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Environmental Assessment

Buford / New Castle Motorized Trail

**Rifle Ranger District, White River National Forest
Garfield County, Colorado**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The White River National Forest (WRNF) is evaluating a proposal to construct an ATV/UTV trail on National Forest System (NFS) lands that extends from the West Elk Trailhead to Triangle Park along the Buford New Castle (BNC) Road (National Forest System Road (NFSR) 245). The proposed trail is approximately 8 miles in length, designed to accommodate both all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and side-by-sides (UTV). The proposed route falls within ¼ mile of the existing BNC road. The West Elk Trailhead was designed for winter use and can easily accommodate vehicles, trucks and trailers. The site currently has an outhouse facility in place that is maintained by the snowmobile club during the winter months and the Rifle Ranger District in the summer. Construction of this route would be vital for accessing over 485 miles of unlicensed motorized routes on the Rifle, Blanco and Eagle Ranger Districts.

This project was initiated in response to implementation of the WRNF Travel Management Plan (TMP). The TMP defines where licensed, unlicensed, and mechanical vehicles are allowed across the WRNF. Due to restrictions in the travel management plan, unlicensed vehicles are now prohibited on NFSR 245 due to a recommendation from an engineering analysis completed in 2006. Such factors as sight visibility, speed and amount of vehicles were evaluated.

This environmental assessment (EA) includes a site specific analysis of the proposed route's effects on: wildlife, recreation, transportation, cultural resources, vegetation and timber resources. The responsible official is the Rifle District Ranger. Based upon the effects of the proposed action, the responsible official will decide whether or not to allow this proposal on NFS lands.

The proposed action would directly improve the safety of ATV/UTV users by providing an alternate designated trail that provides access to hundreds of miles of open travel routes and popular dispersed campsites. The proposed action would not increase ATV/UTV use in the area, but provide a safe and more enjoyable experience for the current unlicensed motorized visitor.

The analysis found that compared to the no action alternative, there are no substantial direct, indirect or cumulative effects that were not addressed by the design criteria for construction of the ATV/UTV parallel route and trailhead enhancements. The design criteria are protective measures that will be followed during construction and maintenance of the trail and trailhead.

DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

The Forest Service (FS) has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This EA discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action. The document is organized into four parts:

- **Introduction:** This section includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose and need for the project and the agency's proposal for achieving that purpose and need. This section also details how the FS informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded.
- **Alternatives, including the Proposed Action:** This section provides a more detailed description of the agency's proposed action as compared to no action and a summary table of the environmental consequences associated with the proposed action.
- **Environmental Consequences:** This section describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action contrasted to the existing condition, which represents the no action alternative as set forth in 26 CFR 220.7.(b)(2)(ii). This analysis is organized by resource area where each section has a description of the affected environment followed by the effects of the proposed action compared with no action.
- **Consultation and Coordination:** This section provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of this EA.

Additional documentation, including the biological assessment and evaluation, may be found in the project planning record located at the Rifle Ranger District Office in Rifle, Colorado.

CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE, NEED AND PROPOSED ACTION

Background

General Description of the Project Area

The project is located approximately 15 miles north of the Town of New Castle, Colorado, off the Buford / New Castle (BNC) Road (NFSR 245) beginning in Township 4 S, Range 91 W, Section 6 and extending to Township 3 S, Range 91 W in sections 31, 30, 24, 19, and 18. The project area encompasses approximately eight miles. A general location map of the project is shown in **Figure 1**.

The proposed trail is located along NFSR (National Forest System Road) 245. The topography along the road consists of rolling hills, wide open meadows and scenic overlooks. The primary tree species include Engelmann spruce, sub alpine fir and aspen stand forests. Unlicensed vehicles are often seen along NFSR245, especially on weekends and throughout the fall hunting season (September-November). White River National Forest (WRNF) Travel Management Plan (TMP) was signed in May of 2011 closing NFSR 245 to unlicensed vehicles (ATV/UTV).

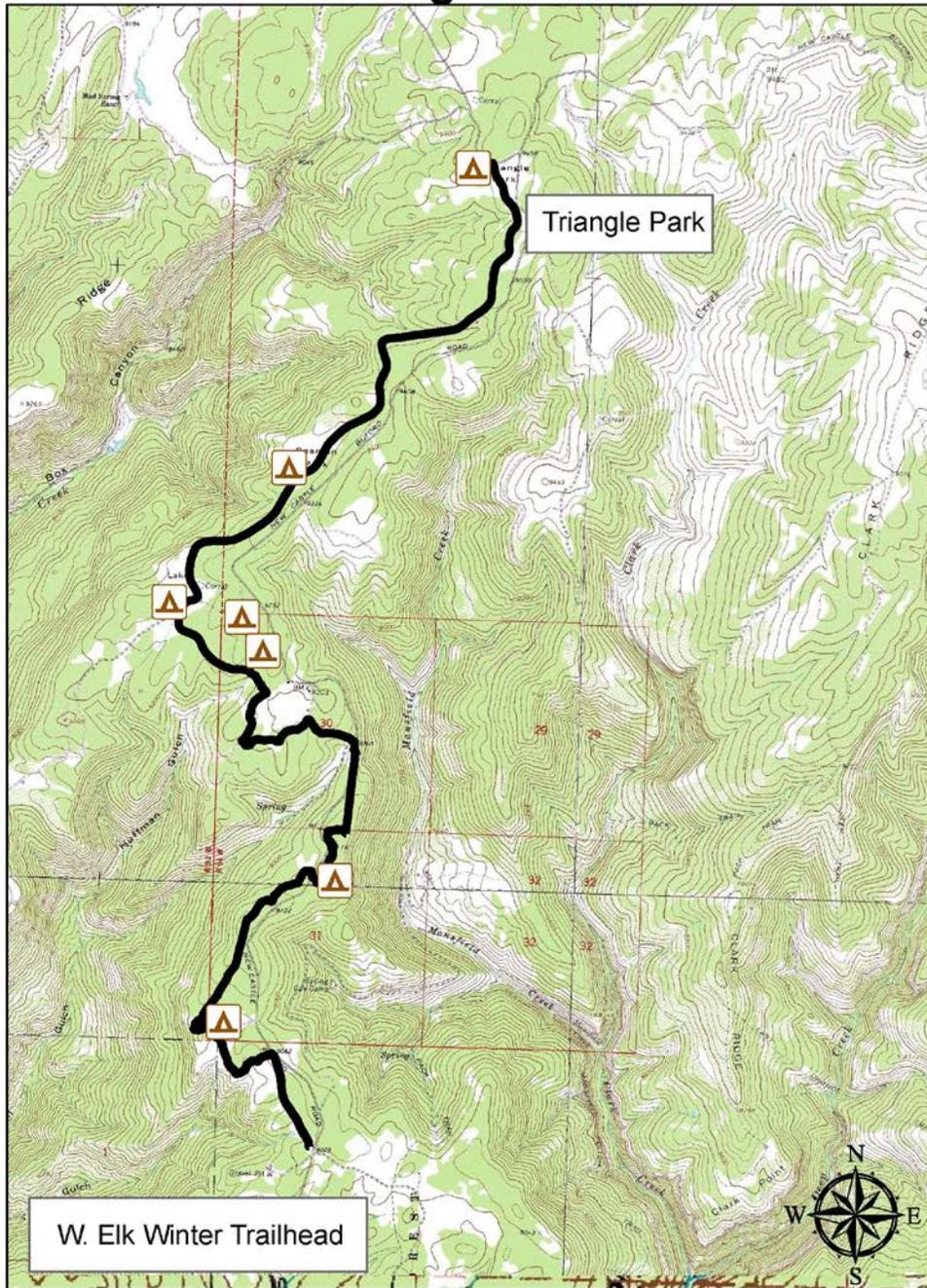
Management Area Prescriptions

The 2002 Revised White River National Forest (WRNF) Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) give specific direction on how the FS manages different land areas. These land management areas define where different management activities may be carried out and where different kinds of public uses occur. Each area is defined by a primary management theme, a management area description and set of elements that guide the activities taking place in it. All lands administered by the WRNF are managed according to these prescriptions. These management areas provide sustainability of the physical, biological and scenic values of general forest and rangelands. Habitat and vegetation are managed to achieve and maintain the desired vegetation.

The project area lies mainly within 4.3 (Dispersed Recreation) with some portions occupying 5.13 (Resource Production) and 5.4 (Forest Flora and Fauna Habitats) (LRMP, pp. 3-44, 53 and 55). In management area 4.3 “areas may be designated as either motorized or non-motorized” (LRMP, p. 3-44). In management area 5.13 “an extensive road and trail system exist” (LRMP, p. 3-53) and in 5.4 “visitors can find dispersed recreation opportunities including both motorized and non-motorized” where “visitors can expect to see other people and evidence of human activities” (LRMP, p. 3-55). The “Recreation Opportunity Spectrum for this management area is semi-primitive motorized in the summer and the scenery is managed to provide a range of scenic integrity objectives from low to moderate” (LRMP, p. 3-56).

Figure 1.

Proposed Unlicensed Vehicle Route Rifle Ranger District



Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose and need for action is to provide a safe and enjoyable ATV/UTV trail along the Buford/New Castle Road that connects the West Elk (winter) Trailhead to the designated unlicensed travel management system. The ATV/UTV designated trail is needed to connect the West Elk Trailhead to Triangle Park where unlicensed vehicles can access Coulter Mesa, Meadow Lake, Blair Mountain and beyond. This action is in response to implementation of the new TMP. The West Elk Trailhead was designed for trucks hauling snowmobiles to access the winter trail system maintained by the Rifle Snowmobile Club. The trailhead is centrally located and provides a large parking area with ample room to easily maneuver a truck and trailer. It is an ideal location for trucks hauling ATVs/UTVs to park and access the designated motorized travel routes in the Flat Top Mountains. In the summer this parking area is underutilized. Its main purpose in the summer is as a meeting location, rest area and occasional camping spot. Yearly, this location has been known as a destination for large gathering and parties. As a result, Forest Service employees have hauled tons of trash from the trailhead every summer. More presence and management is needed to reduce some of these impacts from large gatherings. A summer, designated trailhead would likely discourage inappropriate use of National Forest System lands. Research has indicated that additional Forest Service and visitor presence, signage, and development can deter vandalism.

In addition to the trail, enhancements to the West Elk (winter) Trailhead are needed to assist with informing visitors of the new travel management changes. Enhancements include installing a three panel kiosk that will be changed seasonal to reflect both summer and winter recreational opportunities that exist in and around the area. Other improvements to the trailhead include defining the parking area to deter impacts to surrounding vegetation and providing visitor amenities such as picnic tables and ATV/UTV loading/unloading ramps as funding and need arise.

Proposed Action

The action proposed by the Forest Service to meet the purpose and need, is to construct a safe ATV/UTV trail that connects the West Elk Trailhead to the open unlicensed travel system at Triangle Park. The project layout, route and design may be altered slightly upon completed ground surveys for plant and archeological resources. If plant or archeological resources are found, the trail will be re-routed to avoid impacts. The Forest Service also intends to make improvements to the West Elk Trailhead to accommodate vehicles hauling ATV/UTVs, enhance the amenities provided at the site to include installation of a three panel kiosk with visitor maps of our designated travel system, tread lightly principles and historical/cultural information of the surrounding area. Additional improvements at the trailhead include defining the parking area boundary and providing amenities such as picnic tables and ATV/UTV loading/unloading ramps.

To access the trail and trailhead, vehicles will travel approximately seven miles on NFSR 245 (Buford/New Castle Road) to the West Elk Trailhead. The ATV/UTVs will leave the north end of the trailhead on an existing closed road and meander along the west side of NFSR 245 with views of the Bookcliffs, Mamm Peaks and Battlement Mesa. The trail crosses NFSR 245 to access scenic overlooks of Mount Sopris and the Elk Mountains. The road crossings are

designed along straightaways where you can safely see on-coming traffic. They will be marked and signed for both trail users and licensed vehicle travel on NFSR 245.

The trail will be open to unlicensed motorized vehicles. These vehicles include dirt bikes, ATVs, and UTVs (a.k.a. “side by sides”). The trail is intended for use during the summer and fall season, when the snow has melted (June – November). In the winter the trail might be utilized by cross-country skiers and other winter recreationists.

The trail will also provide access to popular dispersed campsites along the route. Some popular dispersed campsites are located along NFSR 245.4A, NFSR 245.4B, NFSR 245.4C, NFSR 245.4D. The TMP closed these routes to unlicensed vehicles. This project proposes to re-open these routes to both licensed and unlicensed vehicles (ATV/UTVs and dirt bikes).

Decision Framework

For this project, the responsible official is the Rifle District Ranger. Given the purpose and need, the responsible official review the EA in order to make the following decisions:

- Should the FS construct an eight mile ATV/UTV trail connecting the West Elk (winter) trailhead to the motorized travel system to accommodate unlicensed vehicle visitors?
- Should we provide additional facilities (e.g. picnic tables, information signs, ATV loading ramps) to accommodate users at the West Elk Trailhead?
- What design criteria if any, should it include?

This EA discloses the environmental effects of the proposed action as compared to no action. It is not a decision document. A subsequent Decision Notice, signed by the District Ranger, will document the decision and rationale for selection of the preferred alternative.

Public Involvement

Since the summer of 2009, comments regarding the Buford / New Castle Road unlicensed parallel route have been received at all levels of management on the WRNF. The public mailed 20 individual letters regarding the unlicensed access concerns along NFSR 245 and over 75 people signed a letter of support for construction of a parallel route during the travel management planning process. District staff met with members of the community on multiple occasions and has heard their desire for support to seek options for providing a safe, alternative route for unlicensed vehicle use along NFSR 245. Due to the complexity of the TMP, it was decided to address these concerns in a separate document. This proposed action was created to meet that objective.

The proposed action was listed on the WRNF’s Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning in September 2011. A project proposal was sent internally to all employees on the Rifle and Blanco Ranger Districts. An interdisciplinary team was developed to list possible issues and to address concerns received from internal reviews. A Notice of Proposed Action was published for a 30-day public scoping and comment period which began January 26, 2012. A total of eight comments were received in response, all in support of the project.

Issues

The FS separates NEPA issues into two groups: key and non-key issues. Key issues are defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-key issues are 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 for 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)..."

After discussions with partners and recreation users across the forest, the FS identified two key issues:

- Wildlife - The proposed action could affect wildlife in the area
- Recreation - The proposed action may displace non-motorized dispersed campers.

These concerns helped the agency focus its environmental analysis. As stated in 36 CFR 220.7(b)(2)(i) *"when there are no unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources (NEPA, section 102(2)(e)), the EA need only analyze the proposed action and proceed without consideration of additional alternatives."*

CHAPTER 2: ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for National Forest System Road (NFSR) 245 Unlicensed Parallel Route and summer use of the West Elk Trailhead.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

No Action

The effects of the no action alternative are analyzed in this EA as required by CEQ regulations. Under no action, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. The Unlicensed Parallel Route and summer use of the West Elk Trailhead would not be implemented. Unlicensed vehicle use on the NFSR 245 would be enforced. If an unlicensed vehicle were driving on NFSR 245, the minimum citation is \$275.00 per machine. Consideration of the no action alternative is documented in Chapter 3 by contrasting the impacts of the proposed action with the current condition and expected future condition if the proposed action were not implemented (36 CFR 220.7(b)(2)(ii)).

Proposed Action

The FS proposes to construct a trail that would allow unlicensed motorized vehicles to access the designated open travel system from the West Elk (winter) Trailhead. The trail itself would be wide enough to accommodate UTVs (approximately 65 inches) and the travel corridor would be cleared of vegetation up to 80 inches. No full size vehicles would be allowed. The proposed route is approximately eight miles long. The map attached displays an approximate trail location that incorporates existing roads, trails, timber skid trails and hauls routes. The proposed action would aid in the implementation of the White River National Forest Travel Management Plan.

In addition to the trail, improvements are proposed at the West Elk (winter) trailhead. This trailhead is located on NFS lands in Garfield County and currently accommodates between 60-80 truck and trailer parking spaces. Improvements include installation of a three panel kiosk with travel management information and recreational opportunities on the Flat Top Mountains. Equipment needed to construct this trail involves primarily hand tools, and use of small construction equipment (i.e. small bulldozer, and mini-excavator). The trail is designed primarily of native material, however, where identified; 3 inch minus aggregate material will be applied to harden the soil to reduce future maintenance costs and sustainability. The aggregate materials will be hauled from the Hiner Spring Gravel Pit (approximately eight miles away) or purchased from a local supplier.

Additionally, the proposed action includes re-opening NFSR 245.4A, NFSR 245.4B, NFSR 245.4C, NFSR 245.4D to both licensed and unlicensed vehicles to help access dispersed campsites. These routes were closed to licensed vehicles only in the TMP.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

In 2010, the Rifle Ranger District proposed to construct an ATV/UTV Trailhead and information kiosk located on the Flat Tops Mountains. In anticipation of the release and subsequent implementation of the Forest Travel Management Plan and due to ongoing safety concerns, a need was identified to accommodate ATV/UTV summer use in a location that is central to ATV/UTV riding opportunities and connected route systems. Construction of the trailhead was proposed at the intersection of NFSR 823 Meadow Lake Road) and NFSR 601 (Blair Mountain Road). In November 2011 a Forest Service engineer, landscape architect and recreation specialist developed preliminary designs for an ATV/UTV trailhead to accommodate approximately 20 trucks and trailers and 10 passenger vehicles. This location was chosen due to its central location between two popular ATV/UTV areas that provides access to routes located on the Rifle, Blanco and Eagle Ranger Districts of the White River National Forest.

This alternative was not carried forward because of the lack of community support and funding needed to construct and maintain this facility.

Design Criteria

In addition to the following standards and guidelines from the LRMP, design criteria are protective measures included as upfront features of the proposed action. These design features were derived from the proposal put together by the Rifle Ranger District. The effects analysis in Chapter 3 is based on the assumption that design criteria are followed as described during project implementation.

Information gathered from Forest Service specialists in engineering, heritage, botany, rangeland management and silviculture were included in developing the design criteria. No additional mitigation is required beyond these measures. The Design Criteria are organized by resource category.

Recreation

1. Design trail as a class 4, all-terrain vehicle route and use recommendations identified in the Trails Management Handbook (FSH 2300.18) for trail tread clearing widths (72”- 96”), clearing height (8’ – 10’ high) and target grades (3%-10% with a maximum grade of 15” for 10% - 20% of the trail).
2. Construct sediment and erosion controls (water bars, rolling grade dips, site hardening, etc.) along the entire trail to prevent runoff and erosion. Inspect, maintain and repair as needed throughout the existence of the trail.
3. Construct climbing turns rather than switchbacks
4. Limit visual impacts by trail design from visitors driving along NFSR 245. Construct the trail in dense forest away from the road when possible. Limit constructed features to regulatory and interpretive signs.
5. Enhance viewing opportunities along the trail.

6. Follow these and additional guidelines provided in the Forest Service Trails Management Handbook.
7. Install White River National Forest standard kiosk design and use approved color schematics and panel outline in accordance to the facility master plan.
8. Use boulders and natural materials to define the trailhead parking boundary.
9. No hazardous materials of any kind will be stored on NFS lands. Fuel for equipment will be transported to the site in the bed of a pickup truck.

Transportation

1. Install, inspect and maintain reflective signs meeting Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) requirements on NFSR 245 informing passenger vehicles of up-coming ATV/UTV trail crossing.
2. Install, inspect and maintain reflective stop signs meeting MUTCD requirements at ATV/UTV road crossings of NFSR 245.
3. Design turnouts along the trail with good site distance to safely allow for ATV/UTV passage.
4. Clear roadside vegetation along NFSR 245 to provide appropriate site distances per AASHTO Guidelines for Geometric Design of Very Low-Volume Local Roads ($ADT \leq 400$)
5. Provide maps with the new travel management information at the trailhead.
6. Enforce travel management rules and regulation on NFSR 245.

Cultural Resources

1. All employees, contractors, subcontractors or other parties associated with the project will be instructed that, upon discovering evidence of possible prehistoric, historic or archaeological objects, work will cease immediately at that location. The FS will be notified immediately of the location and nature of the findings. Care will be exercised so as not to disturb or damage artifacts or fossils uncovered during excavation operations.
2. Equipment operators will be informed that the removal, injury, defacement or alteration of any object of archaeological or historic interest is a federal crime and may be punishable by fine and/or imprisonment.
3. During project implementation, in the unlikely event of an inadvertent encounter of Native American remains or grave objects, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) requires that all activities must cease in their discovery area, that a reasonable effort be made to protect the items found or unearthed, and that immediate notification be made to the agency Authorized Officers as well as the appropriate Native American group(s) (IV C.2). Notice of such a discovery may be followed by a 30-day delay (NAGPRA Section 3(d)). Further actions may also require compliance under provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act.

Additional cultural resource inventories shall be conducted for alterations to the proposed route prior to implementation of the alterations. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and tribes will be conducted in accordance to the legal requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1979, as amended.

Rangeland Management

1. The FS will control weeds in accordance with the WRNF Invasive Plant Species Management EA (FS 2007).
2. To prevent the introduction of non-native, invasive plant species, construction equipment shall be thoroughly cleaned, inspected, and approved by the Forest Service prior to use of the equipment on National Forest lands or prior to moving equipment across National Forest System lands.
3. Treatments will be developed using integrated weed management principles for each species and situation. Treatments may include hand pulling and herbicide application.
4. Monitoring of noxious weeds will be conducted throughout the trail's existence to detect new infestations, evaluate prevention and/or treatment success, and identify the need for re-treatment.
5. ATV/UTV catterguards will be installed at allotment boundaries and along fence lines used to manage cattle and sheep on NFS lands.
6. Education and awareness of invasive weeds and safe passage in cattle and sheep areas will be displayed at the trailhead, shared with the White River Trail Runners club and provided at volunteer events.

Timber

1. Trees removed within the trail corridor will either be cut flush with the ground, or the entire root wad will be removed and filled with native material.
2. Trees removed outside of the disturbance limits will be identified by a timber specialist as presenting potential hazards to visitors, facilities and equipment and removed.
3. Construction slash will be scattered, stacked and made available for dispersed campers to use for as firewood.

Comparison of Alternatives

This section compares the effects of implementing the proposed action versus no action. Information in Table 1 summarizes the findings of the effects analysis, which is detailed in Chapter 3.

Table 1. Summary of Effects Analysis

Resource	Proposed Action	No Action
Wildlife	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. May affect, not likely to adversely affect Canada lynx 2. No impact on Northern goshawk 3. May adversely impact individuals but is not likely to result in a loss of viability for olive-sided flycatcher, flammulated and boreal owls, three-toed woodpecker, purple marten, or marten 	<p>No Impact to any Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive Species</p>
Recreation	<p>Recreation in the area will be enhanced with the improvements of the parking facility, informational kiosk, access to popular dispersed campsites and over 485 miles of unlicensed motorized trail. This facility will aid in the implementation of our Travel Management Plan by centralizing information and maps.</p> <p>The trailhead may displace some dispersed non-motorized campers who occupy sites during the camping seasons (June – November).</p> <p>Motorized recreationalist will have an improved experience by having a central location to park and obtain travel management information. The trailhead also includes an outhouse facility.</p>	<p>Increase of resource damage along open unlicensed roads of truck and trailer loading and unloading. Lack of compliance and education of the new TMP rules and regulations.</p> <p>Visitors will be responsible for obtaining travel mgmt. information and maps before they arrive on the forest (verses at the trailhead). Health and safety concerns are also an issue, if facilities are not in place.</p> <p>ATV/UTVs would not have access to popular dispersed campsites</p>
Transportation	<p>Construction of the trail will provide a safe facility for unlicensed motorized recreationist to access open motorized routes across the forest while adhering to the recommendations made in the 2006</p>	<p>Trucks hauling ATV/UTVs will have to transport an additional 10 miles to Triangle Park where they will either park along NFSR</p>

Resource	Proposed Action	No Action
	<p>Motorized Mixed Use engineering study of NFSR 245 and mitigating decisions made in the 2011 White River National Forest Travel Management Plan regarding mixed motorized use of NFSR 245.</p> <p>The trail is laid out to meet Trail Management Handbook criteria</p> <p>Safe crossings of NFSR 245 by the trail are designed to meet AASHTO Very Low Volume Road criteria</p>	<p>211 (Bar HL road) or in open meadows to unload equipment. Public safety could be reduced due to increased activities in areas where unloading occurs.</p> <p>Additional forest service presence would be needed to enforce the travel restrictions along the Buford / New Castle Road.</p>
Cultural Resources	<p>No cultural resources were identified within the path of the current proposed route, following specific design criteria, it is recommended that the construction of this trail will result in “no historic properties affected.” Alterations to the proposed route will require additional Section 106 review as determined necessary by the Forest Archaeologist.</p>	<p>No Effects</p>
Vegetation	<p>By following design criteria this project would not be expected to result in direct or indirect effects to regional forester sensitive plant species.</p>	<p>No Effects</p>
Rangeland Management	<p>No direct effects. Indirect effects of motorized recreationalists may stress sheep. To mitigate stress, education of how to pass through sheep safely is included in the design criteria.</p>	<p>No Effects</p>
Timber	<p>Construction of the trail will remove approximately 1.2 acres of trees from the 5.13 Resource Production – Forest Products management area, thereby removing this acreage from the suitable timber land base.</p>	<p>No effects to the suitable timber base</p>

CHAPTER 3: AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section summarizes the physical, biological, and social resources of the affected project area and the potential effects to those resources from proposed motorized ATV/UTV motorized trail construction and use. It also presents the scientific and analytical basis for the comparison of alternatives presented in Chapter 2.

The direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed ATV/UTV motorized trail construction and use issue-related resources are compared to the no actions alternative throughout. Under the no action alternative, the FS would not construct the 8 mile ATV/UTV motorized trail that parallels NFSR 245, and there would be no effects to any resource.

Location and General Information

The project area is located approximately 15 miles north of the Town of New Castle, Colorado, off the Buford / New Castle Road (NFSR 245) beginning in Township 4 S, Range 91 W, Section 6 and extending to Township 3 S, Range 91 W in sections 31, 30, 24,19, and 18. The project area encompasses approximately 8 miles. A general location map of the project is shown in **Figure 1**.

Access to the area is generally from Interstate 70, exiting at New Castle (Exit 105), and northwest on County Road 226, then north to the Buford/New Castle Road (NFSR 245). The road to access the trailhead and potential trail is paved until you reach the White River National Forest boundary where it turns into a well maintained gravel road. From the boundary, the West Elk (winter) trailhead is approximately 7 miles.

The Buford/New Castle Road (NFSR 245) is the Rifle Ranger Districts most traveled road. It is a well maintained gravel road designed for both 2 and 4 wheel drive vehicles. This route is heavily traveled providing access to the Flat Top Mountains where visitors come to recreate. Recreation in the area is bountiful. The majority of the visitors come to experience the views and sounds of the forest. Popular activities include driving for pleasure, hiking, camping and horseback riding.

The Rifle Ranger District surrounds five full service communities along the I-70 corridor. These communities include; Parachute, Rifle, Silt, New Castle and Glenwood Springs. The majority of our visitors are local. They travel 25-50 miles to visit there National Forest Land. Many of the residents have lived in these areas for over 50 years and are vested in the management of their land.

Wildlife

Existing Environment for Federally Threatened, Endangered and Proposed Species

On the White River National Forest, a district-by-district list of federally listed species for the White River National Forest has been regularly updated as part of a “Level 1” consultation process among federal agencies. The most recent list reviewed and approved by the USFWS occurred on September 22, 2011. That list is used for the biological assessment.

The habitat is comprised of aspen stands, Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir stands, open montane meadows and various mixtures of all of these. The under story includes montane grasses and forbs and a mixture of mountain shrubs including sagebrush, rabbitbrush, snowberry, serviceberry, current, and wild rose. Elevation within the analysis area ranges between 9,000 and 9,500 feet and geographically the route follows the ridge tops to Triangle Park. The entire route is within a Forest Designated Winter Recreation Play Area.

Federally threatened, endangered, or candidate terrestrial wildlife species that were initially considered include those identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as potentially occurring on the Rifle Ranger District or potentially affected by management activities on the District. This list includes federally threatened: Canada Lynx and Mexican spotted Owl.

The Mexican spotted owl was dropped from further analysis because their specific canyon habitats necessary for their life requirements are not found within the project area.

There are no survey data available on the population status of lynx in the area. The last documentation of native lynx on the White River National Forest occurred in the early 1970s.

One guideline for Canada lynx in the Forest Plan is to maintain or improve conditions for lynx movement within key landscape linkage areas (Forest Service 2002c). Important forested linkage areas are identified as 5.5 management areas. The project area is not within a 5.5 management area. There are no lynx linkage areas within the project area and no critical habitat for Canada lynx has been designated in Colorado.

Direct and Indirect Effects to Federally Threatened Species

Effects on individual lynx potentially using the ATV route corridor that parallels FR245 within ¼ mile (disturbance): Noise and human activity associated with traffic and tree clearing has the potential to displace lynx that may be using the area during the time that construction is taking place. Route is on a winter recreation play area where snow compaction already occurs therefore, there will be no net increase in snow compaction in this area.

Cumulative Effects to Federally Threatened Species

The project would adhere to all lynx standards and guidelines in the 2002 Revised White River NF Land and Resource Management Plan, would not increase regular snow compaction or travel

ways in areas that are not already designated winter play areas or designated routes. Because this route travels through lynx denning habitat, it is possible to disturb individual lynx that could be using the area. This disturbance would be temporary (six month construction duration). Based on the above facts, the effects to lynx are believed to be insignificant and discountable. It is determined that the FR 245 ATV parallel route project *may effect, but will not likely to adversely affect* Canada lynx.

Existing Environment for Forest Service Sensitive Species

Suitable habitat may be present in the project area for the olive-sided flycatcher, flammulated owl, three-toed woodpecker, purple martin, and marten. Activities associated with those newly cleared and newly constructed portions of the proposed trail may alter portions of their habitat and disturb the species during the construction period.

Direct and Indirect Effects to Sensitive Species

Northern Goshawk: Since there are no known nests, the project will not eliminate suitable hunting habitat, nor result in a net increase of recreational vehicle use, this project would have *no impact* on the northern goshawk.

Boreal Owl: There is a potential *this project may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the Planning Area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.*

Flammulated owl: This species has been documented nesting along the FR 245 corridor in the lower elevation aspen that is adjacent to mountain shrub habitat. Activities associated with those newly cleared and newly constructed portions of the proposed trail may alter portions of their habitat and disturb the species during the construction period. These activities *may adversely impact individuals, but are not likely to result in a loss of viability in the Project Area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.*

American three-toed woodpecker: The initial construction actions of removing snags, mature conifer trees, and insect infested trees would temporarily reduce the quality of three-toed woodpecker habitat. There is the potential to impact individual three-toed woodpeckers under this project. The amount of harvesting associated with this project is not expected to impact populations. For these reasons, this project *may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the Planning Area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.*

Olive-sided flycatcher: The project area is geographically placed along the top of a ridge for its entire route and will not impact olive-sided flycatcher breeding habitat but may impact foraging territory. For these reasons, this project *may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the Planning Area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.*

Purple martin: The adverse effects from the project activities may include temporary disturbance, displacement of individuals in the immediate area of construction, or direct displacement due to snag and tree removal. This project would not cumulatively add to impacts from past timber sales. *This project may adversely impact individuals, but it is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the Planning Area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.*

Marten: In general marten are not considered highly sensitive to human disturbance. The adverse effects from the project activities may include temporary disturbance, displacement of individuals in the immediate area of construction, or direct displacement due to snag and tree removal. *This project may adversely impact individuals, but it is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the Planning Area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.*

Recreation

Existing Environment

Recreation is prevalent in the Flat Top Mountains. From direct observation by Rifle Ranger District employees, dispersed camping and driving for pleasure are the most popular activities in this area during the spring, summer and fall months. All-terrain vehicles (ATV and UTV) sales have soared within the past 20 years. It is not uncommon to see families traveling on ATVs on roads throughout the forest. It has become one of the best means of transportation on our forest roads. It is an extremely popular activity for many residents in our surrounding communities.

In exception of NFSR 245, this setting is classified and managed as semi-primitive motorized in the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). Recreation areas are mostly managed for their desired settings. The ROS classification criteria assist recreation planners with tools or “setting indicators” to help meet visitors expectations and experiences. The “setting indicators” are then broken down into management criteria for access, remoteness, naturalness, facilities and site management, social encounters, visitor impacts, and visitor management. In a semi-primitive motorized area, visitors’ encounters range from low to moderate, typically the visitor will encounter 10 or less parties per day. The maximum party size is generally between 12-20 people. The access into the area is subtle, meaning barriers and signs should blend in with the natural landscape. Their primary function is for site protection and they are made of native materials. The visitor management tools are rustic and harmonize with the natural environment and are simple, information facilities. These areas offer unique opportunity to view and experience our natural environment where visitors are more inclined to seek adventure, be independent, self-reliant and take risks.

Within one mile of the West Elk (winter) Trailhead are two non-motorized foot, horse and bike trails, the Mansfield Ditch Trail and Cherry Creek Trail. Both of these trails are 24” wide and offer excellent opportunities for solitude and discovery. During the spring and early fall, the Cherry Creek Trail is used by cattle permittees for guiding cattle to their allotments for grazing.

It is not uncommon to see cattle on these trails. In addition the trail may be used in winter by cross-country skiers, snowshoers and skijorers.

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

Compared to the no action alternative, environmental effects include construction of an 80' parallel motorized ATV/UTV route adjacent to a popular, well maintained, traveled roadway. If implemented, this new trail will provide access to hundreds of miles of unlicensed motorized routes, connecting the Blanco, Rifle and Eagle Ranger Districts. This new route would provide a safe means to access open routes. The ATV/UTV trail offers access to three open meadows or parks; Lake Park, Seaman Park and Triangle Park. These parks are commonly used as dispersed campsites. Dispersed camping is prevalent along the BNC Road. Along the section of road between the West Elk Winter Trailhead and Triangle Park, eight dispersed sites have been inventoried.

The trail is designed to use existing roads, trails, timber skid trails and hauls routes to minimize construction costs. The trail will enhance unlicensed riding opportunities. The trail provides opportunity to experience Engelmann Spruce and aspen forests. It skirts large meadows and scenic overlooks. The design of the trail also travels near popular dispersed camping locations for visitors to camp and ride safely and legally on our travel management system. The trailhead will provide a place to park and display information informing visitors of the new policy and the recreational opportunities that exist in and around the area.

The trailhead developments are minimal. They include placing rock barriers to keep vehicles out of the adjacent meadow, adding a new interpretive kiosk with a travel management map displaying open unlicensed routes and providing visitor amenities, such as picnic tables and ATV/UTV loading and unloading ramps as demand and funding arise.

Recreation in the area will be enhanced with the improvements of the parking facility, informational kiosk and construction of the access trail to 485 miles of unlicensed motorized trail. This facility will aid in the implementation of the White River National Forest Travel Management Plan. The Rifle Ranger District, including this area has been identified forest wide as providing exceptional motorized opportunities.

The environmental effects of no action alternative would be far greater than the impact of the new trail construction and trailhead developments. Trucks with trailers would be required to drive past the West Elk (winter) Trailhead and haul their ATV/UTVs to Triangle Park where they would heavily impact the first couple level areas within 100' of an open unlicensed road to park and unload their ATV/UTVs. This could have a negative impact on vegetation and scenic qualities of the area. There are only a couple locations available that are relatively flat enough to safely park and unload. Having multiple access locations decreases the opportunity to display information on the new travel routes effectively. By utilizing the current parking area and constructing a connector trail, we will reduce the impacts of vehicles parking along our system roads, enhance our unlicensed motorized travel system and have greater compliance of our Travel Management Plan (TMP).

Possible indirect effects to the new access trail and trailhead developments may involve congestion along the trail. By defining the route and travel corridor, congestion may occur along the 80" travel corridor. This could be mitigated by adding turnouts and passing lanes in areas identified with good site distance and clearing. Also, ATV/UTVs traveling on the trail might produce dust in the dry summer months. The overall impact would be minimal in comparison to NFSR245. The parallel trail may displace wildlife; however, it is observed and documented that most wildlife tends to bed away from well-traveled roads and congested areas. It should also be noted that the noise from additional ATV/UTVs may disrupt dispersed campers along NFSR245. Colorado has a new sound law that went into effect July 1, 2010. To operate an OHV in Colorado, the following sound limits must be met: 99 dB(A) if manufactured before 1/1/1998 and 96 dB(A) if manufactured after 1/1/1998. State Park Rangers could possibly use the new trailhead to test machines and enforce state regulations for noise and registration.

The trailhead and ATV/UTV trail may displace some dispersed camping sites that are normally occupied throughout the camping season (June – November). That said, it may also be an attractant for campers coming to the area wanting to operate their ATV/UTVs and disperse camp. There are numerous non-motorized dispersed camping locations adjacent to the trailhead, on the east side of the Buford / New Castle Road near Cherry Creek and Mansfield Trail that could accommodate displaced campers. The ATV/UTV trailhead is centrally located and could be a convenient place to share important messages for both motorized and non-motorized visitors. The trailhead would be an ideal meeting location and an important management tool to display the WRNF new travel opportunities, safety information and NFS rules and regulations.

The cumulative impact from the proposed ATV/UTV trail and trailhead developments combined with motorized travel on NFSR 245 would be minor, but the potential for congestion, dust and noise could increase slightly with implementation of the proposed action.

Transportation

Existing Environment

In the White River National Forest Travel Management Plan, the Buford / New Castle Road (NSFR 245) was closed to unlicensed vehicles due to an analysis of motorized mixed use traffic on National Forest System Roads. NSFR 245 is a main thoroughfare through the forest and is used for recreational and commercial forest traffic as well as people traveling between New Castle and Buford, CO. According to the analysis on mixed use traffic, vehicle speeds on the road can reach 45 mph in several areas. In 2006 the analysis was completed by a forest service engineer who recommended constructing a parallel trail between the West Elk (winter) Trailhead and Triangle Park that connects and incorporates locations to disperse camp. The findings of the report considered all state, local and USDA Forest Service regulations and guidelines pertaining to mixed motorized use on Buford / New Castle Road. It indicated that there was a high probability of a crash and a high crash severity rating. The professional engineering judgment indicated a significant risk to public safety by continuing motorized mixed use on the entire length of road within the Forest.

This proposal is in direct response to the engineering analysis completed for the Travel Management Plan. The intent of this proposal is to provide a safe trail for unlicensed motorized recreationist to access open motorized routes, dispersed campsites across the forest and to adhere to the recommendations made in 2006.

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

Compared to the no action alternative, the social effects of providing an alternative trail along the Buford / New Castle Road will assist with management of the Travel Management Plan and recreational motorized opportunities on the Rifle Ranger District. This route has community support. The White River Trail Runners are a local non-profit group who formed to assist with maintaining motorized recreational opportunities on public lands. This group has agreed to assist in construction, maintenance and enforcement on this route and ultimately the unlicensed motorized closure of NSFR 245.

Indirect effects of the no action alternative would result in a need for additional forest service presence, information and an increase in resource damage along open, unlicensed motorized routes. Additional forest service presence would be needed to enforce the travel restrictions along the Buford / New Castle Road. Information would need to be available in multiple locations for visitors to refer to so they can be informed of the new travel policy or they would have to contact the offices via phone or internet to obtain additional information. Parking and sanitation issues would arise at those locations that are flat and large enough to park a truck and trailer with space to safely unload off of open motorized routes.

Cumulatively, the proposed action would benefit the unlicensed motorized recreationist on the Rifle Ranger District. The proposed route is within close proximity to the Fayville Trail that parallels the Buford / New Castle Road on the Blanco Ranger District. This trail is already established. Visitors would have an opportunity to legally operate their unlicensed vehicle from the West Elk (winter) Trailhead to Hiner Spring and beyond. These trails provide a safe opportunity for unlicensed motorized recreationists to access our travel system.

Cultural Resources

Existing Environment

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) requires that Federal agencies take into account the potential effect of a Federal undertaking on any cultural resource that is eligible to or listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Decisions that authorize the construction of new roads or trails have the potential to impact cultural resources and are therefore considered undertakings. Archaeological phenomena, as specified by 36 CFR 296.3, such as structures, shelters, features, artifacts, rock art, human remains, or any portion or piece of the preceding which possess scientific, historic, and/or social values of a cultural group are defined as cultural resources.

The criteria applied to evaluate cultural resources for NRHP eligibility are based on the quality of historical significance present in cultural resources that possess integrity of location, design,

setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. NRHP eligible cultural resources are associated with one or more of the following: significant persons, events, or patterns in prehistory or history; distinctive engineering, artistic, or architectural characteristics; or the potential to yield data important to the research of history or prehistory. The Forest Archaeologist, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), determines significance and NRHP eligibility of cultural resources.

Class I Research

The files of the Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP) Compass database and the WRNF for previously conducted surveys and identified resources were consulted prior to initiation of fieldwork for this project. An isolated find is defined as fourteen or fewer surface artifacts with no associated cultural features and minimal potential deposition. The Colorado OAHP defines a site as fifteen or more artifacts within 50 meters of one another, or at least one cultural or structural feature. Exceptions to this site definition are historic can scatters numbering less than 50.

Class I Results

The proposed route intersects with eleven previous inventories for timber sales, road construction, range allotments, a timber blow-down event, and the Ute Trail inventory. These survey efforts resulted in the identification of no cultural resources within the project area. Additionally, forty cultural resource inventories have been completed within one-mile of the proposed route identifying fourteen cultural resources within one mile of the project. These resources consist of both historic and prehistoric sites that provide adequate knowledge for the kinds of sites in the surrounding area and for fieldwork expectations.

Fieldwork Results

Additional inventory was completed in the fall of 2008 and the spring of 2012 by a Forest Service archaeologist along the route identified by district recreation staff and a volunteer. In total, approximately 60 acres were surveyed along the proposed route during this survey effort. No cultural resources were identified.

Consultation

Colorado State Historic Preservation Office consultation was completed on 4/5/2012 with a finding of no historic properties affected.

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

While cultural resource inventories of the proposed ATV trail resulted in the discovery of no cultural resources, it is possible that there are cultural resources in the vicinity of the route. If the construction of the trail extends beyond what was originally inventoried, then it is important to ensure that cultural resources are not disturbed by these on-the-ground adjustments. Trail and road construction may directly affect artifacts from a surface or buried context and more loosely defined cultural landscapes that cover areas much greater than an average archaeological site. Generally, trail and road construction has the potential to disturb cultural resources through displacement and/or obliteration. Some impacts may not be immediate. For example, areas

disturbed during a construction event can lead to erosion which in turn can result in cultural resource loss.

The following are the direct and indirect effects of implementing the alternatives as described in Chapter 2 on cultural resources within the analysis area. Significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to cultural resources are not anticipated by the implementation of any of the alternatives.

Alternative 1 – No Action

Alternative 1 would result in no impact on cultural resources. If the trail were not constructed, then there would be no potential for disturbance to cultural resources.

Alternative 2 – Construct the Trail

The use of hand tools and heavy machinery such as bulldozers and bobcats has the potential to disturb the ground surface. The blade and bucket implements attached to these tools can expose buried deposits, displace surface artifacts, and result in artifact breakage. The wheels and tracks of heavy machinery can also displace soil and crush artifacts resulting in further disturbance, especially while turning these types of machinery on sloped surfaces. Additionally, areas disturbed during a construction event can lead to erosion which in turn can result in cultural resource loss due to exposure to natural weathering agents long after the project has been completed.

Because no cultural resources were identified within the path of the current proposed route, following specific design criteria, it is recommended that the construction of this trail will result in “*no historic properties affected.*” Alterations to the proposed route will require additional Section 106 review as determined necessary by the Forest Archaeologist. Because no cultural resources were located within the proposed route, no cumulative effects have been identified.

Vegetation

This portion of the analysis addresses two categories of management status plants including federally listed threatened species and regional forester sensitive species. The goal of this analysis is determine if the project would be compliant with the Endangered Species Act, Forest Manual Direct 2670 and Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines.

Existing Environment

The area potentially affected by the proposed action will be referred to as the project area. The project area occurs within sedimentary subalpine forest and meadow habitats which range in elevation between 9,000 feet and 9,300 feet. Forested cover types present include Engelmann’s spruce, subalpine fir, and Aspen. Areas potentially affected within forested cover types are primarily existing logging roads and skid trails. Non forested habitats which may be affected by the proposed action namely occur in three locations including Lake Park, Triangle Park and Seaman Park. Cover types present in non-forested habitats are grass and forbs. Riparian habitat only appears to be present in the area of influence of the proposed action in Lake Park where a

series of stock ponds have been developed from a spring fed source or possibly from snow run off which collects in a basin setting.

Terrestrial Threatened, Sensitive and Management Indicator Species

Federally Listed Plant Species: The project area has no plants or suitable habitat for federally listed plant species (Table 2). They will not be discussed further in this document.

Table 2. Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed Plant Species*

PLANTS			
Species	Area of Influence / Project Site		Basic Habitat Description
	Suitable Habitat	Species Documented	
<i>Eutrema edwardsii</i> ssp. <i>penlandii</i> , Penland alpine fen mustard	No	No	Alpine tundra, stream banks and wetlands. Mosquito Range above 11,800 ft. Dillon RD.
<i>Phacelia scopulina</i> var. <i>submutica</i> , <i>DeBeque phacelia</i>	No	No	Semi desert shrublands and pinyon-juniper. Wasatch Formation. Below 6,200 ft. Rifle RD.
<i>Sclerocactus glaucus</i> , <i>Colorado hookless cactus</i>	No	No	Semi desert shrublands and pinyon-juniper. Wasatch Formation. Below 6,700 ft. Rifle RD.
<i>Spiranthes diluvialis</i> , <i>Ute ladies' tresses</i>	No	No	Seasonally moist soils and wet meadows of drainages and margins of ditches. Below 7,000 ft. Suspected in Eagle, Garfield and Pitkin counties.

* If no habitat present, then no further analysis required.

Regional Forester Sensitive Species: The project area has marginally suitable habitat for select regional forester sensitive plant species which could occur in non-forested habitats including narrow-leaf moonwort and Hall's fescue (Table 3). The likelihood that these species are present in the project area is low. The nearest documented occurrence of trianglelobe moonwort is on Maroon Peak on Aspen Ranger District. The nearest documented occurrence of narrow-leaf moonwort to the project area is on the Dillon Ranger District near Copper Mountain. While potential habitat for Hall's fescue occurs on the White River National Forest there are currently no documented occurrences on the planning unit. The most likely habitat for Hall's fescue is in the upper subalpine near tree-line.

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

By following design criteria, this project is not expected to result in direct or indirect effects to regional forest sensitive plant species. The proposed action is not expected to add cumulatively to the following past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions: Sheep grazing, timber harvest, road and trail construction and maintenance, motorized and non-motorized summer recreation, motorized and non-motorized over-snow recreation and dispersed camping.

Table 3. Region 2 Sensitive Species*

PLANTS			
Species	Area of Influence / Project Site		Basic Habitat Description
	Suitable Habitat	Species Documented	
<i>Armeria maritima</i> , Sea pink	No	No	Alpine in grassy tundra slopes with wet, sandy or spongy organic soils. 11,900 to 12,000 ft.
<i>Astragalus leptaleus</i> , Park milkvetch	No	No	Riparian, streamside, swales, often amongst sedges and willow or wet aspen. 6,000 to 9,000 ft.
<i>Botrychium ascendens</i> , Trianglelobe moonwort	Yes	No	Riparian among willow and historically disturbed, now stabilized habitats. 8,000 to 10,840 ft.
<i>Botrychium lineare</i> , Narrowleaf moonwort	Yes	No	Clearings and meadows. Historically disturbed, now stabilized habitats. 0 to 11,000 ft.
<i>Botrychium paradoxum</i> , Paradox moonwort	No	No	Clearings and meadows. Historically disturbed, now stabilized habitats. Above 10,000 ft.
<i>Braya glabella</i> , Smooth rockcress	No	No	Alpine. Calcareous soils, lakeshores, scree slopes and solifluction lobes. 11,200 to 13,200 ft.
<i>Carex diandra</i> , Lesser panicled sedge	No	No	Fen on peat or on mossy floating logs in spring fed ponds. 6,100 to 8,800 ft.
<i>Carex livida</i> , Livid sedge	No	No	Fen on peat. Often calcareous or rich fens. Above 6,398 ft.
<i>Cypripedium parviflorum</i> , Yellow lady's slipper	No	No	Riparian/wetlands or transitional to Cottonwood, Aspen and conifers. 5,800 to 11,500 ft.
<i>Draba exunguiculata</i> , Clawless draba	No	No	Alpine fell fields. 12,000 to 14,000 ft.
<i>Draba grayana</i> , Gray's Peak draba	No	No	Alpine in gravelly slopes and fell fields. 11,500 to 14,000 ft.
<i>Draba weberi</i> Weber's draba	No	No	Splash zones, among the rocks along streams and lakes and spruce forests. Above 11,000 ft.
<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i> , Roundleaf sundew	No	No	Fens which are poor or intermediate poor on floating mats, also in iron fens. 9,100 to 9,800 ft.
<i>Epipactis gigantea</i> , Giant hellebore	No	No	Seeps on sandstone cliffs and hillsides; springs, especially hot springs when elev. above 8,500 ft.
<i>Eriogonum exilifolium</i> , Slenderleaf buckwheat	No	No	Sagebrush and Barrens in open, sparsely vegetated habitats. 6,900 to 8,600 ft. Dillon RD.
<i>Eriophorum altaicum</i> var. <i>neogaeum</i> , Altai cottongrass	No	No	Fen where open grown or partially shaded. 9,500 to 14,000 ft.
<i>Eriophorum chamissonis</i> , Chamisso's cottongrass	No	No	Fens where graminoids and forbs dominate the vegetation. 10,400 to 12,000 ft.
<i>Eriophorum gracile</i> , Slender cottongrass	No	No	Fens on floating mats of peat. Often calcareous. 6900 to 10,500 ft.
<i>Festuca hallii</i> , Hall fescue	Yes	No	Meadows and edges of conifer forests or dry alpine tundra. 6,800 to 11,000 ft.
<i>Kobresia simpliciuscula</i> , Simple kobresia	No	No	Fen in flooded marly areas often with <i>Carex simulata</i> & <i>Triglochin</i> spp. 6,000 to 10,000 ft.
<i>Machaeranthera coloradoensis</i> , Colorado tansyaster	No	No	Mountain parks to dry alpine tundra, little competing vegetation. 8,500 to 12,940 ft.
<i>Parnassia kotzebuei</i> , Kotzbue's grass of Parnassia	No	No	Riparian in subalpine and alpine wet, rocky ledges, in mossy streamlets. 10,000 to 12,000 ft.
<i>Penstemon harringtonii</i> , Harrington beardtongue	No	No	Open sagebrush slopes or among pinyon-juniper. Calcareous parent material. 6,400 to 9,400 ft.
<i>Ptilagrostis porteri</i> , Porter's feathergrass	No	No	Fens on hummocks among willows. Mostly on peat soils. 9,200 to 12,000 ft.
<i>Ranunculus karelinii</i> , Ice cold buttercup	No	No	Among rocks and scree on exposed summits, slopes. 12,000 to 14,100 ft.

PLANTS			
<i>Rubus arcticus</i> ssp. <i>acaulis</i> , Dwarf raspberry	No	No	Riparian/wetland species with willow or wet partially shaded under spruce 8,600 to 9,700 ft.
<i>Salix candida</i> , Hoary willow	No	No	Fens which are calcareous, among other willows. 6,600 to 9,200 ft.
<i>Salix serissima</i> , Autumn willow	No	No	Fens which are calcareous, among other willows. 6,600 to 9,200 ft.
<i>Sphagnum angustifolium</i> , Peat moss	No	No	Fens. High mineral content and alkaline pH calcareous or rich fens. 7,800 to 9,720 ft.
<i>Sphagnum balticum</i> , Baltic bog moss	No	No	Fens which are nutrient poor; iron fens and intermediate poor fens. 9,600 to 11,483 ft.
<i>Thalictrum heliophilum</i> , Sun loving meadowrue	No	No	Steep talus slopes open, hot, dry sites. Soils from Green River Formation; light colored saline/clays. Shifting substrates harsh sites 6,300-8800 ft.
<i>Utricularia minor</i> , Lesser bladderwort	No	No	Fens in shallow water. Open grown or partially shaded. 5,500 to 9,000 ft.
<i>Viburnum opulus</i> var. <i>americanum</i> American cranberry bush	No	No	Riparian and riparian transition to cottonwood, river birch and hawthorn. 6,000-7000 ft.

* If no habitat present, then no further analysis required.

Rangeland Management and Weeds

Existing Environment

This section describes the existing condition of range land management in the area proposed for the ATV/UTV motorized trail route.

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

Range management has no direct effects to sheep management from the construction of the BNC parallel route.

The parallel route runs through the middle of the Mansfield/Seaman sheep allotment. It only touches the Meadow Creek cattle allotment which will have little to no effect. Indirect effects include an increase of motorized recreational activity that could likely stress sheep. One way to mitigate stress of sheep by the public is to display and educate visitors through interpretive signs and educational contacts on ways to move through sheep safely. Other methods include coordination with permittees to provide exact dates annually of sheep movement through and around the trail to keep public informed. ATV cattle guards will be installed along the route that cross existing fence lines to assist in range management rotations.

It is reasonably foreseeable that a cumulative effect of motorized activity along the trail could cause increase loss to sheep operation. Observations of use by federal employees have indicated that more residents in the western slope of Colorado are recreating close to home. This potential growth in recreation could have a cumulative effect on the health of the sheep and the livelihood of the permittee.

Timber

Existing Environment

This section describes the existing condition of the timber stands proposed for removal along the ATV/UTV motorized trail route.

Timber Stand Characteristics

The timber vegetation types in the analysis area are Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir (spruce/fir), and quaking aspen (aspen). Some spruce/fir stands have minor to substantial inclusions of aspen, as well as aspen harvest units containing substantial amounts of spruce and fir. All spruce/fir stands are multi-storied, containing minor to substantial amounts of seedlings, saplings and poles, primarily fir. The harvest history of the along the ATV/UTV motorized trail route has been one of salvage in the late 1940s through 70s. Spruce trees killed by spruce beetles were salvaged to recover value but little green-tree harvesting occurred. Spruce beetles likely gave fir the competitive advantage in some stands, resulting in the current stand composition being predominately fir.

Past Timber Sales

Timber harvesting started in the area in the late 1940s. Logging continued in the area during the 1950s and 1960s. Many of the conifer stands were impacted by the spruce beetle epidemic of the 1940s and early 1950s resulting in spruce mortality. The silvicultural methods previously used in this area were salvage and shelterwood of spruce and fir, and coppice cutting of aspen. This has created limited vertical and horizontal diversity in some of the stands.

Alternative 1: No Action

Under this alternative, no vegetation management treatments would occur.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

Construction of the trail would remove approximately 1.2 acres from the *5.13 Management Resource Production – Forest Products* management area, thereby removing this acreage from the suitable timber land base.

There would be no cumulative effects produced under the no action alternative at this time. Implementation of Alternative 2 in combination with hazard tree removal along roads and fuelwood cutting would not produce any measurable cumulative effects in the project area.

CHAPTER 4: CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The FS consulted the following individuals, federal, state and local agencies, tribes and non-FS persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team/Specialists

District Ranger, Glenn R. Adams
IDT Leader, Recreation Specialist, Kyle Grambley
West Zone Biological Technician, Kim Potter
Civil Engineering Technician, Karla Mobley
Archaeologist, Patrick Uphus
Forest Botanist, Johnny Proctor
Range Specialist, Lydia LaBelle de Rios
Timber Management Administrator, Steve Goodson

Federal, State and Local Agencies

Colorado Parks and Wildlife
State of Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
Colorado State Historic Preservation Office
Garfield County Board of County Commissioners
Town of New Castle

Tribes (Letter sent January 10, 2012)

Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Ute Indian Tribe
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

Others

Josh Cullen
Russ and Val Lee
Susan Nichols-Alvis
David Hillbrand & Family
Kurt Hill

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