

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

ROCK OF AGES TRAIL PROJECT

USDA Forest Service
Norwood Ranger District
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forests
San Miguel County, Colorado

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Chapter 1: Introduction

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) documents the analysis of the potential environmental effects of implementing the proposed Rock of Ages Trail Project. In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the EA addresses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that may result from implementation of the Proposed Action or any Alternatives.

The information contained in this EA will allow the District Ranger to make an informed decision about how to best meet the stated purpose and need for action. The resulting decision will be documented in a Decision Notice when the environmental review process is completed.

- Chapter 1: This chapter provides an overview of the legal and administrative parameters including the purpose and need for action. It also documents the public involvement process used to identify issues, concerns, and opportunities associated with the Proposed Action. The comments from public scoping were used by the project Interdisciplinary Team to help identify the significant issues and develop a full range of alternatives.
- Chapter 2: This chapter provides a more detailed description of the Proposed Action as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose and need for the project. These alternatives were developed based on significant issues raised by the public and other agencies. This chapter also includes a list of design criteria to be used for project implementation.
- Chapter 3: This chapter describes the environmental effects of implementing the Proposed Action and the other Alternatives. The chapter is organized by environmental and social resources that are present and potentially affected by the Proposed Action and the other Alternatives. The Baseline alternative is used as the reference point for evaluation of each alternative.
- Chapter 4: This chapter provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the environmental assessment.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Norwood Ranger District Office in Norwood, Colorado.

PROJECT AREA

The project area is located on National Forest System lands in the vicinity of Silver Pick Basin about ten miles southwest of Telluride, Colorado in T48N R10W Sections 19, 30, 31, and 32 (Exhibit A): The project area lies entirely within San Miguel County, Colorado.

BACKGROUND

In July of 2003, landowner Rusty Nichols closed his private lands in and adjacent to Silver Pick Basin to public access. This action closed a segment of the Silver Pick Trail which was the shortest, most popular approach to Wilson Peak, a popular 14,000-foot peak in the Lizard Head Wilderness.

In October of 2007, the Trust for Public Lands purchased 230 acres of the landowner's properties in Silver Pick Basin, Rock of Ages Saddle, and on the southwest ridge of Wilson Peak. Although this was an important first step toward restoring access, the private landowner retained three private claims in the lower Basin that continue to be closed to the public. A new route would need to be established to fully restore public access through the Basin.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The primary purpose of the proposed action is to restore public hiking access through Silver Pick Basin to the Rock of Ages Saddle. In addition there is an opportunity to: 1) improve parking facilities at the trailhead and along the access road to the trailhead to accommodate both standard vehicles and stock trailers; 2) address resource damage and safety issues on the Forest Service Road #645; 3) discourage public trespass on private lands in the area; and 4) adjust the travel management designations on Trail #407, Trail #407.1A, and FSR #622 in response to the loss of public access through the Basin.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Norwood District proposes to restore public hiking access through Silver Pick Basin to the Rock of Ages Saddle. The proposal also includes:

- **Construction of a new trailhead parking area at the western terminus of FSR #645.** The parking area would be less than .5 acre in size and would accommodate up to 15 vehicles. An estimated 30 – 40 Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, and/or aspen trees (8+ inches diameter at breast height) would be cut to create the parking area.

Dispersed camping would be designated in the meadow area north of the parking lot. Fire rings would designate each site. A kiosk and vault toilet would be installed in/near the parking area. The parking area would be surfaced with gravel and defined by a rail fence.

Prior to the July 2003 closure of private lands in Silver Pick Basin, recreationists used the Silver Pick Trailhead parking area for parking and dispersed camping when climbing Wilson Peak. Under the Proposed Action, this parking area would be retained as an undeveloped recreation site. This means that, while the kiosk and trail signs would be removed, the site would remain available for dispersed parking and camping.

- **Construction of a new secondary parking area adjacent to FSR #645, 300 yards west of Big Bear Creek.** This site would accommodate two or more vehicles with trailers and would be less than .5 acre in size. An estimated 25 Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, and/or aspen trees (8+ inches dbh) would be cut to create the parking area. Dispersed camping would be allowed in the vicinity of the parking area.
- **Designate portions of four existing trails and roads as the “Rock of Ages Trail” which would be the primary hiking access through Silver Pick Basin to the Rock of Ages Saddle.** Beginning at the new trailhead, the Rock of Ages Trail would use portions of Trail #407, an unnamed mining road, Trail #407.1A, and Trail #408.1 (former Silver Pick Trail). The Rock of Ages Trail would be an estimated 3.0 miles in length.
- **Designate the Rock of Ages Trail and the southern .9 mile of FSR #622 as open to hiking and horse use.** Portions of the proposed Rock of Ages Trail are currently open to mountain bikes/horse/foot travel per the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan. Specifically this includes those trail segments that coincide with Trail #407 and #407.1A along with the southern .9 mile of FSR #622. In the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan, these three road/trail segments were identified as a bike trail loop. This loop route was originally designed to start at the existing Silver Pick Trailhead on FSR #622 then proceed south through the private land claims in Silver Pick Basin, then west on Trail #407.1A and Trail #407 to connect with the Wilson Mesa Trail and FSR #622.

The Forest Service will be acquiring a public trail easement through the private land in Silver Pick Basin as shown on Exhibit A.

In 2003 when private lands in Silver Pick Basin were closed to public access, the bike loop opportunity was eliminated, leaving both ends of the route, FSR #622 and Trail #401.1A, terminating at their intersections with private land. In response to this change in public access, the Proposed Action designate the Rock of Ages Trail and southern .9 mile of FSR as open to hiking and horse use but closed to mountain bikes.

A squeeze gate would be installed on FSR #645 immediately west of the proposed Rock of Ages trailhead parking area. This gate would allow access to motorcycles, mountain bikes, hikers, and horses but would restrict access to vehicles wider than 50 inches. A standard swing gate would also be installed

adjacent to the squeeze gate to accommodate authorized administrative access. The gate would be used for administrative use only.

- **Add the Burro Trail to the NFS trail system and designate it as open to hiking and horses.** A short segment of new trail (an estimated .2 mile) would need to be constructed to connect the Burro Trail to the proposed Rock of Ages Trail and to avoid trespass on private lands.

In addition, the northern .2 mile segment of the existing Burro Trail located on National Forest System lands would be decommissioned to reduce the potential for public trespass of private lands. Decommissioning would involve posting a trail sign at both ends of the trail segment as well as moving talus rocks to obliterate the trail corridor.

- **Conduct heavy maintenance on FSR #645 from its intersection with FSR #622 to the new trailhead parking area (approx. 2.5 miles).** This road is in very poor condition to the point of being impassable during wet conditions. In several locations the road bank has slumped down onto the road. Mature trees and shrubs are crowding the road corridor.

Standard maintenance work to improve drainage, repair and fill in ruts, and apply spot gravel was initiated in the fall of 2008 and will be completed during the summer of 2009. Additional proposed heavy maintenance would include the removal of an estimated 30 Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, and/or aspen trees (8+inches dbh) to widen the road corridor so that it is passable by full-sized vehicles.

- **Reconstruct a 300-foot segment of the proposed Rock of Ages Trail.** An estimated 300 feet of retaining wall (located southeast of the Gold Pick Claim) would be constructed along the existing mining road to armor the trail corridor.
- **Construct approximately .1 mile of new trail that would skirt the western edge of the privately-owned Gold Pick Claim.** This new trail segment would detour the Rock of Ages Trail around private land. Trail signs would be posted to discourage private land trespass.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

The responsible official (Norwood District Ranger) will be deciding whether or not to construct trail and trailhead facilities and conduct heavy maintenance on FSR #645. If an action alternative is selected, the decision will determine under what conditions and by which methods the project and associated activities will be conducted.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping was conducted during a 30-day comment period to solicit public and agency input to the proposed action, and to help determine issues and concerns associated with the proposed action. The Norwood Ranger District published a Legal Notice in the Telluride Daily Planet on September 19, 2008 notifying the public of the Rock of Ages Trail project and the opportunity to comment on the proposed action. In addition, a personal scoping letter was sent to 22 interested and affected individuals, organizations, and agencies on September 17, 2008 to solicit input to the proposed action.

During the scoping period people were given the opportunity to submit comments through the mail, e-mail, FAX, telephone, or to deliver them by hand. A total of four comments were received.

The project Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) met in December 2008 to review and analyze the comments received from the public. The ID Team reviewed the proposed action for consistency with direction in the 1991 Amended GMUG National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). Resource specialists also conducted field reviews and provided the reports necessary to determine potential impacts to heritage and biological resources. The Forest Service hosted a field trip of the proposed project on July 24, 2008. Representatives from the San Miguel County, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, Telluride Mountain Club, and Colorado Mountain Club attended the field trip.

ISSUES

Issues are points of discussion, debate, or disagreement regarding anticipated effects of the proposed action. It is these potential effects that provide focus for environmental analysis, influence alternative development, and lead to project design criteria.

All of the comments received during scoping and subsequent public meetings were reviewed by the Responsible Official and the ID Team. The Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..."

Response to the comments can be found in Appendix A.

Significant Issues

The following issue was used to evaluate the proposed action:

- 1. Designate the Rock of Ages Trail as open to mountain bikes with the objective of expanding mountain biking opportunities in the area.**

The Proposed Action would designate the proposed trail as open to hiking and horses. Local nonmotorized groups have recommended that mountain bikes also be allowed to use the route.

Portions of the proposed Rock of Ages Trail are currently open to mountain bikes per the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan Decision (2002). Specifically, Trail #407 and #407.1A are open to mountain bikes.

CUMULATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED IN THIS ANALYSIS

Cumulative actions are those past, present and reasonably foreseeable activities in or near the project area that may not individually, but may cumulatively result in effects of concern. Consideration of these actions aids in the understanding of the context of the proposed action within a broader setting, and is important in determining whether “significant effect to the quality of the human environment” may occur as a result of the proposed action or alternatives.

Cumulative actions considered include the following:

1. Land ownership and access needs.
2. Irrigation ditch easements that exist within the project area.

Chapter 2: Alternatives Including the Proposed Action

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives available to the Responsible Official for addressing the purpose and need for action. A description of all alternatives is provided with associated maps and figures.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE FOREST PLAN, LAWS, REGULATIONS, POLICIES AND OTHER DIRECTION

Forest Plan Consistency

Management direction in the 1991 Amended Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the GMUG National Forests is included in Chapter III. The Forest Plan includes General Direction and Standards and Guidelines for management activities on the Forest and each of the Management Areas. Forest Direction is applicable to all areas

of the forest unless specifically altered in the Management Area Direction. The Rock of Ages Trail project area is entirely within Management Area 2A (semi-primitive motorized recreation).

The General Direction and Standards and Guidelines related to travel management within the project area is found under Transportation System Management (III-76 through III-78) and under Trail System Management (III-81 through III-82). Management Area Direction related to travel management within the project area is found under Dispersed Recreation Management, Transportation System Management, and Trail System Management (III-101 through III-104). The following table summarizes applicable Forest Plan Direction:

Management Activities	General Direction	Standards & Guidelines
Transportation System Management	02 Classify areas as to whether off-road vehicle use is permitted.	a. Specify off-road vehicle restrictions based on OHV vehicle management
	03 Close all newly constructed roads to public motorized use unless documented analysis shows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Use does not adversely impact other resources b. Use is compatible with the ROS class established for the area c. They are located in areas open to motorized use d. They provide user safety e. They serve an identified public need f. The area accessed can be adequately managed g. Financing is available or can be arranged for maintenance 	
	04 Manage public motorized use on roads and trails to maintain or enhance effective habitat for elk	a. Objective level of habitat effectiveness for elk within each fourth-order watershed is at least 40% b. Habitat effectiveness will be determined by evaluating in combination hiding and thermal cover, forage, road density and human activity on roads.
	05 Manage road use by seasonal closure if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Use causes unacceptable damage to soil and water resources due to weather or seasonal conditions. c. Use causes unacceptable wildlife conflict or habitat degradation. 	
	06 Keep existing roads open to public motorized use unless: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. use causes unacceptable damage to soil and water resources. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. they are located in areas closed to motorized use and are not designated routes in the Forest travel management direction. g. use conflicts with wildlife management objectives. 	
	<p>07 Closed or restricted roads may be used for and to accomplish administrative purposes when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Prescribed in management area direction statements b. Authorized by the Forest Supervisor c. In case of emergency. 	
	<p>08 All existing roads not needed for multi-resource management will be obliterated at the earliest opportunity. Reduce existing open road mileage in project areas whenever possible.</p>	
Trail System Management	<p>01 Maintain all trails for foot and horse travel unless specifically closed to either or both class of user.</p>	
	<p>03 Provide a full range of trail opportunities in coordination with other federal, State, and municipal jurisdictions and private industries both on and off NFS lands.</p>	
Dispersed Recreation Management (2A)	<p>01 Emphasize semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunities. Increase opportunities for primitive road motorized trail use. Specify land areas or travel routes may be closed seasonally or year round for compatibility with adjacent area management, to prevent resource damage, for economic reasons, to prevent conflicts in use, and for user safety.</p>	<p>a. Specify off-road vehicle restrictions based on ORV use management.</p>
	<p>02 Prohibit motorized vehicle use off Forest system roads and trails in alpine and other ecosystems where needed to protect soils, vegetation, or special wildlife habitat.</p>	
Trail System Management (2A)	<p>01 Maintain existing motorized routes or construct new routes as needed as part of the transportation system. Provide loop routes of ½ to 1 day's travel time with at least ½ the total route located within the semi-primitive motorized ROS class and suitable for motorized trail bike travel.</p>	<p>a. Do not exceed an average motorized trail density of 4 miles per square mile on fourth order watersheds.</p>

Laws, Regulations, Policies, and Other Guidance

In conformance with the Endangered Species Act and Forest Service regulations, a combined Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation was prepared to determine potential effects to federally listed and Forest Service sensitive species and habitat. Based on this analysis, the determination was made that the Proposed Action “may effect, not likely to adversely affect” the Canada Lynx, a federally listed species. On a landscape scale, the proposed action would have no measurable effect upon existing habitat conditions within the analysis area. In addition, the proposed action would not lead to any measurable effects to baseline suitable lynx habitat conditions within the Little Cone Lynx Analysis Unit. Any effects to suitable habitat would be clearly insignificant within the LAU.

Proposed trail reconstruction on the trail would have no effect upon alpine plant species or habitat for the Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly. The presence of any Colorado tansy aster or snow willow within the trail corridor is highly unlikely. If these plants were present, the potential impact would be highly limited in scope and discountable within the range of the species.

The two species of cotton grass and the northern leopard frog are associated with wetlands and/or fens. The only two potential sites within the project area are well removed from any activities included in the proposed action.

The proposed action does not include any changes to the existing road crossing at Big Bear Creek. Existing habitat conditions for the Colorado River cutthroat trout would be retained. The erosion control work included in the proposed action is likely to reduce sediment delivery in to Bear Creek and any tributaries that are crossed. However, it is unlikely that this would be a measurable change to the existing situation. Tree removal along the road corridor and at the parking areas involves a total of 85-95 trees that are at least 8 inches dbh. These trees could serve as nest sites for the birds evaluated. Cavity-nesting birds could occupy these trees, as well as birds that may nest within the crown of these trees. If tree falling occurs during their nesting period there could be direct mortality of adults and/or young.

In compliance with the 1992 amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act and the accompanying regulations, a Cultural Resource Inventory Report was completed to determine the presence of Heritage Resources and the potential for any impacts to those resources. Based on this report there are no cultural resources found within the project area that need to be avoided or protected. A copy of the Inventory Report was sent to the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternatives considered in detail are described below. The No Action alternative is required under NEPA, and is used to describe the current situation within the project area.

The other alternatives were developed by the project Interdisciplinary Team to meet the purpose and need for the project in response to the significant issues identified.

Alternative 1 – Mountain Bike Opportunity

Under Alternative 1, the proposed Rock of Ages Trail would be designated as open to travel by mountain bikes, hikers, and horses. The trail would offer a 3.0 mile out-and-back route for mountain bikers. In addition, the southern .9 mile of FSR #622 would remain open to mountain bikes, offering an out-and-back route.

Signing would be placed at key points along the Rock of Ages Trail to discourage trail users from trespassing on adjacent private lands. The Burro Trail would remain an unmaintained, unsigned social trail. The .1 mile trail connector between the Burro Trail and the Rock of Ages Trail would not be constructed.

All other features of Alternative 1, including the FSR #645 improvements, construction of the two parking areas and their associated amenities, and proposed trail detours and reconstruction would be the same as described under Alternative 3, the Proposed Action.

Alternative 2 – No Action

Under this alternative, there would be no change in the current situation within the project area. The Rock of Ages Trail would not be designated and signed as a NFS system trail. FSR #645 would receive routine maintenance and a squeeze gate would be installed approximately .5 mile west of where the road crosses Big Bear Creek (per the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan). This gate would restrict vehicles greater than 50 inches in width from proceeding west onto the Wilson Mesa and Elk Creek trails. Parking and associated amenities would not be developed along FSR #645. The Burro Trail would remain an unmaintained, unsigned social trail.

Recreationists (mountain bike, hiking, horse) would continue to have limited access into Silver Pick Basin on Trail #407.1A and FSR #622. Access on this trail would dead end abruptly at its intersection with private land in the Basin.

Alternative 3 – Proposed Action

The Proposed Action Alternative is described in detail on pages 3-5 of this document.

Project Design Criteria

In response to management standards and guidelines of the Forest Plan and the significant issue identified for the proposed action, project design criteria were developed to alleviate potential resource impacts and to facilitate administrative access. The project design criteria and administrative actions are necessary to implement the selected alternative.

1. To avoid impacts to water quality, aquatic species, and wildlife, road and trail maintenance, construction, and/or reconstruction will be implemented in accordance with Forest Service design practices and standards.
2. Any invasive species or noxious weed infestations resulting from this project will be monitored and treated in combination with control efforts that may take place within the project area.
3. The Forest Service will manage administrative access into the project area. Affected landowners will be provided administrative access to roads and trails behind the locked gates in accordance with the terms and conditions of their road permits, special use permits, and/or easements.
4. The Forest Service will provide periodic maintenance of the road, parking areas, trail, gates, and associated signs in concert with maintenance of the overall trail system in cooperation with interested public user groups.
5. The Forest Service will enforce travel management regulations as part of the overall Uncompahgre National Forest travel plan and monitor the effectiveness of the trail closure methods and designated trail use within the project area. Problems identified within the project area will be documented and corrected as soon as possible.
6. Additional signing will be installed to clearly identify trail routes and the types of uses and permitted seasons of use of those trails.
7. An educational kiosk with wilderness, 14,000 foot peak climbing, travel management, and trail use etiquette information will be installed at the trailhead parking lot. . Both new parking areas will be monitored for the need for further improvements such as hardened, formal parking areas to reduce resource damage.
8. To avoid adverse impacts to the northern goshawk, activities should not occur within ¼ mile of an active nest from March 1 to July 31 if those activities would cause nest failure or abandonment.
9. Seed disturbed areas of exposed soil. Use a certified weed free three species mix to include blue wildrye (*Elymus glaucus*), tufted hairgrass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), and alpine timothy (*Phleum alpinum*) at mix rates of 80%-10%-10% PLS (pure live seed) respectively. Seed at a rate of 10 pounds per acre in the fall prior to snowfall.
10. Inventory the project area for presence of all Class A and B invasive species.
11. Treat all Class A and B invasive species listed by the state of Colorado. If contracted, submit herbicide use records to the Forest Service after treatment. Class A and B invasive species known to occur in the area include Musk Thistle (*Carduus nutans*), Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), Yellow Toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris*), and Oxeye Daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*). Use of Milestone (*aminopyralid*) is

Comparison of Alternatives

The following table provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in the table is focused on the significant issues identified for this project.

Significant Issue	Alternative 1 Mountain Bike Opportunity	Alternative 2 No Action	Alternative 3 Proposed Action
Designate the Rock of Ages Trail as open to mountain bikes.	The Rock of Ages Trail would be designated as open to mountain bikes, hikers, and horses. In addition, the southern .9 of FSR #622 would remain open to mountain bikes.	The Rock of Ages Trail would not be designated as new system trail. Per the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan, mountain bikers, hikers, and horses could continue to travel on certain road/trail segments such as: Trail #407, Trail #407.1A, and FSR #622. Mountain bike travel on #407.1A and FSR #622 would terminate in Silver Pick Basin where the trail/road intersects with private land.	The Rock of Ages Trail would be designated as open to hikers and horses. In addition, travel management of FSR #622 would be restricted to hiker and horse use only.

The following table provides a summary of the actions included in each of the alternatives as well as the environmental consequences associated with issues evaluated for this project.

Attribute	Alternative 1 Mtn Bike Opp.	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
Miles of Trail - Construction - Maintenance - Decommission	0.1 3.0 0.0	0 0.5 0	.3 4.0 0.2
Miles of Road - Reconstruction - Maintenance	2.0 2.0	0 2.0	2.0 2.0
Miles of Trail Open to Mountain Biking	3.0	1.5	0
Public Access Restored Through Silver Pick Basin (Y/N)	Yes	No	Yes
Address resource & safety issues on FSR 645	The road would be reconstructed and maintained to allow access to 4WD vehicles even under wet weather conditions.	The road would be maintained but still not accessible during wet weather conditions	The road would be reconstructed and maintained to allow access to 4WD vehicles even under wet weather conditions
Effect on the potential for public trespass on private lands in Silver Pick Basin	The ROA Trail and FSR #622 would create mountain bike routes that would dead end at private land boundaries in the Basin. Trespassing downhill through private lands would always be an attractive, though illegal option for bikers and would be difficult to enforce.	Trail #407.1A and FSR #622 would create mountain bike routes that would dead end at private land boundaries in the Basin. Trespassing downhill through private lands would always be an attractive, though illegal option for bikers and would be difficult to enforce.	The potential for trespass would be low. The presence of quality parking, camping, and trail facilities would give hikers no reason to trespass across private lands.

Chapter 3: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter describes the physical, biological, and social conditions that may be affected by the Proposed Action and its alternatives. As directed by the CEQ implementing regulations for NEPA, the discussion focuses on resource conditions in the Rock of Ages project area associated with the significant issues and concerns presented in Chapter 2. The description of the affected environment succinctly describes the environment of the area to be affected by the alternatives under consideration. Only those descriptions necessary to understand the effects of the alternatives are provided (40 CFR 1502.15).

RECREATION AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

There are a variety of public and commercial recreational activities occurring within the vicinity of the project area.

The Rock of Ages project area contains segments of three mountain bike routes including the first .25 mile of Trail #407, #407.1A, and FSR #645. Trail #407 and Trail #407.1A are also open to foot and horse travel while the FSR #645 is open to all types of motorized and nonmotorized travel.

Summer recreation activities in the project area include dispersed camping, hiking, mountain biking, ATV and motorcycle riding, 4WD use, horseback riding, and fishing.

The area receives heavy use by hunters during the August – November big game archery and rifle hunts. Roads throughout the project area have historically provided hunting and dispersed camping access.

Several commercial outfitter-guides operate within the area during the summer and fall months including Telluride Horseback Adventures (horse tours), Many Ponies (horse tours), Telluride Mountain Guides (peak climbing), Mountain Madness (peak climbing), San Juan Outdoor School (peak climbing), and San Juan Mountain Guides (peak climbing). B&W Outfitters (big game hunting) is authorized to occupy a base camp along the north side of FSR #645 each fall. This camp would not be impacted by the construction of the two parking areas described in the Proposed Action.

The existing Silver Pick Trailhead traditionally provided both parking and dispersed camping primarily for climbers attempting to summit Wilson Peak. Under all alternatives, this parking lot would be retained as an undeveloped site.

Effects

Alternative 1 would restore public access through Silver Pick Basin to the Rock of Ages Saddle. The designation of the Rock of Ages Trail and the construction of a new trailhead facility, dispersed camping area, and secondary parking area would greatly improve the recreation experience for trail users.

In addition this alternative would expand mountain biking opportunities by designating the entire 3.0 miles of the new Rock of Ages Trail as open to mountain bikes. This represents an additional 1.5 miles of mountain bike trail compared to Alternative 2 (No Action).

Designating the new trail as open to mountain bikes would likely increase the potential for public trespass of private lands in Silver Pick Basin. The Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan authorized mountain bikes to travel on portions of the Trail #407, Trail #407.1A, and FSR #622 (southern .9 mile) with the objective of providing a loop bike route through Silver Pick Basin. Upon the closure of private lands in the Basin, the

bike loop opportunity was eliminated, leaving FSR #622 and Trail #407.1A as dead end bike routes.

Designating the new Rock of Ages Trail as open to mountain bikes would create a potential management issue by inviting bikes into Silver Pick Basin on a trail that has no legal downhill exit route. For example, from the proposed Rock of Ages trailhead bikers would ride up the new trail (840 feet in elevation) then descend into Silver Pick Basin, intersecting with an existing network of mining roads. Trespassing downhill on the former Silver Pick Trail (road) through private lands to FSR #622 would always be an attractive, though illegal shortcut option for bikers.

In conclusion, allowing mountain bikes on the Rock of Ages Trail would make it difficult to meet one of the primary objectives of the project's purpose and need which is to discourage public trespass of private lands in the area.

This alternative would address resource and safety issues on FSR #645. Standard maintenance work to improve drainage, repair and fill in ruts, and apply spot gravel would be conducted. In addition, vegetation clearing along the road corridor and additional road surfacing would ensure that the road would be accessible by 4WD vehicles even during wet weather conditions.

Under **Alternative 2**, public access would not be restored through Silver Pick Basin to the Rock of Ages Saddle. Novice peak climbers could access Wilson Peak from Navajo Basin (from the Navajo, Kilpacker, Lizard Head, or Cross Mountain trails) but these routes are much longer and have a greater elevation gain than the traditional approach through Silver Pick Basin. More advanced climbers could make a shorter, more direct approach to Wilson peak by departing from the Wilson Mesa Trail and skirting Silver Pick Basin via a technical ascent of Wilson Peak's northwest ridge.

Public trespass through private lands in Silver Pick Basin would likely continue under this alternative. Despite widespread public notification (websites, news releases, and signing at two locations along FSR #622 and at the Silver Pick Trailhead), some members of the public continue to trespass across these private lands during their attempts to summit Wilson Peak. Trespassers reportedly park at the Silver Pick Trailhead and hike south on FSR #622 through the private claims.

This alternative would partially address resource and safety issues on FSR #645. Standard maintenance work to improve drainage, repair and fill in ruts, and apply spot gravel would be conducted. However, there would not be any vegetation clearing along the road corridor nor would there be adequate road surfacing to ensure that the road is accessible during wet weather conditions.

Alternative 3 would restore public access through Silver Pick Basin to the Rock of Ages Saddle. The designation of the Rock of Ages Trail and the construction of a new trailhead facility, dispersed camping area, and secondary parking area would greatly improve the recreation experience for trail users.

In addition this alternative would expand hiking opportunities in Silver Pick Basin with the additional designation, signing, and maintenance of 1.0 mile of the Burro Trail. This trail melts out earlier than would sections of the proposed Rock of Ages Trail and has much less snow overall. Consequently, it would potentially serve as an early season climbing route to Wilson Peak.

The potential for public trespass of private lands in the Basin would be greatly reduced under this alternative. The availability of improved, reliable trailhead access on FSR 645; quality parking and dispersed camping facilities; and well-maintained and signed trails to the Rock of Ages Saddle would meet the needs of trail users. There would be no reason for the public to trespass through private lands in the Basin.

This alternative would address resource and safety issues on FSR #645. Standard maintenance work to improve drainage, repair and fill in ruts, and apply spot gravel would be conducted. In addition, vegetation clearing along the road corridor and additional road surfacing would ensure that the road would be accessible by 4WD vehicles even during wet weather conditions.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ANALYSIS

Cumulative effects were considered for past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions as listed on page 7 of this document. The area to be analyzed includes T48N R10W and Sections 19, 30, 31, and 31.

The Elk Creek Ditch is located within proximity to the project area. Ditch easement holders are authorized ATV access on FSR 645 and the Wilson Mesa Trail. All Alternatives would include the installation of a squeeze gate at the west terminus of FSR #645 that would restrict vehicles 50 inches or wider. A standard swing gate will also be installed adjacent to the squeeze gate to accommodate ATV access by ditch easement holders. The gate will be used for administrative use only.

A variety of private inholdings are located within Silver Pick and Elk Creek Basins. Each of the landowners of these inholdings has a right to reasonable access to their land per federal law (Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980). As explained above, all Alternatives would include the installation of a squeeze gate at the west terminus of FSR #645 that would restrict vehicle 50 inches or wider. The same mitigation (installation of a standard swing gate) will be installed adjacent to the squeeze gate to ensure that any existing or future administrative access needs will be provided for.

Chapter 4: AGENCIES AND PERSONS CONSULTED

FOREST SERVICE INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM:

Kathy Peckham, Recreation Manager
Dee Closson, Lands Manager
Craig Grother, Wildlife Biologist

Doug Marah, Engineer
Chiara Palazzolo, Landscape Architect
Leigh Ann Hunt, Forest Archeologist

OTHERS:

Steve Johnson – Telluride Mountain Club
Bryan Martin – Colorado Mountain Club
Steve Bonowski – Colorado Mountain Club
James Ashby – Colorado Fourteeners Initiative
Joan May – San Miguel County Commissioner
Rusty Nichols – Private landowner