhood. Wildlife implications of this social trail will need to be evaluated to determine whether this trail should be formalized or whether steps should be taken to close the trail. If efforts are made to formalize this trail, the narrow width and scale of the existing trail should be maintained, particularly with the westernmost leg of the trail given steep terrain in this area.

- User groups: Hiking, limited mountain biking
- Ability Level: More difficult

- Supports Vision Goals: Accessibility, Sustainability, Connectivity, Diversity
- Issues/Concerns/Process: Steep terrain, wildlife analysis, USFS approval

**#11. Two Elk Connector:**

This new soft-surface trail would connect the lower reach of the Two Elk Trail with East Vail, eliminating the need to access the Vail Pass bike path. The trail would align low on the hillside south of I-70 and improve a long loop-trail for the Vail area. Wildlife implications of this trail will need to be evaluated.

- User groups: Multi-use
- Ability Level: Intermediate
- Supports Vision Goals: Safety, Accessibility, Diversity, Connectivity
- Issues/Concerns/Process: Terrain analysis, private property impacts, wildlife analysis, USFS approval

## OTHER TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

### Trail Improvements from the 1994 Plan

Many of the trail and trail system improvements identified in the '94 Plan have been completed. A number of improvements that have not been implemented, such as the Vail Trail, the South Trail and a loop trail network around the Town are included in the Conceptual Trails Plan. Below are uncompleted improvements from the '94 Plan, most of which should still be considered for implementation:

#### **Vail Mountain Access**

The Town should continue to work with Vail Resorts to improve trailhead information, signage, etc. at Golden Peak, Vail Village and Lionshead. The potential to expand the trail system on Vail Mountain should also be discussed with Vail Resorts.

#### **Neighborhood Trailheads**

The '94 Plan identified trailhead improvements that would provide trail connections to existing neighborhoods. The location and design of these connections should be evaluated as a part of the design process for potential new trails.

#### **Paved Shoulders on Vail Valley Drive to Sunburst Drive**

The '94 Plan suggested paved shoulders along Vail Valley Drive to provide a safer connection between Vail Village and the Gore Valley Trail. The potential for this path has been studied and due to narrow right-of-way and existing improvements, this path is not considered to be feasible. As an alternative, traffic calming measures for this road will be studied as part of the update to the Town's Transportation Master Plan.

### Paved Trails

The following trail segments would connect existing, paved multi-use trail segments to enhance non-motorized connectivity. Refer to the Conceptual Trails Plan for the location of these trails:

- Intermountain to West Vail Interchange (#A)
- Donovan Park to Westhaven Drive (#B)
- West Lionshead Circle to East Lionshead Circle (#C)
- Lionhead Parking Structure to Vail Municipal Complex (#D)
- South Frontage Road to Meadow Drive Connector (#E)
- Vail Mountain School to East Vail Interchange (#F)

### Youth Facilities

Two ideas are suggested for improving bike opportunities for children:

#### **Kids Bike Park/Pump Track**

A series of short loops, dirt piles, jumps, etc designed for younger kids. This idea was raised multiple times during community input meetings. Potential locations include the Booth Creek area next to the I-70 berms and Golden Peak.

#### **Single Track Loop**

A short loop trail on the upper bench of Donovan Park designed as beginner hiking and kids mountain biking.

### Trail Maintenance

The need for significant maintenance to three existing trails was identified:

#### **North Trail (Buffehr Creek to Cortina Lane)**

Existing multi-use trail has several eroded/poorly constructed trail sections. Recommend working with the USFS to improve/reconstruct those sections as needed.

#### **North Trail (Red Sandstone Road to Buffehr Creek Road)**

Existing multi-use trail has several eroded/poorly constructed trail sections. Recommend working with the USFS to improve/reconstruct those sections as needed.

#### **Buffehr Creek Trail**

Existing multi-use trail could be improved with several short realignments to improve usability and sustainability. Recommend working with the USFS to improve/reconstruct those sections as needed.

### Accessible Trails

Vail's parks, playgrounds, public buildings and other public facilities are designed to be inclusive of varying ability levels. Whether a person's ability is affected by age or physical disability, the Town strives to provide "accessible" public amenities. When designing new trails or evaluating existing trails, accessible paved and soft-surface trails should be considered as part of the process.

Paved trails are evaluated using criteria from the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). The U.S. Forest Service evaluates trails through the publication, Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG), which allow for varying levels of accessibility that are correlated with user experience for a given trail type. Accessibility should be addressed as part of any subsequent work on a comprehensive trail plan as described in Chapter 4.

## TRAIL TYPES AND STANDARDS

A variety of improvements to Vail's existing system of trails and paths are contemplated by this Plan. Hiking-only trails, multi-use trails, beginner level trails, paved trails and wide shoulders are examples of these trail and path improvements. Standards for the design and construction of paved and soft-surface trails will vary depending on the type of trail, intended user groups, terrain and other considerations. Design standards will be one of many factors in determining the feasibility of future trail improvements. A summary of trail and path types along with relevant design standards are found in the appendix of this Plan.

## REGIONAL CONTEXT OF VAIL'S TRAILS

The Regional Context Plan on the following page depicts existing trails and trail ideas in a broader context and how trails proximate to Vail interface with outlying trails and with neighboring communities. The Regional Context Plan also depicts potential trail improvements located outside of the area covered by the Conceptual Trails Plan.

## PROCESS FOR EVALUATION OF TRAIL IDEAS

The process for studying the potential development of any new trails will involve a number of steps, the first of which will be direction from the Town Council for staff to prepare a more detailed plan for potential trail improvements. Like the Open Lands Plan update process, this detailed trail planning process will involve public input and will essentially take the Conceptual Trails Plan to a higher level of detail. It is anticipated that this trail planning process will involve revisiting the need for and potential benefits of each trail idea, defining trail alignments and other design considerations, and understanding trail construction and maintenance costs. In addition, site-specific environmental (soil and geologic conditions, vegetation and wetlands, etc.) and wildlife analysis will be completed in order to understand the potential impacts of any new trail that is under consideration. Only after this additional planning and analysis will the Town make decisions on whether to pursue the development of any new or alteration/adoption of existing trails.

### Wildlife Analysis

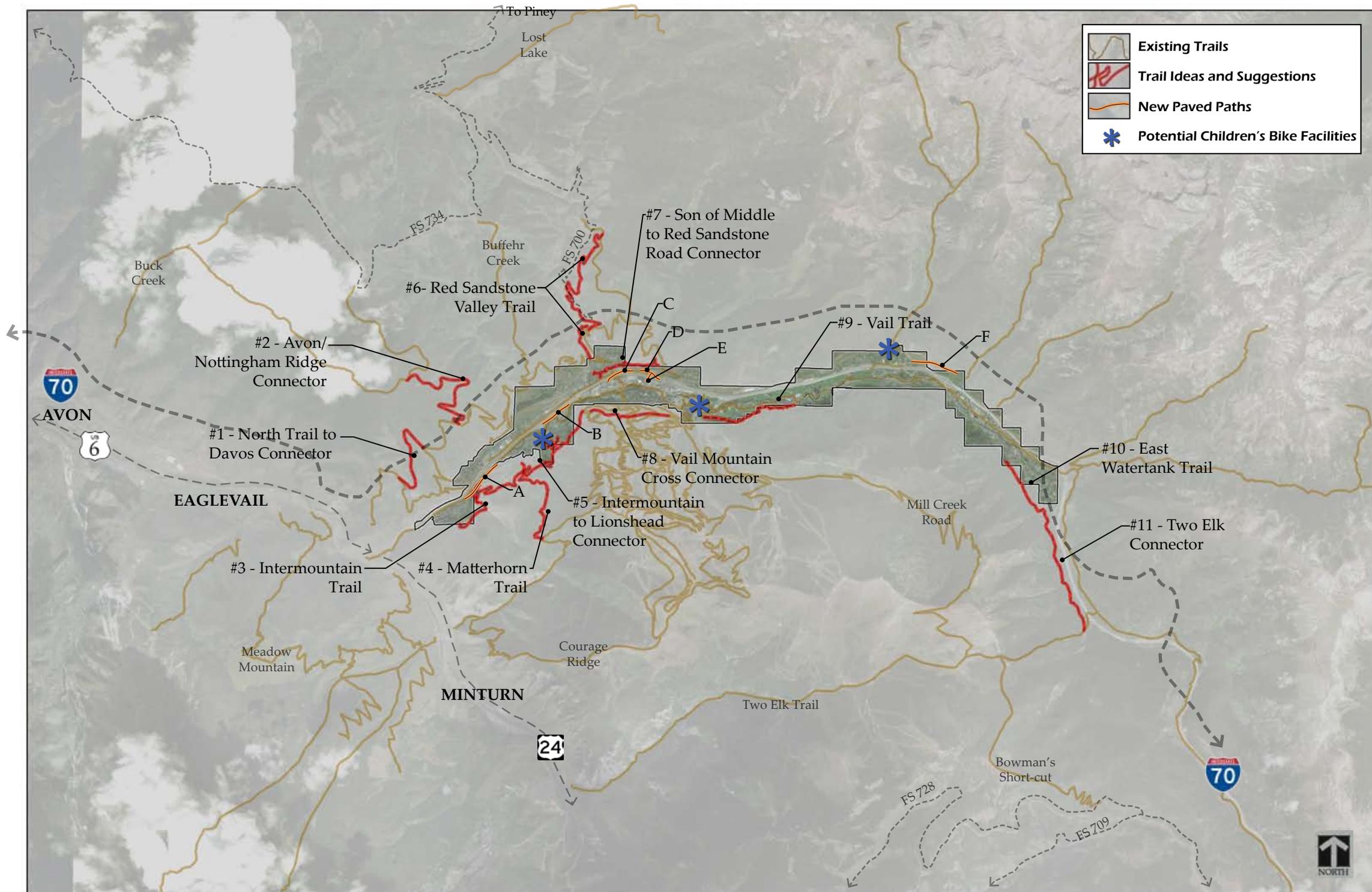
A major element of the next phase of work in evaluating the feasibility of new trail development will be the completion of a detailed, comprehensive environmental analysis, a key element of which will be an evaluation of how trails could impact wildlife resources. It is anticipated that this evaluation will be completed by a consultant retained by the Town and that the evaluation will among other things evaluate existing wildlife resources and habitats, assess potential impacts that may result from trail development, and identify whether it is feasible to implement measures that could minimize, mitigate, or eliminate such impacts. The goal of this analysis

is to provide a comprehensive evaluation of all new trail ideas and existing and social trails in and around Vail. The findings of this analysis will assist the Town in future decision-making regarding the potential development of any new trail ideas and whether to formalize or take steps to close existing social trails.

CPW will play a significant role in this process by providing baseline information and by providing referral comments during this process.

The findings of this environmental analysis and specifically the wildlife evaluation will be a major factor in the Town's decisions on whether to proceed with any new trail development. Ultimately the Town Council will decide how to balance the community's desire for recreational trails with the community's desire that trails be sensitive to wildlife and other environmental considerations. The purpose of the wildlife evaluation is to provide the Town with information necessary to understand how new trails may impact wildlife, and where a trail may present impacts whether measures can be implemented to mitigate them. While the Town Council will make decisions on trails at the local level, the USFS will be the ultimate decision-maker on any trails located on USFS lands. Information from this environmental analysis will be included in formal applications to the USFS.

The environmental and wildlife evaluations described above should be coordinated with the ecological/biodiversity study discussed in Chapter 2.



# REGIONAL CONTEXT PLAN

### **USFS Process**

Each of the eleven trail ideas depicted on the Conceptual Trails Plan are located entirely or in part on USFS land. As such, these trails will involve review by the USFS.

The review of proposals for new trails on USFS lands involves two steps. The USFS process evaluates trails under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process. The first step with the USFS involves submittal of a proposal that includes a comprehensive, Town-wide trails plan. This Town-wide trails plan will define trail alignments very broadly with 200-yard wide corridors and will identify user groups, trail levels and trail standards. The trails plan will also involve coordination with entities proximate to Vail so that trail planning can be integrated with that of other communities. Environmental information in accordance with the NEPA process is also required and all USFS processes include opportunities for public input. Following USFS review of this initial step, if approved the second step with the USFS involves detailed design of proposed trails and more a detailed NEPA process. As compared with step one which involves the comprehensive trail system, with step two individual trail segments can be proposed for approval and construction.

A comprehensive outline of the USFS process is found in the appendix.

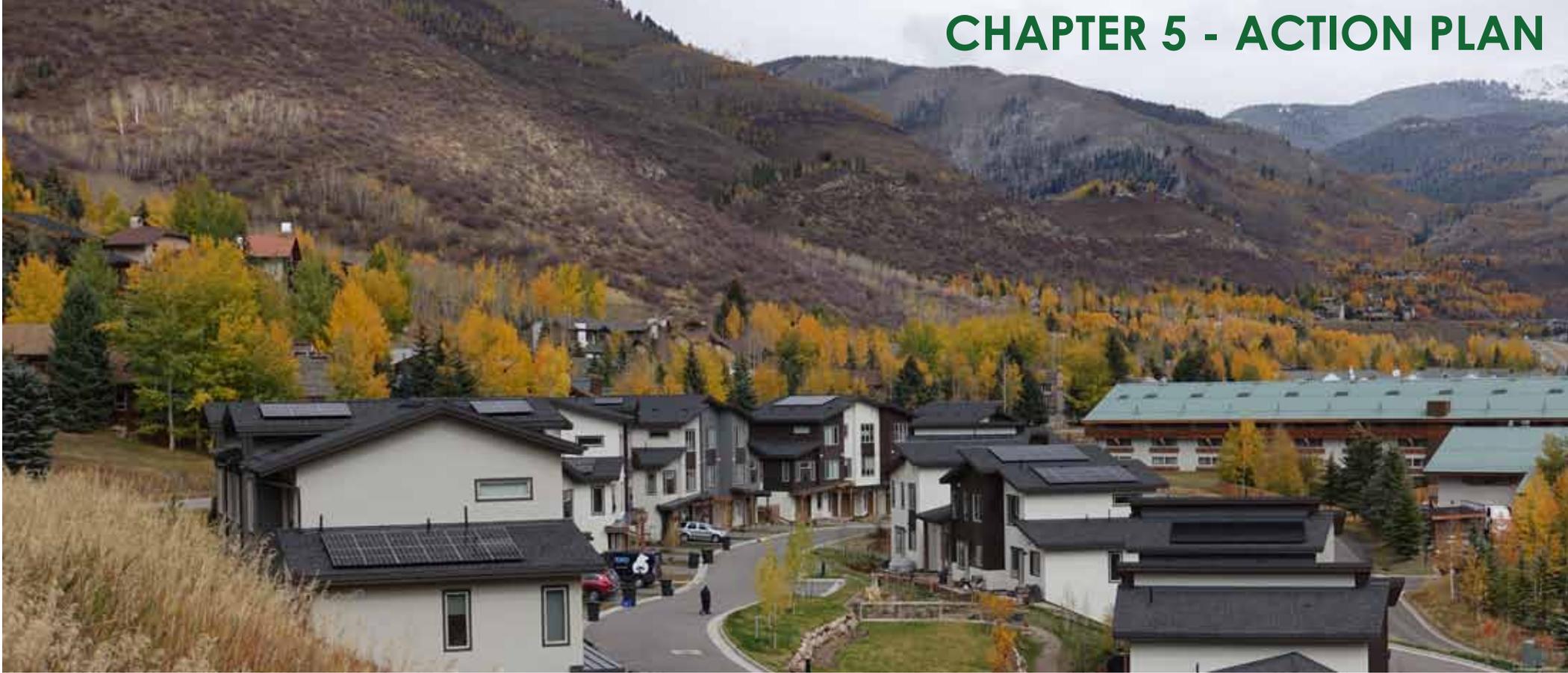
## **EASEMENTS FROM PRIVATE LAND OWNERS**

Many of the new trail ideas within the Town will require the Town to obtain easements

from private land owners. Chapter 5 – Action Plan identifies privately owned parcels where easements would be necessary to develop trail segments within the Town boundary. Seven such actions are recommended. Refer to Chapter 5 Action Plan for information on these easements.

### **Potential Collaborations**

A number of the trails identified on the Conceptual Trails Plan are located outside of the Town's boundaries and would implement more regionally-oriented trail improvements. Examples of these include the potential adoption of the Matterhorn Trail and the Avon/Nottingham Ridge Connector. It is possible that the Town could facilitate new trail development on Vail Mountain by pursuing collaboration with Vail Resorts. It is likely that if these trails are to be developed, they will involve the Town collaborating with other jurisdictions and organizations. Refer to Chapter 6 Implementation for additional discussion on the implementation of trail improvements.



The Action Plan from the '94 Plan “provides a framework for obtaining and protecting open lands as well as creating trail linkages in a logical and comprehensive manner”. The Action Plan chapter of the '94 Plan addressed protection techniques for open lands, established priorities for action, and provided land use recommendations for Town-owned lands and for improvements to the Town’s trail system. The most significant element of the Action Plan is a comprehensive list of recommendations for the acquisition of properties or easements necessary to implement the goals of the Plan. Referred to as Action Items, these acquisitions were recommended to protect environmentally sensitive lands, to facilitate the development of trails, to obtain land needed for community-oriented uses and to simplify the Town’s boundary with adjacent United States Forest Service lands.

The Action Plan from the '94 Plan identified fifty-one parcels for acquisition or for obtaining easements. Since 1994, thirty of these Action Items have been completed and another eight Action Items have been partially completed. Thirty of the fifty-one Action Items were recommended to protect environmentally sensitive lands and sixteen were for trail development or for access to Gore Creek. Thirty-six of the Action Items were High Priority Items and twenty-five of these high priority items have been completed. The Town has been quite effective in the implementation of Action Items from the '94 Plan. A plan depicting the status of Action Items from the '94 Plan is found in the appendix.

The updated Action Plan on page 42 identifies twenty-seven Action Items that are recommended to implement improvements and recommendations described in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this Plan. Like the '94 Plan, these Action Items recommend the acquisition of land or easements necessary to further the Town’s goals for the protection of environmentally sensitive lands, trail development and land needed for community-oriented uses. Refer to Chapter 6 Implementation for information on other follow-up actions recommended to implement the goals of this Plan. Each of these Action Items are discussed in greater detail below.

## 2018 Action Plan

The twenty-seven Action Items are shown two ways – all Action Items are identified on the Town-wide Action Plan found on the following page and each Action Item is depicted on more detailed maps along with a description of the Action Item. Descriptions address the purpose for the action, whether the action involves the acquisition of land or easements, the relative priority for the action and other information regarding the parcel and the recommended action. There are four different categories of Action Items:

### Action Items from '94 Plan

Of the fifty-one Action Items from the '94 Plan, thirty-eight were either implemented, partially implemented, addressed alternative ways or the Action Item has been deemed to no longer be feasible. An example of an Action Item being implemented in alternative ways is the Town acquiring an easement for the development of a trail in lieu of the Action Plan recommendation for outright purchase of the parcel. An example of an Action Item no longer being feasible is a vacant parcel that was recommended for acquisition but was developed before it could be acquired.

### Action Items to Protect Environmentally Sensitive Lands

Fifteen Action Items are recommended to protect environmentally sensitive lands. These items focus on land located adjacent to Gore Creek or its tributaries, lands with access challenges, steep terrain and wildlife resources. The Action Items that address parcels located along water courses are intended to reinforce the Town's initiatives to improve water quality and protect wetlands and riparian habitat.

Strategies for Action Items involve the outright purchase of land, working with land owners to re-zone property or to establish conservation easements to limit the development of the land or other techniques to protect these lands.

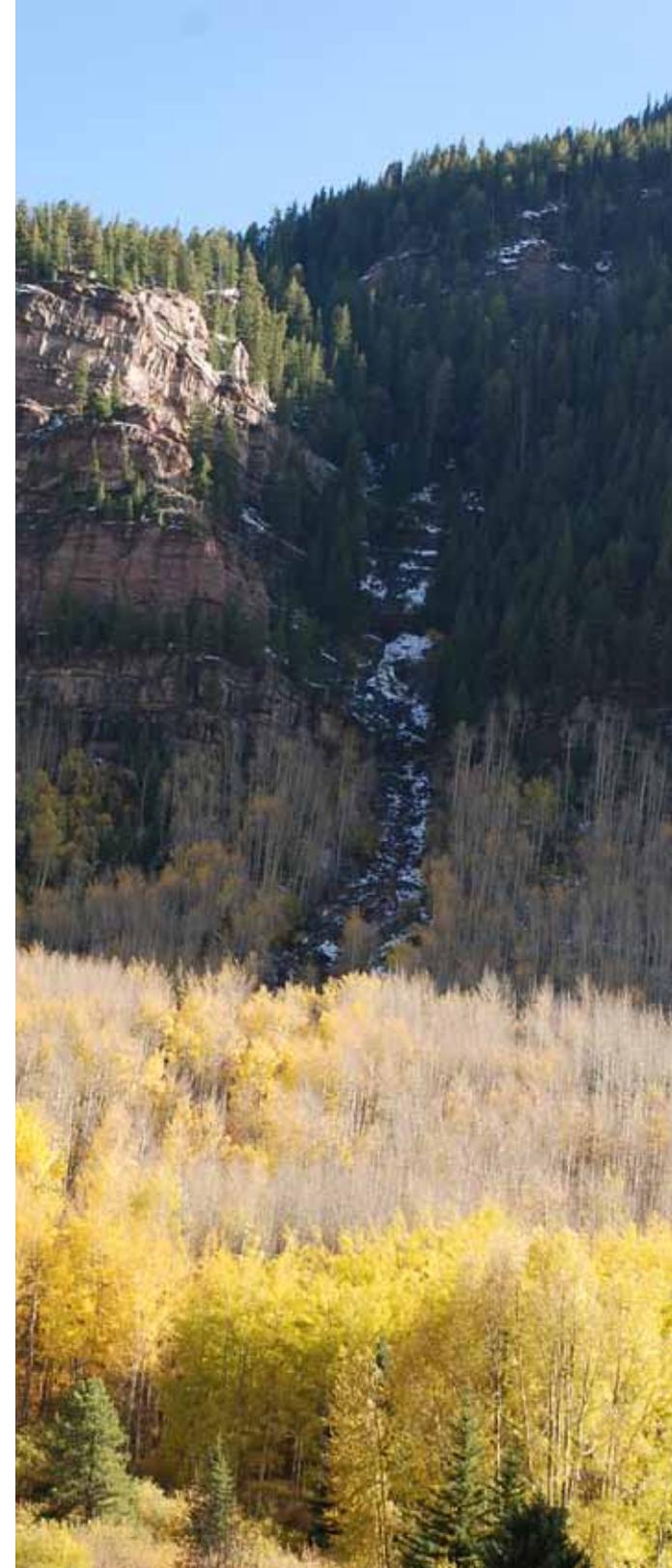
### Action Items to Implement Trail Improvements

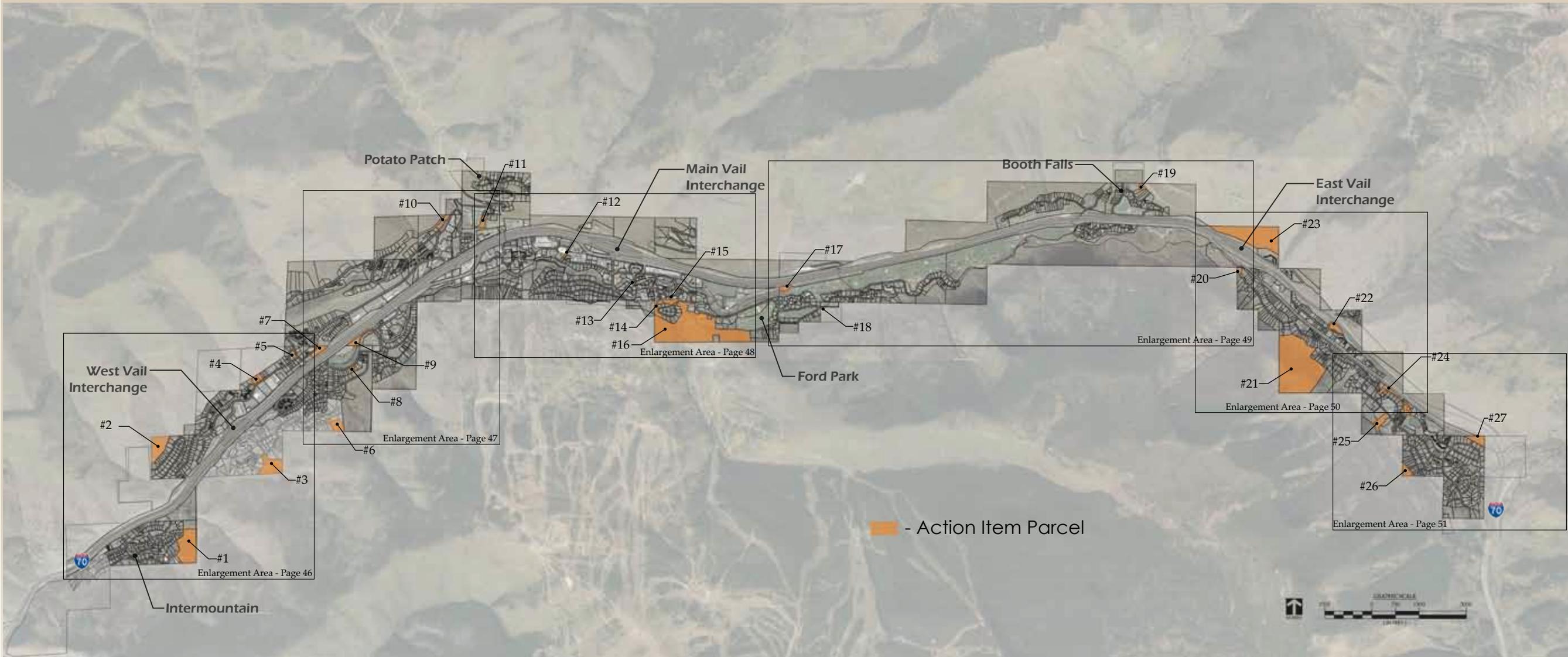
Seven Action Items are recommended to facilitate the development of new recreation trails or to improve the Town's trail system. Strategies for these Action Items involve either the acquisition of land or easements.

### Action Items to Address Town/Community Facility Needs

Six parcels are recommended for acquisition to provide land for public facilities or community needs. Four of these Action Items are sites that could potentially be developed with workforce housing and two parcels that will clarify ownership of a Town road.

Action Items listed above total more than twenty-seven because some Action Items address multiple goals. A matrix summarizing all recommended action items is found in the appendix.





# ACTION ITEMS



## ACTION ITEMS

Below are descriptions of the twenty-seven recommended Action Items. Action Items are numbered sequentially from west to east, the numbering of Action Items does not imply priority for implementation.

### ACTION ITEM #1

**Purpose** - Establish connection from Intermountain neighborhood to future soft surface trail.

**Action** - Obtain trail easement.

**Other Information** - Parcel is owned by the Eagle River Water and Sanitation District. A water tank is located on the site.

**'94 Action Plan** - This parcel was Action Item #6 from the '94 Plan.

### ACTION ITEM #2

**Purpose** - Protect environmentally sensitive land from development.

**Action** - Acquire parcel or work with land owner on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential.

**Other Information** - This 6.3 acre site is characterized by very steep terrain and currently has no legal access. Development potential is limited. Parcel is located outside of Town boundary. While the primary purpose for acquiring this parcel is to protect it from development, the slope and southern aspect of the parcel could make it a viable location for a solar farm. Environmental implications from a solar farm, such as slope stability and impacts to wildlife would need to be evaluated and viable access to the site (likely involving the USFS) would need to be established as a requisite for pursuing this idea.

**'94 Action Plan** - This parcel was Action Item #2 from the '94 Plan.

### ACTION ITEM #3

**Purpose** - Establish trail connection from Highland Meadows neighborhood to future soft surface trail.

**Action** - Obtain trail easement.

**Other Information** - Parcel is privately owned. Action Item #6 could provide neighborhood connection if this easement cannot be obtained.

**'94 Action Plan** - N/A

### ACTION ITEM #4

**Purpose** - Public facility or community use/workforce housing.

**Action** - Acquire parcels.

**Other Information** - Site consists of three parcels zoned Two-family Primary/Secondary Residential that comprise 1.53 acres. Steep terrain on north half of these parcels will limit development potential. Refer to Chapter 3 - Town Owned Lands and Use of Lands for more information.

**'94 Action Plan** - N/A

### ACTION ITEM #5

**Purpose** - Protect creek corridor land from development.

**Action** - Acquire parcel or work with land owner on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential.

**Other Information** - This .31 acre parcel is zoned Two-family Primary/Secondary Residential. Bufferhr Creek and associated riparian habitat bisects the site and floodplain impacts the site.

**'94 Action Plan** - N/A



**ACTION ITEM #7**

**Purpose** – Public facility or community use/workforce housing.

**Action** – Acquire parcel.

**Other Information** – This 1.76 acre parcel is zoned Public Accommodation and has Special Development District approval for a hotel and workforce housing project. The Town remains supportive of the approved development plan. Only if or when it is clear that the approved project (or a similar mixed-use housing and hotel project) is not viable, should the Town consider acquisition of this parcel. Refer to Chapter 3 - Town Owned Lands and Use of Lands for more information.

**'94 Action Plan** – N/A

**ACTION ITEM #8**

**Purpose** – Protect land from development and maintain wildlife movement corridor.

**Action** – Acquire parcel or work with land owner on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential. Prior to pursuing purchase of this parcel monitoring of the site (with game camera) should be done to better understand how wildlife may use this parcel.

**Other Information** – This .46 acre parcel is zoned Two-family Primary/Secondary Residential. Big game are commonly seen crossing parcel to access Gore Creek.

**'94 Action Plan** – N/A

**ACTION ITEM #9**

**Purpose** – Public facility/park expansion or workforce housing project.

**Action** – Acquire parcel

**Other Information** – This 3.0 acre parcel has three tennis courts that are owned and managed by the Hotel Talisa ownership group. In the event the ownership group were interested in disposing of this parcel, the Town's acquisition could allow for the development of a small workforce housing development or expansion of Donovan Park. Refer to Chapter 3 - Town Owned Lands and Use of Lands for more information.

**'94 Action Plan** - N/A

**ACTION ITEM #10**

**Purpose** – Protect environmentally sensitive land from development.

**Action** – Acquire parcel or work with land owner on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential.

**Other Information** – This vacant 1.39 acre site is zoned Agricultural and Open Space, is characterized by steep terrain and within a rockfall hazard zone. Development potential is limited.

**'94 Action Plan** - This parcel was Action Item #14 from the '94 Plan.

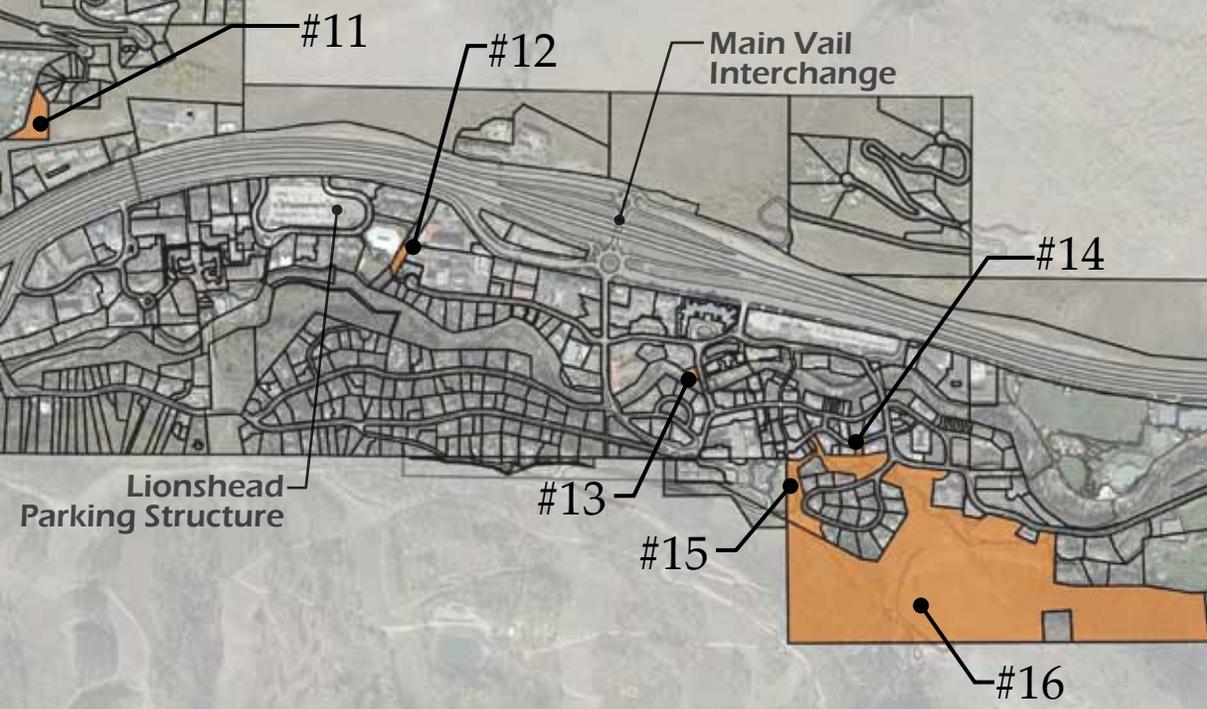
**ACTION ITEM #6**

**Purpose** - Establish trail connection from Highland Meadows neighborhood to future soft surface trail.

**Action** – Obtain trail easement.

**Other Information** – Parcel is privately owned. Action Item #3 or the upper bench of Donovan Park could provide neighborhood connections if this easement cannot be obtained.

**'94 Action Plan** – N/A



### **ACTION ITEM #11**

**Purpose** - Establish trail connection.

**Action** - Obtain trail easement.

**Other Information** - This 1.3 acre parcel is privately owned. The Town of Vail owns land on either side of this parcel. Easement on this parcel would provide trail design flexibility in responding to surrounding terrain.

**'94 Action Plan** - This parcel was Action Item #18 from the '94 Plan.

### **ACTION ITEM #12**

**Purpose** - Protect environmentally sensitive land from development.

**Action** - Acquire parcel or work with land owner on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential.

**Other Information** - This vacant .32 acre parcel is owned by the ERWSD. It is zoned Outdoor Recreation. Middle Creek runs through the parcel and both West Meadow Drive and the Gore Valley Trail cross through the southern portion of the parcel.

**'94 Action Plan** - N/A

### **ACTION ITEM #13**

**Purpose** - Protect environmentally sensitive lands.

**Action** - Acquire parcel or work with land owner on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential.

**Other Information** - This .11 acre parcel is privately owned and zoned Public Accommodation. The parcel is within the Gore Creek floodplain.

**'94 Action Plan** - This parcel was Action Item #22 from the '94 Plan.

### **ACTION ITEM #14**

**Purpose** - Establish trail connection.

**Action** - Complete research to confirm if easement has been obtained for this trail. If not, obtain trail easement for existing paved recreation trail.

**Other Information** - This .10 acre parcel is privately owned and zoned Agricultural and Open Space.

**'94 Action Plan** - This parcel was Action Item #24 from the '94 Plan.

### **ACTION ITEM #15**

**Purpose** - Establish trail connection.

**Action** - Complete research to confirm if easement has been obtained for this trail. If not, obtain trail easement for existing paved recreation trail.

**Other Information** - This 3.28 acre parcel is privately owned and zoned Agricultural and Open Space.

**'94 Action Plan** - This parcel was Action Item #23 from the '94 Plan.

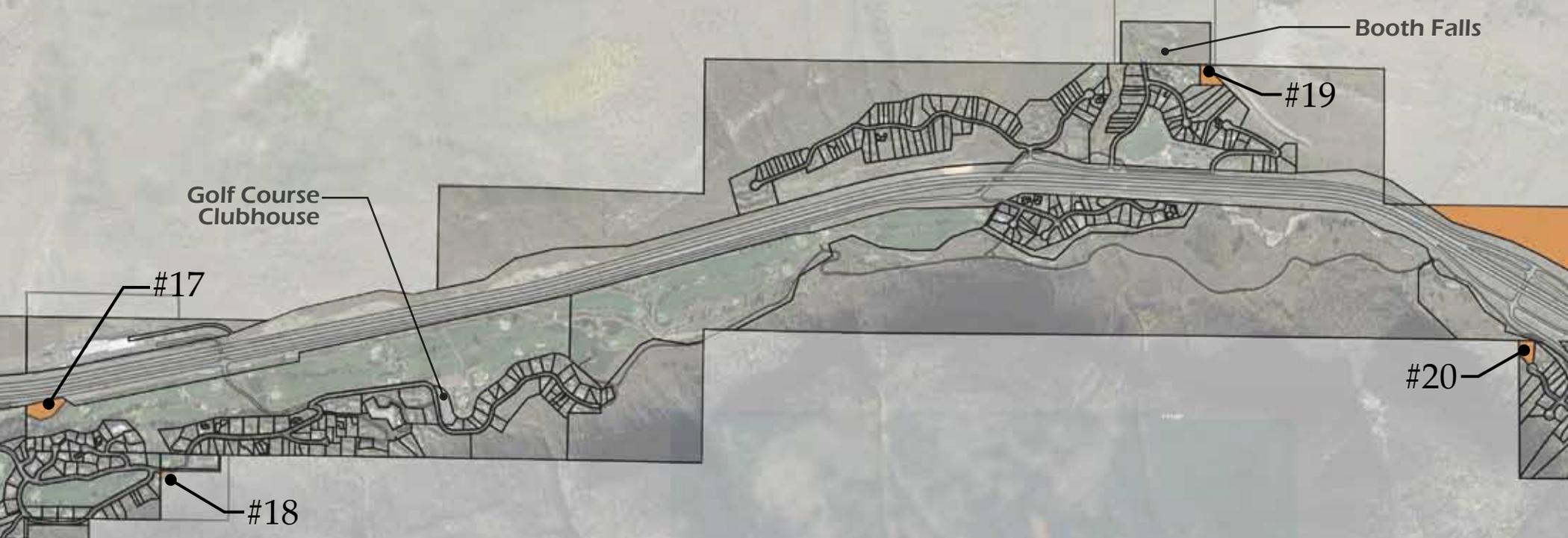
### **ACTION ITEM #16**

**Purpose** - Establish trail connection.

**Action** - Complete research to confirm if easement has been obtained for this trail. If not, obtain trail easement for existing paved recreation trail.

**Other Information** - This 47.9 acre parcel is privately owned and zoned Ski Base/Recreation-1.

**'94 Action Plan** - This parcel was Action Item #25 from the '94 Plan.



**ACTION ITEM #17**

**Purpose** - Protect environmentally sensitive lands.

**Action** - Acquire parcel.

**Other Information** - This parcel is privately owned. It was to have been included in the Town’s purchase of land where the Vail Golf Club was subsequently developed, but was not conveyed as a part of that transaction. The parcel includes wetlands and the Gore Creek corridor.

**’94 Action Plan** - N/A

**ACTION ITEM #18**

**Purpose** - Maintain access to Vail Valley Drive.

**Action** - Acquire portion of parcel that includes Town roadway.

**Other Information** - This parcel is owned by the United States Forest Service.

**’94 Action Plan** - N/A

**ACTION ITEM #19**

**Purpose** - Protect environmentally sensitive land from development.

**Action** - Acquire parcel or work with land owner on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential.

**Other Information** - This vacant .59 acre site is privately owned and zoned Low Density Multi-family. The parcel is characterized by very steep terrain, is within a rockfall hazard zone and has limited access potential. Development potential is very limited.

**’94 Action Plan** - N/A

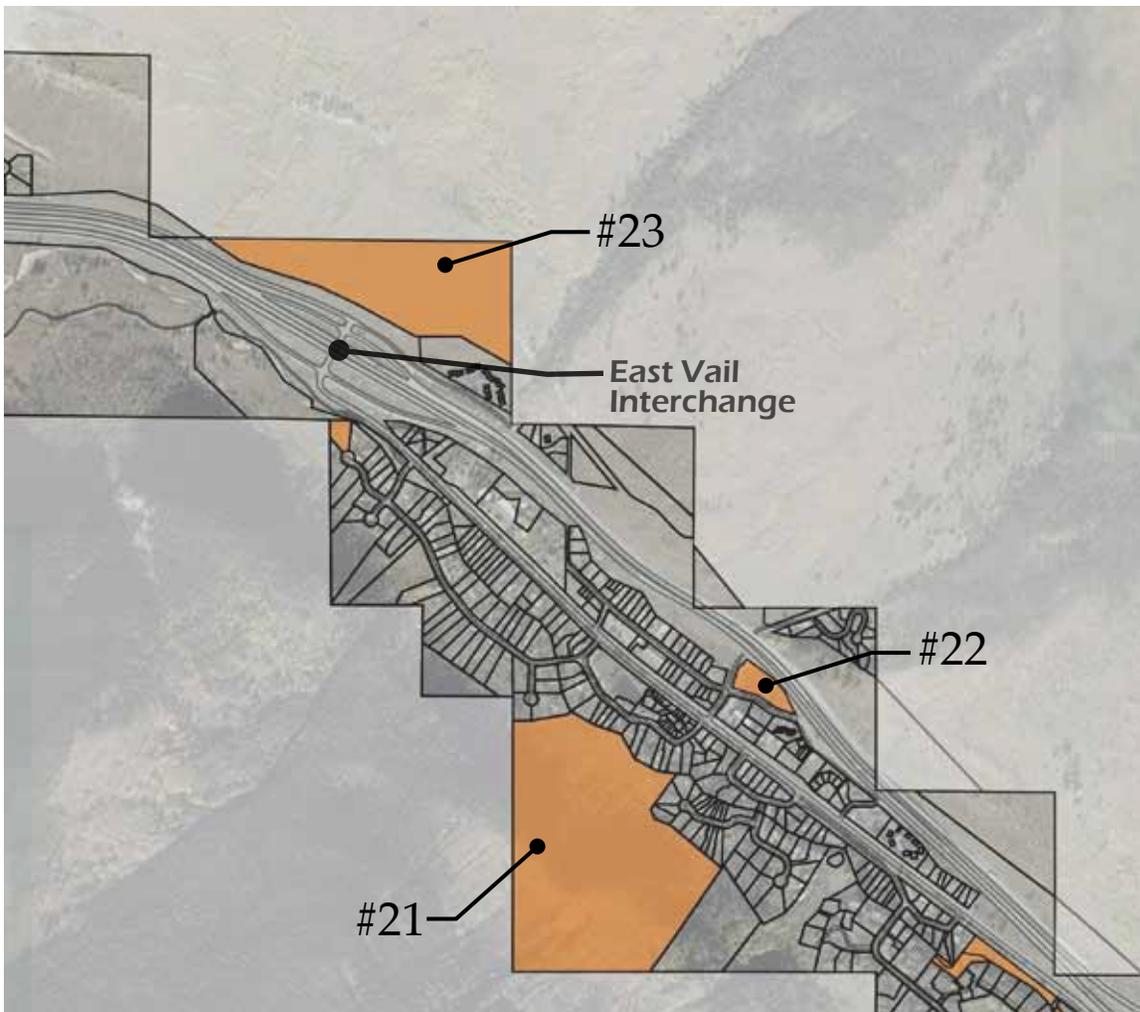
**ACTION ITEM #20**

**Purpose** - Protect environmentally sensitive land from development.

**Action** - Acquire parcel or work with land owner on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential.

**Other Information** - This privately owned, vacant .65 acre site is zoned Two-family Primary/Secondary Residential. The parcel is within the Gore Creek floodplain. Development potential is very limited.

**’94 Action Plan** - This parcel was Action Item #38 from the ’94 Plan.



**ACTION ITEM #21**

**Purpose** - Protect environmentally sensitive land from development.

**Action** – Acquire parcel or work with land owner on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential.

**Other Information** – This privately owned, vacant parcel is 45.2 acres and zoned Agricultural and Open Space. The parcel has no legal access and is within avalanche, debris flow and rockfall hazard areas.

**'94 Action Plan** – This parcel was Action Item #44 from the '94 Plan.

**ACTION ITEM #22**

**Purpose** - Protect environmentally sensitive portion of parcel, potential development of workforce housing project.

**Action** – Acquire parcel.

**Other Information** – This 1.78 acre parcel is owned by the Colorado Department of Transportation. Bighorn Creek bisects the parcel and the parcel is impacted by a debris flow zone. Refer to Chapter 3 - Town Owned Lands and Use of Lands for more information.

**'94 Action Plan** – N/A

**ACTION ITEM #23**

**Purpose** – Protect environmentally sensitive land from development and or mitigate development impacts on environmentally sensitive land.

**Action** – Acquire parcel if not developed by the land owner. If a development application is submitted and approved, work with the land owner to establish a conservation easement on the approximate 17 acres of Natural Area Preservation property, and further mitigate for wildlife and other environmentally sensitive issues on the approximate 5 acres of developable property.

**Other Information** – If the land owner were to decide not to develop this land at their sole discretion, the Town should take steps to acquire the property or work with the land owner to protect the land from development. This approximately 23 acre parcel is within bighorn sheep range and should be evaluated for habitat and rockfall hazards. The parcel had been incorrectly identified as unplatted open space in the 1994 Open Lands Plan. During the process of updating this plan, the land owner was confirmed, and applied for and received approval for subdivision and rezoning of the parcel to approximately 17 acres Natural Area Preservation and approximately 5 acres Housing.

**'94 Action Plan** - This parcel was Action Item #2 from the '94 Plan.



**ACTION ITEM #24**

**Purpose** - Protect environmentally sensitive land from development.  
**Action** – Acquire parcels or work with land owners on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential.  
**Other Information** – This Action Item includes four privately-owned parcels, each of which are located almost entirely within the Gore Creek Corridor.  
**'94 Action Plan** – N/A

**ACTION ITEM #25**

**Purpose** - Protect environmentally sensitive land from development and potential trail development.  
**Action** – Acquire parcel or work with land owner on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential.  
**Other Information** – This 2.94 acre parcel is owned by the Mountain Meadow Condominium Association. The parcel is within debris flow, rockfall and avalanche hazards areas  
**'94 Action Plan** – N/A

**ACTION ITEM #26**

**Purpose** – Protect environmentally sensitive land from development.  
**Action** – Acquire parcel or work with land owner on conservation easement or other measures to eliminate development potential.  
**Other Information** – This vacant 1.9 acre site is privately owned. The parcel is characterized by very steep terrain, is within avalanche and rockfall hazard zones and has limited access potential. Development potential is very limited.  
**'94 Action Plan** – N/A

**ACTION ITEM #27**

**Purpose** – To maintain access to Bighorn Road  
**Action** – Acquire parcel.  
**Other Information** – The parcel is owned by the Colorado Department of Transportation.  
**'94 Action Plan** – This parcel was Action Item #50 from the '94 Plan.



# CHAPTER 6 - IMPLEMENTATION

The Open Lands Plan provides a general framework for the implementation of actions to achieve goals for the acquisition and protection of environmentally sensitive lands, the use and management of Town lands and Town and community facilities and trails. Some recommendations, such as the acquisition of specific parcels or easement are very specific. These recommendations are outlined in Chapter 5 Action Plan. Other recommendations, referred to as Implementation Steps are addressed at a more general level and involve things like the implementation of a program or a study necessary to make final decisions on if or how to proceed with implementing the goals of this Plan. An example of a follow-up study is the need to complete a detailed environmental and wildlife analysis in order to make final decisions on recreation trails. These types of general recommendations are described in preceding chapters of this Plan. This chapter summarizes the major Implementation Steps recommended by this Plan, suggestions on how these recommendations can be addressed, the potential for collaborations and potential funding sources. At the conclusion of this chapter is a matrix summarizing all Implementation Steps. It is recommended that Town Staff meet with the Town Council on an annual basis to define priorities and establish a work program for implementing the goals of this Plan.

## ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS

Chapter 3 – Environmentally Sensitive Lands identifies parcels to be acquired and/or protected from development and addresses methods for the protection of such lands.

### Action Items from Action Plan

The Action Plan identifies fifteen privately-

owned, environmentally sensitive parcels for acquisition and protection. Refer to Chapter 2 Environmentally Sensitive Lands and Chapter 5 Action Plan for additional information on these parcels. The first step in implementing these Action Items is for Town staff to work with the Town Council to establish a work program and priorities for Action Items to be addressed. Once priorities are determined, the initial step will be for staff to initiate dialogue with land owners to gauge their interested in working with the Town on the acquisition of their property or on other steps to protect the land from development (e.g. conservation easement, re-zoning, etc.).

### **Land Acquisitions**

The '94 Plan identified techniques for the acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands and for the acquisition of lands for public purposes or community use. These techniques remain valid today:

- **Acquire fee interest** - This traditional method involves paying fair market value to a willing seller for full fee interest in the land. A purchase using terms or installments could be beneficial to both the Town and the seller.
- **Tax Sale** - If or when the opportunity presents itself, acquiring land via tax sale would be a very cost effective way for the Town to acquire property.
- **Donations** - While closely related to benefits from a conservation easement (see below), a private landowner's donation of land or development rights to the Town could provide tax benefits to the land owner.

- **Bargain Sale** - This is a combination of a donation and sale of land or development rights. Bargain sales are considered when a land owner cannot afford to donate the entire value of a property.

Funds generated by the Town’s RETT are one potential source of revenue for land acquisitions. Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) programs are another potential funding source. GOCO programs include grants for conservation easement transaction costs and grants for open space acquisitions. The Eagle County Open Space Program is another source of funding that should be pursued.

### **Conservation Easements on Private Land**

Conservation easements limit development opportunities and protect privately-owned lands from development in a way that can be beneficial to the land owner and to the Town. The benefit to the Town is that a conservation easement would protect the land without the Town expending funds to purchase the land in fee. The land owner may realize tax benefits for the donation of the conservation easement. There are also funding sources available for landowners to assist with implementing a conservation easement. The Town could collaborate with a land owner and land trust on conservation easements. For example, the Town could purchase land outright then work with a land trust to obtain grants (to offset the purchase price) in exchange for placing a conservation easement on the land. The Town could also assist a land trust in acquiring a conservation easement by providing funding to reimburse the land owner for the value of the development rights they will be giving up.

These and other opportunities should be explored by the Town.

### **Designated Open Space and Conservation Easements**

This Plan discusses two approaches for how the Town can protect Town-owned open space parcels – the Designated Open Space process and conservation easements. Twenty-six Town-owned parcels are eligible to be dedicated as Designated Open Space. In addition, this Plan identifies four parcels for consideration of conservation easements. It is recommended that Town Staff initiate a detailed evaluation of these parcels and prepare recommendations for which parcels, if any, warrant being dedicated as Designated Open Space and which parcels, if any, may warrant protection via a conservation easement. This effort *should* be supported by a citizens task force. The findings of this evaluation would then be presented to the Designated Open Space Board of Trustees who would make decisions regarding any recommendations to the Town Council regarding both Designated Open Space parcels and conservation easements.

## **PUBLIC FACILITIES AND COMMUNITY NEEDS/USE AND MANAGEMENT OF TOWN LANDS**

### **Workforce Housing**

The Action Plan identifies four parcels of land for potential acquisition for the development of workforce housing and Town facilities. Town staff should initiate dialogue with these land owners to gauge their interest in selling their land. If the landowner(s) have an interest in selling and upon direction from the Town Council, conceptual site/development feasibility studies should be completed

to better understand the development potential of these parcels. The Vail Housing Authority can play a role in these evaluations and assist in the acquisition of the potential housing parcels.

### **Public Facilities and Community Needs**

There were a number of public facilities and community needs that were discussed during the preparation of this update. An expanded snow dump, solar farm, disc golf course, and event or performing arts centers are some examples of these. While specific locations for these and other facilities are not provided by this Plan, it is assumed that one or more of these ideas may be pursued if or when directed by the Town Council.

### **Management of Lands for Biodiversity**

The protection, preservation and enhancement of vegetation, aquatic resources, riparian and wildlife habitats and other natural resources found on Vail’s open lands is an important community priority. Understanding these resources and making sound decisions regarding the use and management of Town lands is an objective of this Plan. It is recommended that a comprehensive study of Vail’s open space lands be completed, monitoring of these resources be initiated and programs for enhancing these lands be implemented. Understanding the existing condition and health of the natural landscape is necessary to establishing a “baseline” for the ongoing monitoring of these natural resources. This effort should be completed by an ecological-oriented consulting firm with the underlying objectives of inventorying these natural resources and developing programs to enhance the biodiversity of these lands.

It will also be important to understand how the management and use of Town open lands affects these natural resources. Formal policies for the management of Town lands should be an outcome of this effort. Management policies for the Town's open space lands should be adopted by the Town Council after completion of studies described above and in Chapter 3 – Town Owned Lands and Use of Town Lands.

### **Routine Maintenance of Town Open Lands**

The Town's Public Works Department currently manages Town-owned open lands. This effort should be formalized to establish a comprehensive program for the routine maintenance of lands that includes, among other things, periodic inspection of lands, weed control and vegetation management, maintaining of signs and other facilities, clearing of litter, maintaining drainage, etc. Appropriate staff and budget should be established to implement this program. Management programs should be refined based on the findings and policies that may result from the bio-diversity study described in the preceding section.

## **RECREATIONAL TRAILS**

This Plan identifies eleven ideas for potential improvements to the soft surface trail system in and around Vail. These ideas include the potential for new trails, the adoption, or formalization of existing social trails or the closure of social trails. These trail ideas and the process for further study and for obtaining approval from the USFS for new trails, easements necessary for new trails and the

potential for collaboration with other organizations are discussed in Chapter 5 – Trails.

### **Wildlife Enhancements**

In response to the existing condition of wildlife resources in the Gore Valley and the value the Vail community places on wildlife, it is recommended that prior to the development of new recreation trails, that the following steps be taken in an attempt to improve wildlife resources:

- Better define Trail-Free zones depicted on the Conceptual Trails Plan
- Public Education
- Enforcement of Seasonal Trail Closures
- Habitat Enhancement

The Town should initiate dialogue with CPW and USFS on these initiatives.

### **Action Items from Action Plan**

The Action Plan identifies the need for seven easements or land acquisitions that would be necessary to implement Trail Ideas. No action is necessary on these Action Items until environmental and wildlife evaluations are completed and decisions are made on future recreation trails. Decisions on easements and land acquisitions will be made at a later date.

### **USFS Trails and Trailheads**

Eight trailheads within the Town of Vail provide access to trails on USFS lands. A number of these trails are new or have been improved in recent years. In many cases the current use of these trailheads is significant, to the point where the trail experience is compromised and there are issues with congestion at the trailheads. This is particularly true with the Booth Falls trail and others in East Vail. The Town should initiate dialogue with the USFS to

discuss options for addressing the use of these trails and implementing necessary management programs.



### **Vail Resorts and Vail Mountain Trails**

Vail Resorts manages a network of interpretive, hiking and biking trails on Vail Mountain. A number of these trails extend into the Town of Vail. Vail Mountain trails represent a significant percentage of the soft surface recreational trails located proximate to or accessible from the Town. While Vail Resorts has no immediate or long-term plans to expand their system of trails, the Town should continue dialogue with Vail Resorts regarding any future trail improvement plans. Coordination with Vail Resorts will be needed on Trail #5 Intermountain to Lionshead Connector and Trail #8 Vail Mountain Cross

Connector, both of which are located partly or entirely on Vail Mountain. In addition to trails identified on the Conceptual Trails Plan, the Town should initiate dialogue with Vail Resorts on the potential development of new trails, particularly trails located on the front side of Vail Mountain. Trails on the front side of Vail Mountain have the potential to link directly into Town, making them accessible to both residents and guests. In addition, the USFS review process for trails on the front side of the Vail Mountain would potentially be less rigorous given Vail Resort's current use permit.

### **Trail Maintenance**

The Town of Vail currently maintains all paved and sanctioned soft-surface trails within its boundaries. In addition, the Town maintains the Gore Valley Trail between the Intermountain neighborhood and Highway 6/24 in Dowd Junction. Other trails within the greater Vail network are managed by the USFS, CDOT, ECO Trails and Vail Resorts. Any new soft-surface trails outside of Town boundaries may require that the Town become more active in trail management and trail maintenance. The Town should explore maintenance collaborations with Eagle County Adopt-a-Trail (a USFS and Vail Valley Mountain Bike Association program), Friends of Eagles Nest Wilderness, Vail Resorts EpicPromise and the Colorado Youth Corps,

### **Trail Use/Education and Outreach**

During community input sessions many concerns were expressed about the Town's existing trail system. Among these concerns were improving the quality of signs and wayfinding, trail etiquette (specifically conflicts

with different user groups and overcrowding at popular trails). These concerns can be addressed by a combination of improved signage and community outreach programs.



### **Signage**

- An evaluation of all directional signs should be completed and as deemed necessary a program for improving these signs should be implemented,
- Provide trail maps at all trailheads,
- Adding signs on multi-use trails at switchbacks and blind spots alerting users to be aware of other trail users, and
- Adding informational signs at trailheads to address topics such as wildlife considerations or trail closures, alerting users to trails being open to multi-use and information on the ability level of the trail.

### **Outreach Program**

Establishing outreach programs to provide information on Vail's trails was considered a viable way to improve the trail experience for all trail users. Outreach programs could provide information on:

- Trail etiquette, specifically with regards to respecting other users on multi-use trails,

- Wildlife or other seasonal closures,
- Trail maps, information on ability levels, etc.,
- Encouraging the use of under-utilized trails in the area (to disperse users from over-crowded trails), and
- Proper planning for trail use (clothing, food and water, emergency supplies).

Information addressing these and other topics could be provided to trail users via local bike shops, the Town's visitor centers, the Town's web page and by local hotels.

## **CONCLUSION**

As an element of the Town of Vail Comprehensive Plan, the 2018 Open Lands Plan Update addresses opportunities for the acquisition and protection of sensitive lands, provides recommendations on the use of Town lands and outlines steps to take in evaluating existing and future recreation trails. The Plan provides the Vail Town Council and the Vail community with a framework for future actions and decision-making regarding each of these topics. While in many regards the Plan provides fairly explicit direction, the Plan is a master plan document and as such the Plan is general in nature. As noted throughout the Plan, much additional work, analysis and community involvement will be necessary prior to making future decisions.

This Plan is an update to the 1994 Open Lands Plan. It is recommended that this Plan be revisited in the next five to ten years.

<b>SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED IMPLEMENTATION STEPS</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE PARTY</b>	<b>REVIEW AUTHORITY</b>
<u>Work Program</u> - Town staff to meet annually with the Town Council to define priorities and establish a work program and budget for implementing the goals of the Open Lands Plan.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works	Town Council
<b><u>Environmentally Sensitive Lands</u></b>		
<u>Designated Open Space Board of Trustees</u> - Assign members to, and reconvene, this Board.	Environmental/Community Development	Town Council
<u>Designated Open Space</u> - With assistance from a Citizens Task Force, analyze the 26 parcels that currently qualify to be Designated Open Space and make recommendations on which parcels, if any, should be considered for designated. Evaluate the Designated Open Space process to identify potential Charter amendments that could improve the effectiveness of the program.	Community Development, Public Works	Designated Open Space Board of Trustees, Town Council
<u>Conservation Easements</u> - With assistance from a Citizens Task Force, evaluate the appropriateness of establishing conservation easements on Town-owned lands and identify lands that could benefit from protection by conservation easement.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works	Town Council
<u>Action Plan</u> - Reach out to owners of environmentally sensitive lands identified for acquisition or protection on the Action Plan, monitor the availability of such parcels.	Environmental/Community Development	
<b><u>Town-Owned Lands and Use of Lands</u></b>		
<u>Biodiversity</u> - Initiate a comprehensive study of lands containing important biodiversity values, such as vegetation, aquatic resources, riparian and wildlife habitat, to understand existing conditions to identify programs for the enhancement of these resources. Develop formal policies for the management of Town-owned lands for biodiversity.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works; Consultant	PEC, Town Council
<u>Maintenance of Town-owned Lands</u> - Develop a program for maintenance of the Town's open lands, open space and trails. Identify funding requirements for such programs.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works; Consultant	Town Council
<u>Wildfire and Safety</u> - Coordinate the efforts of Vail Fire & Emergency Services to manage vegetation to minimize the potential threat of wildfire in and around Vail with other Town management efforts.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works, VFES	
<u>Action Plan</u> - Reach out to owners of parcels identified for acquisition on the Action Plan, monitor the availability of such parcels.	Environmental/Community Development	
<b><u>Trails</u></b>		
<u>Public Education</u> - Implement a public education program addressing how trail use affects wildlife, the importance of respecting trail closures, and how to be respectful and sensitive to wildlife resources when using trails.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works, Community Information Officer	Town Council
<u>Wildlife Habitat Enhancement</u> - Work with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the United States Forest Service to collaborate on programs to enhance wildlife habitat.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works	Town Council
<u>Seasonal Trail Closures</u> - Work with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the United States Forest Service to improve compliance with seasonal closures via education, enforcement and installation of gates at trailheads.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works	
<u>Trails Plan</u> - Initiate a comprehensive trails plan process to include the evaluation and further study of trail ideas identified in this Plan and a comprehensive environmental and wildlife analysis to be used in future decision-making regarding any new trail development.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works, Consultant	Town Council
<u>Trail-free Zones</u> - As an element of the comprehensive environmental and wildlife analysis, refine the recommended trail-free zones identified on the Conceptual Trails Plan and coordinate with the United States Forest Service on actions that could be taken to establish trail-free zones.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works, consultant	Town Council
<u>Action Plan</u> - As may be necessary depending upon the outcome of detailed trail planning, reach out to owners of parcels identified for the acquisition of easements necessary for trail development.	Environmental/Community Development	
<u>Collaborations</u> - As may be appropriate, coordinate with other organizations such as Vail Resorts and Eagle County on the planning and evaluation of potential new trails.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works, Consultant	
<u>Community Outreach</u> - Establish outreach programs targeted to both locals and visitors to provide information on trail use, trail etiquette and trail opportunities in the area.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works, Community Information Officer	Town Council
<u>Signage and Wayfinding</u> - Evaluate existing signage, wayfinding and maps and prepare a comprehensive program for improving signage.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works, consultant	PEC, Town Council
<u>Existing Trailheads</u> - Work with the United States Forest Service on the maintenance and management of existing trails and trailheads. Involve other stakeholders in this effort.	Environmental/Community Development, Public Works	Town Council

# APPENDIX

- 1994 Open Lands Plan
- Status of Action Plan Parcels and Trails from the '94 Action Plan
- Summary of Action Items
- Summary of Real Estate Transfer Tax Ordinances
- Designated Open Space procedures
- USFS Process
- Trail Types and Standards
- Conceptual Trails Plan/Trails Dropped from Consideration
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife - Wildlife in the Gore Valley
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife - Wildlife Influence Area Maps
- Trail Scoping Session Minutes - September 2017
- Summary of 2018 Wildlife Forum