

Mad Rabbit Trails Project FAQ

US Forest Service, April 6th, 2021

How is the Forest Service analyzing the Mad Rabbit trails project?

The Forest Service follows the procedures identified in the National Environmental Policy Act. An Environmental Assessment is under way to identify the purpose and need for the project, reasonable alternatives, resource concerns, engage the public / partners for feedback and decide on a preferred alternative.

<https://www.epa.gov/nepa/what-national-environmental-policy-act>

How does the Forest Service identify which trails are considered in this project?

The Forest Service identifies the purpose and need for the project. The purpose of this project is to manage dispersed recreation in the project area related to trail based recreation. There is a need for this project given the interest from the public in a more diverse set of trails that meets multiple user needs, growth in trail-based recreation use and to address user created trail impacts located in popular recreation corridors.

Areas appropriate for trail-based recreation are identified using the Routt Forest Plan, applicable direction such as the Colorado Roadless rule and review by resource specialists. The Forest Service engages the public and partners through multiple public work sessions. These have included the FS trails planning charrette, the Routt Recreation Roundtable, and two 30-day public comment periods. Examples of trail-based input received during project development and analysis include the Steamboat Trails Alliance proposal, IMBA trail assessment, Routt Rec Roundtable report and various input related to motorized, non-motorized, adaptive, event and interpretive trail opportunities.

The Forest Service project lead and District Ranger work with Forest Service resource professionals (wildlife, hydrology, soils, fisheries, botany, range, fire, timber, heritage, recreation) and its' partners, like Colorado Parks and Wildlife / Department of Natural Resources, to identify the amount and types of trails appropriate for the purpose and need balanced with other resource needs in the project area.

Where does funding come from to plan this project?

The Forest Service uses appropriated dollars from Congress for planning to pay resource specialists, the project lead, District Ranger, the Forest Service Enterprise project support team, public engagement sessions and supporting materials. The Forest Service has also received planning funds through a partnership with the city of Steamboat Springs from its' 2A lodging tax fund. A formal agreement between the Forest Service and the city of Steamboat Springs identifies how these funds can be expended according to the city's 2A funding approval process. The Forest Service identifies in the agreement that funds provided for planning by the city are for the Forest Service to conduct operations in an independent manner and nothing in the agreement shall be construed in any manner as an obligation by the Forest Service to guarantee a favorable decision to the city or to obligate the Forest Service to any future action.

When will a decision be made on this project?

The project is in the analysis period where resource specialists and partners like Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Department of Natural Resources are analyzing the effects of different alternatives. Once that analysis is complete the Forest Service will release a draft Environmental Assessment for review through a formal 30-day comment period. Given the analysis timeline the earliest a draft EA would be released is June or July. The Forest Service will review input received and release a draft decision. Following the draft decision there is a 45-day objection period and a 45-objection resolution period. Once any objections are resolved the District Ranger will release a final decision at which time the Forest Service will seek funding / resources to implement the decision.

How will the Forest Service implement the project if it decides through the NEPA process to add trails in the project area?

Trails identified to address the purpose and need for the project through the NEPA process will be put into a scope of work following the final decision. The FS will seek funding and resources based on the scope of work from several potential sources depending on where those funds can be expended. A list of some potential sources is below

- Congressionally appropriated Forest Service funds and crews
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife motorized OHV trail grant
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife non-motorized trail grant
- Great Outdoors Colorado grant
- National Forest Foundation grant
- Steamboat Springs 2A lodging tax funds
- Volunteer partners (Routt County Riders, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, Mountain Trails Access, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, Stars Steamboat Adaptive Recreational Sports, etc)