

Inventory and Projected Needs by 2026

Estimated Trail Miles (2016)

The table below shows the current estimated trails inventory for Colorado, along with a preliminary projection for additional miles needed by 2026. The numbers shown are best, available in July 2016. These may change as the Colorado Trails System mapping project obtains better information.

The methodology used for additional 2026 trail miles is based on the forecasted increase in Colorado’s population by the State Demography Office, Dept. of Local Affairs. That forecast is for an approximately 25 percent increase in state population to 6,564,100 in 2026. Therefore, the projected trail miles needed by 2026 is 25 percent greater than current totals. This projection should be reviewed.

In early 2016, Governor’s Hickenlooper’s Office, working with DNR and CPW identified 16 trail segments in Colorado for future funding. These are the “16 in 2016” trails announced in January 2016.

The “16 in 2016” trail segments represent 825 miles of unbuilt trails. When completed these

Colorado’s Estimated Miles of Trails		
Management Agency	2016 Reported Totals	2026 Projected Miles Needed
Municipal/Regional	6,152	1,509
Local Governments	2,610	Based on projected increase in Colorado population.
County/Regional	3,542	
State Agencies	7,970	1,955
CPW – State Parks	727	Based on projected increase in Colorado population.
CPW – State Wildlife Areas	232	
Colo. Dept. of Transportation	7,011 ¹	
Federal Agencies	19,168	No estimate for 2026. Federal land managers determine if and where new trails are needed on federal lands.
US Forest Service	14,601	
Bureau of Land Management	4,043	
Other Federal Agencies	524	
Rocky Mountain NP	355	
Designated Motorized Trail Uses		
Motorized Trails (almost all on federal lands)	7,144²	
TOTALS:	33,290	

Table C.1

¹ CDOT miles are shown as reported to the Colorado Trails System project in early 2016. These need clarification as to what miles are included in the total.

² Motorized miles are for designated motorized trails. These are included in the 19,168 total shown for “Federal Agencies” as those trails are generally open to all uses. The 7,144 specified for motorized trail use is not double counted in the overall total.

segments will address important gaps in the Colorado Front Range Trail, as well as the Peak to Plains trail that will eventually connect metropolitan Denver westward to the Kokopelli Trail and the Colorado-Utah border.

The projections offered in Table C.1 are discussion starters, and not hard targets for trail construction. There is insufficient information available to establish specific forecasts for where or how many trails will be needed. Table C.1 shows projections for “Municipal/Regional” agencies. Counties, municipalities, special districts that provide trails should consider their specific needs and their service populations, adjusting their strategies accordingly, just as those agencies have done in the past. The intention of this projection is to raise awareness and strengthen the conversation, not provide direction to cities, counties and special districts. Those entities are best positioned to do what they need, and work with the State Trails Program, as well as others, for funding.

State agencies also should be, and are, aware of the need for additional miles of trails to accommodate additional people in Colorado over the decade. CPW currently provides a small portion of trails, although the trails in parks and wildlife areas are often highly important to those who use those trails.

Trails on federal lands provide a different challenge. The focus group discussions returned many times to problems with trail conditions and maintenance on federal lands. The federal agencies face huge challenges in this area as budgets are strained beyond capacity and likely face more challenges in the future. The trail maintenance backlog on the National Forests is the subject of a General Accounting Office Report,³ discussed later in this report.

The State Trails Program, working with partners such as Great Outdoor Colorado (GOCO) should refine these estimates, especially through the Colorado Trails System mapping effort. Since parts of Colorado will grow much faster (or slower) and consequently require more (or less) miles of new trails to accommodate the increase in population. Actions in the plan itself call for identification of areas where trails conflict with critical wildlife needs, to assist in future trail planning. Additionally, other actions discuss undertaking a gap analysis to identify locations where trails are needed. The intent is to identify a balance between trail needs and areas where trail construction could negatively impact wildlife and other environmental concerns. The key is to use information and technology to find a balance for people and Colorado’s natural environment.

³ GAO. 2013. *Forest Service Trails: Long- and Short-Term Improvements Could Reduce Maintenance Backlog and Enhance System Sustainability*. GAO-13-618

Future analyses should provide projections more sensitive to specific location. For example, working with county level population projections would provide information that would be more germane to county planning efforts.

As the Colorado Trails System mapping effort moves forward, more accurate trail inventory information will emerge. At this point, the US Forest Service, as required by the federal 2005 Final Travel Management Rule, has completed the Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUMs) for all Colorado National Forests and Grasslands. The USFS updates their information annually. Municipal/Regional agencies and the BLM update their information periodically. The Colorado Trails System mapping effort is set up to update the trail inventory accordingly, the important consideration is that a statewide trails mapping effort continues and is maintained in the future.