TRAILS CONCEPT PLAN

TOWN OF VAIL

WELCOME

TRAILS IN VAIL COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Meeting Goal:

To achieve some level of consensus and understanding among community members through open discussion and compromise. Together, we're trying to reach a collective vision or "Trail Concept Plan" for the Town of Vail. We want to hear your thoughts on trail priorities, new trails, and improvements to existing trails for this community.

Photo Credit: Jack Affleck

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PURPOSE

Open Lands Plan

The Comprehensive Open Lands Plan, adopted in 1994, established community priorities for open space and recreation needs. It identified parcels for acquisition, environmental protection, trail development, and public use. The Plan named improving the trail and bike path system as its #2 priority, and offered recommendations for 23 trail-related improvements.

Open Lands Update

Twenty-three years later, many of the trails-related recommendations have been completed—the Town built the North Trail, widened the Frontage Roads and improved many trailheads. The plan is being updated to reflect present demands for open lands and trails. The update will include a Trails Concept Plan with specific trail recommendations for Forest Service approval.

Open House Workshop

Through this workshop, community members have the opportunity to provide feedback and offer ideas on Vail Trails.

We want to hear your vision for Vail's trail system, recommendations for new trails, and feedback on existing suggestions and ideas. These thoughts will be incorporated into the Trails Concept Plan section of the Open Lands Plan.

Questions to Consider

• What are the strengths and weaknesses of Vail's trail system?

• If you left Vail and came back 10 years later, what would you want the trail system to look like?
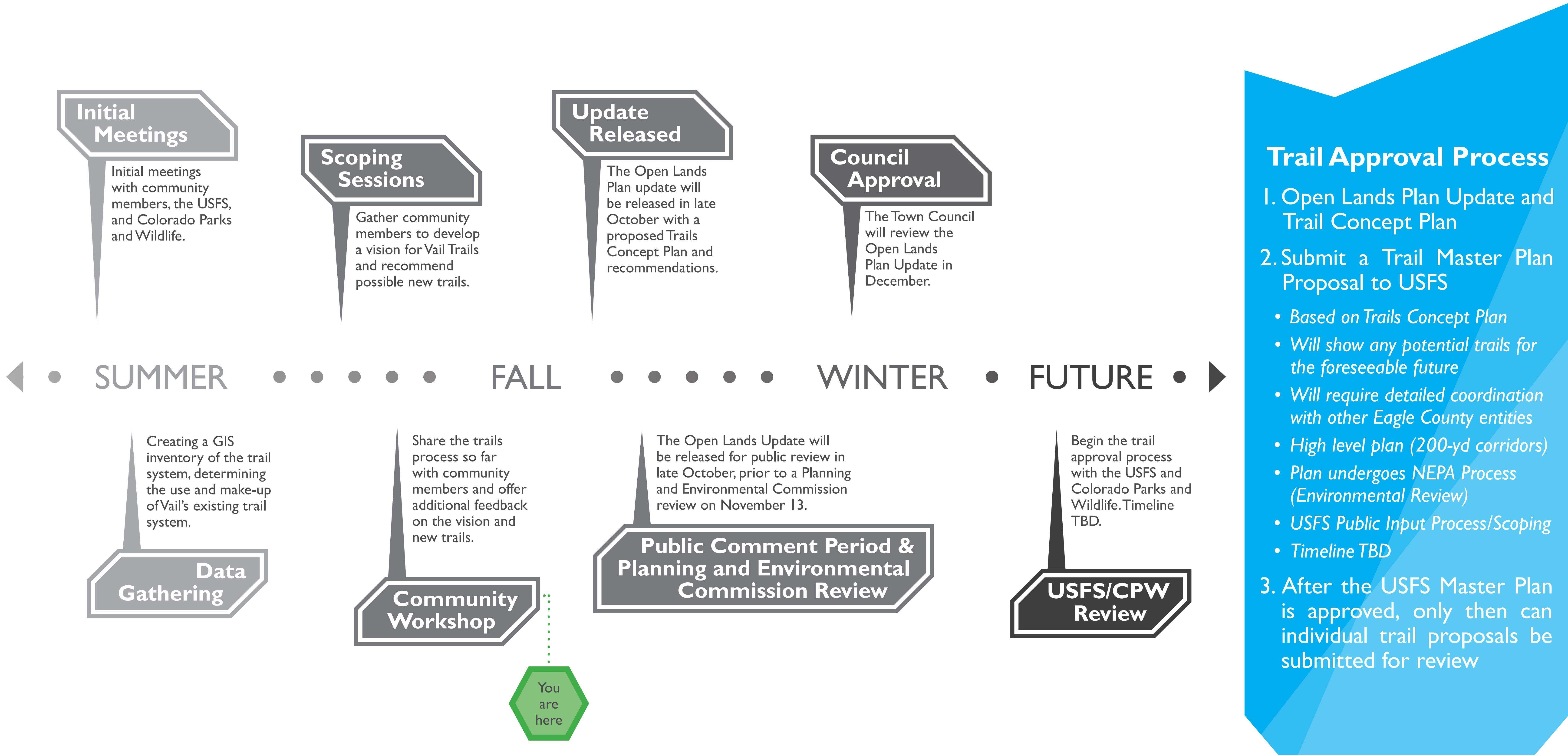
• How should Vail spend its trail related budget?

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TIMELINE AND PROCESS

Initial Meetings

Initial meetings with community members, the USFS, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Scoping Sessions

Gather community members to develop a vision for Vail Trails and recommend possible new trails.

Update Released

The Open Lands Plan update will be released in late October with a proposed Trails Concept Plan and recommendations.

Council Approval

The Town Council will review the Open Lands Plan Update in December.

SUMMER • • • • • **FALL** • • • • • **WINTER** • **FUTURE** • ▶

Creating a GIS inventory of the trail system, determining the use and make-up of Vail's existing trail system.

Data Gathering

Share the trails process so far with community members and offer additional feedback on the vision and new trails.

Community Workshop

You are here

The Open Lands Update will be released for public review in late October, prior to a Planning and Environmental Commission review on November 13.

Public Comment Period & Planning and Environmental Commission Review

Begin the trail approval process with the USFS and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Timeline TBD.

USFS/CPW Review

Trail Approval Process

1. Open Lands Plan Update and Trail Concept Plan

2. Submit a Trail Master Plan Proposal to USFS

   • *Based on Trails Concept Plan*
   • *Will show any potential trails for the foreseeable future*
   • *Will require detailed coordination with other Eagle County entities*
   • *High level plan (200-yd corridors)*
   • *Plan undergoes NEPA Process (Environmental Review)*
   • *USFS Public Input Process/Scoping*
   • *Timeline TBD*

3. After the USFS Master Plan is approved, only then can individual trail proposals be submitted for review

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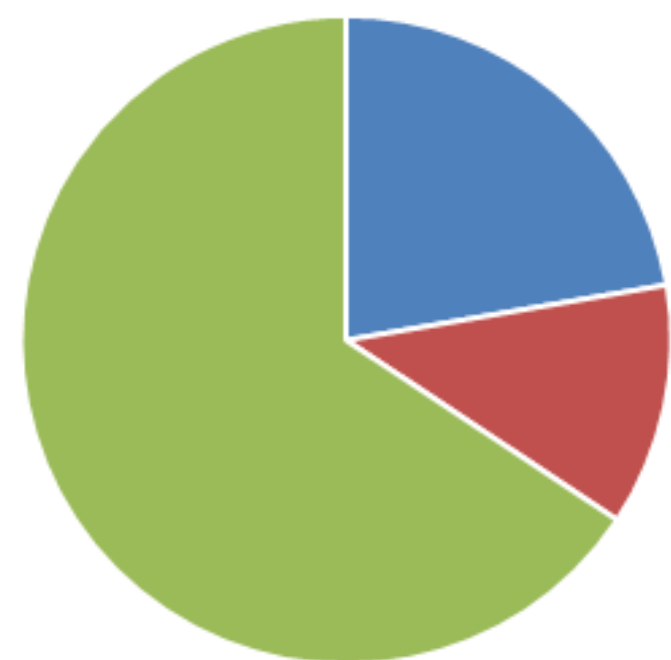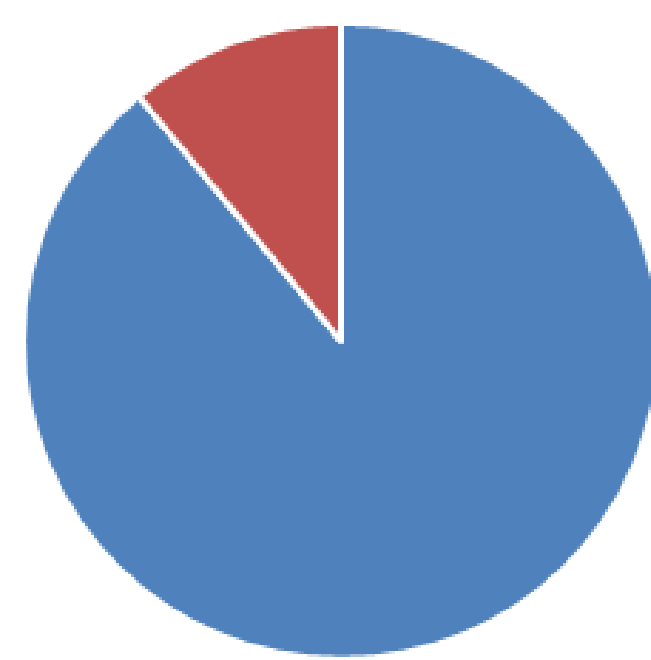
DATA GATHERING

SE Group gathered data on the existing trail system and social trails. They studied the distribution of ability levels and surface types in the existing system. They also posted trail counters on Town and social trails to measure usage of the existing system.

Greater Vail Network by Intended User Type

■ Hiking ■ Biking ■ Multi-Use

Town of Vail - Trail Types

■ Hard surface ■ Soft Surface

GREATER VAIL NETWORK BY INTENDED USER TYPE AND ABILITY		
Hiking		
Easy – 7%	Moderate – 31%	Difficult – 63%
Biking		
Easy – 8%	Moderate – 72%	Difficult – 19%
Multi-Use		
Easy – 46%	Moderate – 30%	Difficult – 25%

Trail Counters

SE Group placed counters on ten trail segments in Vail, each for a week at at time.

- Gore Valley Trail has the most traffic with over 100,000 predicted annual users
- Sections of the North Trail see between 11,000-14,000 predicted annual users
- Many social trails are also very busy:
  Memorial Park Social Trail: 9,000 annual users
  East Water Tank Social Trail: 4,300 annual users
  Vail Trail: 5,000 annual users

Findings

» *98 trails totaling 222 miles in the Greater Vail network*

» *The majority of easy network trails are hard-surface rec paths*

» *89% of trail mileage in Town of Vail is hard-surface, easy rec paths*

» *All biking-only trails are on Vail Resorts*

Key Takeaways

» *Minimal easy mountain biking in Vail*

» *Vast majority of hiking trails are difficult*

» *High use of official and social soft-surface trails*

Note: numbers may not be total due to rounding. All trails counted by mileage.

SE Group installing a trail counter

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COMMUNITY SCOPING SESSIONS

The Town of Vail held five scoping sessions during September to gather input from community stakeholders. The 26 attendees represented various neighborhoods, user types, and ages. They discussed visions, goals, and constraints for Vail's trails and proposed new trails for the system.

Who were the attendees?

- » hikers
- » bikers
- » horseback riders
- » parents of young children
- » outdoor shop and hotel managers
- » wildlife advocates
- » long-time residents
- » new renters

What they said:

"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"

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MAJOR THEMES

Safety (Sa)

- Reduce user conflict through signage and education
- Make biking and walking safer (especially at roundabouts)
- Build paved trail segments to create off-road opportunities in busy areas of town (Vail Mountain School to East Vail Interchange)
- Prepare for the increasing prevalence of electric bikes

Comments:

Sustainability (Su)

- Protect important habitats and wildlife populations
- Improve existing trails to make them more sustainable and to lower maintenance costs
- Ensure trails provide a nature experience for locals and visitors
- Consider maintenance options such as volunteer groups, youth corps, and trail maintenance crews
- Limit trail expansion by repairing and better-utilizing existing trails and coordinating with neighboring communities

Comments:

Accessibility (A)

- Improve signage to make existing trails easier to follow
- Look to alleviate congestion on existing trails through adoption of social trails and/or improving public access to trail information
- Bus service and connector paths to trailheads to make trails accessible without a vehicle
- Soft-surface parallel trail to Gore Valley Trail as a commuting route and beginner trail for guests (not all in favor)

Comments:

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MAJOR THEMES

Diversity D

- *Work creatively with Vail's steep topography on trail diversity*
- *Provide beginner to intermediate mountain biking trails*
- *Provide easier walking trails for children, elderly, and inexperienced hikers*
- *Gear trails towards different user types to reduce conflict*
- *Protect the Vail Trail as a small footprint, meandering hiking trail and provide other similar experiences where possible*
- *Work with neighboring towns to provide well-rounded summer experience*
- *Building an in-town pump track to provide mountain biking experience for children*
- *Consider other trail activities when developing trails such as fat biking, e-bikes, and snowshoeing*

Comments:

Connectivity C

- *Improve connectivity of both hard and soft surface trails*
- *Additional connector trails to Forest Service trails to mitigate trailhead parking problems*
- *Short neighborhood connector trails for walking errands and to enable kids to ride to a friend's house*
- *Convenient neighborhood access points for hiking, biking, and local trips*
- *Connecting Town and Forest Service trails with the Vail Resorts' network*
- *Regional connector trails (to Minturn, Avon...)*

Comments:
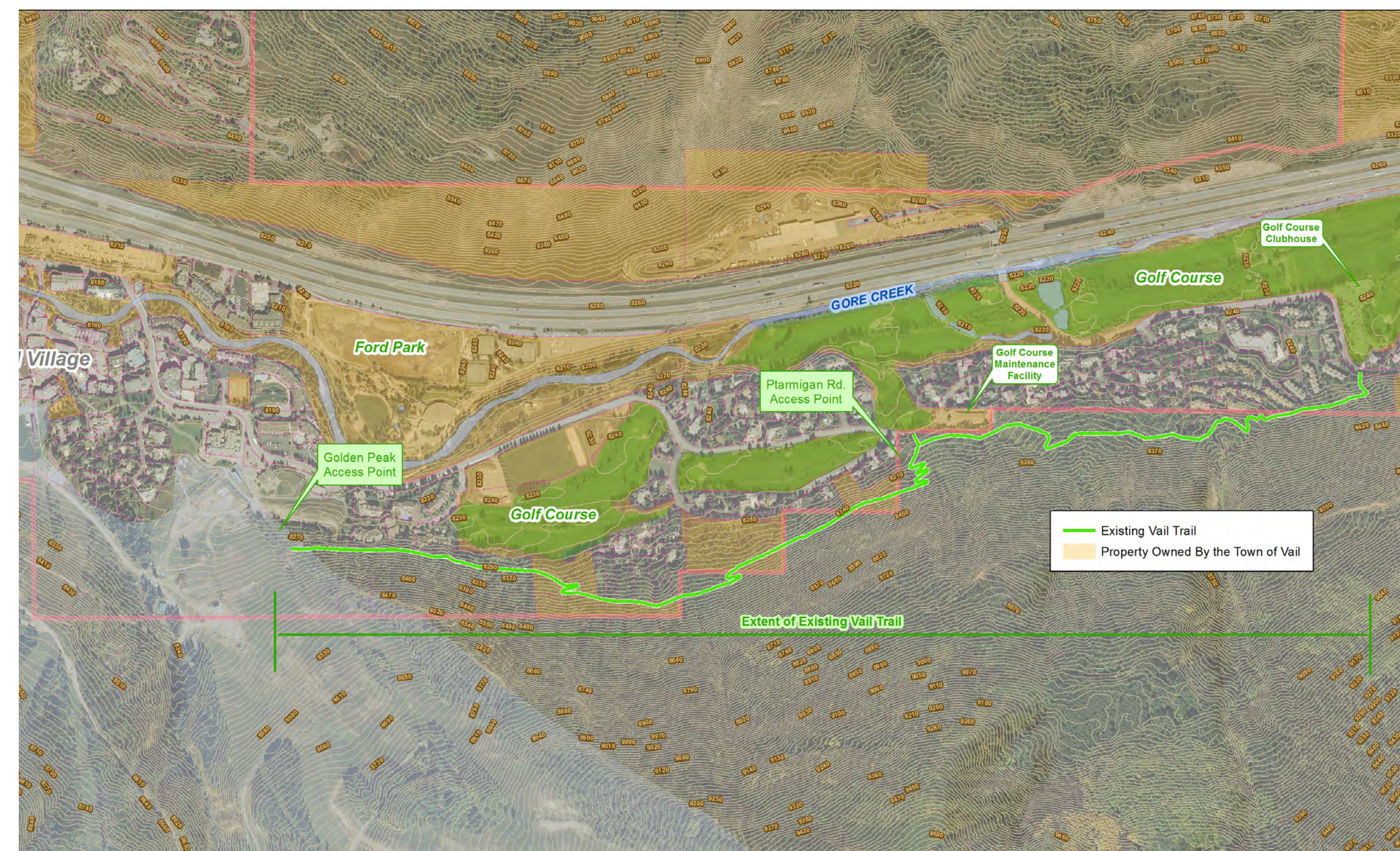
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SOCIAL TRAILS

Social Trails are user-created unsanctioned trails. They do not appear on any official maps and the Forest Service could close them at any time. The Town could adopt some of these trails by acquiring the easements from private property owners or the Forest Service. The Town would then be responsible for their maintenance and they would appear on town trail maps.

SE Group found that many social trails have comparable usage to sanctioned soft surface trails. For example, the Memorial Park Trail had 267 users per week and the Intermountain and Vail Social Trails each had about 150 users. The sanctioned North Trail sees about 300 users per week. The social trails have high usage throughout the week from residents using neighborhood trails.

VAIL TRAIL

The Vail Trail is a soft surface trail between Golden Peak and the Golf Course Clubhouse.

Currently the trail is 1.5 miles of narrow single track on USFS, Private and Town-owned lands. In 2015, the Town proposed widening the existing trail and extending it to East Vail. That plan led to discussions that inspired an update to the Open Lands Plan.

Various Public Input on Vail Trail:
- *Protect the current feel of the trail (narrow, meandering, hiker-friendly)*
- *Leave it entirely as is*
- *Adopt it and acquire necessary easements*
- *Improve sustainability*
- *Extend it towards East Vail*
- *Make it hiking-only*
- *Improve access at the eastern end*

TRAILS 101

Sustainable Trails

Sustainable trails protect the environment, meet user needs and expectations and require little maintenance.

Key Characteristics:

- Follow natural contours to minimize construction impact and erosion
- Keep users on the trail with wide, dry trails
- Average trail grade <10% to reduce erosion

Trail Maintenance Options

All system trails require some level of maintenance. Maintenance options include:

- Eagle County Adopt-a-Trail – existing Eagle County volunteer program that maintains nearly 30 trails
- Youth Corps – cost effective option using Colorado youth groups to perform trail related tasks
- Town of Vail Trail Crew – Town employs seasonal work force (option used in other mountain towns)

Wildlife Concerns

Vail's natural surroundings support numerous habitat types that must be considered when discussing a trails plan.

On the east side of town, there is critical bighorn sheep habitat, a peregrine nest, and elk habitat. To ensure these important species are protected, the town will initiate wildlife studies where needed and work with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Forest Service.

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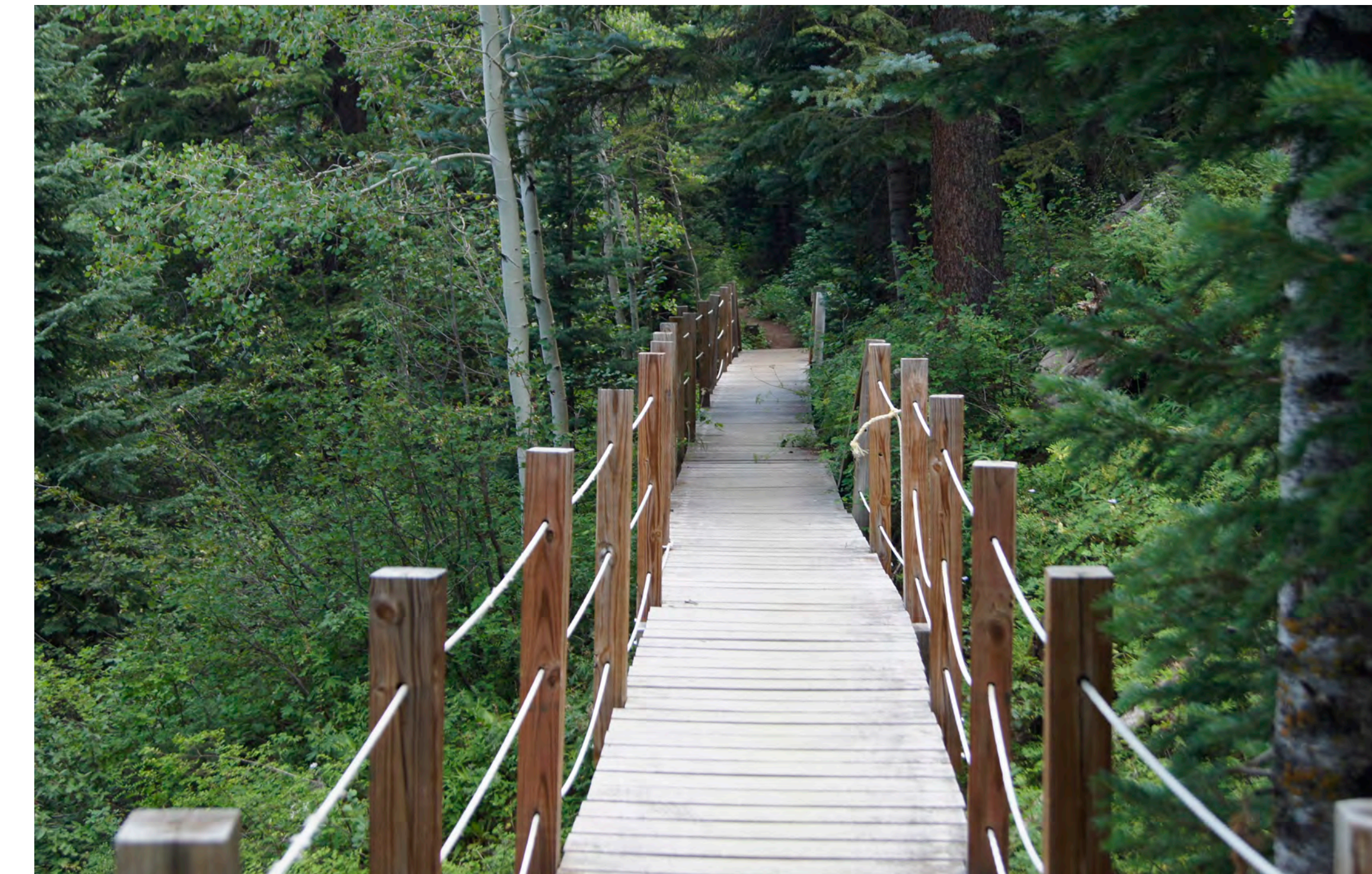## TRAILS 101

User Conflict

National Forest trails are open to bikers and hikers. Wilderness trails are hiker-only. Common ways to reduce user conflict are:

- Design wider trails so users can easily pass
- Signage to encourage better trail etiquette
- Disperse users through better trail information and more trail opportunities
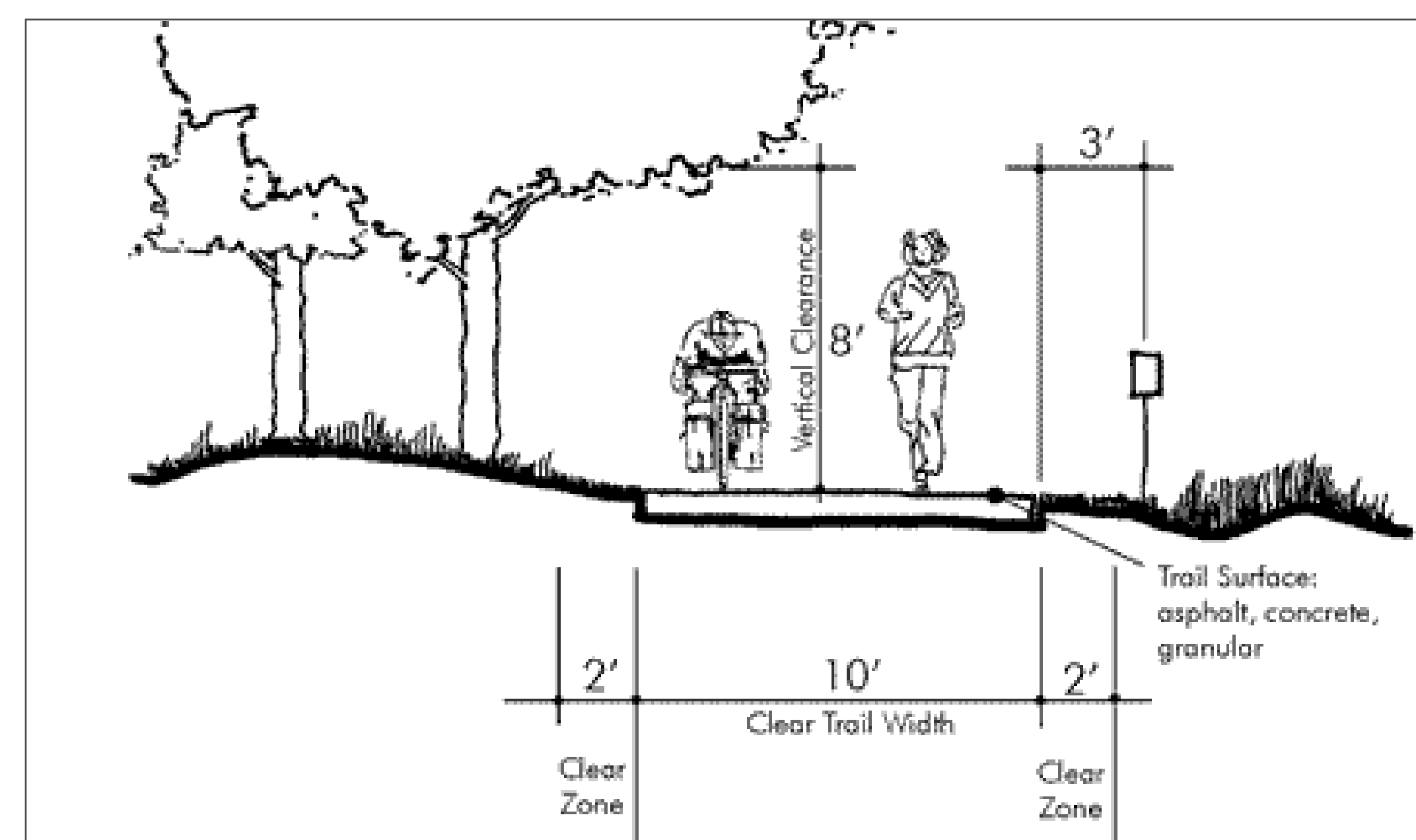
Trail Widths

Widths of new trails depend on their expected user group.

- Soft surface hiking and biking trails: 3-5' wide
- Soft surface hiking only trails: 12-36" wide
- Mountain biking trails: 12-48" wide
- Hard surface multi-use trails: 10' minimum, 12-14' with a 2' soft surface pedestrian shoulder is recommended in heavy use areas.

Trail Adoption

Adopting a trail would mean acquiring easements on lands that are not town-owned (private or USFS), adding appropriate signage and performing any necessay trail maintenance. An adopted trail would be an official part of the trail system and appear on town trail maps.

SHARE THE TRAIL YIELD TO

SOURCE: IOWA DOT

TRAILS CONCEPT PLAN

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TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS KEY

Adopt/Formalize:

A. 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 AA.

User Groups: 🚶

Ability Level: ■

Goals: A C D

Issues: Steep terrain, safety, wildlife

B. Matterhorn Trail

Existing social trail connects Eagles Nest/Game Creek Trail down to the Matterhorn neighborhood. This trail could be formalized with the USFS, realigned in sections to improve sustainability and connected to Trail Opportunity AA.

User Groups: 🚶 🚴

Ability Level: ◆

Goals: C D Su

Issues: Steep terrain, safety, wildlife

C. Vail Trail

Existing social trail for soft-surface hiking and limited biking between Vail Village and the Golf Course. The trail currently crosses into USFS and private property and should be formalized with the property owners. Improve sustainability where needed, reconstruct east end to improve accessibility and sustainability, recommended hiker-only

User Groups: 🚶

Ability Level: ■

Goals: A C D Su

Issues: Steep terrain, hazards, wildlife, private property

D. East Watertank Trail

Existing social trail provides intermediate soft-surface hiking and limited biking for the East Vail neighborhood. Potential to connect to Trail Opportunity DD.

User Groups: 🚶 🚴

Ability Level: ◆

Goals: A C D Su

Issues: Steep terrain, wildlife

Children's Facilities:

These ideas were discussed during the scoping sessions. Some suggestions are shown on the Trail Recommendations map.

Kid's Bike Park/Pump Track

A series of short loops, dirt piles, jumps, etc designed for younger kids. The idea was raised multiple times. Suggested locations include the Booth Creek 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.

Improve Existing:

E. North Trail

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

User Groups: 🚶 🚴

Ability Level: ■

Goals: A C D Su

F. North Trail

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

User Groups: 🚶 🚴

Ability Level: ■

Goals: A C D Su

G. 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.

User Groups: 🚶 🚴

Ability Level: ■

Goals: A C D Su

Low-Probability Trail Suggestions:

H. Basingdale to Minturn Connector Trail

This existing social trail is currently closed. It connects the Intermountain neighborhood towards Highway 24 near Minturn. The trail crosses through Colorado Parks and Wildlife property and through an important deer and elk migration corridor. CPW has indicated that no trail should cross though this area. Any trails plan should evaluate other potential connections to the Minturn area.

QQ. Minturn Ridge Trail

This trail connects the Game Creek trail to the Meadow Mountain Ranger Station. With the Basingdale and Matterhorn trail, this trail forms a loop from Intermountain and West Vail. Low probability of construction due to close proximity of Cougar Ridge Trail.

RR. Spraddle Creek to Booth Creek Connector Trail

No trail currently exists, however an extension of the North Trail has been suggested. The suggested trail is approximately The alignment shown is approximately 750-1,000 vertical feet above the valley floor. Any trail would cross through critical Bighorn Sheep habitat. CPW has indicated that no trail should cross through this area. An alternative alignment within 100-250 vertical feet of the valley floor should be discussed with CPW.

Hard Surface Trail Suggestions:

NN. Gore Valley Trail to Minturn via I-70 Underpass

Provide a hard surface connection from Vail to the town of Minturn.

SS. North Recreation Path Connection

Complete the North Recreation Path between the Vail Mountain School and the East Vail interchange.

For both trails, the user group, ability, and goals are as follows:

User Groups: 🚴 🚶

Ability Level: ●

Goals: A C Sa

TRAILS CONCEPT PLAN

TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS KEY

Trail Opportunities:

AA. Intermountain to Lionshead Connector

Proposed multi-use trail to connect the Intermountain Trail (A) 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:

Ability Level:

Goals: A C D

Issues: wildlife, private property

BB. 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.

User Groups:

Ability Level:

Goals: A C D Su

Issues: wildlife, private property

CC1. Vail Trail Extension Phase I

New trail that provides a soft-surface alternative to the paved Gore Valley Trail through the town-owned Katsos Ranch Open Space.

User Groups:

Ability Level:

Goals: A C D

Issues: wildlife, steep terrain, peregrine nesting site, private property

CC2. Vail Trail Extension Phase II

This trail is a soft-surface option above East Vail connecting the East Watertank Trail to Memorial Park.

User Groups:

Ability Level:

Goals: A C D

Issues: wildlife, peregrine nesting site, steep terrain, private property

DD. Mill Creek Connector

This trail could connect Mill Creek Road to East Vail over a ridge to provide 1) additional hiking option out of East Vail and 2) loop option.

User Groups:

Ability Level:

Goals: A C D

Issues: wildlife analysis, steep terrain, Vail Resorts impacts

EE. Two Elk Connector

This new soft-surface trail would connect the lower reach of the Two Elk Trail with East Vail, a potential Vail Trail Extension and under I-70 to near the Gore Creek Campground, eliminating the need to access the Vail Pass bike path and providing East Vail with access to the Wilderness Trails. The trail would align low on the hillside south of I-70 and improving a long loop-trail for the Vail area.

User Groups:

Ability Level:

Goals: A C D Sa

Issues: wildlife analysis, steep terrain, private property

FF. Bald Mountain Hiking

Potential new hiking-only opportunity using some existing trail/road and some new trail. Provides an alternative to the Wilderness Area trails in East Vail, and is within the proposed new Wilderness Area Boundaries. Potential access from town, reducing some of the parking issues at the existing trailheads. The trail leaves from the Son of Middle Creek trailhead, follows former trails along Spraddle Creek and ends at Bald Mountain. This trail was closed as part of the WRNF Travel Management Plan.

User Groups:

Ability Level:

Goals: A C D

Issues: wildlife analysis

GG. Son of Middle Creek to Red Sandstone 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:

Ability Level:

Goals: A C D

Issues: wildlife, steep terrain, private property, Town of Vail approval

HH. Red Sandstone Single Track

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 safe alternative for mountain bikers heading up the road. This trail could also open access to trails in the Lost Lake area.

User Groups:

Ability Level:

Goals: A C D Sa

Issues: wildlife analysis

JJ. Lost Lake Loop System

The idea behind this system is to utilize some existing trail and decommissioned logging roads to create a nested loop system near Lost Lake. The idea would require significant study, but could provide a beginner/intermediate/expert system within several miles of Vail.

User Groups:

Ability Level:

Goals: A C D

Issues: wildlife analysis

KK. Buffehr-Red Sandstone Connector

This trail connects Red Sandstone Road to the Buffehr Creek Trail near the confluence of the Son of Middle Creek Trail. Provides a single track loop with the new Red Sandstone Parallel trail, this could form a loop trail from the Sandstone or West Vail neighborhoods.

User Groups:

Ability Level:

Goals: A C D

Issues: wildlife analysis, steep terrain

LL. 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.

User Groups:

Ability Level:

Goals: C D

Issues: wildlife analysis, approval of Traer Creek Development Company, Town of Avon

MM. North Trail to Davos Connector

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

User Groups:

Ability Level:

Goals: C D

Issues: wildlife analysis

Note: All proposed trails, trail improvements, and social trail adoptions must undergo a two step US Forest Service and Colorado Parks Wildlife Review

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COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

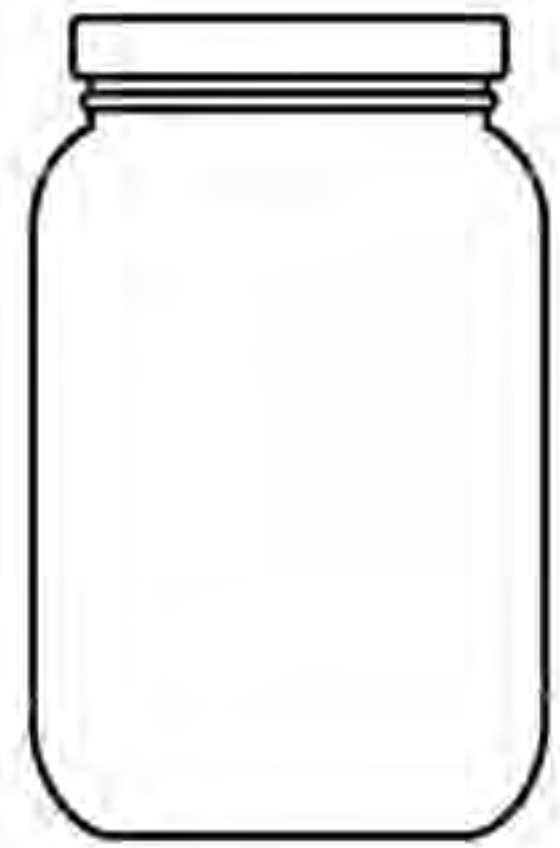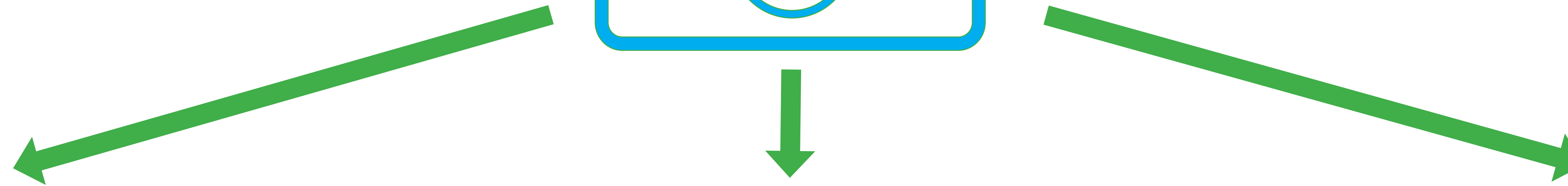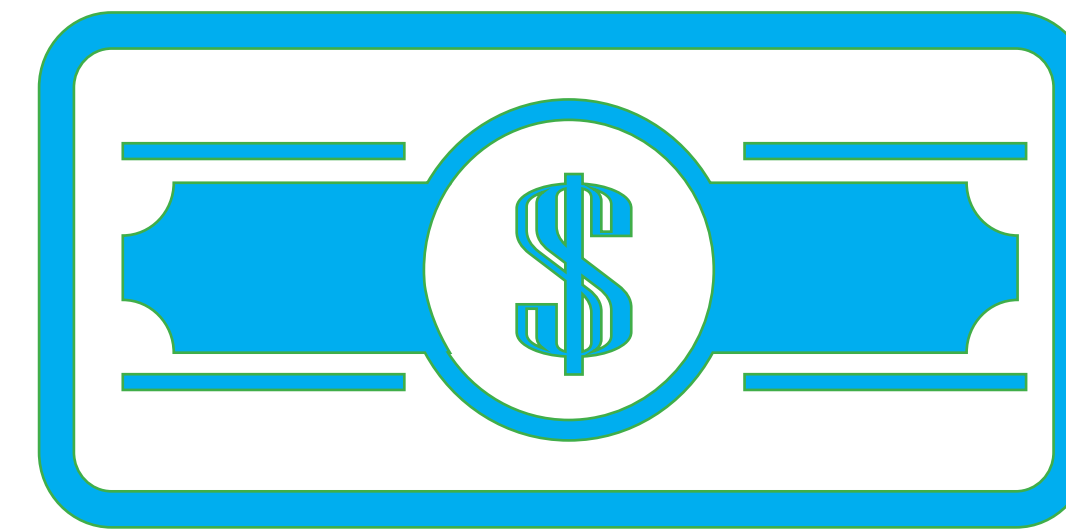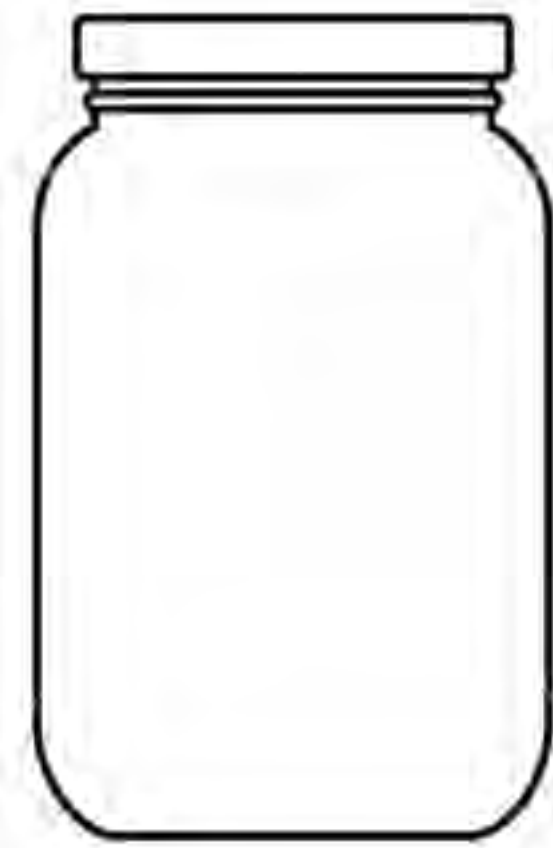| What do you envision for Vail's Trail System?	Which recommended trails would you like to see built?	Additional thoughts....

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HOW DO YOU WANT TO SPEND YOUR TRAIL DOLLARS IN VAIL?
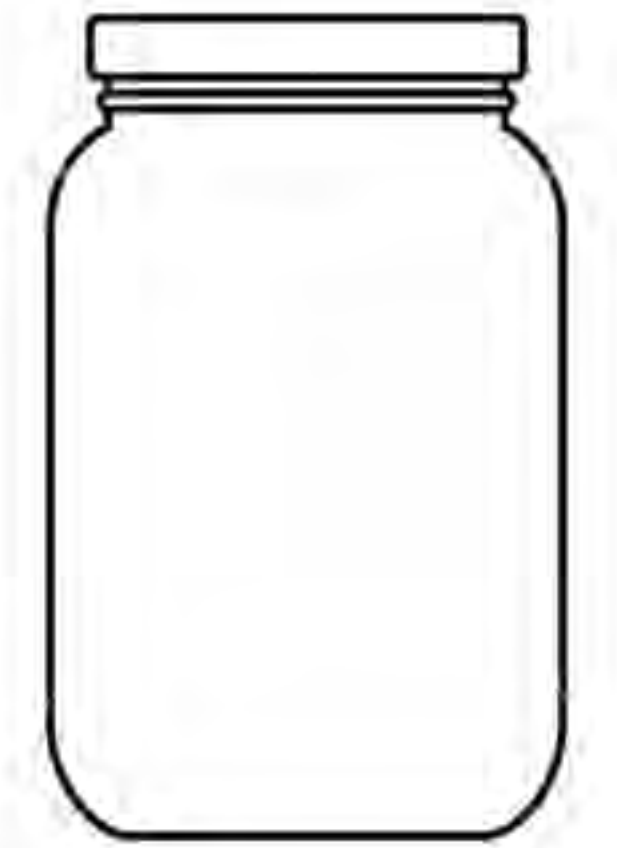
Designing safer intersections

New soft surface trails for varying ability levels and user groups

New connections in and around town

Trail maintenance, signage, adoption of social trails

Enhance existing wildlife studies or protection