



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Medicine Bow – Routt
National Forests
and Thunder Basin
National Grassland

Parks Ranger District
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<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr>

File Code: 1950
Date: October 10, 2012

Dear Interested Party:

The Forest Service is seeking public input on proposals that have been identified for the Ellis Trail Relocation Analysis Area Project. The project would create a new **motorized trail open to 4WD vehicles >50” wide** by relocating all or a portion of National Forest Service Road (NFSR) 499.1 (Ellis Trail), close/obliterating a portion of NFST 1197.1 (Whiskey Creek Trail), changing the maintenance level of two segments of NFSR 82.1 (Roadhog) and changing motorized trail use designation for one segment of National Forest System Trail 1101.1 (Wyoming Trail). The Ellis Trail Relocation Analysis Area Project encompasses approximately 6,398 acres in the northwest portion of the Parks Ranger District, Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, in Jackson County, Colorado and & northeastern Hahns Peak/Bears Ears Ranger District in Routt County, Colorado.

The Forest Service will prepare an Environmental Analysis (EA) to analyze and disclose the environmental effects of these proposals. Although the analysis will include all proposals a separate decision document may be issued for each distinct project. This letter contains background information on these proposals. Scoping is an integral part of the environmental analysis process. It provides an opportunity for the public to express opinions about site-specific areas on the Forest that are being considered for possible projects or proposed actions. The purpose of scoping is to identify issues and concerns related to the proposed action(s). In addition, scoping may identify additional information and management opportunities that may be incorporated into the proposed action(s), as well as formulating alternatives to the proposed action(s).

ANALYSIS AREA

The Ellis Trail Relocation Analysis Area (AA) is located primarily in Jackson County with a small portion in Routt County, approximately 30 miles northwest of Cowdrey, Colorado on the Parks & Hahns Peak/Bears Ears Ranger Districts. The legal description for the proposed actions is T.11N., R.84W., Sec.06, T.12N., R.84W., Sec.17-20, 29-31, and T.12N., R.85W., Sec.13, 24, 25, 36. The AA is the portion of the Hog Park Creek watershed within Colorado with elevations ranging from approximately 8,240 – 10,440 feet.

Table 1: Management Areas (MA) within the AA

MA	Forest	Description	Acres*
1.11	Routt	Wilderness Pristine**	2,493
5.13	Routt	Forest Products	3,904

*All values have been rounded to the nearest acre. ** None of the proposed actions are located in Wilderness.



PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of this proposal is to implement direction from the Routt National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) to manage for ecosystem function, and to provide for multiple-uses and sustainability of National Forests in an environmentally acceptable manner. Specifically there is a need to:

- Manage motorized use to reduce the effects on wetlands, streams, and watershed health, and soil productivity.
- Reduce road maintenance costs.
- Maintain a high quality four-wheel drive recreation opportunity.

Routt National Forest Plan

- Goal: Ecosystem management on the Routt National Forest shall provide for multiple-use outputs and the habitats and processes necessary to maintain the biological diversity found on the Forest.
- Objectives: Work cooperatively with National, State and local interests to protect water related values in perpetuity on National Forest System lands (RFP page 1-2).
- Forest Plan Standards & Guidelines:
 - Water and Aquatic Standard 7: Do not degrade ground cover, soil structure, water budgets, or flow patterns in wetlands. The current location of Ellis Trail is having all of these adverse effects on wetlands.

NFSR 499.1 (Ellis Trail) is a historic route used by freighters to move goods by pack and wagon train to tie hack camps along the Colorado-Wyoming state line. Portions of the trail also served as stock driveways. The original trail has been adopted as a level 2 road without consideration for impacts to stream courses or wetlands, and never incorporated BMP's. As a result 0.5 miles of the road crosses a wetland meadow, other wetland areas, there are areas of steep pitches directly down the fall-line, and stream crossings have become severely eroded and incised.

The 2006 Sierra Madre Decision Memo included relocation of the 0.5 miles of NFSR 499.1 that goes through the wetland meadow. Due to the extent of the wetland meadow and length of road, mitigation in place is not possible. The lack of sideslope through the meadow prevents incorporation of drainage structures into the existing roadbed, and therefore it was recommended that this section of the Ellis Trail be relocated. However after engineering location and layout, it became obvious that relocating the road uphill would still require crossing three perennial drainages which were bordered by wet springs and seeps. While this would eliminate impacts to the wetland meadow, impacts to wetlands would still occur, so the proposed actions were developed to improve the outcome of the project.

Whiskey Creek Trail (NFST 1197.1) is also located within the AA and along with numerous unauthorized user created trails associated with it, are negatively impacting the surrounding natural resources. Historically NFST 1197.1 joined FSR 4355 & 4356 in Wyoming, but both of these roads have been decommissioned. The portion east of the Wyoming Trail (NFST 1101.1) to the Colorado/Wyoming state border, even though it is visually depicted on the visitor map, was meant to be decommissioned. No corroborating paperwork can be located so it is being included in this project to re-officially decommission and obliterate NFST 1197.1 east of NFST

1101.1. NFSR 82.1 serves as the access road to an area of timber management and a connector to the existing Ellis Trail.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTIONS

Based on a review of the existing condition of the area's resources, Forest Plan standards and guidelines, desired future condition, and resource management needs, preliminary proposed actions have been developed for the Ellis Trail Relocation Analysis Area Project. See attached vicinity and project maps for the location of each proposed action. The assigned Interdisciplinary Team will analyze the effects of the proposed actions to determine whether they are in compliance with Forest Plan standards, guidelines, and resource objectives.

Summary of Proposed Alternatives:

- **Alternative 1: No Action Alternative.** The No Action Alternative provides a basis for comparison for the Proposed Action. Under this alternative no actions would take place at this time. Existing management conditions, natural processes and succession would be allowed to continue. This alternative is required to be analyzed in NEPA analysis. This alternative represents the existing condition of the area.
- **Alternative 2: Proposed Action.** Relocate a portion of Ellis Trail and decommission Whiskey Creek Trail east of Wyoming Trail to Colorado/Wyoming state-line. See following for full description of the proposed actions.
- **Alternative 3: Alternative Proposed Action.** Close Ellis Trail to motorized use without relocation to prevent further resource damage. Decommission Whiskey Creek Trail east of Wyoming Trail to Colorado/Wyoming state-line. See following for full description of the alternative proposed actions.

The proposed action is to relocate all or a portion of NFSR 499 (Ellis Trail) on the Parks Ranger District to reduce impacts to wetlands, streams, and watershed health while retaining a challenging off-road recreation experience by designating a new 4WD route. The new four-wheel drive route would be designated using a combination of existing roads and trails and new trail construction to connect NFSR 82 near the Wyoming border to NFSR 500 on the continental divide at the current NFSR 499/500 road intersection. The new route would be designated as a ***motorized trail open to 4WD vehicles >50" wide***. There is potential for the southern end of NFSR 499 to remain open for dispersed camping. This option would need to be considered with respect to road maintenance costs and travel management needs.

Road construction associated with the Sierra Madre timber sale has been completed. Review of GIS data in combination with 2011 NAIP imagery shows that there is an opportunity to reroute 4WD traffic from NFSR 499 along some of the new timber roads and through proposed timber harvest units to connect back into NFSR 500 in an area with minimal resource concerns. Much of the new trail construction would occur in proposed harvest units in the Sierra Madre and Encampment Timber Sales.

New trail construction would be specifically designed as a challenging four-wheel drive trail best suited for jeeps and small high clearance off highway vehicles. Where existing roads are used to as part of the reroute, opportunities would be identified to create more of a four-wheel drive

opportunity through the removal of culverts, narrowing of the roadway, etc. All new trail construction and modifications to existing roads would be designed to protect resources while providing for a high quality four-wheel drive opportunity.

The proposed action “New Construction Middle” was developed to create a short loop on the north end of the rerouted Ellis Trail (see attached map). This section of trail is not needed for the actual proposed reroute. It would be very steep and rocky with multiple switchbacks. The portion of the short loop it would create provides an opportunity for four wheel drive and OHVs to have more rugged and challenging trail conditions without negatively affecting surrounding natural resources.

Whiskey Creek Trail (NFST 1197.1) and the numerous user created trails associated with it east of the Wyoming Trail (NFST 1101.1) to the Colorado/Wyoming state border would be decommissioned and obliterated.

Table 2: Proposed Actions – Alternative 2

Proposed Action	Description	Miles
Change from administrative use only to public motorized use for 4WD OHV >50”	Roughen NFSR 85.1 aka PADRE (Level 1) for 4WD	0.9
Change from administrative use only to public motorized use for 4WD OHV >50”	Roughen NFSR 83.1 aka MADRE (Level 1) for 4WD	2.0
Change motorized trail from 4WD OHV <50” to motorized trail for 4WD OHV >50”	Minor clearing and trail maintenance on NFST 1101.1 aka WYOMING TRAIL to change standard for trail use from 4WD vehicles <50”wide to those >50” wide	0.6
Decommission ROADHOG or convert to non-motorized use	Decommission or convert to non-motorized trail southern-most 0.1 miles of NFSR 82.1 aka ROADHOG to prevent motorized use in meadows.	0.1
Change from public motorized use to administrative use only	Install gate and/or vehicle barriers just south of where New Construction South trail segment diverges from NFSR 82.1 to retain timber management access.	0.4
Decommission portion of Ellis Trail or non-motorized use	Decommission or convert to non-motorized trail meadow segment of NFSR 499.1 aka ELLIS TRAIL	3.0
Decommission portion of Whiskey Creek Trail	Close/Obliterate eastern portion of NFST 1197.1 aka WHISKEY CREEK from NFST 1101.1 to WY border	1.8
New Construction South	New 4 WD trail construction with low water crossing	0.4
New Construction North	New 4WD trail construction	0.9
New Construction Middle	New 4WD trail construction to create a loop route	0.8
Possible decommission southern portion of Ellis Trail	Possible decommission of southern-most portion of NFSR 499.1 aka ELLIS TRAIL or convert to non-motorized trail	1.2

Note: All lengths are rounded to the nearest 1/10th mile. The amounts described in the above table are based on the best information currently available. It is likely some of these amounts will change slightly during implementation, due to adjustments made necessary as a result of field conditions not identified during reconnaissance and/or as a result of implementing design criteria and mitigation measures.

The Responsible Official may choose to reduce impacts to wetlands, streams and watershed health without replacing the 4WD recreation experience. The Alternative Proposed Action (Alternative 3) is to decommission all or part of NFSR 499 (Ellis Trail) and the southern-most 0.1 mile of NFSR 82.1 (Roadhog) on the Parks Ranger District to reduce impacts to wetlands, streams, and watershed health. There is potential for the southern end of NFSR 499 to remain open for dispersed camping, but this option would need to be considered with respect to road maintenance costs and travel management needs. No new road or trail construction would occur.

Whiskey Creek Trail (NFST 1197.1) and the numerous user created trails associated with it east of the Wyoming Trail (NFST 1101.1) to the Colorado/Wyoming state border would be decommissioned and obliterated.

Table 3: Alternative Proposed Actions – Alternative 3

Proposed Action	Description	Miles
Decommission ROADHOG or convert to non-motorized use	Decommission or convert to non-motorized trail southern-most 0.07 miles of NFSR 82.1 aka ROADHOG to prevent motorized use in meadows.	0.1
Decommission portion of Ellis Trail or non-motorized use	Decommission of NFSR 499.1 aka ELLIS TRAIL or convert to non-motorized trail	3.0
Decommission portion of Whiskey Creek Trail	Close/Obliterate eastern portion of NFST 1197.1 aka WHISKEY CREEK from NFST 1101.1 to WY border	1.8
Possible Decommission southern portion of Ellis Trail	Possible Decommission of southern-most portion of NFSR 499.1 aka ELLIS TRAIL or convert to non-motorized trail	1.2

Note: All lengths are rounded to the nearest 1/10th mile. The amounts described in the above table are based on the best information currently available. It is likely some of these amounts will change slightly during implementation, due to adjustments made necessary as a result of field conditions not identified during reconnaissance and/or as a result of implementing design criteria and mitigation measures.

Additional alternatives may or may not be developed in response to resource concerns identified by the Interdisciplinary Team and/or through public input.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION & SUBMITTAL OF COMMENTS

The public is invited to offer comments at this time. Information you provide may help refine the proposed action, identify pertinent issues related to the proposed action, develop any additional alternatives or mitigation measures that may be needed, and assist in preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA). Please be as specific as possible with your comments or in expressing concerns so that they can be effectively addressed.

To ensure consideration in this process, comments must be submitted within 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in the Jackson County Star. This will be the only opportunity for the public to comment before decisions on this project are made. Those commenting should include (1) name, address, telephone number, organization represented, if any, (2) title of the document on which the comment is being submitted, and (3) specific facts and supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider. Please address your written

comments to Anthony Koch, Environmental Coordinator, USDA Forest Service, 100 Main Street, PO Box 158, Walden CO, 80480. Comments may also be hand delivered to the above address during regular business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, excluding federal holidays. Electronic comments should be sent to: comments-rocky-mountain-medicine-bow-routt-parks@fs.fed.us (Acceptable format for electronic comments: rtf, pdf, word). The Parks District Ranger will be the Responsible Official for these proposals.

IMPLEMENTATION

Once the NEPA analysis is completed a decision whether or not to implement in part or full the proposed actions or other alternatives is anticipated by February 2013. If no significant issues are identified by the public or Forest Service specialists, the Forest Service proposes to begin implementing this project spring/summer 2013.

Thank you for your interest in the current and future management of the Routt National Forest.

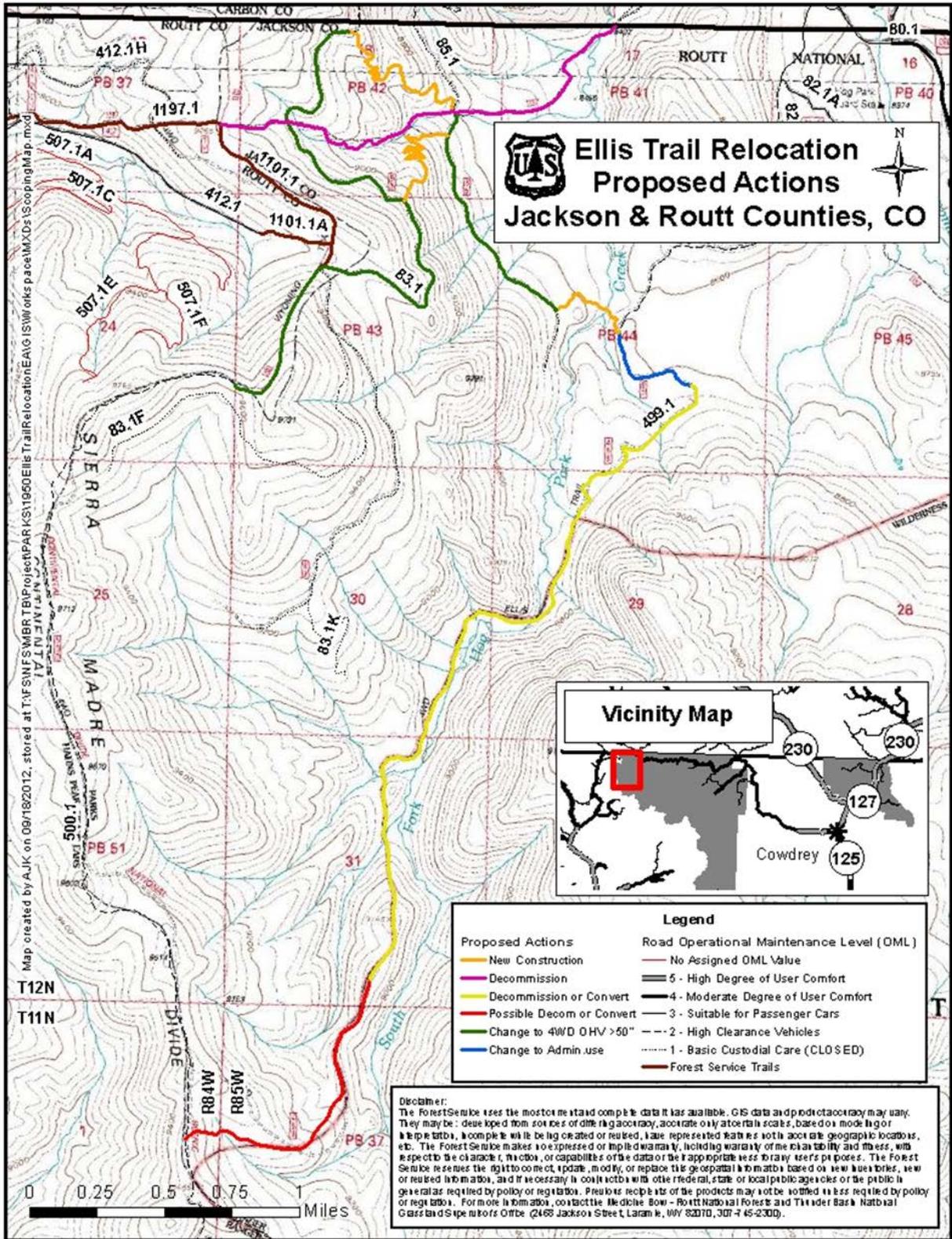
Sincerely,

/s/ Michael J. Alpe (for)
MICHAEL A. WRIGHT
District Ranger

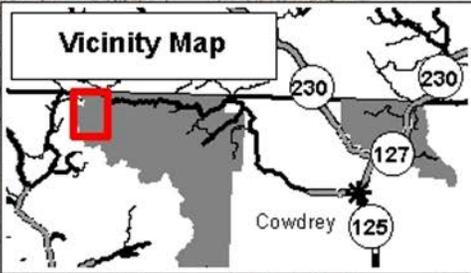
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**Ellis Trail Relocation
Proposed Actions
Jackson & Routt Counties, CO**



Legend	
Proposed Actions	Road Operational Maintenance Level (OML)
— New Construction	— No Assigned OML Value
— Decommission	— 5 - High Degree of User Comfort
— Decommission or Convert	— 4 - Moderate Degree of User Comfort
— Possible Decom or Convert	— 3 - Suitable for Passenger Cars
— Change to 4WD OHV >50"	— 2 - High Clearance Vehicles
— Change to Admin. use	— 1 - Basic Custodial Care (CLOSED)
	— Forest Service Trails

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