

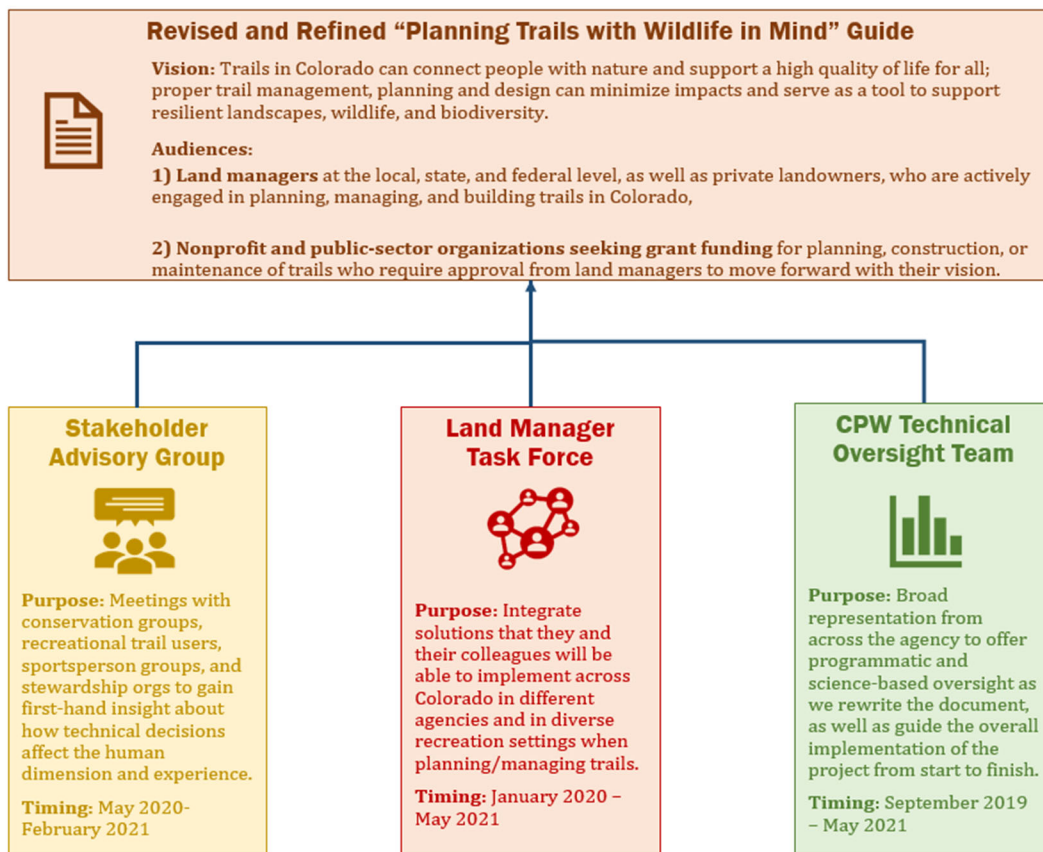
## Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind March 2021 Update

### Current Status

The Land Manager Task Force has met nine times over the last year to ensure we are creating a document that is relevant to them, and that we have their buy-in on this document. We ended the March 5th Task Force meeting with enthusiastic consent for this version, with the understanding that a few changes will be made before the final draft, including final copy editing and adding photographs and a few visual pieces. These changes will be made prior to sharing the document for Public Comment.

The second draft version of this document was shared on January 22<sup>nd</sup> with our Stakeholder Advisory Group, members of the Land Manager Task Force to share with their agency colleagues, and the CPW Technical Team to share broadly within their regions/sections. The version you're seeing has been updated from the previous draft to provide a better trail planning framework to support Regional Partnerships, further clarify Best Management Practices for dealing with specific species and habitats. This new draft also provides an appendix with links to additional resources including the High Priority Habitat list, current literature list, and a recently released USFS General Technical Report that is a comprehensive synthesis of recreation impacts on wildlife to show how the document is holding to the purpose of being grounded in the best available science.

## Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind ~ Engagement Summary



## New Draft Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind Outline

### Introduction: Overview and Background

#### Chapter 1: The Collaborative Process

- Core Team Formation
- Public Engagement

#### Chapter 2: Evaluating Wildlife Needs and Trail Opportunities

- Evaluating Wildlife Habitat
- Siting Considerations: Avoid, Minimize, Mitigate
- Considering Human Dimensions

#### Chapter 3: Plan for Trail Management and Monitoring

- Monitoring
- Education and Outreach
- Adaptive Management Techniques
- Enforcement Planning

#### Appendix A: More Specific Species and Habitat Best Management Practices

- Considerations
- Species
- Habitats

#### Appendix B: Supporting Documentation from the Published Literature

- High Priority Habitat list
- Current literature list
- USFS General Technical Report

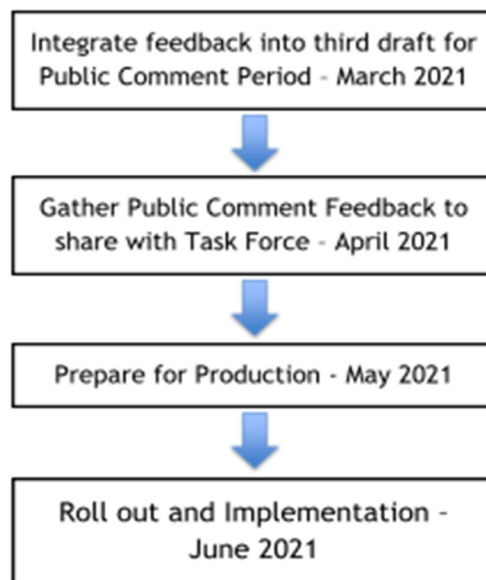
#### Appendix C: List of Resources

- Links to all the resources that are mentioned in the document.

#### Appendix D: Participants

- Task Force Members that contributed to the document
- Representatives from advisory groups

### Next Steps:



## Summary of Quantitative Survey Questions For 1.24.21 Draft

- 36 stakeholders participated in the survey, giving the document an average rating of 4.3 (based on a scale of 1 - needs a lot of work to 5 - hit the mark). This is an improvement from the 3.5 rating the first draft received a 3.5 rating.
- Participants rated the document 4.1 when asked how confident they were that they could use this draft to catalyze collaboration with other stakeholders.
- When asked whether the document meets the objectives laid out for it, 31 (86%) said it 'completely' or 'mostly' meets the objectives, one said 'somewhat,' and one said 'not at all.' Three respondents offered written feedback, which is included in the narrative summary below.
- **Balance of Collaboration:** When asked, "Does this document represent a balanced approach to conservation and recreation," on average participants ranked it at 46 (0 = Conservation, 50 = Balanced, 100 = recreation). Most responses fell between 35-65, with four participants ranking it near 0 (Figure 1). This compares to the initial draft which was ranked at 43.

4.3★  
average rating

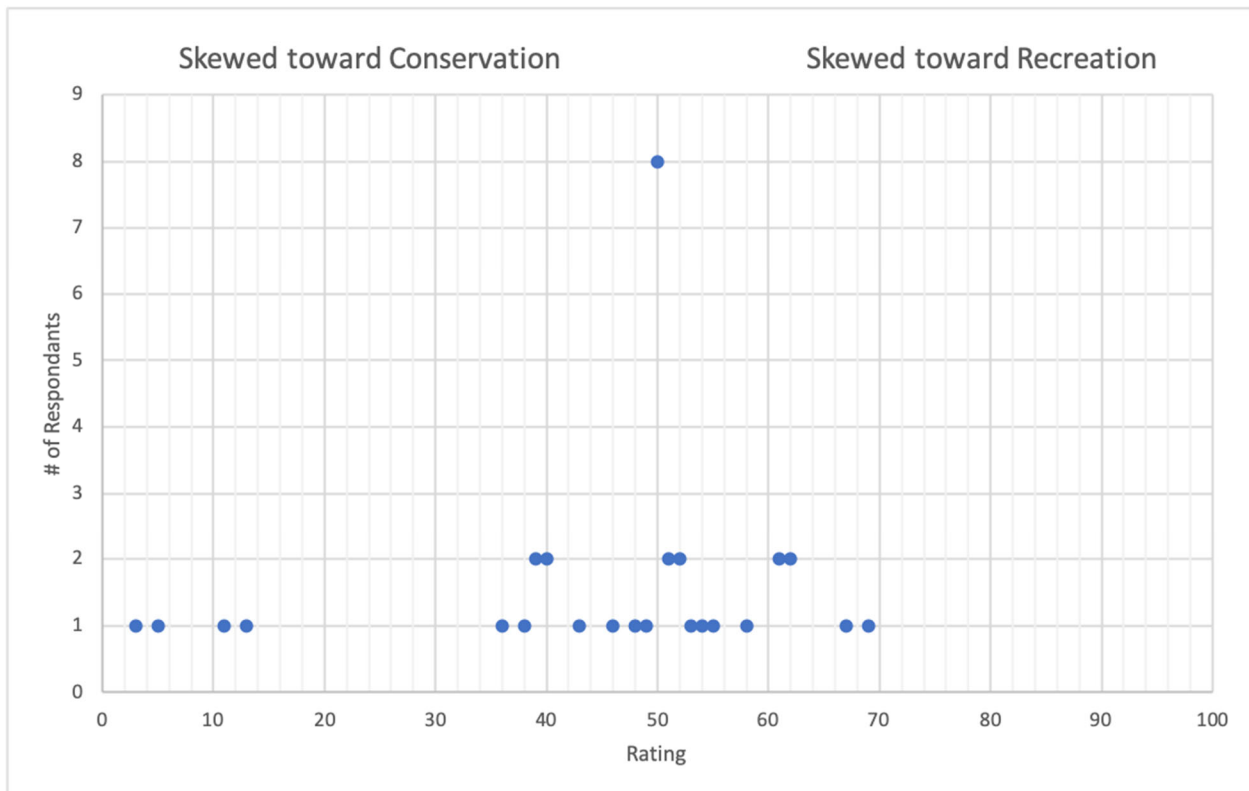


Figure 1

In the field when planning and managing new trails	38.89%	14
As guidance for your organization	58.33%	21
Sharing it with partners that you work with on trails to strengthen your collaboration	83.33%	30
As guidance for state trails grants	52.78%	19
As recommendations for how other funders should consider projects	22.22%	8
As best practices for how regional partnerships should approach conservation and recreation	77.78%	28
Other (please specify):	Responses	22.22% 8

**Figure 2**

- When asked, “how might you use this document,” responses covered all choices, with “sharing it with partners to strengthen collaboration” chosen the most (Figure 2). “Guidance for funders” was chosen the least. Note that participants could select more than one answer. Responses to “other” included:
  - Use it for teaching Trail Management & Construction Classes at Trinidad State Junior College
  - Establishing new protocol for public proposal of new trails or internal documents to guide new trail processes.
  - Not sure I would. I feel that this is written entirely from a biologist point of view with little consideration for recreation. Dwells entirely on wildlife almost to the point that there should not be human interaction. That is not reality.
  - Chapter 2 goes into the science part of planning trails with wildlife in mind. I would ignore chapters 1 and 3 except for some insight but not for guidance.
  - Maybe as background info for someone who wants to propose a trail on federal land
  - I am personally experienced enough in the trail planning field that I am unlikely to use the document; it can be a good suggested read for someone new to trail planning in Colorado.
  - I see it as a great tool for youth to plant the seed about what their career opportunities might be.
  - It could be used to inform other parts of the public about trails. People don’t always think about the impacts and the work that goes into trail building, management, and upkeep. That education can be helpful to land management. Not necessarily the whole document, but specific sections that are relatable to certain communities.
- Additionally, participants were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with five key statements regarding navigation, clarity, and helpfulness (Figure 4). These statements and the diverse responses provide strong quantitative context for the summary of focus groups, submitted letters, and additional survey comments that are reviewed in the next section.
- 25 of the participants confirmed that they would endorse the document, 9 selected that they would endorse the document if changes were made, and 2 people were firm that they would not endorse the document. Many of the reasons participants provided for selecting “maybe if” are summarized in depth in the following section, and other reasons not captured in that section include: needing to pass it up for approval from leadership at a higher level; and a more explicit description of how this document can be integrated with other processes already in place (e.g. State Wildlife Action Plan, Colorado Natural Heritage Program).
- The two participants that said they would not endorse this document provided very different reasons. The first said that they would be unlikely to use this document because they already have many other guiding documents and resources that serve a similar purpose, though they did note that this is a good resource to people new at trail planning. The second said they felt this Guide “will likely be utilized inconsistently to limit and restrict existing and future trail based recreation, and will be subjectively and craftily employed to restrict expansion and enhancement of the much needed growth of our Colorado recreational trail networks.”

## **Themes from Survey Comments, Focus Groups, and Submitted Letters for 1.24.21 Draft**

Feedback on the 2nd draft was received in a variety of formats, including survey responses, emails, focus groups, 1-1 interviews, and as comments on the document. The following section provides a thematic overview of that feedback, including sections for positive comments, constructive criticism, and larger discussion topics. We received many specific line edits, which were reviewed first by the facilitation team, and second by the Task Force, and are not summarized here.

### **Positive Feedback**

Survey participants and others who provided feedback were overall pleased with the improvements made in this draft. Some of the improvements commented on included shortening and streamlining the flow of the document, striking a better balance between recreation and conservation, adding a unique resource to the conservation-recreation debate, sticking more faithfully to the original 1998 document, and making it usable as a guide for groups getting involved in trail projects.

- Overall I think this is a very solid bit of work that the task force has accomplished and that this will be really valuable. I really like many parts of it and feel that it is very close to being ready for release.
- The new draft does a better job of helping the reader zero in on the main theme: balancing wildlife with trails. This theme is a much needed unique contribution the handbook can make to the current less focused dialogue. Trails and wildlife are at the heart of the conservation-recreation debate and this draft separates them out from the array of related concepts they are usually buried in. Thus the draft sticks more faithfully than previous drafts to the original 1998 handbook mission!
- This is a huge improvement from the first draft. Verbiage is better as is the layout. Length is also spot on and avoids the issue of the first draft where groups that I work with would not have used it. I could give this to someone looking to build trails in our area and know they could see use this as a resource.
- I think the document is a good guide for those who have a basic understanding of its contents and experience in planning trails.
- Visually the document is broken into chunks with graphics and bolded sentences that help identify and emphasize key points.
- I think it does a pretty good job of maintaining that balance. It's a paradoxical balance because there's only so much you can do to balance these interests. The doc does a good job of acknowledging that there's always going to be some amount of impact, and it does a good job of being realistic about managing that impact and trying to be balanced about it.
- Extremely readable and accessible. Great ways the document is sectioned off to make the information digestible. The sentences are well written and structured to be easily understandable to someone like me who doesn't really read documents like this a lot.
- I don't feel like it had a lot of technical jargon, it was written in pretty plain language. When questions popped up in my mind they were quickly answered later in the document. It leads you into the next section well and the information is organized in a logical way and builds on itself. The case studies helped clarify my questions - the real-life scenario was very helpful in better grasping the concepts in the section.

### **Constructive Criticism, by theme**

#### **1) Items or Topics Missing from the Document**

Survey participants were asked whether they believed anything was missing from the document *that compromises its main objectives*. Some of these topics are covered in specific sections below. The following items were identified as critical additions to the document and do not fit into any other category:

- If there were an executive summary it could be used for decision makers who won't dive into everything..
- The focus seems to be mostly on trail location and proximity to predefined sensitive areas which is an important first consideration. I'd like to also see at least some mention of hydrology and trail design

practices that can reduce related impacts to all landscapes and habitats.

- I really like the mapping visuals as this is what I was hoping to see in the document. I think continuing to build upon that to provide more examples (maps that show this is where recreation would be more appropriate to lessen impact on wildlife).
- This document goes into far too little detail and depth on Adaptive management when in fact AM might be the most important process tool for implementing actions that are fairly applied and progressive in nature. Flexible seasonal closure dates based on real time data and limiting cross country travel first, instead of all travel, are effective tools. The document should tout the value of having clear expectations laid out for the public that if monitoring shows illegal use or damaging use or unacceptable impacts, then enforcement actions will be taken and/or the next phase of Adaptive Management restrictions will be employed.
- It needs to point users to comprehensive data that exist for guiding conservation, management, planning, and development.
- Throughout the document, there are many references to wildlife and wildlife habitat. I am not suggesting that we remove any focus away from the wildlife species but rather broaden the focus and inclusivity of this vision for establishing trails to include the full range of species and natural communities that make Colorado special. I do not think this would dilute the impact or effectiveness of this document.

## **2) Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

A variety of people provided feedback on how the document talks about EDI as part of the trail planning process. Focus group participants also raised that there is no focus/mention of outdoors people with differing levels of physical capacity to access these trails. Specific feedback on the EDI content in the document was also provided to and changes were made to incorporate those comments.

- In the Ch. 2 section on Human Dimensions, we incorporate language on inclusivity and welcoming experiences for everyone when they get to the trailhead
- In Ch. 3, calling out that honoring diverse learning styles and accessible/diverse modes of education and outreach techniques
- Add additional information on allowing differing levels of physical capacity to access these trails

## **3) Collaborative Process**

While the collaborative process outlined in Chapter 1 received generally positive feedback (3.9 out of 5 in the survey), there were a handful of comments critiquing it. Two participants noticed an opportunity for the chapter to better align with Figure 2, saying “chapter one would benefit from formatting to better align/identify the Process steps from the initial diagram to the corresponding text section (number them?).”

On a larger scale, one stakeholder noted that the chapter seemed to add another layer of bureaucracy into the trail planning process, and that “it’s not fair and reasonable to purposely burden processes with overwhelming bureaucracy and timelines so long few will have the staying power or will to see the process through to the end.” Two others commented that the collaborative process was skewed to favor recreation interests, with one saying it’s “calculated to exclude half of the public who favors wildlife over trails, while uniquely empowering supporters of trail infrastructure development.”

## **4) Cumulative Impacts**

We heard from a variety of stakeholders that trail impacts to wildlife should be more explicitly contextualized within the larger scope of impacts to wildlife. Observations about this topic included:

- Cumulative impacts from other impacts and changes to the landscape are mentioned, but need to be emphasized further that recreation impacts of new/existing trails & trail use must be considered along with other impacts (climate change, drought, roads/highways, wildfires, logging, oil & gas, residential development, etc).

- Wildlife can also be impacted greatly by nature (floods, fires, mudslides, avalanches, etc.) as well as other recreationists (hikers, equestrian, bicyclists) that are probably more prevalent on public lands.
- Advocate for large-scale comprehensive planning that takes into account cumulative impacts on wildlife and changing climate. Cumulative impacts may be unintentional such as through connecting separated trail systems that may increase trail use and wildlife impact. Additionally, connecting trails may impact already strapped management and enforcement efforts by spreading out the recreational users. Changing climate will impact refugia for all species, both the animals and the plants they depend on. These impacts are mentioned, but not focused as such in the document.
- Natural geomorphic changes such as flooding, landslides, earthquakes, erosion, sedimentation, mass wasting, avalanches, etc. should also be listed as occurrences that cause impacts to wildlife and habitat. The current list is focused on negative (i.e., “man made”) impacts, but there are many natural mechanisms and processes at work that alter and impact wildlife and their habitat. Humans do not exclusively cause impacts. We must also recognize that wildlife modify the habitats they occupy.
- The portion of the doc related to human dimensions was only about a page. Trails are human built, so they are evidence of human activity. Human dimensions should be more front and center so that people better understand their role in the landscape, and perhaps also differences in different populations.

## 5) Sharing the Final Draft and Incentivizing Use

Some of the feedback we received was about looking forward in time. People were curious about how the document will be disseminated and how its use can be incentivized. Observations about this process included:

- I think the document by itself is a great resource and I commend everyone who had a hand in it. My main concern is with how we incentivize its use and get buy-in from the appropriate stakeholders.
- Critical to success of the document is effective educational materials and dissemination via workshops, roundtables, webinars and effective PR like “hug a hunter.”
- Would endorse the document if “there are incentives from CPW to incorporate use of this document into the State and Regional CO-OPs and trails grant programs.”

## 6) Best Available Science

There were a handful of specific comments about the science literature pertaining to topics such as lynx and grouse BMPs and route density. Additionally, two people noticed that the literature review (formerly Appendix B) was absent from the 2nd draft. Summaries for these comments are included in the *Remaining Discussion Items* section beginning on page 11.

Additional observations about the science in the document include:

- Do not suggest that seasonal wildlife closures should always be used when they have not even been recommended in many instances that would, theoretically, apply based on some wildlife habitat maps.
- This document should not selectively cite studies that are supportive of certain perspectives, while ignoring other studies that suggest alternate perspectives. The same is true for omitting inconvenient conclusions from studies relevant to this document.

## 7) Maintaining Existing Trails

A handful of stakeholders noted that management of existing trails is not given significant consideration in the document. Two people expressed concern over what they perceived to be excessively long timelines suggested for maintenance: “While years of time may be appropriate for planning new trail networks, this timeframe is totally unacceptable for maintenance efforts on existing trails. Maintenance must be timely and responsive to a wide range of issues and often this responsiveness cannot occur under the timeframes proposed in the Guide.” Another stakeholder expressed concern that processes for reclaiming illegal user-created trails were not discussed enough. Further observations about this topic include:

- Trail maintenance often includes minor trail reroutes and relocations and these minor modifications must be recognized and treated in a much more expedited manner than new trail construction. Trail reroutes or realignments of existing trails are often the most common measure to help avoid or mitigate resource issues. These actions should never take years of collaboration and planning to complete and this Guide should be used to extend the process to complete these types of beneficial and small-scale projects.
- As trails have become the most important outdoor recreational activity and we expect Colorado's population to grow exponentially in the future, there needs to be stronger consideration towards reclamation of bandit/rogue/illegal user-made trails. It is only mentioned briefly in this document, but they must factor in to the threshold of too many trails on the landscape. Transparency of this issue to user groups might help to better inform them of the bigger picture, and the document should place a stronger emphasis on reclamation/rehabilitation of these trails as opportunities for mitigation.

## **8) Balancing Avoid Language**

There was conflicting feedback on how the avoid, minimize, mitigate framework would play out on the landscape. One person described how they joked to their colleague that a map of all the locations recommended under avoid “might be a large rectangle in the shape of Colorado.” This reflected a sentiment from a variety of other people that this document comes off as no-trails. On the opposite side of the coin, other participants were concerned that the document left too many pathways to create trails, and that it lacks “a plan to just say ‘no’ when wildlife impacts are too great.” Other observations about this conflict include:

- Still calls for widespread travel restrictions for a variety of species. The overly broad guidance to have recommended seasonal trail closures and the fact that none of the regional wildlife people have ever flagged this for existing 14er trails (overlaps with mountain sheep, mountain goat and ptarmigan habitat pretty much everywhere) makes me question whether this recommendation needs to be more targeted.
- I think Chapter 2 could be rewritten for more clarity to avoid misunderstandings. While I understand the basic concept of avoid, minimize, and mitigate; I could see how some would read that 'avoid' is all we should be focusing on. Maybe it just needs to come out and state when that would be appropriate a little more clearly to avoid that misinterpretation.
- There is still a lot of prohibit/avoid/language - would mapping all of this mean no trails in Colorado? I don't believe that is the intent so I would suggest adjusting the language to make that more clear.
- I would also like to see the Chapter 2 portion around avoid/minimize/mitigate be cleaned up to make it clear when you would recommend the three measures: 1) There are some areas where trails are not appropriate because of the impact they will have on wildlife and you should avoid them. 2) There are some areas where having trails will have some impact so here is how you can minimize those impacts. 3) There are areas where trails where the impacts are already occurring or can not be minimized so here are ways you can mitigate the impacts.

## **9) Adaptive Management**

One area that several reviewers suggested was lacking was the concept of adaptive management. One reviewer suggested that we lay out the steps of Adaptive Management to follow an appropriate and progressive spectrum of ever increasing restrictions as warranted but should begin with the least restrictive first to test theories and efficacy of management actions.

## **10) Framing of Trail Limitations and Opportunities**

Two survey participants described their dislike of how the document frames human and wildlife needs differently. One said, “I don't like that opportunities are for human needs for trails and limits are wildlife needs,” and went on to describe how this seemed to set the reader up to not think holistically about trail planning. Similarly, another participant noted that “by putting wildlife in the limits section this document is indicating that wildlife is an impediment/obstacle to opportunities.” They suggested that the document instead frame protecting habitats and sensitive species as “opportunities to preserve natural wonders and ecosystem services.” Changes were made to address this concern.



## Justification for Some Suggestions Not Integrated Into Draft 3

**Theme 1. While there was overall affirmation for Chapter 1 from stakeholders, there were some comments regarding rewriting it completely or fearing that such a collaborative process would be yet another layer of bureaucracy.**

Given the support that showed up in the survey for the approach to this chapter, it will remain overall the same with some adjustments in language. It is recognized that there are multiple ways to approach a collaborative process, and the Task Force is confident that the one outlined in Chapter 1 is a solid starting point for establishing local, collaborative solutions.

Additionally, while it was pointed out in the feedback that collaborative processes can take time and feel like an extra hoop to jump through, Colorado has entered a moment when finding solutions that work for people, wildlife, recreation, conservation, and the land is paramount. These solutions require a large collective effort to achieve better long-term outcomes. While collaboration has been a successful mainstay in many processes to date, it is not within the scope of this document to state each of those or describe them in full. Instead, this document is built on the recognition of collaboration being a proven approach in Colorado already. The framework provided by Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind is designed to complement the Executive Order established on October 30th, 2020 to establish Outdoor Regional Partnerships. The principles and values that informed this document are the same informing the development of those Partnerships. While both this document and the Regional Partnerships could exist on their own, the two processes can also inform and support one another.

**Theme 2. There needs to be a thorough discussion of the need to identify long-term trail maintenance funding during the planning phases for proposed new trails.**

Lack of adequate funding for long-term trail maintenance should be considered and applications for State Trails Grants are required to address this concern. That being said, Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind is not meant to be, nor can it be, a regulatory document. Recommendations for considering funding are proposed in the document but cannot be mandated. The document also points out that where there are funding gaps, establishing partnerships with local volunteers can be a key strategy for long-term sustainability of a trail or trail system.

**Theme 3. Confusion about Audience**

The Task Force for Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind, was developed to be made up of land managers because they are seen as the main audience for this document. Ideally, when trail or wildlife needs are proposed at the local level, land managers can convene a core team as described in Chapter, and use this document as the guiding framework for their process. Trail proponents and wildlife advocates should both ensure that the local land manager they're working with is starting from the collaborative framework outlined in this document. This is made clear in the introduction of the document and at other points, and has been articulated during the writing process.

**Theme 4. Misunderstood Tones: "Avoid Trails at All Costs" and "Allow Trails Everywhere"**

While the vast majority of responses and feedback received view this document as a balanced approach to conservation and recreation (survey respondents rated a 46 on the balance scale), there were factions within the stakeholder community that either feel this document is either 1) not regulatory or drastic enough to adequately protect wildlife, or 2) that it goes too far in stating "avoid trails." Neither of those tones are the intention.

In some ways, the purpose of this document is not to make a statement such as that generally or generically. Instead, the document, from the outset, motivates land managers to lead collaborative teams and conversations between diverse advocates and proponents. Ideally, it is at this more local level, based on guidance in this document, where teams can decide how, where, and when to plan a new trail with wildlife in mind.

Finally, the combative tone within some of this feedback should be noted. Collaboration takes a mutual willingness to engage in dialogue and collective decision-making. Sometimes people and organizations are simply not prepared or willing to engage in such a process, and land managers should go into collaborations with eyes wide open. Again, given the moment that Colorado finds itself in in terms of finding a balance between recreation and conservation, the only path forward is collaborative. One respondent described it this way:

*There is always going to be tension between wildlife management and access. This process of collaboration, while not perfect, is better than the alternative: the public, when/if barred reasonable access will/could turn against public lands and take counterproductive.*

**Theme 5. There was some desire for a universal mapping tool and/or to make all maps more readily available in this document.**

Currently there are several mapping tools available, but there is not consensus around the viability of any single tool. Thus these are cited in the document as options and tools, not mandated. Similarly, several species and landscape-specific maps cannot be cited publicly due to the sensitive information about species in some cases. That being said, once involved in the collaborative process with a land manager, the team should decide upon and have access to a suite of shared mapping and desktop analysis tools.

**Theme 6: Questions did arise about portions of the document that originally discussed realignment of unsustainable trails.**

Funding that currently is being spent on re-alignment projects are not about free rein to replace a trail in the name of finding a more fun trail line. The State Trails Program changed their grant categories to provide more funding for maintenance of projects and defines the purpose of re-alignments are to address a resource management concern, reduce erosion, address a user safety concern, or other adaptive management needs.

**Theme 7: Additional Resources to Be Added**

As one example, a survey respondent stated, one reference that “should be included, referenced and spotlighted in this document is the soon to be released **NOHVCC Colorado Statewide OHV Action Plan.**” While this is an successful plan is it at a much larger-level than what is being discussed specifically for singular trail planning. That being said, this would be a great document to share with the Outdoor Regional Partnership initiative, in addition to the next State Recreation and Conservation plan. Other documents that have been cited might also fall into this category. In a future approach, a website iteration would allow more room to share resources.

**Theme 8: Restoring Trust**

**As described by one respondent:** “the Guide must address some level of a social component of the relationship. Once again there is not enough emphasis in the Guide on restoring and rebuilding trust between managers (e.g., wildlife specialists, resources managers, land managers, government agencies, etc.) and the affected recreational user groups. Based upon past decisions and actions, there is undoubtedly disparity between recreational trail user groups and their perceived level of trust and confidence in processes such as this one to fairly consider and honestly balance wildlife concerns with human recreation pursuits. In order to garner future public collaboration and ensure effective, open communication, there absolutely must be trust restored between the public (especially affected recreational user groups) and managers.”

The document attempts to address this in Chapter 1 by including the section on the Principles of Collaborative Processes seeks to ensure that future processes ensure that trust is built. It is outside the scope of this document or the planning process of a singular trail to restore trust overall, but **hopefully the emphasis on collaboration that this new framework presents can provide an opportunity to start fresh and build trust whenever possible.**