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Chapter I: Introduction

Purpose
The purpose of this plan is to provide jurisdictional agencies with a comprehensive planning tool for the development of a trail system in Chaffee County, Colorado. This plan is meant to supplement the municipal Comprehensive Plans and assist agencies, groups and individuals with objectives and maps to guide future trail development in the county.

Scope of plan
This plan looks at existing trails and trail opportunities in Chaffee County. It incorporates existing and proposed trail plans from the three municipalities, Buena Vista, Salida and Poncha Springs. It also identifies trail opportunities within the county that will connect communities and provide public access to the trails on public lands.

Goals of Plan
• Create an interconnected trail system in Chaffee County
• Identify missing links and connections
• Identify opportunities for new trails
• Identify opportunities for heritage and scenic trails and interpretation
• Identify and protect important access routes
• Encourage coordination and cooperation between agencies and municipalities in trail planning and development
• Identify existing plans and incorporate them into this plan

Recommendations
• Preserve and improve trails in Chaffee County to provide opportunities for safe, convenient, scenic and enjoyable trail experiences for all user groups.
• Ensure appropriate public access to public lands.
• Encourage the improvement of highway shoulders to promote transportation safety throughout the County.
• To encourage and promote the development of trails along highways and county roads for non-motorized travel.
• Cooperate planning and resources with other agencies and interested parties.

Public Process
Many years of cooperation and coordination have gone into the development of the Chaffee County Trails Master Plan. Public meetings, trail planning and mapping, trail construction, land use legislation and land management plans have helped create the necessary framework within the municipalities and county to build this Chaffee County Trails Master Plan 2003. This Plan is sponsored by the towns of Buena Vista and Poncha Springs, the city of Salida and the Chaffee County Commissioners.
Chapter II: Chaffee County Overview

A. Chaffee County Information
Chaffee County is located in southwest Colorado along the eastern slope of the Continental Divide in a mountain valley with elevations that range from 7,000 feet to over 14,000 feet. Surrounded by high mountain peaks, this area is graced with alpine rivers and streams, expanses of ranch land and meadows, and landscapes that vary from rolling piñon and juniper forests to rugged wilderness. The Arkansas River runs through the County from north to south and is one of the defining features of the valley both physically and culturally.

Chaffee County is irregular in shape and is roughly forty-five by twenty-five miles in dimension. There are three municipalities in the County, the Town of Buena Vista, the City of Salida and the Town of Poncha Springs. Two major highways, U.S. Highways 50 and 285 serve the County and intersect at the Town of Poncha Springs. The U.S. Census Bureau reported 16,242 people living in Chaffee County in the year 2000.

Twenty percent of the 649,452 acres in Chaffee County is owned privately while 80% of the land is public. In general, the lands on the valley floors are private, grading to Bureau of Land Management properties on the lower hills with most of the higher elevation lands being part of the Pike/San Isabel National Forest.

Recreation is an important part of the community and the economy of the valley. Chaffee County residents and guests alike enjoy the myriad of winter and summer activities available in Chaffee County and the public trails are used all year round.

B. Trails in Chaffee County
Chaffee County offers a wide range of trail experiences and opportunities. The word “trails” in the context of this plan refers to the network of roads, streets, paths and routes which people use for transportation and recreation. In addition to the municipal systems, various public agencies and institutions manage the trails in Chaffee County.

United States Forest Service
The Forest Service (USFS) manages 70% of the 80% of public land in Chaffee County. The Forest Management Plan is the guiding planning document for the United States Forest Service. The plan provides management designations for the use of land within the Forests. The Forest Service is currently undertaking a travel demand management review process, which will analyze the demand for trails and establish uses for trails within the Forest. Recommendations within this plan, and other input on expanding or restricting trail uses on Forest Service lands will be considered within that framework.
The Forest Service has over 300 miles of trails within the Chaffee County Forests, which are called “system trails”. The Salida District of the Pike/San Isabel National Forest is in Salida while the Forest Service lands in the extreme northern portion of Chaffee County are part of the Leadville District. The Forest Service works with volunteers and local groups to maintain trails and construct new ones.

**Bureau of Land Management**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages 8% of public trails in Chaffee County. The Bureau of Land Management’s current planning document, called the Royal Gorge Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) was approved in early summer of 1996. The document provides the basic framework for management decisions on BLM lands for the next 15 to 20 years. The document does not preclude the BLM from developing new trails or dealing with issues on existing ones. The BLM works closely with citizens, user groups and the Front Range Resource Advisory Council in making land use decisions.

On most BLM lands in Chaffee County, trail users are limited to existing roads and trails. The BLM has recently completed its first travel-planning document in the Fourmile Area, east of Buena Vista. The BLM has offices in Canon City and at the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area office in Salida.

**Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area**

The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) is managed through a unique, cooperative partnership of Colorado State Parks, the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Division of Wildlife and the U.S. Forest Service. State Parks and BLM provide the primary management for the intensive recreation use as well as the area’s many resources. The partners have acquired important river access for the public and developed many facilities such as campgrounds, picnic areas, boat ramps, wildlife viewing areas and fishing trails. AHRA is formulating a master plan for future access trails along the Arkansas River.

**State of Colorado**

The State of Colorado owns over 20,000 acres in Chaffee County. This land is managed by various state agencies, including Colorado State Forest Service, State Land Board, Department of Corrections and the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Only a small portion of this land is available for use by the public, and is governed by the rules and regulations of the managing agency. The Colorado Division of Wildlife encourages recreational use of its owned and leased lands, referred to as “State Wildlife Areas” or “State Lease’s”, respectively. These properties include Clear Creek Reservoir; Love Meadow, Wrights Lake, Mount Ouray State Wildlife Area (SWA), Mount Shavano SWA, Franz Lake SWA, Sand Lake SWA, and approximately four miles of fishing leases along the Arkansas River. Several sections of the Salida Trail System have been constructed in the Franz, Sand, and Mount Shavano SWAs in collaboration with the Colorado Division of Wildlife.
C. Existing Regional Connections
Chaffee County is a meeting ground for several regional and long-distance trails.

**Colorado Trail**
The Colorado Trail runs North to South through the heart of Chaffee County along the west side of the valley across the flanks of the Collegiate Peaks. This popular trail runs 400 miles through Colorado.
Colorado Trail Foundation
548 Pine Song Trail
Golden CO 80401

**Continental Divide Trail**
The CDT has been given federal designation as a national scenic trail. The trail runs along the continental divide and western boundary of Chaffee County. The trail uses primarily existing trails and is mostly completed in Chaffee County.
Continental Divide Trail Alliance
PO Box 628
Pine CO 80470

**American Discovery Trail**
The ADT is a project to develop the nation’s first coast-to-coast trail. The 1995 National Trail Feasibility study shows this national scenic trail entering Chaffee County from the north on the Colorado Trail. It will run down to Buena Vista along Highway 24, up Cottonwood Pass Road to the Colorado Trail, then south to the Chalk Creek drainage where it exits the county over Tincup Pass.
American Hiking Society, the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service.

**Other Connections**
Several trail networks flow out of Chaffee County to connect with other areas. The trails in the Tincup/St Elmo area and the trails near Cottonwood Pass connect with trails in the Taylor Park area and points further west. The network of trails in the Marshall Pass, Monarch, and North Fork areas also continue west and south of Chaffee County.
Chapter III: Municipal Trail Systems

A. Buena Vista Trail System
See also map of Buena Vista: Chapter VI
Lead agency: Town of Buena Vista

The trail system within the town of Buena Vista consists of an asphalt bike/pedestrian lane running along Crossman Ave. from Highway 24 west to the city limits. Another asphalt trail runs along Railroad Street toward the High School on railroad right-of-way. This trail connects to a small section of asphalt trail through the Marquard Nature Area along Cottonwood Creek. These trails are the backbone of a proposed trail network extending from Town Lake to the Arkansas River along Cottonwood Creek.

The Barbara Whipple Trail is a non-motorized trail beginning at the Town River Park, crossing the Arkansas River and extending east to public lands. Developed and maintained by a citizens group with private and public funding in the mid 1980s, it is now cooperatively managed by the town and the BLM. The beginning of the town trail system has been developed within the Town River Park.

In 1996, Buena Vista leaders recognized the need for long-range planning and adopted a town Comprehensive Plan. The plan addresses growth issues and the public’s thoughts on open space and trails within town limits. The plan mentions trails at least 40 times and considers trails to be an integral part of both the transportation and recreation systems.

The Buena Vista Trail Development Committee was appointed in 1996 to draft a community trail master plan. The Committee has pledged to work cooperatively with Chaffee County and with trail user groups to improve the system.

The adopted Buena Vista Community Trails Plan calls for constructing a loop trail along Cottonwood Creek from the Town Lake to the Arkansas River. The trail then proceeds upstream along the river to the Town River Park and eventually back to the Town Lake. This loop trail provides a central system for several trails extending through town and out into the county:

- A bike/pedestrian lane west on Main Street (CR306)
- The Barbara Whipple Trail to the east
- The railroad corridor north and south
- Other trails as growth develops within and outside the city limits

The Buena Vista Community Trails Plan recommends the following to the Board of Trustees:

- That funding strategies be developed to implement the trail plan,
- That easements be acquired for trails,
- That the Trails Development Committee reviews subdivision or development proposals to the Buena Vista Planning & Zoning Commission that may impact the trails plan
- That the Trails Development Committee continue to oversee and provide assistance to the implementation of this trails plan.
B. Salida Trail System
See also Salida area map: Chapter VI
Lead agency: City of Salida

The City of Salida has an eight-mile trail system of paved and crushed gravel trails. The Salida Trail System is a combination of three trail sections that form a city network.

The Monarch Spur rail/trail runs along the abandoned D&RG Railroad right-of-way and forms the backbone of the system.

From this trail, access is available to the Cemetery Loop Trail, which extends out into the County and back and to the Arkansas River Trail, which follows the Arkansas River upstream and connects and encircles two lakes within the Division of Wildlife Recreation Area.

The Salida Planning and Zoning Commission voted in October of 1996 to recommend approval of the Salida Trail System. Since then, adoption of the Salida Comprehensive Plan 2000 has helped facilitate the trail planning process by identifying the need to “develop a system of interconnected parks, open spaces and trails that protects important natural resources and open spaces around Salida and serves the recreational needs of residents and visitors.” The Salida Trails System plan is now a more detailed version of the Salida Comprehensive Transportation Plan.

The Salida Comprehensive Plan also recommends establishing a capital improvements program to fund trail facilities and requires that new development and redevelopment provide trail corridors between activity centers and public lands. Additional ordinances within the City of Salida Land Use Code 2002 support trail development in the years to come.

Salida has been creating an in-town trail system since 1990. The Salida Trail System Committee, a member of (SPOT) Salida-area Parks, Open Space, and Trails a 501c3 non-profit corporation has spearheaded the planning, development and construction of the trails in the Salida area.

Connections to be made to the Salida Trail System are prioritized as follows

- Complete all in-town trail connections.
- Extend the abandoned Railroad Right of Way Trail to the west toward Poncha Springs, north to CR 120, and south to Highway 50.
- Create a Rail-with-Trail between the Tennessee Pass railroad corridor and the Arkansas River in the Salida area.
- Extend the Holman Trail to Centennial Park and Highway 50.
- Create “Designated Bike Routes” within the City of Salida.
- Sign and enhance the County Roads and trails south of Highway 50. (CR 111 to CR 107)
- Enhance trails extending outside of Salida.
C. Poncha Springs Trails
See also Poncha area map - Chapter VI
Lead agency: Town of Poncha Springs

The Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Poncha Springs was adopted in 1998 and mentions the wide array of trails on public lands in Chaffee County. Poncha Springs appointed an informal Trails Committee to plan out a trail network within Town to connect to existing and proposed Salida and Chaffee County trails. Along with the desire to connect to existing trails, the Committee focused on developing a trail network through Town that would succeed in connecting the four portions of Town that are separated by Highways 50 and 285. With the Committee’s recommendations, the Town adopted a Community Trail Plan on July 22, 2002 with the provision that the portions that cross major highways be omitted until there are mechanisms in place to slow or stop traffic. Four trail sections are identified in this plan.

The Poncha Loop is a circular trail through residential, park and industrial areas within the Town limits. The Poncha Loop will be the Town's main trail connecting the North/South and East/West portions of Town, which are separated by Highways 50 and 285. Primarily using existing town streets, this 2.9 mile trail will loop from Town Hall and Chipeta Park to the Poncha Springs Industrial Park, to the Visitors Center, to Hoover Park and back to Town Hall.

The Mailbox Trail (so named due to its resemblance to an open mailbox) utilizes the property abandoned by the railroad. This 2.7 mile riparian and industrial area trail, located on the north side of Town, will connect the east and west sides of Poncha Springs.

The River Trail, a one mile section along the South Arkansas River within the Town limits and the Power Line Trail, runs through the Town's Southeast corner are portions of long distance trails that pass through the Poncha Springs. These trails have the potential to continue to the east and to the west indefinitely.

The Town of Poncha Springs has ordinances in place that will provide sites, land or cash-in-lieu of land for mitigation of the impacts of new growth on parks, open space and trails.
Chapter IV: Chaffee County Trails

County roads link communities together and provide access to recreation areas. Outside the city limits of Buena Vista, Salida and Poncha Springs Trail Systems county trail connections are identified. The Chaffee County Trails Master Plan identifies these County trail connections as County Spine Trails, which include major roadways, waterways and rail corridors, and County Connections to Public Lands, which include county roads.

The 2000 Chaffee County Comprehensive Plan recommends that the Chaffee County Commissioners work closely with the three county municipalities and use zoning regulations, incentives and non-regulatory tools to accommodate planned trails. The plan also indicates that all development applications must be reviewed by the County to identify potential trail corridors and that a fund for the public purchase of trail easements could be created.

Chaffee County is additionally in the process of adopting a Land Use Code. Chapter 4 has been adopted, which contains trail requirements in three density levels, urban, sub-urban and semi-rural.

A. County Spine Trails

County Spine Trails are long distance trails that connect the entire county. Such trails would provide transportation links between Salida, Poncha Springs and Buena Vista, and allow access to a myriad of trails running from the valley floor to higher elevations. These County Spine Trails can be created by combining easement accesses along major roadways, waterways, railroad corridors and utility lines.

1. Roadways

The following are major arterial roadways within Chaffee County. They connect communities and they are major transportation routes in and out of the County. Efforts should be made to widen the shoulders or create separated trails along side these roadways.

**US Highway 50**
US Highway 50 runs east to west in southern Chaffee County. It enters Chaffee County along the Arkansas River east of Salida, connects to Poncha Springs to the west, and then goes up and over Monarch Pass. (Fremont County to Gunnison County)

**US Highway 285**
US Highway 285 enters Chaffee County from the south at Poncha Pass, runs north through Poncha Springs and up to Johnson Village, where it turns east to Trout Creek Pass. (Saguache County to Park County)

**US Highway 24**
US Highway 24 enters Chaffee County from the north at Granite and runs south through Buena Vista where it joins US Highway 285 turning east to Trout Creek Pass. (Lake County to Park County)
State Highway 291
State Highway 291 follows the Arkansas River connecting US Highway 50 south/east of Salida to US Highway 285 to the north.

County Road 306
CR 306 is a major east/west route from Buena Vista to Cottonwood Pass.

2. Waterways
The following are natural waterways that connect communities and provide open space opportunities. Efforts should be made to support the creation trails along these corridors.

Arkansas River
The Arkansas River is a major recreational area running north to south through the county.

South Arkansas River
The South Arkansas River parallels US Highway 50 running down from Monarch Pass to where it joins the Arkansas River east of Salida.

River Tributaries
Trails along other river tributaries may be considered.

3. Railways
The following are railroad (RR) corridors that provide possible trail routes.

Union Pacific Tennessee Pass Railroad
The Union Pacific Tennessee Pass Railroad Line parallels the Arkansas River. Extending north to south through Chaffee County, a trail could be created on or next to the railroad corridor.

D&RG Monarch Spur Abandoned Railroad
The D&RG Monarch Spur abandoned railroad corridor extends from Salida west to Monarch Pass paralleling US Highway 50 and the South Arkansas River. Within Salida, this rail corridor is part of the Salida Trail System. More trails could be built on other sections of the abandoned railroad right-of-way.

Other Railroads
Other railroad opportunities may be considered.
4. Utility Lines
The following are utility line easements that could provide possible trail routes.

**Power Line**
The power line, south of Salida, runs east to west across Chaffee County. The overhead towers could allow access for a ground trail.

**Fiber Optics Cable Line**
A fiber optic cable line is buried from Salida to Buena Vista along State Highway 291 and US Highway 285.

B. County Connections
County connections to public lands are county roads to remain open for public access to public lands. These connections may also be considered for future trail enhancements. The County Connections are divided into four geographic areas. After each county road (CR) number is a reference/access point location name.

See also maps of Chaffee County - Chapter VI
Lead agency: Chaffee County

**North/West County Connections (NW)** Connections between Buena Vista and mountains to the west
- CR 390 (Colorado Trail/Continental Divide Trail)
- CR 388 (Pine Creek Trailhead)
- CR 368, 368A, 368B (Harvard Lakes Trailhead)
- CR 365 (North Cottonwood & Silver Creek Trailheads)
- CR 361 (to CR 365 & 368A & B)
- CR 344 (Cottonwood Lake)
- CR 321 to 322 (Mt. Princeton Trailhead)
- CR 162 (St. Elmo)
- CR 350 (Crossman Ave)

**North/East County Connections (NE)** Connections between Buena Vista to the east
- CR 371 (BLM/Fourmile)
- CR 375 (Fourmile Trailhead)
- CR 301 (Fisherman’s Bridge)
- CR 304 (Midland Trail)
- CR 305 (Midland/Lenhardy Cut Off)
- CR 187 (Aspen Ridge)
- CR 307 to 308 (USFS/Fourmile)
- CR 311 (USFS/Fourmile)
- CR 300 (Ruby Mt.)
- CR 309 (USFS/Fourmile)
- CR 185 north (Aspen Ridge)
South/East County Connection (SE) Salida Area
   CR 194 (Hecla Junction)
   CR 175 to 185 south (Ute Trail)
   CR 184 (Turret)
   CR 173 (S Mountain)
   CR 177 (Salida east-RR route)
   CR 103 (Salida East)
   CR 101 (Bear Creek)
   CR 105 (Castle Gardens)
   CR 107 to 108 (Methodist Mountain)
   CR 110 (Methodist Mountain)
   CR 111 (Methodist Mountain)
   CR 160 to 163 to 165 (Big bend)
   CR 120 (Salida - Poncha)

South/West Connections (SW) Poncha Springs Area
   CR 270 to 272 to 273 (Mt. Antero Trail/Browns Creek)
   CR 250 (Blanks Cabin/Colorado Trail)
   CR251-1 (Colorado Trail)
   CR 240 (North Fork)
   CR 224 (Colorado Trail)
   CR 220 to 221 (Green Creek)
   CR 237 (Old Monarch Pass)
   CR 210 (Little Cochetopa Creek)
   CR 210 to 212 (Pass Creek Trail)
   CR 210 to 214 (USFS access)
   CR 206 (Poncha Cemetery)
   CR 200 (Marshall Pass)
   CR 140 (CR250 to Blanks Cabin)
   CR 231 (Monarch Park)
   CR 115 (Hot Springs Road)
Chapter V: Building a Trail System

A. Planning
The first step in building a trail system is to assess the topography and physical features of possible trail corridors and identifying them on a map.

A comprehensive trail plan, reflecting the principles of continuity, potential use, destinations, and safety, should then be produced and integrated into policy and planning documents.

B. Partnerships
Public input is important to identify community needs concerning recreation, transportation, open space, natural & historic preservation and neighborhood development.

Partnerships between political jurisdictions, local, state, federal and utility agencies, landowners and tenants and community organizations will build alliances for a successful trail system.

C. Acquisition
Acquiring land to build a trail can range from a purchase of land to the granting of an easement for trail construction. The acquisition of land can be a continuing process and trails are often built in segments, as rights-of-way become available.

D. Funding Sources

Federal Funding Sources
- Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) (Colorado Department of Transportation)
- National Recreational Trails Trust Fund (US Department of Transportation)
- US Forest Service- Challenge-Cost Share Program.
- Bureau of Land Management Challenge-Cost Share Program
- National Park Service: Rivers and Trails Conservation Program
- Land and Water Conservation Fund
- Soil Conservation Service: Resource Conservation and Development Program

State funding sources
- Great Outdoors Colorado
- Colorado Division of Wildlife
- Department of Local Affairs: Energy Impact Assistance Program
- State Historical Society
- State University System programs
- Colorado State University Extension Program
Local Funding Sources:
- Private sector contributions
- Local taxes
- Impact Mitigation Funds
- Growth-Impact Ordinances
- Bonds
- Dedicated Sales Tax

Other funding sources
- Open Space Special Benefit Assessments
- Fiber Optics/Other Utilities
- Foundation Funding
- Railroad Franchise Agreements
- User Fees

E. Building
A variety of local, state and federal statutes and standards often apply to trail development. Some are listed below:

- The American with Disabilities Act of 1991 (ADA)
- The National Environmental Protection Act of 1969 (NEPA)
- Colorado Department of transportation Standard for Road and Bridge Construction
- Trail Construction Guidelines - CO Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation
- Design Guide for Accessible Outdoor Recreation-USDA Forest Service and USDI National Park Service
- Other regulatory and legal considerations in trail development include trail use designations, local land use codes and private property rights.

F. Support

User Education
Trail signage, trail maps, and the promotion of trail etiquette in the community will encourage respect for the trails.

Enforcement
Law enforcement agencies should be involved in the planning, building and the everyday use of community trails. Regulation enforcement reduces user conflict and increases user safety.
Maintenance
The agency responsible for maintenance should be determined prior to construction of a new trail. Funding for maintenance should be included as a multi-year item in the sponsoring agencies budget whenever possible.

Community Involvement & Volunteers
Once a trail is open, the community gains a sense of “ownership” toward the trail. Individuals develop strong personal attachments, creating tremendous citizen support for trail maintenance and development.

Chapter VI: Maps

A. Buena Vista
B. Salida
C. Poncha Springs
D. Chaffee County

This document prepared by:
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SPOT aims to promote the creation, preservation, improvement and appreciation of parks, open space and trails in the greater Salida area.