SIGNAL PEAK TRAIL PLAN SCOPING

Gunnison County Trails Commission recommendation.

Commissioners, the current scoping effort by the BLM was a topic of our GCTC meeting on Monday, May 8, 2017. Several current Trails Commission members and past members are users of the area and were participative in the Ridgeline Trail Project, Summer 1999, which borders the scoping area.

After careful review of the Proposed Action Summary we are enthusiastic and would like to compliment the partners of this system and what it will bring to the overall trail quality in the County.

We would like to note that for decades this area has been available to the public for winter use (Hiking, Snowshoeing, Skiing) and wonder about the "Proposed Seasonal Closures". Would the surface above the trails, or the original contouring ridgeline up to Signal Peak be closed January 1 – March 15? **We recommend that in winter seasons that don't require a Big Game Closure, the Ridgeline topography be open to public for over-the-snow travel.**

With formalized trail construction, we believe the area will see more use from locals and visitors. **We recommend the presence of signed communication on trail etiquette, and right-of-way for different trail user groups.** This area has had a strong history of runners and hikers utilizing the current trails and they should continue to feel welcome and encouraged to be in the area.

The trail contact points to Lost Canyon Road were once open and in the last 20 years have been "closed" with fencing and other barriers. **We recommend strong, clear communication, signage and travel management measures at these access points to ensure that this system will remain non-motorized.**

There is a current single track trail (AKA Shoelace) that starts at the end of the fence on the old ridgeline trail and contours to the main Signal Peak road. This alignment is eliminated from the map and seems to be replaced by the Ridge trail. Just curious if this new alignment was generated due to an earlier sun exposure than having the current trail on the north side. We will follow up with Jim Lovelace on this topic.

Respectfully;
Joellen Fonken (GCTC) and Nancy Ruehle (past GCTC)

Signal Peak Trail Plan – New Trail Construction Proposed Action Summary

Purpose and Need: The need for the proposed action is to define a sustainable recreation environment that satisfies the needs of trail users while protecting natural values. The purpose of the action is to respond to a proposal from Gunnison Trails to construct a non-motorized single-track trail system within the Signal Peak area northeast of Gunnison.

Background: Due to its proximity to the City of Gunnison and Western State Colorado University, the Signal Peak area has seen a steady and increasing number of recreators accessing their public lands. Recognizing this, the Signal Peak area was identified as an Urban Interface Recreation Area in the Gunnison Sage-Grouse Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA). A stated goal of that document was to strike a "practical compromise" to balance wildlife and recreation needs.

The key issues identified by BLM that may drive alternative development for this Environmental Assessment are related to Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation and the management of seasonal habitat important to wintering big game. Other preliminary issues include cultural resources, trail location and trail use, and the consideration of connected actions such as parking and camping within the planning area.

The proposed action is to construct a community/destination mountain bike optimized trail system accessible from the town of Gunnison as well as Western State Colorado University and outlying neighborhoods. The trail system would utilize 7.8 miles of existing system single-track trails as well as adopt, retrofit, or realign 7.7 miles of existing single-track routes. In addition to the above, the proposed action is to design and construct approximately 20 miles of new trails utilizing sustainable trail building techniques.

***Note**: The original Gunnison Trails Signal Peak Master Trails Plan has been modified by BLM. Some aspects of the proposal are not being carried forward for further analysis due to conflicts with existing guidance. The proposal has also been modified by BLM by removing conceptual trails to bring the overall open/closed mileage total into compliance with the Proposed Condition identified in the Gunnison Sage-Grouse Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) while still providing an appropriate spectrum of trail experiences, loop options, and connectivity.*

The proposed action would:

Subject all trails on BLM lands in the system to a closure period that mirrors the shed antler season closure enforced by CPW to benefit wintering wildlife. Current shed antler season closure dates are January 1 through March 15th, and then from legal sunset to 10am daily March 15th – May 15th. Conditions based trail closures during mud season would also be in effect. This closure period could be extended during severe winter years based on the presence and condition of wintering big game animals, and modified accordingly to reflect changes to shed antler collection dates.

Require that dogs be on leash from March 15th to May 15th within the planning area for Gunnison Sage-Grouse and wintering wildlife conservation.

Continue to prohibit unauthorized motorized travel March 15th to May 15th within the planning area for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Subject new trails in areas sensitive to lekking Gunnison Sage-Grouse to closure March 15th to May 15th.

Retrofit or realign the existing trail connecting Cranor Hill Ski Area to the Ridge Trail. **Cranor Hill Trail** would be closed March 15th to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Adopt and maintain the existing **Rasta Gulch Trail**. Rasta Gulch Trail would be closed March 15 to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Close and restore the existing Chicken Scratch Trail to avoid Gunnison Sage-Grouse brood-rearing habitat and improve drainage function. Construct a realignment of **Chicken Scratch Trail** utilizing east facing slopes within the same drainage. The realigned Chicken Scratch Trail would be closed March 15th to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Construct a reroute of a dangerous and unsustainable section of the **Ridge Trail** above the old Chicken Scratch alignment. This reroute would utilize southern exposures below the ridgeline feature west of Signal Peak.

Close and restore the existing Shoelace Trail. Shoelace is an existing user created trail located on the north-facing slope on the ridge feature immediately west of Signal Peak.

Close and restore the existing Lost Canyon Trail. Relocate the trail to sustainable grades connecting the Ridge Trail to Lost Canyon Road. The realigned **Lost Canyon Trail** would be closed March 15 to May 15th for Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation.

Adopt, retrofit, and maintain the existing **North Woods Trail** segments (including connectors) and join them via newly constructed segments to connect to Sheep Gulch Road (BLM 3108a).

Construct a new trail connecting Sheep Gulch Road to Lost Canyon Road. **Sheep Gulch Trail** would be accessed via a parking site/trailhead to be located on Lost Canyon Road.

Construct the **South Rim Trail** traversing below Signal Peak and Signal Mesa to connect to BLM 3211c.

Construct the **Southern Cross Trail** from the eastern terminus of the Contour Trail to connect to the South Rim Trail.

Adopt, retrofit, and maintain the existing **Music Rocks Trail**.

Construct the **Three Canyons Trail** as an advanced level trail below the South Rim/Music Rocks Trails connecting to BLM 3211b.

Construct the **Midland Trail** connecting BLM 3123 to the Broadcaster/Three Canyons area.

Construct the **Broadcaster Trail** (identified as “descent 3” in Gunnison Trail’s Signal Peak Master Plan); a descent-optimized route connecting BLM 3211b to the Contour Trail.

Place user signage at trail entrances and intersections, as well as regulatory map kiosks at key entrance points. Key Entrance points would include the Radio Tower area above Western State Colorado University, the Sheep Gulch conceptual trailhead, and the powerline intersection behind the Tomichi Heights subdivision.

General:

Working trail names displayed above in bold reference conceptual trails displayed on the accompanying Signal Peak New Trail Construction Proposed Action map.

All proposed trail representations on the accompanying map are conceptual at this time. Final design may deviate from the map. Trails would be located to avoid impacts to cultural sites and sensitive plant populations.

All trail construction will follow International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) trail guidelines and standards to provide high quality trails. These include but are not limited to:

1. A trail's grade should not exceed half the grade of the hillside or side slope where it is located unless located on a suitable surface (i.e. bedrock);
2. An average trail grade of 10% or less is most sustainable;
3. Maximum trail grade should not exceed 10-20% and should be based on considerations such as soil type, number and type of users, and annual rainfall;
4. Frequent grade reversals (such as rolling dips, drainage dips, etc.) should be used to promote drainage of water; and
5. Trail tread should be out sloped where appropriate to encourage water to sheet across and off of the trail.

Full standards can be found at: https://www.imba.com/resources/trail-building/designing-and-building-sustainable-trails

Construction activities requiring vegetation disturbance would be avoided May 15th to July 15th. This is the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds.

Fence crossing locations, including gates and rollovers, would be identified with input from livestock grazing operators.

A trail stewardship/adoption program would be developed to ensure that appropriate maintenance, as well as trail short cutting and illegal trail building are addressed promptly. BLM would work with partners to prevent the spread of noxious weeds within the planning area.

BLM would consult with partners regarding facility development on non-BLM lands that legally access the planning area.

Decision to be Made:

BLM will determine route-by-route trail locations, mode of travel, and season of use.

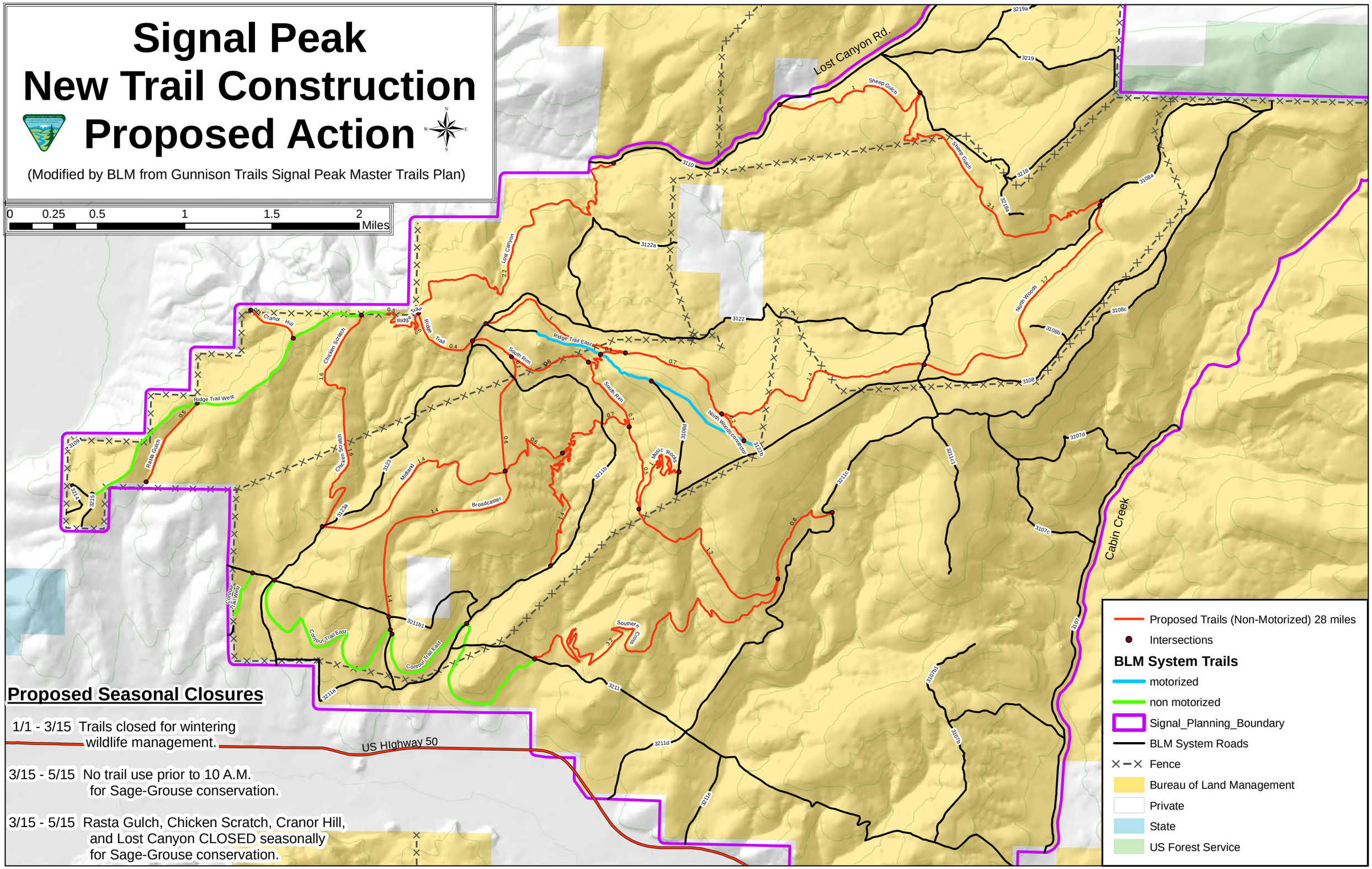
BLM will determine associated facility development on BLM lands.

BLM will determine whether dispersed camping restrictions (i.e. “Day Use” designation) would be appropriate for all or part of the planning area.

To Comment: Comments will be accepted until Monday May 22, 2017 and can be mailed to the Gunnison Field Office, Attn: Jim Lovelace, 210 West Spencer Avenue, Suite A, Gunnison, CO 81230 or emailed to blm_co_gfo_nepa_comments@blm.gov with “Signal Peak Trails Plan” referenced in the subject line.

Signal Peak
New Trail Construction
Proposed Action

(Modified by BLM from Gunnison Trails Signal Peak Master Trails Plan)



Proposed Seasonal Closures

1/1 - 3/15 Trails closed for wintering wildlife management.

3/15 - 5/15 No trail use prior to 10 A.M. for Sage-Grouse conservation.

3/15 - 5/15 Rasta Gulch, Chicken Scratch, Cranor Hill, and Lost Canyon CLOSED seasonally for Sage-Grouse conservation.