MEMORANDUM

TO: Gunnison Sage Grouse Strategic Committee
FROM: Steve Westbay
DATE: February 19, 2014
RE: City Trails Grant Application to Great Outdoors Colorado

The City of Gunnison's **Creeks to Peaks** trail project proposes to develop trails connecting residential neighborhoods, public schools and Western State Colorado University (WSCU) to open spaces and environmental education opportunities. The City of Gunnison is one of 12 jurisdictions that have been invited by the GOCO board to submit an application for this $9.1 million trail grant cycle. The initial project cost for the Creeks to Peaks grant is about $750,000. Three trail segments referred to respectively as the **Gunnison River Access Trail**, the **Signal Peak/Tenderfoot Mountain Trail** and the **Gunnison-Tomichi Ditch Trail**, are proposed for development (see attached maps).

Signal Peak/Tenderfoot Mountain Trail is adjacent to the WSCU campus and crosses property owned by the WSCU Foundation. It will incorporate improvements of an existing box culvert (7'x7') under U.S. Highway 50 in order to provide safe pedestrian access from the urban core and university campus to public lands located on each side of the highway. This trail segment is part of the Outer Loop trail system and will link the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Signal Peak Recreation Area—on the northeast flank of the city, to the Tomichi Creek Wildlife Area to the south, which is owned and managed by the CPW. The trail will also require fencing due to adjacent cattle grazing operations. The total length of this trail segment is approximately 3,600 feet.

Gunnison-Tomichi Ditch Trail segment will follow an irrigation ditch from the eastern edge of the university campus to the Gunnison Cemetery and then link to the existing Contour Trail, which was acquired by the City in 2010. This trail will create a loop system on the eastern edge of the city. The trail will be a 12 foot-wide gravel surface. Portions of the trail segment will follow existing agriculture access roads while other portions of the alignment will be completely developed. Fence construction to control cattle grazing access will be necessary. This 1.6 mile trail segment is a critical component of the BLM's *Signal Peak Recreation Area Plan*.

Gunnison River Access Trail will be located on the 382-acre VanTuyl Ranch, which is owned by the City of Gunnison, and is adjacent to the Gunnison River on the northwest edge of the city limits. A developed trail system on the VanTuyl Ranch, funded in part by GOCO, connects residential neighborhoods, Char-Mar Park, and the Gunnison Community School to the VanTuyl Ranch. The *VanTuyl Ranch Management Plan*, also funded by GOCO, proposes that a trail segment be extended from the VanTuyl Ranch trail system to a 1.5 mile reach of the Gunnison River corridor, owned by the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW).

Habitat Value. The proposed trial segments on the east part of the city contain a variety of Gunnison Sage-grouse (GUSG) habitats with varying qualities. The *Gunnison Sage-grouse Habitat Assessment for Gunnison Rising North* (2007), which was completed as part of an annexation review, provides a detailed assessment of the site's habitat status. According to this assessment, potential breeding habitat on the property consists of approximately 219 acres of big sagebrush, sagebrush-bitterbrush, drainages, riparian, and irrigated hayfields. Potential summer-fall habitat consists of approximately 651 acres of black sagebrush, big sagebrush, sagebrush-bitterbrush, drainages, riparian, and irrigated hayfields. Potential winter habitat consists of approximately 104 acres of big sagebrush, sagebrush bitterbrush, and drainages. Overall, the quality of breeding habitat is moderate, while the quality of summer-fall habitat and winter habitat is low with respect to minimum structural habitat guidelines.

The river access trail on the VanTuyl Ranch is location in the northwest quadrant of the city. This trail will complete the connection from CharMar Park to the river. The majority of the trail will be a boardwalk design and is approximately 1,100 feet in length.

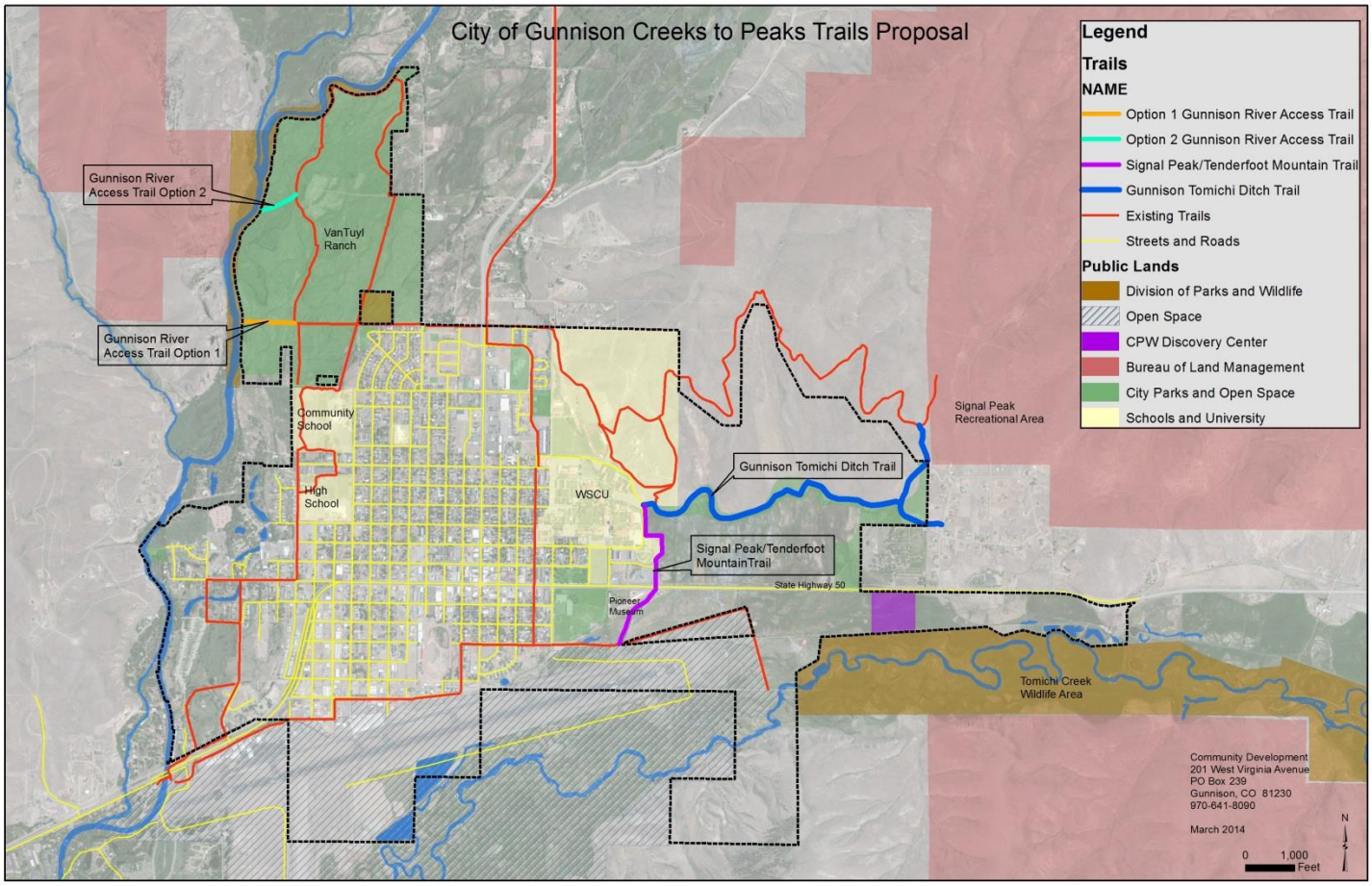
Potential Impacts. Gunnison Rising, located on the eastern fringe of the community was annexed in order to accommodate additional urban development and this future development is within occupied GUSG habitat., The Signal Peak-Tenderfoot trail is located in hay meadows and the northern segment follows Escalante Drive, which is the circulator road of the University Campus. The Gunnison Tomichi Valley Ditch trail follows an existing agriculture road. Development of these trail segments will create disturbance by recreational users and may result in some minor habitat loss. Development of these trails segments will not significantly fragment GUSG habitat since it follows a two-track dirt road used historically used for agriculture operations.

Development of the VanTuyl Ranch trail segment will create disturbance in jurisdictional wetlands.

Mitigation. As part of the *Gunnison Rising Annexation Agreement*, the property owner was required to provide mitigation of GUSG habitat loss. Based on a recommendation of the Gunnison Basin Sage Grouse Strategic Committee, mitigation included the dedication of a 160-acre conservation easement on the northern fringe of the property, and the property owner also relinquished two livestock grazing permits held on BLM and National Forest lands within the basin.

During the past two years federal land management agencies (BLM, USFS, NRCS, NPS), the Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and Gunnison County worked with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to develop the *Candidate Conservation Agreement For the Gunnison sage-grouse, Centrocercus minimus Gunnison Basin Population* (CCA). This comprehensive resource management document identified specific recreation areas within the basin; the premise of this action was to concentrate recreation around the fringes of the Gunnison city limits. In essence, development of these proposed trail segments provides mitigation by concentrating recreation facilities in the pre-defined geographic areas adjacent to the existing urban core.

Benefit. The habitat/species benefits derived by the project are discussed in the mitigation section above. Allowing the local federal land management staff members and the community to be directly involved in resource management decisions is the most important derived benefit. Local education and participation in species protection has been a mainstay of the community and has enhanced community values related species and habitat protection.


City of Gunnison Creeks to Peaks Trails Proposal
Legend
Trails
NAME
Option 1 Gunnison River Access Trail
Option 2 Gunnison River Access Trail
Signal Peak/Tenderfoot Mountain Trail
Gunnison Tomichi Ditch Trail
Existing Trails
Streets and Roads
Public Lands
Division of Parks and Wildlife
Open Space
CPW Discovery Center
Bureau of Land Management
City Parks and Open Space
Schools and University
Gunnison River Access Trail Option 2
Gunnison River Access Trail Option 1
VanTuyl Ranch
Community School
High School
WSCU
Gunnison Tomichi Ditch Trail
Signal Peak Recreational Area
Signal Peak/Tenderfoot MountainTrail
State Highway 50
Pioneer Museum
Tomichi Creek Wildlife Area
Community Development
201 West Virginia Avenue
PO Box 239
Gunnison, CO 81230
970-641-8090
March 2014
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