

ARKANSAS RIVER



STAGE & RAIL



TRAIL



LEADVILLE STAGE ROAD

COLORADO MIDLAND RR

# MASTER PLAN

FINAL DRAFT  
APRIL 2015





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Two images north of Buena Vista, one by the renowned William Henry Jackson ca.1890 and its modern version in 2015, illustrate principal elements the proposed Stage & Rail Trail would celebrate. In Jackson's photo a standard gauge Midland RR locomotive is coming through the tunnels, completed in 1887, while the 1880-built Denver and Rio Grande narrow gauge lies just below. In the right foreground, the Leadville Stage Road, built ca. 1870, crosses the Arkansas River on a simple wooden bridge. In the modern photo, the Midland route is now a Chaffee County road that would host the S&RT. The bridge is long gone and the unused Union Pacific Rairoad standard gauge now dominates the scene.

Below, late day sun illuminates a historic ranch just north of Centerville along a stretch of US285 that would serve as a connecting route for the Stage and Rail Trail.





The Arkansas River Stage and Rail Trail Master Plan and its preceding Feasibility Study would not have been possible without the consistent encouragement and administrative support of the Greater Arkansas River Nature Association (GARNA), their Board and a volunteer Working Group. Through their collective efforts over the past five years, they have identified and strengthened the local – and regional – support required to move the long distance trail vision forward.

The planning team would also like to acknowledge and thank key local entities and institutions that have provided support and in some cases funding:

- Lake County Board of County Commissioners
- Chaffee County Board of County Commissioners
- Chaffee County Heritage Area Advisory Board
- Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway
- Top of the Rockies National Scenic and Historic Byway
- Colorado Department of Transportation
- Towns/Mayors of Salida, Buena Vista and Leadville
- Buena Vista Trails Advisory Board
- Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (CPW)
- CPW Wildlife Specialists
- Bureau of Land Management
- US Forest Service Leadville District
- Lake County Open Space Initiative
- Land Trust of the Upper Arkansas
- Salida Parks Open Space and Trails
- Salida Mountain Trails

The planning team would also like to thank the Colorado State Parks and Wildlife State Trails Program (Recreational Trails Grant) for providing funding that made this Master Plan and the Feasibility Study possible. The State Parks and Wildlife Program should be recognized for helping many Colorado communities improve the recreation and natural resource experiences of their citizens.

Special thanks go to the GARNA Working Group members who have worked with great dedication on behalf of this project:

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P.I.E.

Fundamental objectives in S&RT planning

**PRESERVATION**  
of the physical fabric and the stories of these two historic routes.

**INTERPRETION**  
of the history of these routes' construction, use and significance to regional development.

**EXPLORATION**  
of historic segments, where appropriate, to physically experience a sense of the original travel.

The **Leadville Stage Road** (LSR, sometimes known as the Old Stage Road) and **Midland Railroad** (MRR) have been part of the development history of **Lake and Chaffee Counties** for more than 100 years. For a decade or more, the idea of the LSR and MRR as a long-distance trail (now referred to as the Arkansans River Stage and Rail Trail or simply the S&RT) has been contemplated by many. Local biking and hiking enthusiasts as well as historians have long talked about preserving, interpreting and exploring these old routes. In 2005, the Chaffee County Heritage Area Advisory Board, with executive support from GARNA, began to document stories, alignments and remnants of the two routes and other historic transportation pathways from Salida to Leadville as part of heritage-focused planning for a proposed Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway. With successful establishment of Colorado's 25th byway in 2005, the Heritage Board and GARNA supported efforts to build momentum for use and preservation of the LSR and MRR by offering them as an alternative experience for cyclists, hikers and horseback riders. A Stage & Rail Trail, it was argued, would highlight the heritage values of the new **Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway** as well as the existing **Top of the Rockies National Scenic and Historic Byway** in Lake County. In a broad sense the S&RT would recognize the modern Scenic Byways, the river, and these historic routes as the three major and complementary avenues to experience the scenic, recreational and historic values of the Upper Arkansas River Corridor.

In 2010, GARNA received a **\$40,000 planning grant from the Colorado State Parks Trails Program** to conduct an S&RT Feasibility Study. That first step was to determine the level of community support for the preservation, interpretation and exploration of the LSR and MRR routes in Lake and Chaffee Counties and assess opportunities to provide public access to some sections of the routes. The study began in the fall of 2010 with support from Colorado State Parks Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) managers, the U.S. Forest Service, BLM, Lake County, Chaffee County, the towns of Buena Vista and Salida, City of Leadville and individual trail and open space organizations from the surrounding communities. In addition to gathering details on the historic route locations, physical remnants and underlying land ownership status, the study team sought frequent guidance from all these **potential trail management "partners"** above. The study's public outreach focused on determining the level of support that existed in the various communities and among the public and private landowners along the corridor. Although many of these **"stakeholders"** had already been contacted during preparation of the study's grant application, **public outreach** was an opportunity for them to make more formal statements of concern or support. The outreach included three open-houses to engage citizens in both counties regarding the concept of Preservation, Interpretation and Exploration (P.I.E.) of the LSR and MRR (S&RT) routes.

The Feasibility Study planning process identified **considerable local support** from the **general public and public land managers** for the idea of a long-distance trail that offered users an opportunity to learn about and experience the 125-year old story. However, during meetings with **private land owners**, there was **little support** for public access, especially within the 20-mile north-central section of the proposed 64-mile corridor from the Otero Bridge to and through Granite. This remained the case as the planning team continued preparing a draft Master Plan. Although several private landowners in that section expressed appreciation for preserving the history of the two transportation routes, they were not interested in allowing public access on or near their private properties. There were also more detailed **expressions of concerns** for potential **wildlife and habitat impacts** identified earlier by Colorado Parks and Wildlife specialists. Links to the final June 2012 Feasibility Study and other relevant documents are found in Appendix 3.

During development of this **draft Master Plan** in 2014 the planning team revisited the Feasibility Study's **alignments, alternatives and issues** with the goal of identifying a long-range plan that would respond to the concerns of opponents while still achieving the major objectives of the long-distance trail vision. The draft Master Plan presented in the pages that follow proposes a **preferred S&RT alignment** which incorporates by-passes in problematic sections as well as alternative alignments and a broad range of interpretive overlooks, trailhead development, historic resource protection and trail options.

As part of the planning process the team worked with potential planning partners to outline a viable long-term S&RT **management strategy**. Each agency would retain authorities and responsibilities within sections in their respective jurisdictions, but the necessity of a **non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) coordinator** suggested in the Feasibility Study has been confirmed. This recognizes that no single partner among a half dozen potentially involved would have the mandate or resources to fill an over-all leadership and coordination role. The proposed NGO organization would act as "trail champion" and coordinator for implementation and management of the S&RT in partnership with

all the management partners. Its function would include assistance to the partners in obtaining grant funding for implementation of the Master Plan. The NGO might be a stand-alone non-profit or find a niche within an existing local non-profit, but sustainable funding mechanisms must be in place (as discussed in the draft Plan).

The following document is a *draft* Master Plan. Each of the planning partners are now tasked with completing their own reviews and determining the appropriate path to **adoption** and **implementation**. The **regional route map** on the opposite page provides a broad overview and context for the Master Plan. Historic routes of the Leadville stage and the Midland RR are shown as well as the proposed S&RT preferred alignment.







Origin of the Stage & Rail Trail Concept

Since 1996, GARNA has played an active role in fostering stewardship of the resources of the greater Arkansas River region through education, volunteerism and experiences. It does so through formal partnerships with natural resource agencies and work with local, like-minded organizations. GARNA assisted the Chaffee County Heritage Area Advisory Board in implementing the Chaffee County Commissioners’ 2004 designation of Chaffee County as a local Heritage Area and developing the vision for a local scenic byway. In 2005 Chaffee County successfully obtained designation of the Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway for the spectacular 57-mile section of roadway that connects Granite, Buena Vista, Salida and Poncha Springs via US Highways 24, 285, 50 and State Highway 291. As Colorado’s 25th Scenic Byway, it is contiguous with Lake County’s 115-mile Top of the Rockies National Scenic and Historic Byway designated in 1999. Detailed Management Plans for both byways identify early mining, railroad and stage history as key elements of their local significance, foreshadowing the formal integration of historic sections of the LSR and MRR (as the proposed Stage & Rail Trail) into the byway experience.



Appreciating that the routes and potential benefits and impacts of an S&RT would concern many local and even regional stakeholders, GARNA’s working group identified first a Feasibility Study and now a Master Plan as the logical steps in an open public process to consider the merits of establishing such a trail. The goal of the draft Master Plan has been to define elements of a long-distance educational and recreational trail and provide a management framework that would protect and maintain its associated historic, natural and recreational resources, including safe and appropriate access to natural and cultural features on or along these historical routes. The draft Plan outlines the preferred physical trail alignment and facilities that would make up the Stage and Rail Trail. It also defines the partnership roles and management structure for implementing and managing that trail.



MASTER PLAN VISION FOR THE STAGE AND RAIL TRAIL

*To raise awareness of and appreciation for the benefit of preserving the alignment, physical remnants and stories of the Leadville Stage Road and Midland Railroad routes in Chaffee and Lake Counties through public education and development of appropriate public access along the historic routes.*

Purpose of a Master Plan

The Master Plan’s purpose is to facilitate, with roughly equal priority, three major objectives along the trail or its corridor: Preservation, Interpretation, and Exploration (P.I.E.)

- **Preservation** of the character of the historic routes, their physical features and stories.
- **Interpretation** of that character and education of visitors on the value of these historic and recreational resources in the heritage of the river corridor.
- **Exploration** and the physical experiencing of these historic routes through hiking, bicycling and horseback riding and – in many sections – driving.

Specifically, the Master Plan

- Provides a management framework addressing public and private responsibilities, opportunities and concerns.
- Identifies potential management partners and implementation roles.
- Identifies various community partnerships, funding options and citizen advisory roles.
- Encourages regional heritage and recreational connections and relationships.
- Identifies interpretive vantage points, sets interpretive concepts and outlines for further interpretive planning.
- Identifies section-by-section priorities and “next step” phases for development.
- Estimates general implementation costs.
- Defines typical trail and maintenance standards.

Adoption of Draft Master Plan

As of early 2015 the planning team concluded the draft Master Plan and made final presentations to the various partnering agencies. With these presentations, findings and recommendations have been formally placed in the hands of the planning partners for their review and potential adoption. It is anticipated these partners will consult among themselves as to their intentions and time frames for implementation. If experience with other long distance trails is a guide, some sections of the proposed S&RT which do not face substantial administrative, funding or landowner challenges might be designated within a relatively short time; others may take longer. Ultimately, implementation and success of the S&RT will depend not only on the actions of individual management agencies but also on the enthusiasm, support and willingness to contribute time and energy of the citizens of the two-county river corridor.

H.H. Buchwalter





Increasing Demand for Trails

Although local statistics are not readily available it is evident that in the past 15-20 years there has been a huge increase in local interest in non-motorized (and motorized) trails. All three communities along the proposed S&RT have expended major community- and grant-funded efforts to develop municipal bike and pedestrian trails. Each has similarly invested in hiking, horseback and cycling trails adjacent to their communities: Salida’s S-Mountain and Rainbow Trail systems, Buena Vista’s Whipple Trail complex and Leadville’s Mineral Belt Trail loop were all developed with combined formal and volunteer planning and labor that is an obvious indicator of interest and increasing demand. These trail systems have been universally accepted as prime community assets. In addition they are commonly cited by town officials as significant contributors not only to local citizen enjoyment and fitness but also to the attractiveness of these communities to tourism and prospective business investors and residential buyers. Businesses serving the needs of hikers and especially cyclists have doubled and tripled in the past decade in all three communities. In parallel with the municipal and adjacent trail systems has been the Colorado-wide and local resurgence of competitive international level bike racing and its accompanying focus on local food and accommodation and cycling-service facilities. The popularity of the Arkansas River, one of the nation’s most commercially rafted rivers, is strong and supports all businesses associated with river use – rafting and private boating as well as fishing the recently-awarded Gold Medal waters of the Arkansas. A key section of the river is at the core of the newly designated Browns Canyon National Monument. These factors indicate that additional diverse recreational attractions such as hiking and biking trails will increase interest in these two counties as destinations.

Corridor Pathways and Regional Trail Connections

A key concept which evolved during the feasibility study was that there are basically three major “pathways” to explore and enjoy the Upper Arkansas Valley in Lake and Chaffee counties. The first is the river itself with its tremendously popular fishing, rafting and kayaking opportunities. The second is the two contiguous Scenic Byways that provide higher-speed driving options oriented towards dramatic scenic vistas and access to the area’s unique small communities. And the third is the S&RT as a slow speed hiking, biking, and horseback route offering an intimate visual and physical encounter with historic resources.

Locally and regionally there are already at least three popular trails that promote recreational and heritage themes and reinforce the S&RT concept. Two major trail systems worth noting are the Colorado Trail and the Continental Divide Trail that run north and south along the Collegiate Peaks high above the river valley. The American Discovery Trail is a third trail designated in the area that overlaps and shares many of the same local roads and routes. National Historic Trail Designation is now being considered in the US Congress for the route of the 1805-1806 Zebulon Pike Expedition, dozens of miles of which were followed by the LSR and MRR 60-80 years later.

An additional regional initiative is the envisioned trail connection of the City of Leadville with Summit County by way of Fremont Pass. The two communities have been discussing making this trail connection along existing old road grades and new sections on both sides of the pass. Negotiations are underway with Climax-Freeport-McMoRan that would facilitate such a trail through their property. There has been talk of the possibility of creating a non-motorized trail along unused rail lines over Tennessee Pass from Minturn and the I-70 corridor to Leadville.

In addition to the municipal and nearby trail systems mentioned in an earlier section, there are other initiatives related to trails whose advocates (official and volunteer citizen) have expressed interest in connectivity to the proposed S&RT.

- The town of Leadville has linked with Lake County in joint development of revised comprehensive plans for each jurisdiction. Encouraging trail development within town and approaching town through the county are priorities not only of interested citizens but of local county and town officials. A Lake County Trails Coalition has recently been formed to coordinate and channel views of trails advocates into comprehensive planning, and has received input from the S&RT planning team. Following development of the comprehensive plans, the county’s own 1994-era trails plan is scheduled for updating, to be guided by principles outlined in the comprehensive plan. The draft Master Plan’s preferred S&RT alignment as it traverses Lake County and approaches Leadville is largely the result of recommendations by that Coalition and its individual members.
- Chaffee County’s own recent citizen-influenced review of zoning and land use includes reference to the importance of additional trails, and encourages all new subdivisions to identify public-access trail corridors along or within their developments; a new citizen initiative (NC3) under the auspices of GARNA is promoting additional bike trails along county roads approaching the town limits of Buena Vista, including the route of the Leadville Stage Road. Updates to Chaffee County’s 2003 trails plan have recently been made that identify priority county roads which should be considered for additional adjacent trail development. The S&RT planning team has been consulted or provided comment in all of these developments, and the preferred and alternative S&RT alignments within Buena Vista and Salida are exactly those recommended by municipal authorities.



**S&RT:  
THE THIRD  
MAJOR  
CORRIDOR**  
*The three visitor  
corridors—  
the Arkansas River,  
the Scenic Byways,  
and a S&RT—  
link historic, scenic  
and recreation  
experiences for a  
broad range of  
users to celebrate  
the Arkansas Valley’s  
beauty and unique  
community lifestyle,  
with direct  
economic benefits.*

Haynes Collection, Yellowstone National Park



*All three communities along the proposed S&RT have popular trail systems which would be easily accessible to S&RT users. In Buena Vista, the alternative S&RT alignment would connect directly to the town’s Barbara Whipple Trail, which provides dozens of miles of non-motorized hiking and biking trail on public lands directly across the river from downtown. The Whipple Trail links to the Midland Bike Trail and the 200-mile Fourmile area trail system.*



Collectively these existing trails and trail-related initiatives offer great potential for connections to the proposed S&RT. Eventually this expanded network will offer the valley’s communities an extensive and unique historical portal back into the stories that shaped the region. They also will provide the area’s residents and visitors with additional family-friendly and healthy recreation options that support key community objectives.

Existing Trail Infrastructure

As noted, town and county trail plans are already in place in all of the jurisdictions along the historic route; all have expressed support for connections to the proposed S&RT, although details will await consideration of the proposals in this Plan. There is also existing infrastructure in many locations (in-town and rural) that can accommodate a physical trail. Certain of Salida’s downtown streets are already slated for, and many already have, bike lane designation; Buena Vista’s town trail system is being implemented and street shoulders are adequate; US285 and US 24 already have striped wide shoulders in most sections where preferred connector routes or alternatives for the S&RT are identified, and CDOT has indicated willingness to work with the planning partners if additional measures are indicated; many of the unpaved Lake and Chaffee county roads involved are low-volume and sufficiently wide to accommodate additional bicycle, horse or pedestrian use. Several trailhead access points already exist on public lands along the historic routes, with parking and rest room facilities in some cases. And, significantly, most currently unopened stretches the LSR are still in good condition, requiring simple clearing of rock falls and a few drainage structures; the proposed sections involving the MRR are already open public county roads.

Benefits

**Economic Benefits** There is little doubt that the two obvious corridors running through Lake and Chaffee Counties – the Arkansas River and the two Scenic Byways – are generating major local economic benefits. The rafting, kayaking and fishing, backcountry hiking, food services, accommodation and heritage tourism industries and related retail businesses along these corridors account for a sizeable, if not a majority, of financial inputs to the two counties.

Significant additional local economic benefits associated with developing and designating the S&RT are likely, and will involve many of the partners already identified. Although reliable estimates can’t be made with current data, there is evidence from heritage tourism development elsewhere that Leadville, Buena Vista and Salida all will benefit from a targeted effort to promote connections between S&RT visitors and local recreation services and providers. An example voiced several times during earlier public open house meetings was the potential of a rafting company and a bike touring company to partner to offer a package where a visitor could raft one day, spend the night and take a bike tour along the historic routes the next day. A similar scenario might apply to combining a day’s ride on the already-popular S-Mountain, Whipple and Mineral Belt trails with a second or third day riding the S&RT between these trails. The S&RT experience could be the “driver” of an extra overnight stay and dollars spent in the community that may have been otherwise lost. Also, with the scenic byways paralleling the route and the addition of roadside interpretive stations, short trail options and a concerted effort by local Chambers, Visitors Bureaus and byway managers, the proposed trail corridor could be marketed as a fresh and attractive destination for a broad range of visitors and interests. It is anticipated that as opportunities mature, additional sites will be developed and resources invested through public and private partnerships. The route could eventually become an important regional draw for visitors and tourism dollars similar to the Colorado Trail, Continental Divide Trail or the state-wide popular Monarch Crest trail segment.

Although many users might regard the S&RT route simply as an attractive recreation destination, and local businesses look to it for direct economic inputs, a wider and more appropriate characterization is as a heritage pathway adding overall “value” to the Scenic Byways and the river itself.

**Community Education and Quality of Life Benefits** Experiencing this slow-speed S&RT historic corridor and its associated interpretive messages will promote education about the role these transportation systems had in shaping the communities along them and how more modern routes have evolved. It is a reasonable prediction that a better informed and educated local constituency is more likely to support preservation of the physical fabric of the routes and strengthen community appreciation of the stories of the S&RT corridor. All these are elements which must be in place if vibrant heritage tourism is to be sustained. Both Lake and Chaffee Counties have supported heritage preservation by establishing their historic byways, and specifically – as in Leadville’s extremely popular Mineral Belt Trail and similar trails in Buena Vista and Salida – for recreational trails that help preserve and interpret local history.

Quality of life has many indicators but important among them are the variety and character of recreational opportunities, a feeling of shared community history, and a sense that local officials and organizations sincerely support these opportunities. The S&RT corridor will amplify these quality of life indicators. As one of the public land mangers has observed, this is a “white-hat” deal that has so many positives it deserves the support of all hands.



*This lonely gravestone along the old stage road north of Balltown is attributed to the fatal end of a (lady) robber caught in a sting operation set up by the Leadville sheriff.*



**Historic resources** [See Chapter 5 section summaries for specific information]

**Character**

Historic resources (the historic “fabric”) associated with the proposed S&RT include both the tangible and intangible. On the tangible side are physical remnants of the stage road and the Midland RR. For the LSR they include extensive constructed stone retaining walls, wooden crib bridge abutments along the Arkansas River shore, traces of short gully crossings and trestles, foundations of and even a still-standing stage station, and miles of more-or-less visible right-of-way originally cleared and maintained by early stage route engineers. For the MRR they include the famous tunnels north of Buena Vista and several miles of original track route. The intangibles include stories of financing and construction, hardships of travel, robberies and accidents, stage and rail equipment, and the significance of these pathways to the development and commerce of the towns and region.

**Historic Preservation Benefits**

Although details of the historic resource picture are not yet complete, this Master Plan begins to identify and locate the tangible and intangible resources along the proposed trail and its corridor. It outlines how future management should address preservation, stabilization and even safety issues of the physical fabric, and encourage research, documentation and interpretation of the intangible fabric. By focusing a spotlight on preservation and research over a long corridor, the S&RT will stimulate appropriate treatment of multiple historic elements and avoid piecemeal preservation that deals with isolated examples without understanding the broader historic context.

Benefits of this historic fabric preservation include assuring that these resources do not simply disappear through lack of awareness and benign neglect. Such preservation obviously enriches opportunities for public education and appreciation; it also adds much to the context of the recreational use, reinforcing the experience of “riding through history” rather than simply riding on a route for fitness, challenge and excitement.

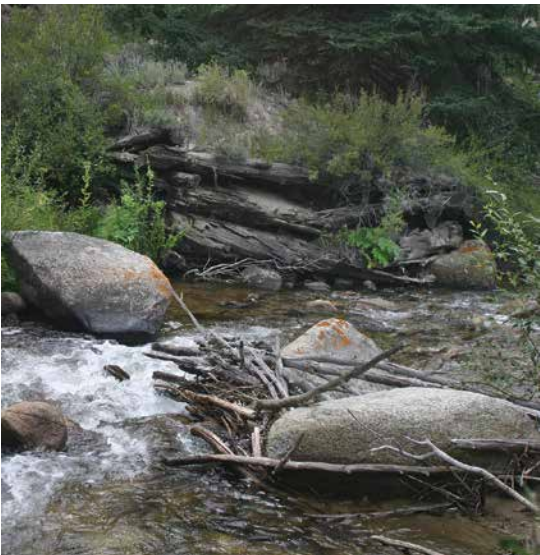
**Opportunities for Heritage Education**

Historic resources, tangible and intangible, are part and parcel of the area’s heritage, a term used to describe the collective sense of what makes an area unique and connected to its historic and natural resources.

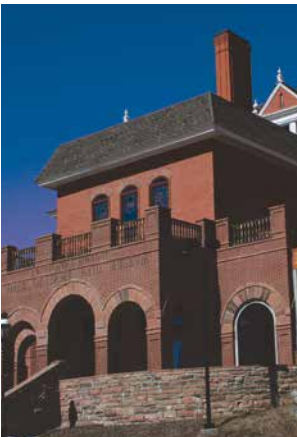
Opportunities for the S&RT to support the goal of heritage preservation include expanding partnerships with local schools and historic preservation organizations, heritage centers and area museums. An existing example of this can be seen in displays in the Buena Vista Heritage Center/Depot Museum. A transportation exhibit was unveiled in 2011 in which the Leadville Stage and Midland Railroad routes were highlighted. More such exhibits are needed. Potential opportunities to incorporate the S&RT story should be pursued through local organizations and programs such as:

- Greater Arkansas River Nature Association
- Chaffee County Heritage Area Advisory Board
- Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway
- Buena Vista Heritage
- Salida Museum Association
- Historic Salida Inc.
- National Mining Hall of Fame & Museum Leadville
- Colorado Historical Society
- Pike National Trail Association
- DSP&P Historical Society
- Colorado Midland Chapter NRHS
- Rio Grande Modeling & Historical Society
- Colorado Mountain College
- Buena Vista School District R-31
- Lake County School District R-1
- High Mountain Institute
- The Link School, Buena Vista
- Darren Patterson Christian Academy, Buena Vista

*On the left, a whimsical stage silhouette has been superimposed on one of the many still-evident fine dry-stone retaining walls south of Granite; on the right are remnants of the stage road’s bridge abutments on Pine Creek, dating perhaps from the 1870s. These and other examples of the trail’s “historic fabric” would be identified and preserved through appropriate actions.*



*The National Mining Hall of Fame and Museum in Leadville is one of many local venues where stories of the old stage road and Midland RR could get further exposure.*



**Local Stakeholder Views: who they are and what they say**

**Overview** Although a large portion of the preferred S&RT route lies within public lands or follows open public roads, initial community meetings and individual contacts during the Feasibility Study documented that some private property owners along a few critical sections of the route do not support public access across or near their lands. For example, although the larger towns along the route are anxious to have the proposed route enter and integrate with their town trail systems, one small unincorporated community – Granite – opposes the trail following its historical route near or through their community. Other private landowners have expressed similar concerns. These are and continue to be serious and legitimate issues, as repeated contacts during the Master Plan project have confirmed. In the detailed section maps, alternatives have been provided that the planning team believes are good faith approaches to resolve these conflicts. They address private property and community impact issues while still advancing the primary objective of establishing a near-continuous trail along the LSR and MRR historic alignments, a 64-mile long vision which has an extraordinary degree of support from the general public, land managers and local officials.

To better understand stakeholder concerns and issues, the Master Plan Team has repeatedly reached out to the public and private interests to seek alternative route and management recommendations that would lead to solutions favored by or at least acceptable to all. Combining the results of the Feasibility Study and recent Master Plan interviews, the following summary of stakeholders and what they say is provided. See Chapter 5 section summaries and mapping for related information and recommendations.

**Public Agencies** The envisioned S&RT would pass through two counties, three incorporated towns and crisscross BLM, US Forest Service, State Land Board and state park lands and several wildlife areas managed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and involve the rights-of-way of State and Federal highways. Each entity has made it clear that it has its own management priorities, responsibilities and concerns, and that it cannot and will not relinquish those within its jurisdictions. However, each of these entities has also indicated support for the basic concept of the S&RT and is committed to a conscientious review and consideration of the draft Master Plan. Like in all long-distance trails which pass from one jurisdiction to another, there will be challenges in developing management practices and regulations consistent with each manager’s objectives yet still creating a trail with an identity and continuity that will not create confusion amongst users. Working with these planning partners, the trail planning team explored what management strategies may best address these challenges, and has incorporated results in this draft Plan.

**Private landowners** Although much of the historic, preferred and alternative alignments of the S&RT lie on public lands or within public rights-of-way, there are on the order of 30 privately-held properties whose owners may be impacted. It is critical to any future trail development and implementation to address the concerns of those property owners. There are five major sections where opposition has been expressed by private property owners, or there are obvious barriers to S&RT designation, as described below. The draft Master Plan provides a variety of recommendations to address these concerns – see Chapter 5 for specifics.

**Tumble Creek Ranch to Gold Camp**

Owners of private parcels making up the Tumble Creek Ranch north of Buena Vista have been contacted several times by team members. The original right-of-way of the Midland Railroad (MRR) on the Ranch is owned outright by these individuals and any previous right-of-way that might have been in Chaffee County jurisdiction has been vacated. All parties involved in ownership of the Ranch have consistently expressed opposition to granting easements to allow any type of public use of the old MRR for about the three quarter mile section that lay within the Ranch, based on their concern for privacy, possible interference with livestock, potential for trespassing by trail users, or belief that a designated trail would negatively affect their property values.

From the Otero Pump Station Bridge to Clear Creek, with the exception of where the MRR crossed Tumble Creek Ranch, the old MRR right-of-way is privately owned by the Homestake Pipeline project which supplies trans-mountain water to Colorado Springs and Aurora. That right-of-way lies with Homestake although underlying landownership is mainly public (Forest Service and State Land Board) and several private parcels. Personal and written contacts were made with the project’s local managers during the Feasibility Study, and although they await results of this Master Plan, their initial view was that they would not in principle oppose public use of that right-of-way so long as it didn’t substantially interfere with their responsibility of maintaining the pipeline, which is buried underneath the route for much of this distance or within their right-of-way.

The US Forest Service manages a parcel immediately north of the Ranch and for a number of years has had discussions with Ranch ownership about providing access to this public land, and formalizing access rights for property owners farther north, but no resolution has been reached. With this issue unresolved the Forest Service Leadville District is not in a position to grant access to the public for the S&RT or any other use.




Goldcamp to Clear Creek

Several but not all private landowners in the Goldcamp to Clear Creek section have responded to meeting invitations or direct contacts. These owners use the old MRR as their only access road and have done so for decades apparently as per private agreements with the Ranch and Homestake management and de facto acquiescence by the USFS Leadville District. The general public does not have access along this route.

In some cases in this section the MRR actually crosses private property but in others only comes close (within 10s of feet) to property boundaries. Two owners of property where the MRR comes close have expressed strong opposition to having a designated trail that close, citing concern for trespassing, disturbance of privacy and the potential for causing interference to their long-standing use of the MRR as access. Other owners in this section have not made their views known one way or the other.

A key additional landowner south of Clear Creek is the State Land Board, owner of the Tiger Lily parcel at Pine Creek. SLB staff representatives have been contacted but no opinion has been offered concerning granting access for a trail pending review of this study report. CPW already has a wildlife management lease on this SLB parcel.

Another privately-owned parcel of significance in the Clear Creek area is the property which includes the old MRR abutments. This is an extension of the large west-bank holdings of the Pueblo Water Board, owners and operators of the Clear Creek Dam and Reservoir. In contrast to individual property owners nearby, local representatives of the reservoir operation have reacted favorably to working with the S&RT concept whether it be an early option (now rejected) of reestablishing the old MRR trestle as a means of crossing the river or of granting permission for the trail to cross their lands on the west side of the river (now the preferred route). There has even been talk of eventually exchanging this river front property for certain BLM lands around the reservoir, which would result in unencumbered control of the trail by BLM (AHRA).

  
**ADDRESSING PRIVATE PROPERTY ISSUES**  
Tumble Creek Ranch to Clear Creek

*Having heard and considered the opinions of private landowners from Tumble Creek Ranch to Clear Creek and of CPW wildlife specialists and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation the current preferred alternative is to construct a trail bridge at the stage road’s historical crossing point north of the MRR abutments at Clear Creek. The S&RT would thus be led to the west side of the river all the way to the Otero Pump Station Bridge. With this alignment there should be no direct interaction between the S&RT and private property holders south of Clear Creek. This alignment would also reduce, though not eliminate, impacts on elk and Bighorn cited by wildlife interests.*

*Granite had several thousand residents and was a county seat in the stage road era.*



Buena Vista Heritage

  
**ADDRESSING PRIVATE PROPERTY ISSUES**  
Around Granite


*In response to concerns expressed by Granite the preferred S&RT approach would be to construct a bridge over the Arkansas River (which also necessitates crossing the UP railroad) considerably north of the community and establish the trail along a proposed new trail segment or along US24 south to the existing Granite Bridge, at which point the trail would cross back to the east bank to proceed south along the high-priority Granite to Clear Creek segment. This approach would insulate Granite as much as is feasible from potential negative impacts of the S&RT.*

Granite

The third area of private landowner opposition was found in Granite. Initial and on-going contacts have been made with about ten of the 25-plus property owners near the river, some of whom are part-time residents. Some owners are more-recent arrivals, some individuals trace their family’s roots in Granite back many decades. These owners have concerns about potential loss of privacy, disrespect for private property and potentially negative impacts of promoting Granite as a trailhead or tourist destination without corresponding benefits for residents. This is of special concern, they argue, if the S&RT were designated along CR397 which is the main street of their unincorporated community. They are also concerned that there is not enough space for additional trailhead parking which may be generated by S&RT designation. They are worried that management and enforcement of use would inevitably diminish over time, leaving the community itself to deal with problems related to the trail. More generally, they are apprehensive that designation and promotion of a trail would lead to its high even excessive popularity, overwhelming their quiet lifestyle.

In contrast to these concerns there was also some interest in increased preservation of the town’s historic properties, artifacts and stories and in better communicating to other Chaffee County residents and visitors the valuable contributions that Granite has made to the Upper Arkansas’s heritage of mining, transportation and early county administration (Granite was the first county seat of Chaffee County). It was even suggested that a future local museum could raise awareness about this history.

  
**S&RT IN LAKE COUNTY**  
*The Lake County Commissioners have been strong supporters of the S&RT concept, including development of a route into Leadville and have gone on record to do their best to work with other future managing partners to complete the connection.*

  
**BALANCING PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND SPECIAL INTERESTS**  
*All long-distance trails that pass through multiple jurisdictions and private properties pose challenges in developing management practices and regulations consistent with each manager’s objectives, while not creating confusion for users and disturbance to private landowners. Today, public agencies are faced with decreasing budgets and resources for managing additional facilities. Counties and cities are challenged to provide additional public recreation amenities, yet protect private property rights. Public land managers are faced with providing recreation access and natural resource conservation while private land managers/owners seek to protect property values and preserve privacy. The Master Plan Team urges trail proponents and opponents to appreciate each others’ perspectives and the need for balance as this long-term project moves forward.*

Granite to Two Bit Gulch

From Granite and the end of CR397 there is an unnumbered public road within BLM lands which lies on the old stage road to Spring Gulch. There it departs up the gulch on BLM land eventually becoming Forest Road 397. The stage road continues north near the river all the way to Two Bit Gulch, a distance of about 2 ½ miles. In the section from Spring Gulch to Two Bit Gulch there are approximately 24 privately owned parcels, all within Lake County. Since there are situations where several parcels are owned by a single individual, only about 13 owners are involved. As of completion of this draft Plan, 5 of these 13 have been directly contacted and are familiar with the S&RT proposal; the remainder have been sent background information and a summary of what the draft Plan will recommend but their responses are pending.

The public access status of the Leadville Stage Road from Kobe south to the Lake County line has endured considerable legal scrutiny as well as consideration under Revised Statute 2477. If, as currently interpreted by the Lake County Commissioners, the Leadville Stage Road (sometimes referred to in legal documents as the Old Stagecoach Road) is indeed a public road throughout this section, then in principle, public access is already assured and no further easements would have to be obtained from private owners for the county to designate the S&RT here. The reality is that the county has accepted the stage road only as a “non-county maintained public road” (LC Resolution 96-21) and to date has declined to take responsibility for its improvement, maintenance or construction; it remains effectively impassable to motor vehicles from Two Bit Gulch south to near the Chaffee County line where it joins an open BLM road. The county continues to be reluctant to take on this responsibility, even after receiving requests from affected landowners south of Two Bit to do so, noting that much of this section lies within the 100 and even 50 year floodplains, is subject to flooding in high run-off years, traverses legally-protected wetlands, and some stretches are untraceable and would have to be totally reconstructed. All this suggests that Lake County would face substantial construction and maintenance costs, obligations to provide wetland mitigation and difficulties in federal or state permitting to open the road for motorized access at a standard required by the county for a road servicing private properties.

With this history there will obviously have to be additional discussions between affected landowners, the county and supporters of the S&RT before acceptable solutions are reached.

From the perspective of S&RT proponents, limiting public access only to hikers, cyclists and horse use on a narrow natural surface non-motorized trail would be the most favorable outcome, and this is the action recommended to the county in this draft Plan (see Chapter 5, Section 7 for details). This approach would lessen – although not eliminate – environmental and visual disturbance, permitting complications and construction costs and also avoid predictable conflict between motorized and non-motorized users.

If the county should adopt this approach it would leave most of the private parcels – as they are now and have been for many years – without road access sufficient to permit significant development. The team cannot speculate on all the options that landowners might consider pursuing in that circumstance, but one would be to offer their properties for sale and eventual transfer to a public land manager such as the state park (AHRA). It is common for grantors involved in developing trails, parks and green space (such as GOCO) to provide financial support for such sale and transfer provided that standard procedures are followed in obtaining a fair market appraisal value.

Hayden Meadows to Leadville

One possible S&RT route north of Hayden Meadows into Leadville, which might have been considered, raises private property concerns. The original route of the old MRR mainline into Leadville was from near the Weston Pass junction with US24 up to the trail now identified as the Mineral Belt Trail near Colorado Mountain College. This is unavailable since trail use was not anticipated in a recently-completed conservation easement (Moyer Ranch). One of the other options would be to follow modern US24 into Leadville, which likely was the original route of the LSR. Currently, road shoulders in this section of US24 are very narrow and would present safety concerns. Another possibility would be along a local irrigation ditch (Derry No. 1 Ditch). The connection along the ditch would require clarification from the County regarding recreation access in an existing county easement. An additional issue is that the City of Aurora is seeking to construct an underground water diversion pipeline along this route. An ideal outcome in the long term may be to secure rights to construct a public trail within the pipeline easement. With this background of options, in the short term, the Team favors designating the S&RT along certain existing publicly-accessible system roads through BLM and Forest Service lands and county roads to approach Leadville, as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 8.

It is significant that the preferred alignment includes Lake County Roads 5 and 4 which are both associated with the Midland RR: CR4 was the original 1887 Midland route departing downtown Leadville westward to Arkansas Junction and ultimately on to the Hagerman Tunnel and Aspen; CR5 follows the route of the alternative 1888 Aspen Shortline RR (leased to the Midland) which avoided steep grades into Leadville on the original alignment. Use of these segments and the Midland Railroad section along Chaffee County Road 371 farther south are the reason the anticipated trail celebrates not only the historic stage route but also the Midland.





**WILDLIFE IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS**  
*The Planning Team recognizes the proposed S&RT could have negative impacts on wildlife. This is a situation that CPW-Wildlife could monitor to help determine possible final design or management solutions with future trail implementation. The goal is to strike a balance between increased uses of the river corridor for recreation while ensuring that wildlife have adequate habitat and access to the river and are not displaced to poorer habitats. It is agreed that education of the user/visitor is key to future solutions. Wildlife specialists are encouraged to provide their views and recommendations at the point that future managers such as the AHRA, BLM and Forest Service are formally considering accepting the draft Master Plan.*



*Concern for potential Bighorn and nesting raptors impacts north and south of Granite have guided the preferred S&RT alignment.*

**Special Interest Groups**

Particular effort has been made to meet with local special interest organizations in Leadville, Buena Vista and Salida such as bike clubs, town trail advocates, hikers, anglers and horseback groups and commercial businesses that serve trail users, to gather their views on trail connections and the long-distance S&RT plan. The outreach focused on how the “P.I.E.” (Preservation, Interpretation and Exploration) concept will be coordinated with local trail planning efforts and the long-term goals and user priorities of these recreation groups. The Buena Vista Trails Advisory Board, Ark Valley Velo club, Salida’s SPOT and Salida Mountain Trails, and Leadville’s Cloud City Wheelers as well as the Collegiate Peaks chapter of Trout Unlimited and the recently-organized Lake County Trails Coalition have all expressed interest and support. Much can be said about the good work these organizations are already doing, and each has stressed the opportunity the S&RT has to strengthen the regional trail system and public access to the Arkansas and the value of collaboration as these groups work to raise municipal support for their local systems and use.

The majority of these special interests say the regional approach, including the S&RT, will have an important impact on residents’ quality of life as well as provide community and visitor recreation benefits, enhance heritage programs and stimulate the local economy. They also support the idea of partnering with fishing, rafting, fourteener hiking and cultural tourism groups already thriving in the region to enhance the project’s economic benefits. The community spirit and enthusiasm local groups exhibit can be seen in their efforts to raise awareness of trails and promote community benefits. There is no doubt that the actions of these organization have already added greatly to the regional and community sense of place. These are the real motivators for moving the project forward. They can be and are an important voice for adoption and implementation of the S&RT.

**Anticipated Environmental Studies and Permits** (see also Chapter 5 section Recommendations)

Areas along the potential trail route, especially from north of the Otero Bridge to Hayden Reservoir and certain sections (Derry No.1 Ditch) north to Leadville are the most likely to require environmental and/or historic resource impact analysis before physical development for public access could proceed. The planning team reached out to the various jurisdictions (Federal, State, County and CDOT) to anticipate what studies and permitting might be needed. Provisions of the Federal National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and Historic Preservation Act and equivalent state or county procedures are those that may be triggered. Additional public involvement is typically a part of such studies. The individual sections and summaries in Chapter 5 note what might be involved for each of the planning partners, although this would certainly depend on the specifics of developments which have yet to be proposed in their final form. While delays and costs associated with environmental analysis can be expected, evidence from other long-distance multi-jurisdictional trails suggests that required studies and permits should not be considered insurmountable. In fact, environmental studies often lead to workable alternatives and solutions (mitigations of anticipated impacts) which result in better plans. Examples might include seasonal closures for wildlife or specific reroutes to avoid historical, archeological or wildlife resources which may not have been foreseen in the current draft Plan.

**Potential Wildlife Impacts**

Planning Team contacts with knowledgeable and dedicated specialists in the local CPW/Wildlife Section have identified several issues of concern. The corridor which was easiest for early stage and railroad builders to use (the river and riparian zone) is also important to elk, Bighorn sheep, raptors and other species. While voicing concern for additional public access associated with such a project, these specialists have communicated regularly with the planning team to help consider alternative routes and possible user-management solutions. Future trail implementation will need to consider operational strategies such as monitoring of impacts and seasonal trail/access closures. These initial ideas have been incorporated into individual section-by-section recommendations.

The primary negative concerns relate to potential disturbance of Bighorn sheep populations south and north of Granite (between Two Bit Gulch and Tumble Creek), raptor nesting near Goldcamp and Clear Creek and to a lesser degree along the entire river corridor. Additional concerns include seasonal elk and deer migration. It is likely that in cases where environmental studies will be required that wildlife impact issues will be examined in detail, particularly between Two Bit Gulch and Hayden Reservoir. Note that opening some sections of the S&RT such as from Granite to Clear Creek, would facilitate access for recreational hunting, a positive rather than negative outcome.

**Anticipated Levels, Types and Patterns of Use**

The Feasibility Study acknowledged inability to reliably predict anticipated levels and types of use of the proposed S&RT. The current Master Plan team has had little more success locating case studies or statistical information on long distance trails that are a mixture of mountain biking, hiking, horse use and sections which would also be open to licensed motor vehicles. An exception of limited value are annual visitor survey reports 2004-2010 from the Mineral Belt in Leadville dealing with types of use and how people discovered the trail.

The following comments about current and future use on the various listed highways, roads and other sections are admittedly speculative but are based on local Team observations and experience.

**CDOT State and Federal Highways**

(note that the State and Federal highways would not technically be designated as the S&RT as per CDOT recommendation but instead serve as connectors between designated sections)

US24 and 285 as connectors already experience high licensed vehicle use in summer months associated with traffic passing through the two counties to other destinations or to many destinations within the area (towns, mountains, river). Vehicle use increase associated with establishment of the S&RT, although acknowledged, would probably be indistinguishable from general fluctuations or increases attributable to improving attractiveness of these two counties in general. Upward trends in total use are already anticipated in CDOT planning.

Road and mountain biking along these CDOT highway sections has already been increasing in summer due to general popularity of biking, and increases related strictly to S&RT designation likely would be masked by those general trends. A relatively few mountain bike users doing the full 64-mile trail can be expected on these highway sections. Long distance road biking group rides and competitive cycle racing are already fairly common in these two counties on these highways and are likely to continue and even increase. In any event, CDOT has recognized increasing demand for bicycle use on highways throughout the state and this policy will result in appropriate changes to increase bike friendliness as future work is scheduled on these two local highways.

Hiking and horseback use along these highways is almost nil currently, with little prospect of significant increases due to designation of the S&RT. An exception would be those few hikers that might elect to walk the entire 64-mile route.

**County, Forest and BLM Roads**

The majority of the county, Forest and BLM roads proposed as pieces of the S&RT are unpaved relatively low traffic volume routes which are already open to hiking, biking and horse use. Horse use is very light and is not likely to increase with S&RT designation. Hiking use is also light except on those county roads nearest municipalities which may be used for walking dogs or accessing fishing areas.

Bicycling (primarily mountain bikes or modified road bikes) on these county roads is currently light but significant, as more and more local residents use bicycles for recreation and fitness. Most use is on Chaffee County roads like 160 and 163 north of Salida, and 371 north of Buena Vista by local residents and some visitors who use these routes as part of convenient local fitness rides or loops. Similarly Lake County’s CR4 and 5 (paved) already have some bicycle use because of their proximity to Leadville. With designation of the S&RT some increases in cycling use on these county roads can be expected as users opt to go farther to connect with more distant pieces of the S&RT. This will be especially likely on CR160/163/191 from Salida and CR371 for Buena Vista users headed to the Granite sections, and CR4 and 5 for Leadville-originating users headed for Hayden Reservoir and the (existing) Arkansas River Ranch Trail. In some instances such as CR160 (paved) motorized traffic is moderate rather than low volume, and Chaffee County officials have already noted that some measures like cautionary signing should be installed to address safety issues. Lake County’s CR4 (paved) also has moderate traffic volume but in this instance plans are already in motion to provide a designated bike lane or separate pathway.

Only short distances along Forest Service and BLM roads are proposed for designation, primarily north of the Hayden Reservoir in the Lodgepole Flats area. These roads are currently open to all vehicle types including unlicensed OHVs. Mountain biking use is currently very light but is anticipated to increase with designation of the S&RT to the extent that Leadville-based riders begin to use the route to access Hayden Reservoir and the Arkansas River Ranch Trail.

**Roads within Municipalities**

As noted elsewhere, cycling as well as walking on municipal trails has been on the increase in all three towns linked to the proposed S&RT. Some increases in municipal trail use (as well as in-town parking) can be expected when and if the S&RT actually does connect to existing town systems but the extent of the increase can’t be predicted. All three municipalities are actively addressing increasing demand for their trails so it is anticipated that impacts attributed to S&RT will not become a burden. Indeed all these towns are enthusiastic about potential connection to the S&RT.

**Roads near or through Unincorporated Communities**

The communities in this category are Granite, Johnson Village, Nathrop, and Centerville. With the exception of Granite these communities are along the open public roads described above. To date no expressions of concern over designation or increased use have been noted from these other unincorporated communities, and there is little anticipated increased use by the local population.

*Buena Vista’s 1879 County Courthouse, directly adjacent to the S&RT, is one of many historic sites and features that can be interpreted along the proposed trail.*



Katherine McCoy



*The Granite Bridge is a critical element in leading the proposed S&RT from US24 to the historic Granite-Clear Creek-Goldcamp segment of the proposed S&RT.*



In response to concerns described elsewhere in this document, near the community of Granite on the east side of the Arkansas, whose main street is CR397, the preferred alignment has incorporated a proposed bridge across the Arkansas north of Granite to encourage trail users to bypass the town and thus insulate it to some extent from S&RT impacts. Since CR397 and the BLM road just north of Granite are open public roads, some trail users may ignore the bridge option and proceed through Granite on those public roads unless Chaffee County or BLM establishes some preventative regulation.

Current use of all types – cyclists, hikers, horseback, and licensed vehicles – on CR397 through Granite is light to moderate and mostly seasonal; some use of unlicensed OHVs is occurring on CR397, although this is contrary to Chaffee County ordinance.

Increased use in the Granite area is a valid concern both for community members and trail planners, who recognize that the section just north but particularly south of Granite to Clear Creek will likely become one of the most heavily used segments of the entire trail. How popular it will become is difficult to predict but it would depend on the extent to which the area was promoted and the rate at which the sections north and south are developed. Granite is also already a moderately used put-in location for commercial and private boaters, and for anglers, which raises additional concerns about the need for adequate parking and trailhead facilities such as restrooms.

Granite’s special case is further discussed in the Chapter 5, Section 6 Summary.

**The S&RT through Private Lands**

Almost all sections of the proposed S&RT that would traverse private lands are located from Spring Gulch north of Granite through Two Bit Gulch to Kobe, all within Lake County.

The segment from Spring Gulch to Two Bit Gulch is currently not open to any public use, although the stage road passing through it is considered a non-county maintained public road. If the S&RT is eventually designated here all use would be considered new. If the county accepts and implements the draft Plan’s recommendation for non-motorized use along the public right of way then the new uses would be limited to hiking (including anglers), mountain biking and equestrian.

From Two Bit Gulch to Kobe, after considerable legal debate, the Old Stage Road has also been determined to be a county road and is maintained, providing motorized access to properties all along its route as well as permitting cycling and pedestrian use. By Lake County ordinance, as a maintained public road this segment is also open to OHVs.

How much use develops would depend on how well this currently little-known section becomes known, whether or not it is ridden or hiked in conjunction with the S&RT around Granite, and how much it may become incorporated into rides originating in Leadville. It would be used by hikers, cyclists and horse people if the full 64-mile option is chosen, but this is expected to be attractive to relatively few users. Some anglers may opt to use this section to gain access to the east bank of the Arkansas but this opportunity will be limited because a trail on the public road easement in this section does not automatically allow for access to the river’s edge across private lands.

Further details about this section through private lands can be found in Chapter 5, section 7.

**Non-motorized and Motorized Use**

More than 80% of the 64-mile proposed S&RT lies along open public roads open to licensed motor vehicles. Providing interpretive information and encouraging slow-speed appreciation of the approximate routes of the historic stage or Midland for motorized users is an important objective of the S&RT since for many visitors this will be their only means of experiencing the trail. However some sections are not suited to motorized use in order to protect the integrity of the historic fabric as well as to reserve sections where hikers, cyclists and equestrians would not have to be concerned with fast-moving vehicles.

The draft Plan’s position on the use of OHVs (off-highway vehicles) on the S&RT is that such vehicles should not be permitted on sections between Two Bit Gulch and Spring Gulch, on the proposed Granite by-pass, nor on sections south of Granite through Clear Creek and south to the junction of the S&RT with US24.

*Current hiking and mountain biking on these dramatic, well-preserved constructed sections of the stage road on BLM land south of Granite is currently very small, but expected to increase significantly if the S&RT is designated here. One likely management action in this section would be to prohibit dogs on- or off-leash, to reduce impacts on wildlife.*



**ANTICIPATED USE OF THE S&RT**

*Predicting the volume and type of use for the proposed S&RT is problematic. Much will depend on what and when sections are completed, and when and how much formal promotion and word-of mouth attention they get. But evidence from other trails indicates that some sections and trailheads will become quite popular and that it is prudent to plan now for adequate facilities, appropriate routes and realistic management practices to avoid unwanted impacts on both private and public lands.*



Regulations are already in place on other sections of the proposed S&RT. AHRA policies prohibit OHV use on its Arkansas River Ranch Trail. State statues prohibit recreational OHV use on those sections of US24, 285 and CO291 that would serve as connectors. Chaffee County ordinance prohibits OHV use on most of its county roads including those that would be designated as the S&RT. In Lake County, OHVs are permitted on all county roads (subject to restrictions) including CR55, CR4 and CR5. BLM and Forest Service roads in the Lodgepole Flats area currently permit OHVs.

The draft Plan does not recommend any change to the status quo in either county or within municipal, AHRA, Forest Service or BLM lands.

**User Demographics**

The geographic origin of users is expected to be diverse. Although Leadville’s Mineral Belt Trail (MBT) is a single 13 mile loop in one community, its 2004-2010 survey reports provides insight on origin of users by documenting that Front Range and Out of State users are very common although local Leadville users probably predominate. Word-of-mouth between family and friends is responsible for much of the promotion of the MBT although mention in paper publications and on the web is significant. Most cited in terms of attractiveness of the MBT were “scenery” and “history,” both of which are key features of the proposed S&RT as well.

**Typical Patterns of Use**

Although some users, local or visitors, may seek the challenge of doing the entire 64-mile S&RT, it is more likely, as with other long-distance trails, that certain segments or groups of segments will become favored patterns of use. Some possibilities, based on the local Team’s experience, are as follows.

*Salida-Big Bend-Stone Bridge-Salida* loop (2-3 hours)  
Because this begins and ends in town and can be done after work or with little preparation, and will likely be done repetitively by local resident cyclists, it may become the most frequently used segment, although the return to Salida on CO291 is not actually proposed for S&RT designation; CR163 is the highlight of this route where it passes along the west bank of the river.

*Buena Vista to Otero Pump Station Bridge* out and back (2-3 hours)  
Analog to the convenient Salida loop above, this is already popular because the CR371 (Midland RR) route through the tunnels and along the Arkansas offers some of the S&RT’s most spectacular views of the river; available almost year-round; often recommended for locally-rented bicycle customers..

*Leadville to Kobe* out and back (half to three-quarter day)  
Particularly for fit intermediate Leadville bike riders and families not interested in hills, this may become a very attractive alternative to the Mineral Belt Trail; the premium segment here is the newly-opened Arkansas River Ranch Trail on the stage road with an option to incorporate the High Lonesome trail on the west bank on City of Aurora land.

*Granite to Clear Creek* out and back (half day)  
Because this is arguably the most scenic segment of all, and contains the most extensive physical remnants of the stage road and offers the most faithful sense of the original route, this will probably be the most popular segment for both local residents and visitors – cyclists, hikers and equestrians – who have time to carry their bicycles (or trailer their animals) to the Granite trailhead. (It is recommended that dogs on- or off-leash be prohibited in this segment to minimize wildlife and other-user conflicts.)

*Hayden Meadows or Kobe to North Granite Bridge* shuttle or out and back (half day)  
Highlighting the essence of the northern half of the S&RT, this combines the flat meandering Arkansas in the southern Hayden Valley with the narrower canyon south of Two Bit and an easy final stretch on the BLM two track; may become popular with equestrians as well.

*Granite to Buena Vista* shuttle (half day)  
This combines the Granite to Clear Creek heart of the S&RT with the new segment through Stone Cabin and Goldcamp with the easy but scenic Otero Bridge to Buena Vista piece; likely to be very popular with intermediate riders in the valley as an extra activity beyond a day of rafting or fishing.

*Buena Vista to Salida* shuttle or out and back (half or three quarter day)  
Although this is all on public roads, and provides only a few actual remnants of the stage road to view, it might become quite popular with cyclists looking for a longer ride generally off of high speed paved highways; crossing the river at Fishermans Bridge, quiet CR260 and CR163 along the river are the prizes along this segment.



Overview

Developing and then managing a future long-distance trail/route crossing several jurisdictions will involve individual and coordinated actions by a number of management partners, from the BLM and Forest Service, CPW/AHRA and wildlife managers, three town trails programs, two Counties and even volunteer user groups. During the Feasibility Study and development of the Master Plan, the planning team repeatedly met with representatives of those partners to discuss future organizational options and long-term management concerns for the proposed trail.

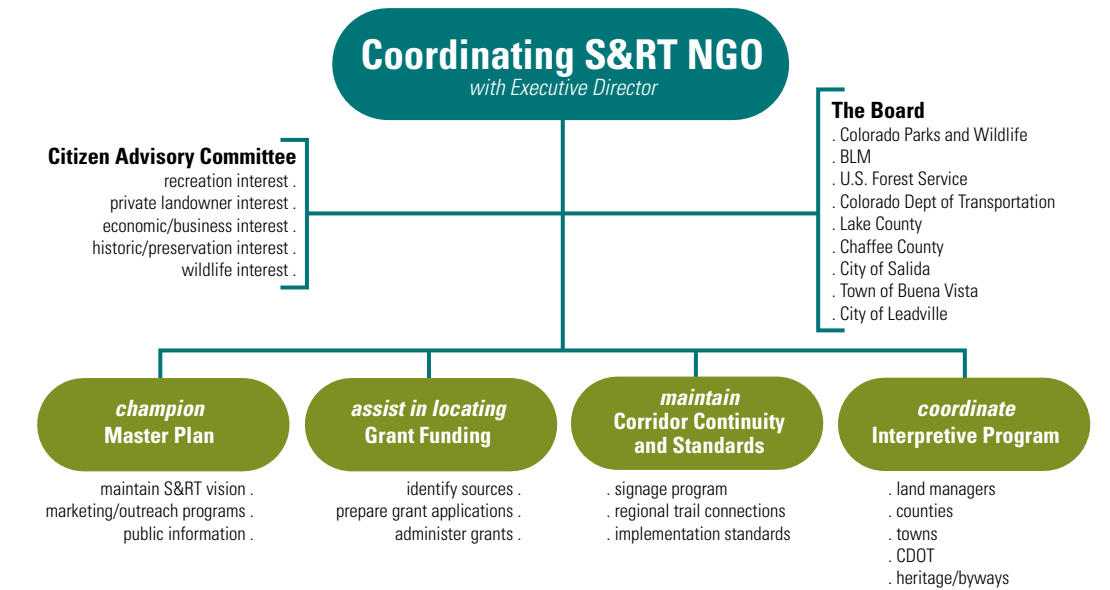
Recognizing that most local agencies already have informal and formal management agreements with one another, the concept of the trail and potential management concerns are not insurmountable but will require a coordinated approach. The primary concerns expressed by AHRA and the BLM are that management details for trail segments need to be in place before physical access is permitted and promoted, even on sections of public land. This will help avoid users trespassing on non-public sections and minimize the perception that land managers are pressuring private landowners or other partners to accept trail use.

In recognition that none of the potential management partners have a mandate or resources that include coordination and oversight of a multi-jurisdictional trail such as the S&RT, those partners have suggested that a non-governmental, non-profit organization (NGO) be identified to fill that role. This entity would act with restricted powers on behalf of its multiple community/agency partners, applying a consistent approach to interpretation and preservation, and be the “public face” of the S&RT. It would also provide and encourage consistent physical design and implementation standards, and work with planning partners in seeking grant and other funding to be used in developing and managing sections of the trail which are within each partner’s jurisdiction and control.

A Suggested Coordinating S&RT NGO

The suggested organization is viewed as a non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) with its own or access to 501(c) 3 status. Each planning partner that had adopted the S&RT Master Plan would be represented on the organization’s Board. While each member would act independently to implement trail projects on the ground and maintain facilities under their authority, they would work in partnership with the NGO to coordinate phasing and other implementation and standardization tasks. The Board of Directors would assure that the NGO maintain the S&RT vision, diligently seek grant and other funding sources to supplement partner budgeted funds, facilitate preservation and interpretive programs and act as the community outreach agent. The organization would hire an Executive Director to act and represent the S&RT at the agency/community/County planning level, promoting the organizational goals, objectives and standards on a day to day basis. The Board would meet periodically to evaluate progress, next steps, funding and assign priorities for facilities and physical trail development.

The Coordinating S&RT NGO would include a Citizen’s Advisory Committee representing a broad range of S&RT economic, management and recreation interests. The Citizen’s Advisory Committee would also assist with volunteer programs and provide public feedback for the Board of Directors. The make-up and membership of the Advisory Committee would be determined on formation of the NGO and evaluated on a periodic basis.





Conflicts between Trail Users and Private Land Owners

To overcome many issues that private land owners have raised concerning allowing public access across or near their properties, the Master Plan Team has made considerable effort to propose preferred or alternative alignments that would avoid crossing or approaching private property (where topography and other conditions permit). Physical facilities such as parking areas and restrooms would be located so as to minimize temptation of users to infringe on nearby private property and appropriate fencing and/or landscape buffers can be provided. Details are included in the section-by-section descriptions in Chapter 5.

Recognizing that in spite of the trail being at some distance from private properties or where it cannot avoid crossing such properties there is still potential for conflict, the Master Plan stipulates that there would be strategies in place to minimize future problems. Such strategies should include signs at trail heads and appropriate trail sections alerting trail users to boundaries of nearby private property, and prohibiting trespass or other activities (e.g. dog control or prohibition, noise, reckless speeding, loitering) that may disturb private residents. Messages encouraging respect for private property and polite interaction with property owners would be incorporated in trail brochures and trailhead displays, and trail maps clearly indicating private property would be provided.

To address the concern that signs, education and encouragement are not effective without enforcement, with input from affected owners and the proposed Citizen Advisory Committee, the S&RT NGO would work with managing partners to develop a way property owners – or trail users themselves – could report trespass or other inappropriate behavior with reasonable expectation of an effective response. Options to consider include a Hot Line phone involving Lake or Chaffee County Dispatch or the county sheriffs and state patrol, in addition to instructing relevant staff at AHRA, Forest Service, BLM or other offices to give increased priority to citizen call-ins about trespass involving trail users. A system should be put in place to monitor the frequency of complaints and the effectiveness of response by the trail section manager or law enforcement authority. Involvement of volunteers (see below) in reporting problems related to private property would be facilitated.

Special Event Considerations

One apprehension expressed by some private property owners is if organized and heavily promoted trail activities such as long distance races or commercially-sponsored extreme sport exhibitions would be encouraged and permitted on the S&RT. These events, it is feared, could result in large unruly crowds, unmanageable parking and sanitation issues and inevitable trespass that is unacceptable even if limited to short periods of time. They further express the view that such events would tend to inappropriately promote the trail, leading to larger and larger numbers of trail users beyond the special events, resulting again in unacceptable impacts. The planning Team recognizes this as a legitimate issue, and trail managers, especially in sections where such private landowner concerns have been voiced, are urged to take this into consideration in dealing with requests for special events. In considering the permitting of special events, the planning team believes that the primary goal of the trail should be meeting the Preservation-Interpretation-Exploration objectives, with a low priority on organized and/or competitive activities.

Volunteers

Volunteers can provide an important contribution to trail management and operations. Volunteer programs connect managers to community resources which build valuable community relationships and local support for the trail and other public recreational programs. Volunteers can be a tremendous help by monitoring resource issues and reporting on use during trail patrols, providing minor maintenance and by assisting the section manager with interpretive and educational programs. The Coordinating NGO would act as clearinghouse for volunteer trail activities while recognizing that some trail managers (e.g. AHRA and the Forest Service) already have effective volunteer programs which might become involved. The S&RT NGO Board and Citizen Advisory Committee would provide guidance in the mission and development of future volunteer programs once needs have been identified.

Relationships with State and Local Road Authorities

Colorado Department of Transportation

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), which exercises control over rights-of-way of both state and federal highways in all Colorado counties, is an interested and significant partner in the proposed S&RT because the trail’s preferred alignment intersects several sections along CO291 and US285 and US24.

CDOT’s long-range plans and “green” objectives support bicycling and walking routes and recognize their importance in building a seamless, integrated multi-modal transportation system for Colorado communities. This includes the construction of wider and safer highway shoulders, providing sidewalks and building trails. They further recognize this as a tool for local and regional economic growth, improving a community’s quality-of-life factors and protecting the natural environment. Recognizing the energy efficiency, cost effectiveness and health benefits of investing in trails as viable alternatives to the automobile, CDOT is partnering with local road and parks departments to make new projects possible.

Federal and state highways managed by CDOT (like US285) would serve as “connectors” between formally designated segments of the S&RT to avoid lengthy delays until these highways are eventually upgraded to state-wide standards for shared vehicle/bicycle use. However, all connectors in the proposed S&RT are already open to and considered suitable for bicycle travel.



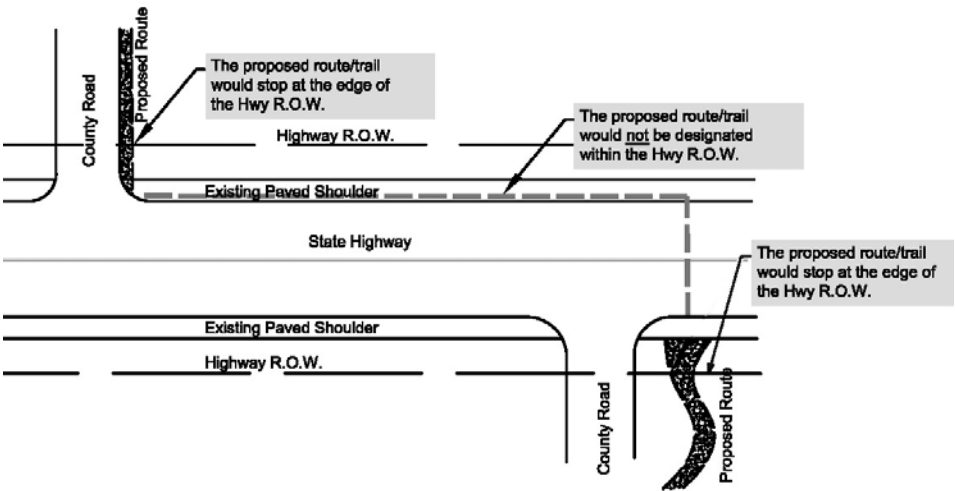
Noting that each of the communities within the S&RT corridor are already promoting trails to meet growth in local demand, CDOT sees the S&RT project as an additional opportunity to promote transportation alternatives and has expressed general support of the proposals.

However, CDOT officials have explained that highway rights-of-way cannot be designated as a formal extension of a multi-use trail route without meeting specific design and environmental standards. Thus, due to costly NEPA and other considerations of formally establishing a trail within a CDOT right-of-way, on the advice of CDOT the S&RT alignment should stop and start at the edge of their rights-of-ways. This is not to be interpreted as opposition to the concept of a through trail but only to recognize that there would be high costs and substantial delays if the Master Plan were to insist on formal designation along CDOT rights-of way. Even without formal designation, users of the potential trail would have legal access to the State right-of way network for biking and hiking and other permitted uses.

An important issue is whether or not proposed but un-designated connector segments along CDOT rights-of-way are currently suitable for hiking and cycling use. Having reviewed the preferred alignment, road crossings and alternatives for the S&RT, CDOT regional offices in Gunnison and Leadville have expressed the opinion that along most of the proposed segments, the CDOT right-of-way currently provides a suitable shoulder for bikers and hikers. If and when the S&RT is actually designated, the planning team recommends that CDOT be fully engaged in examining the suitability of all connecting segments within their rights-of-way, including but not limited to the alternative alignment along US24 from the proposed north Granite bridge to the existing Granite bridge at CR397 and crossing the US285/24 bridge in Johnson Village, where paved road shoulders are exceptionally narrow.

The S&RT NGO would coordinate with CDOT regarding placement of historic markers (Points of Interest) and other signage associated with S&RT developments within their rights-of-way. This would be similar to the cooperative relationship between CDOT and overseers of the two local scenic byways.

The diagram below illustrates how the S&RT would be treated along CDOT rights-of-way where it would not be formally designated.



CDOT has also noted that the proposed trail, plus generally increased use of their rights-of-way in Lake and Chaffee Counties for bicycles and pedestrians, will be factored into plans for future highway improvements.

County Road Departments

Road and Bridge Departments in Lake and Chaffee Counties would be important participants in implementing and maintaining S&RT sections along county roads, although formal designation would be a matter for County Commissioner decision. Throughout Feasibility Study and Master Planning discussions with officials in both Lake and Chaffee Counties, the view has been that many of the proposed preferred or alternative alignments are low volume unpaved or even paved routes which are currently open to and suitable for proposed S&RT use by hikers and bicyclists. On some higher-volume routes (e.g. Chaffee County road 160 and 371 and Lake County’s Halfmoon Road and County Roads 4 and 5) it is understood that some modifications including special alerts to share the road or even widening or bike lane striping might be necessary.



Unlike CDOT highways, county roads in both Lake and Chaffee would be formally designated as parts of the S&RT; most, like Chaffee County 163 above, are low traffic volume unpaved routes needing little more than installation of S&RT emblems and directional signs.

A few of the S&RT’s county road segments, like Chaffee County 160 below, are paved but unstriped and experience moderate volume. These routes will require cautionary signs alerting motorists to shared bicycle use and would be given priority for eventual widening or installation of a separate parallel bike path.





Railroad Right-of-way and Crossings

Throughout the Feasibility Study and Master Plan process, the planning team has made attempts to identify and engage Union Pacific RR authorities in discussions of proposed S&RT railroad crossings. The response has ranged from generic statements of rejection to suggestions that such proposals would be extremely problematic. These responses are similar to those received by other local trail managers and advocates. At this juncture there is no short-term scenario that would move the project forward in areas interacting with the RR. This is particularly frustrating because the sections of the UP involved have long been out-of-use although still not technically abandoned (in-active). At this point in planning, the team has opted to continue to recommend certain actions, such as at-grade crossings of the UP right-of-way and tracks to reach the proposed river bridge north of Granite and the proposed bridge at Clear Creek, and entering the right-of-way for short distances in one or two other locations. It is hoped that, when and if the S&RT Master Plan is accepted that appropriate RR authorities will take note of community, user and agency support of this trail, and be more willing to discuss the proposed actions. Short-term solutions would be to not formally designate the trail at the hoped-for RR crossings and in rights-of-way. Signage would be provided to clarify the access limitation.

Trailheads and User Facilities

Implementing the S&RT will involve increased or changed types of use at existing trailheads or in a few cases new trailheads. This Master Plan identifies where such new or improved trailheads will be located and the facilities that would be needed to serve initially-anticipated levels and types of use. For example, where bicycling and horseback use is expected to be introduced or expand, increased maneuvering and parking space would need to be made available; where new or increased numbers of trailhead users are expected, sanitary facilities would need to be developed or expanded; if a previously infrequent use such as winter season snowshoeing or skiing is expected to increase, this must be taken into account. In some cases it is obvious that minimum parking and restroom facilities need to be provided immediately; in other cases, to avoid overbuilding, it is prudent to proceed more slowly, assessing needs after the trail is opened and is becoming known. The goal is to provide a safe, conflict-free entry point that also offers an appropriate level of information, interpretation and sanitation while not producing unacceptable impacts on the local environment or nearby private property.

As for design standards for trailheads, those already established in existing locations (primarily AHRA recreation sites, but including town trailhead facilities) could provide the baseline. It is not recommended that S&RT facilities attempt to “outshine” or radically alter existing trailhead styles but rather to simply expand or complement them. An exception to this approach would be interpretive signboards, maps and trail signs which would be designed to establish a uniform appearance and identity (a “brand”) obviously representing the S&RT. The level of services will depend on access and utility availabilities.

The detailed maps presented in Chapter 5, Section-by-section summaries, identify both existing and proposed trailheads and interpretive display locations. In some cases existing facilities might simply need some enhancement, but where the S&RT represents a new use, new trailhead facilities would be proposed.

Trail Interpretive Messages and Locations

Preparing a full Interpretive Plan for the S&RT is beyond the scope of this draft Master Plan. It is recommended that when one or more potential managers have accepted the draft plan that the Coordinating S&RT NGO commission and oversee an Interpretive Plan covering the entire length of the proposed trail. The partners themselves as well as local history interest groups and the public would participate in developing that plan.

In the short term this Master Plan recommends that the partners accept in principle that the S&RT has its own interpretive story to tell. It may at times be unique and in others complementary to the interpretive themes and messages being presented by each manager. Involving the Coordinating S&RT NGO in overseeing an S&RT Interpretive Plan will ensure that S&RT messages are focused on the relevant trail themes and are not contradictory to or redundant with each section managers’ own programs. As with S&RT physical facilities it is not recommended that S&RT interpretation outdo or overwhelm other stories but rather complement them.

As with any well-designed interpretive program, the S&RT’s interpretive objectives will include educating the visitor on the value and significance of the resources involved, encouraging the visitor to appreciate and treat those resources respectfully, enhancing his or her enjoyment, and ultimately instilling in the visitor the motivation to support public and private efforts to protect the trail’s historic resources and recreational opportunities.



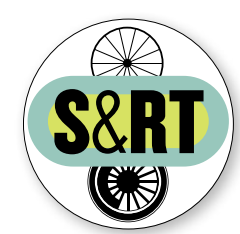
*A single image of the Arkansas River south of Granite captures the full range of historic and scenic resources which the Stage and Rail Trail would celebrate: (1) is the stage road itself from ca. 1875, (2) identifies the 1927 standard gauge Denver and Rio Grande RR (now the modern but unused Union Pacific), (3) shows the 1881 original narrow gauge D&RG, (4) the river; here artificially narrowed by 1881 construction and (5) the heavily overgrown 1887 route of the Colorado Midland RR.*



- Subject to more intensive study by future interpretive planners, the trail’s interpretive themes anticipated to be the most relevant are:
- Portrayal of the history and significance of all transportation corridors through Chaffee and Lake County, with particular reference to the stage road and Midland Railroad.
  - Presentation of historically-accurate accounts of the physical design, funding, construction and changing alignments of the two routes – stage road and Midland Railroad – which have been selected as the principle focus.
  - Personal accounts of the experience and hardships of contemporary travel along the S&RT, including stories of passengers, drivers, engineers, thieves, characters, railroad and stage station masters and supporting staff who serviced the railroad, stages and horses.
  - An account of how the S&RT came to be identified as something of value for recreation and historic preservation and how it was eventually established and is being managed.

Trail Emblems, Directional Signs and Alerts

As with any long distance trail it is important to design a unique visual identity in the form of a logotype or emblem which would be incorporated into interpretive messages as well as stand alone on markers along the trail, assisting the visitor to understand and appreciate that they are traveling along a designated route which shares a common history or purpose. Managers are urged to accept this visual identity element within their sections even though they might not conform to a manager’s existing design standard.



Recognizing that there may be a short term need for a logotype, this example is suggested. The recommended full Interpretive Plan may reexamine this and recommend changes.

Directional or “wayfinding” signs including arrows, alerts to upcoming turns, crossings, private property issues, trail closures and safety hazards are also essential in properly and safely guiding recreational users along the trail. It seems sensible to have such directional signs conform to the sign standards of the manager of that particular section, in contrast to the unique appearance of the S&RT emblem or other branding.



Overview

In a broad sense and from the perspective of the visiting public, the Stage and Rail Trail would be considered a single continuous entity from Salida to Leadville. However, because the proposed trail passes through multiple jurisdictions in its 64-mile extent, it has always been anticipated that different sections of the trail should be implemented and managed by different institutions or authorities. In a formal and administrative sense, the S&RT would exist in those jurisdictions only when so designated by the competent authority. As with other long-distance trails which may be developed in phases, adjustments in management responsibilities may be revised over time.

Principal Partners

This Master Plan identifies and recommends the following managers take primary responsibility for the following sections, including the trail itself, trailhead facilities, interpretive signs and stations. See Chapter 5 for a more detailed identification of partners in each of the eight sections.

Lake County Board of Commissioners

All sections of the proposed S&RT which would lie along public roads (not including State and Federal) between the Chaffee and Lake County line and the town limits of Leadville. This would exclude where the S&RT was designated on Forest Service or BLM roads not subject to county jurisdiction.

Chaffee County Board of Commissioners

All sections of the proposed S&RT which would lie along public roads (not including State and Federal) between the Chaffee County line and the city limits of Salida, and excluding those portions passing through the Town of Buena Vista. This would exclude where the S&RT was designated on Forest Service or BLM roads not subject to county jurisdiction.

Towns of Salida and Buena Vista

All sections of the S&RT which would pass through the incorporated limits of these two municipalities.

CPW/Arkansas Headwater Recreation Area

All portions of the proposed S&RT which would pass through or along the boundaries of the AHRA Cooperative Management Area provided there exist formal or informal management agreements with the underlying owner conveying sufficient authority to manage the trail. It is assumed that AHRA will consult with and take into serious consideration the views of the wildlife specialists of CPW in establishing trail management policies that relate to potential wildlife impacts.

Bureau of Land Management

All portions of the proposed S&RT which would lie along BLM system roads outside the AHRA Cooperative Management Area, or where new trail might be proposed on BLM lands outside the CMA.

US Forest Service Leadville District

All portions of the proposed S&RT which would lie along Forest Service system roads within the Leadville District of the San Isabel National Forest.

Related/Interested Institutions

Several additional institutions, although not considered trail managers, would have roles to play in successful implementation and management of the S&RT.

Colorado Department of Transportation

Because the S&RT would not formally be designated either as it crosses or follows CDOT rights-of-way, CDOT would not be considered a formal trail manager. However these crossings or connectors between designated S&RT sections are critical elements in the integrity of the long-distance trail. CDOT officials would be consulted with during implementation as well as future operation and maintenance and would be invited to serve as ex-officio members on the Board of the Coordinating S&RT NGO.



Because a large proportion of the proposed S&RT lies within the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area – a state park managed jointly by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the BLM – the trail could become an important asset in their recreation portfolio management and protection of the river corridor.

City of Leadville

Because the proposed S&RT would not enter the city limits, Leadville is not identified as a formal implementation and management partner. However, the proposed trail would connect to the Mineral Belt Trail, which is jointly managed by Lake County and the City, and is a part of the city's own trail system. Thus the S&RT would relate to Leadville in a manner similar to Buena Vista and Salida. It is recommended that Leadville participate fully in discussions related to the S&RT, if designated, including but not necessarily limited to serving on the Board of the Coordinating S&RT NGO.

Greater Arkansas River Nature Association

As explained previously, GARNA presents one option for extending its non-profit status to the proposed Coordinating S&RT NGO, provided that sustainable funding is secured. It is recommended that GARNA be given the first opportunity to consider this arrangement and if it is not accepted, other options would be considered.

State Land Board

It is not expected that the Colorado State Land Board would be an active manager of the one or two sections across which the S&RT is proposed, but it would be an important stakeholder especially during implementation when leases may need to be negotiated. In the future, the SLB would be a participant if any changes were to be proposed in sections under its jurisdiction or if any other leases might be proposed on those parcels.

Salida, Buena Vista and Leadville town officials have all encouraged connections to the S&RT as being a positive contribution to the growing popularity of their municipal trail systems and as additional ways of attracting attention to downtown businesses. For example, cyclists can easily divert a block or two from the preferred alignment of the S&RT through Buena Vista (below) to patronize recreational equipment stores and restaurants on East Main.

