



Communication Plan: Forest Plan Direction for the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail

September 28, 2016

SUMMARY & BACKGROUND

The 3,100-mile Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (hereafter referred to as the “CDT” or “trail”) is a congressionally designated trail that spans five states—Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 established the CDT, which amended the National Trails System Act of 1968. The trail spans across private, state and federal lands. The majority of the trail is administered by the Forest Service (20 forests in Region's 1-4), Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service. The Regional Forester of the Rocky Mountain Region is the lead official for coordinating matters concerning the study, planning, and operation of the trail.

The authority for broad-based policy and direction for the development and management of the trail is found in the [2009 Comprehensive Plan](#). Individual forest plan direction for the trail varies greatly across Forests and is non-existent for some. The Federal Interagency Leadership Council, which provides consistent leadership and coordinated management of the trail’s program activities, recognized the need to provide consistent management direction for the trail. With 15 of the 20 trail forests revising their forest plans over the next several years, it was determined that consistency could best be achieved by developing recommended forest plan direction for the trail.

The Trail Administrator worked extensively with Region’s 1-4 District, Forest and Regional Office staff to develop forest plan direction in the form of a template to assist trail forests with revising their forest plans. The purpose of the template is to provide a consistent framework for managing the long-distance, multi-jurisdictional, congressionally-designated trail. The template is a working tool that allows for flexibility to address local needs and conditions. There is flexibility built in for adjustments based on public engagement processes of each Forest. The Trail Administrator will work closely with the trail Forests and Regional Planners in the coming years to revise the template based on public input and lessons learned from implementation of the resulting direction.

GOAL

Inform internal and external audiences about the template and maintain message consistency through the use of the enclosed communication tools—key messages, frequently asked questions and fact sheet.

AUDIENCES

- Line officers
- Recreation and Trails staff
- Planning staff
- Public, Legislative & Media Affairs staff
- Partners
- Media
- Elected officials
- Forest users

TACTICS

- Utilize various communication methods/mediums to deliver our messages/share information.
- Implement the action plan below.





KEY MESSAGES

The Forest Service and partners are working to fulfill the intent of Congress in establishing the CDT as a National Scenic Trail by providing consistent management direction. National Scenic Trails provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and the conservation of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural and cultural qualities along the trail corridor.

- The template provides consistent management direction for the long-distance, multi-jurisdictional, congressionally-designated trail while allowing flexibility for Forests to make adjustments based on their unique needs, conditions, and public input.
- The template was developed cooperatively by District, Forest and Regional Office staffs from Regions 1-4, with feedback from several partners.
- The template is a baseline, working document that will be refined over time based on public input and lessons learned from implementation of the direction.

The template solidifies a common vision for addressing management activities along and within the trail corridor amongst various agency staff and partners, which will result in greater trail and trail corridor protection and enhanced recreational benefits.

- Management consistency will ensure that the trail and trail corridor are maintained to National Scenic Trail standards. We are charged with managing the corridors associated with National Scenic Trails, not just the trail.
- Most management activities can continue along the trail corridor as long as they are implemented in a way that is sensitive to the purposes for which the trail was established.
- The template does not address changes to traditional uses such as hiking, camping, and hunting.

Congressionally-designated areas and trails require that we work closely with our partners and users to manage these special places with an extra level of care.

- The Forest Service is required to develop a land and resource management plan that is designed to integrate all resource management activities, such as the development and management of the trail and trail corridor.
- As each trail forest revises its forest plan, the public will have an opportunity to engage in an inclusive, efficient, collaborative and science-based planning process.
- The template is in line with the objectives of the 2012 Planning Rule, which are to:
 - Sustain multiple uses of National Forest System land's renewable resources in perpetuity while maintaining the long-term health and productivity of the land and contribute to the social, cultural, and economic vitality of affected communities for current and future generations.
 - Promote the ecological integrity of National Forests and Grasslands through the collaborative, science-informed development, revision, or amendment of land management plans.
 - Broaden and deepen the engagement of the American people in National Forest and Grasslands planning.
 - Improve the resilience of National Forests and Grasslands to climate change and other stressors.
 - Improve the efficiency, relevance, and effectiveness of land management planning.





ACTION PLAN & TIMELINE

Date	Activity	Purpose/Audience	Responsible Party	Completed
Jan. 2015	Federal Interagency Leadership Council recommends requests consistent management direction.	Create a structure to provide consistent management direction.	Brenda Yankoviak	✓
Jan. 2015 – Aug. 2016	Planning discussions and document creation and review.	Coordinate and create document.	Brenda Yankoviak, program managers on all 20 trail forests, R1-4 Regional Planners, Forest Planners, partners, Forest Service National Scenic & Historic Trail Administrator’s group, and Core Team.	✓
Sept. 8, 2016	Rocky Mountain Acting Regional Forester signs letter regarding the development of the template.	Notify trail forests about the new direction/template.	Jacqueline A. Buchanan, Leanne M. Marten, Nora B. Rasure, and Calvin, N. Joyner.	✓
Sept. 9, 2016	Share signed letter and template via Mercury with trail forests in Regions 1-4.	Share the new direction/template with Line Officers, Recreation and Trail staff, and Planning Staff.	Susana Echevarria Brenda Yankoviak	✓
Sept. 28, 2016	Post communication plan and fact sheet on SharePoint.	Share information with internal stakeholders.	Brenda Yankoviak	✓
Sept. 28, 2016	Send letter via email to Forest and District Recreation Program Managers, RO and WO Recreation Directors.	Follow-up communication/notification.	Brenda Yankoviak	
Sept. 28, 2016	Send letter via email to partners.	Share the new letter/template with partners: Continental Divide Trail Coalition, Colorado Trail Foundation, Back Country Horsemen of America, International Mountain Bike Association, Montana Wilderness Association, Quiet Use Coalition, Greg Warren, Continental Divide Trail Society, and Partnership for the National Trails System.	Brenda Yankoviak	✓
Sept. 28, 2016	Send email with communication plan, letter and template to applicable national and regional Public Affairs staff.	Share information with public affairs community.	Lawrence M. Lujan	✓





FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What and where is the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail?

THE SHORT ANSWER: The 3,100-mile trail is a congressionally designated trail that spans five states—Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico- roughly following the Continental Divide.

The majority of the trail (70%) is managed by the Forest Service (20 forests in Region's 1-4), 12% by the Bureau of Land Management, and 10% by the National Park Service. The remaining 8% is located on State or private land. The Regional Forester of the Rocky Mountain Region is the lead official for coordinating matters concerning the study, planning, and operation of the trail.

What is a forest plan?

THE SHORT ANSWER: A Forest Plan is an important document that governs forest and grassland management actions.

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 requires every national forest or grassland managed by the Forest Service to develop and maintain an effective Land Management Plan (also known as a *Forest Plan*). The process for the development and revision of plans, along with the required content of plans, is outlined in planning regulations, often referred to as the planning rule. The [2012 Planning Rule](#) is the current rule.

Why are we doing this now, since the legislation was passed decades ago?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Since the majority of the trail forests are revising their forest plans in the near future we have an opportunity to provide consistent direction.

Many of the existing Land Management Plans were completed in the mid 1980's when the trail was still in its infancy. Consequently, many of these plans contain little to no management direction for the trail. Fifteen of the 20 national forests along the trail are revising their forest plans within the next 5 or so years, so we have an unprecedented opportunity to provide consistent direction that will ensure coordinated management and necessary protection of this iconic resource now and into the future.

Who is leading the charge to make this happen?

THE SHORT ANSWER: The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail Federal Interagency Leadership Council.

The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail Federal Interagency Leadership Council, reinstated in 2015 to provide consistent leadership and coordinated management of CDT program activities, recognized the need to provide for consistent management direction for the trail. The Trail Administrator, at the request of the Council, has been leading the charge to make this happen. The Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Regional Forester is the lead official for coordinating matters concerning the study, planning and operation of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. Day-to-day responsibilities for trail activities across all jurisdictions are carried out by the Trail Administrator, who is based out of the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region.

Has something like this been done in other areas of the U.S.?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Yes. Consistent plan direction is a common goal for all long-distance trails.

Forests located along the Appalachian Trail have long had consistent forest plan direction for the trail within a Management Area designation. All other Forest Service Trail Administrators are working to promote and establish consistent plan direction across their respective long-distance trails.





What were the implementation results in the areas where this has happened?

THE SHORT ANSWER: The benefits of consistent management include greater trail and trail corridor protection and enhanced recreational benefits.

The consistent plan direction helped to solidify a common vision for the trail amongst the various agency staff and partners, which has resulted in protection of the trail corridor to ensure the Appalachian Trail provides recreational access and an improved recreational experience and associated benefits to the public in perpetuity. The Appalachian Trail is one of the best known, well-used, and cohesively managed National Scenic Trails in the country.

This seems like a land grab to a degree, and I question the motives of the Federal Government?

THE SHORT ANSWER: The direction in the form of a template is an environmental control aimed to provide management consistency. Management consistency will ensure the trail is managed and maintained to National Scenic Trail standards. Most management activities can continue along the trail corridor but must be implemented in a way that is sensitive to the purposes for which the trail was established.

The agency is working to fulfill the intent of Congress in establishing the Continental Divide Trail as a National Scenic Trail. National Scenic Trails provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and the conservation of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural and cultural qualities along the trail corridor. We are charged with managing the corridors associated with National Scenic Trails, not just the trail tread. One of the primary purposes for establishing the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail was to provide public access to lands where the environment remains relatively unaltered. The 1976 Continental Divide National Scenic Trail Study Report, which recommended the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail for designation, says protection of the land resource must be paramount.

When will the direction be implemented?

THE SHORT ANSWER: As trail forests revise their forest plans.

This direction was issued on September 8, 2016. The direction will be implemented as trail forests revise their forest plans.

What changes will trail users see immediately?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Nothing at this point.

This guidance will not result in any changes until forests publish their final revised plans. Most changes will then probably occur gradually and only where there is a need for change. Some changes will be imperceptible to the public because they will involve changes to the design and implementation of projects but will not prevent most projects from moving forward.

What will recreationists see in the future (ultimately)?

THE SHORT ANSWER: A consistently managed, well-marked sustainable trail.

Over time, recreationists will notice the trail corridor is managed consistently across boundaries—better signage, better access, well-maintained trailheads, and routed to provide a highly scenic, naturally-appearing and predominantly non-motorized setting that provides for high quality hiking and horseback riding opportunities.





What prompted the direction?

THE SHORT ANSWER: A recognized need from Federal Interagency Leadership Council, Partnership for the National Trails System and the Trail Administrator.

The Federal Interagency Leadership Council, which provides consistent leadership and coordinated management of the trail's program activities, recognized the need for providing consistent management direction for the trail. The Partnership for the National Trails System is a coalition of major partners associated with most of the 11 National Scenic Trails and 19 National Historic Trails.

The Partnership has been advocating for greater recognition and protection of the National Scenic & Historic Trails for years, and was instrumental in helping to get stronger language for the National Scenic & Historic Trails in the Forest Service planning directives. They are very supportive of this coordinated approach.

What are the costs associated with implementation?

THE SHORT ANSWER: There are no direct costs associated with implementation of the recommended direction.

As with other resource areas that have specific forest plan direction, the forests would have to design projects to be consistent with that direction and avoid or minimize impacts to the trail. There may be a slight increase in project costs to mitigate impacts to trail users or to the scenic integrity of the trail corridor, depending on the project activity. For example, with timber harvest activities, there may be a need to low-cut stumps and scatter debris to minimize visual intrusions that would not be necessary outside the immediate viewshed of the trail.

What is the goal of these changes?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Trail management consistency.

To manage the trail as a single entity across jurisdictions to maximize its intended recreation opportunities and ensure the conservation of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural and cultural resources associated with the trail.

Was scoping/public comment period done to ensure the public was engaged in the management of these public lands?

THE SHORT ANSWER: No, there was no scoping or public comment period because we didn't conduct an environmental analysis or prepare National Environmental Policy Act document.

The direction is to be used by forests as a basis for discussions with the public when developing their forest plans. The direction does not replace or circumvent the public involvement process. The guidance provides a common starting point for the plan revision process based on law and policy. The direction allows for local flexibility. Forests can make adjustments based on local needs, conditions and public input.

Was NEPA done?

THE SHORT ANSWER: No, the direction is not a decision.

No, the direction is not a decision. The direction is intended to be a basis for discussions with the public when forests develop their forest plans in accordance with the 2012 Planning Rule and the National Environmental Policy Act.





Are there other land management agencies involved in this, and if so what has their role been in working through the implementation?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Yes, the Forest Service, National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management. The direction only applies to the Forest Service at this point. Eventually the Trail Administrator will develop consistent trail direction with the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service.

Forest Service, National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management leadership along the trail all recognized the need to develop consistent direction. The direction only applies to the Forest Service. Eventually the Trail Administrator will develop consistent trail direction with the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service.

Trail Stats: 70% Forest Service (2,150 mi), 12% Bureau of Land Management (380 mi), 10% National Park Service (280 mi).

Can you tell me about the original legislation that brought about this land management effort?

THE SHORT ANSWER: The National Trails System was created by the National Trails System Act of 1968.

Congress passed the National Trails System Act of 1968, as amended, to insure that long-distance, high-quality trails with substantial recreation and scenic potential and historical significance were afforded Federal recognition and protection in order to meet the growing needs of an expanding population.

National Scenic Trails are to be located so as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and the conservation and enjoyment of the significant scenic, historic, natural and cultural resources of the areas through which the trails pass.

Do you anticipate litigation? If so, why? What would be the reasons for litigation?

THE SHORT ANSWER: No.

No, the direction was developed to implement existing law and policy and is within the scope of the agency's authority.

Will the public be charged for use? Are they currently charged for use?

THE SHORT ANSWER: No.

No, the direction provides sideboards and the framework for managing activities along the trail corridor and does not address fees. Charging the public for use is outside of the scope of this direction.

How many visitors are on the Continental Divide Trail per year?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Approximately 300 people attempted a through-hike of the trail in 2016.

Based on observation, most of the use is day use. Use levels vary greatly across the 3,100-mile trail based on ease of access, nearby population centers, trail conditions and the type of terrain. Approximately 300 people attempted a through-hike of the trail in 2016. This number has been increasing for the past several years.

Why is this a priority project when you have so many other areas with much heavier use?

THE SHORT ANSWER: The direction was not developed to address use levels.

The intent of the direction is to provide a framework for addressing management activities along and within the trail corridor. A forest may choose to establish carrying capacity as part of the forest plan revision process.





United States Department of Agriculture

Will people still be able to camp?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Yes, the recommended direction does not directly address camping activities.

Will the direction impact hunting?

THE SHORT ANSWER: No, it would not impact current hunting activities.

It would have no impact on current hunting activities. Because the direction would limit road building within the trail corridor, that may hinder the development of additional routes that could be used for hunter access.



Forest Service
Rocky Mountain Region

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FACT SHEET

PDF version available on SharePoint.

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

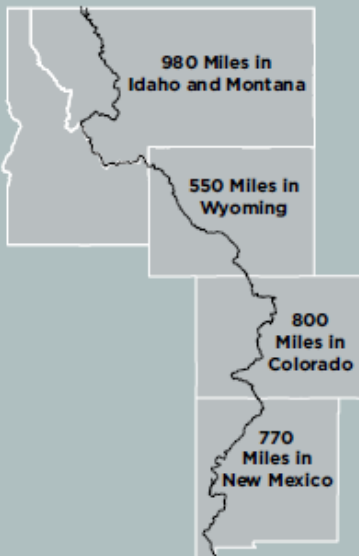
THE HARDEST. THE HIGHEST. THE CDT.



The Continental Divide Trail climbs and descends along the Rocky Mountains from Canada to Mexico, traversing 3,100 miles of America's most dramatic and wild backcountry across the Continental Divide, the backbone of America.

For more information visit www.continentaldividetrail.org

THE FACTS:



The Continental Divide Trail is Proposed to Congress.



Designated as a National Scenic Trail by the National Parks and Recreation Act, which amended National Trails System Act.



Continental Divide Trail Comprehensive Management Plan is amended.

3100 Miles in total

2150 Miles across 20 National Forests



381 Miles across 13 BLM Field Offices



279 Miles across 4 National Park Service Units



275 Miles across State and Private Land

Highest Point: 14,270' at Grays Peak in Colorado

Lowest Point: 4,200' along Waterton Lake in Glacier National Park, Montana



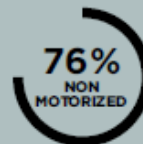
COMPLETING THE TRAIL

1978

2016



Approximately 95% of the trail is located within public ownership. Land acquisitions or easements are needed to protect the remaining 5% (172 miles) of the trail corridor.

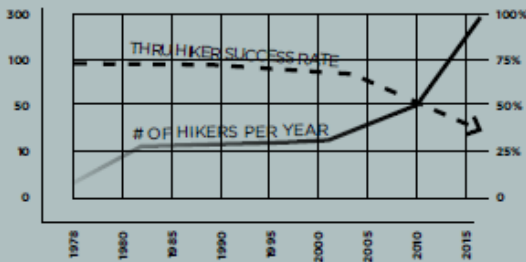


The trail is to be managed as non-motorized. Approximately 24% of the trail exists on routes open to motor vehicle use, and should be relocated in the coming years.
 730 MILES on MOTORIZED Routes
 2350 MILES on NON-MOTORIZED Trail

Once the trail is "complete", the work is never done. Agency staff, partners and volunteers will continue to work tirelessly to ensure the trail is well-maintained, passable, and re-aligned as necessary in the years to come.

HIKING THE CDT

Since 1978, there have been 10-25 attempted thru hikes every year. In 2011, approximately 50 people attempted thru hikes. The number has steadily increased to this year's documented 220 thru hikers. Success rates have been around 75% in the past. Current success rates are about 35-40%.



6 MONTHS THE AVERAGE TIME IT TAKES TO COMPLETE A CDT THRU-HIKE.

17 MILES AVERAGE PACE/DAY TO FINISH IN 6 MONTHS.

APRIL WHEN MOST NORTH BOUND HIKERS START FROM THE MEXICO BORDER.

JUNE WHEN MOST SOUTHBOUND HIKERS START FROM GLACIER NATIONAL PARK.

VOLUNTEERS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Volunteers, youth crews and other partners have been instrumental in helping to build and maintain the trail:

547,639 Volunteer Hours Donated Since 1995

\$8.6M Value of Donated Labor



July 2016