

Introduction



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A Spectacular Resource

Few places epitomize Colorado's diverse landscapes as well as the Colorado River Valley as it winds through Garfield County. The river is lifeblood to verdant cottonwood-willow forests and wetlands that support an array of waterfowl and wildlife and a heritage of ranching and farming. There are opportunities for hiking, bicycling, fishing, paddling, and finding solace. The vistas are long and majestic with snow-capped peaks, canyons and badlands. Much of the viewscape remains pristine, largely uncluttered and unscarred.



There are still many places, especially along the river away from the highway where one can find tranquility in the sounds of the river and songbirds. In the face of growing development in the valley, the people of Garfield County stand at a point of decision. This plan suggests a direction for the future character of this corridor.

Background & Purpose of This Plan

Over the past two decades The Lower Colorado River Valley in Garfield County has been undergoing a significant transformation. Driven by energy-related economic growth and other factors, the valley is seeing significant population growth.

In an effort to promote a better quality of life for its residents and to accommodate both economic growth and the continuation of the Valley's agricultural and ranching heritage, a group of citizens, public agency representatives and business people formed the LOVA (Lower Valley) Trails Group. The mission of LOVA is to create a trail system along the Colorado River corridor from Glenwood Springs to western county line near DeBeque eventually connecting with the trail system in Mesa County.

LOVA is working to incorporate existing uses and blend the many interests:



KEY POINTS

Exceptional and diverse landscape along the Colorado

Opportunities for recreation, conservation and solace

Maintaining character of the valley as development grows

Planning a better future for the valley

LOVA is a citizen based non-profit working with the community and public agencies

LOVA is striving to create a trail system and promote continuation of the valley's rural heritage

LOVA respects private property rights

- Protecting riparian areas, hunting, vistas, and boating;
- Protecting and improving water quality and fishing;
- Protecting and improving wildlife habitat;
- Protecting and improving all the other constructive qualities and interests that the river and its boundaries provide or support.

This corridor should also provide a new transportation network for bicycle and pedestrian commuting and new educational opportunities concerning the river, wildlife, ranching, and existing industrial operations.

In pursuit of this vision, the LOVA Trails Group applied for and received a planning grant from Great Outdoors Colorado with the help of a number of individuals and agencies who stepped forward with matching funds and volunteered services. This plan is the result of that grant and marks a first major step in the realization of the trail system.



The purpose of this plan is to provide a vision and an action plan for achieving a continuous multiple-benefit river corridor trail amenity along the Colorado River through Garfield County. In addition to defining the range of improvements, this plan provides specific design standards and guidelines and an administrative “roadmap” for raising funds, implementing the plan and managing the trail and related amenities for generations to come. It is intended to be comprehensive and long-range, helping to guide development.

The Planning Process

This effort has been approached with an outlook to:

- **Honor** and incorporate existing uses and rights of landowners,
- **Minimize** wildlife, riparian, and native plant community impacts,
- **Support** existing recreational uses of the river corridor resources such as hunting, hiking, fishing, boating, contemplation, and wildlife viewing.

The planning process was inclusive, participatory and comprehensive. Indeed, anyone with an interest or stake in this trail and river corridor was, and continues to be, invited to become part of the process to create and refine this master plan.

The effort was lead by the LOVA Trails Group—an organization that includes citizen advocates, representatives of Garfield County, cities and towns and trail users. Public agencies participated as well as area residents, landowners, businesspeople, farmers, ranchers, miners, hunters, school officials, and the energy industry. The process included five open planning workshops (with landowners and citizens), consultations with numerous interested individuals and groups, and participatory review of all draft materials. A strong emphasis was placed on making this plan a representative document that embraced and responded to the aspirations, goals and concerns of all parties with a stake in, or potentially affected by the project.

LOVA Trails does not support condemnation of land to create this trail and stewardship corridor, nor does it have the authority to take such action. LOVA and its partners expect to create the trail system and conserve areas along the river corridor that private landowners wish to set aside or sell.

Definitions

Types of Trail and Recreational Users

An overarching goal of the plan is to accommodate a broad range of uses by a full range of visitors with all levels of capability. The planning process also addresses long and short distance uses from a brief 20-minute workout to a multi-day cross-country tour. For purposes of this plan, a number of types of trail uses were defined. These include:

- **Walking, Jogging and Hiking**—can be accommodated by either paved or stable crushed rock or earth pathways of varying width. Ideally, separating or dispersing uses can avoid conflicts with bicycles and equestrians.



- **Multi-Use Trail Bicycling**—this includes slower moving recreational bicyclists including families, novice cyclists, children, elderly and others who prefer a bicycling experience away from automobile traffic in a scenic corridor. Generally, a paved (minimum 10'-wide) or crushed stone surface is preferred.

- **Equestrian**—users prefer a soft but stable natural surface. Equestrian rides may be an hour or two or an overnight long distance ride. Access points that can facilitate horse trailer parking and unloading and rest/camping areas with hitching racks and drinking water sources for horses better serve

equestrians. Planning should avoid conflict between horses and other trail uses.

- **All-Terrain (Mountain) Bicycling**—includes cross-track and all-terrain bikes. The range of uses includes riding on multi-use trails, riding on crushed stone or unpaved trails, and “challenge” riding that includes rough terrain, grades and obstacles.
- **On-Road Bicycling**—includes higher speed bicyclists skilled in riding with automobile traffic. This use suggests adequate lane width, paved shoulders, or marked bike lanes.



- **Training and Fitness**—includes people training for competition or personal fitness. These users prefer higher speed (that may not be appropriate on a multi-use trail) and the ability to maintain their pace without stops or disruptions. Distance and grade markers may be helpful.
- **Commuting**—includes use of the trail system for non-motorized transportation including travel to and from work, schools, between neighborhoods and other destinations. Commuting

usually calls for a paved multi-use trail or road system with adequate width and low traffic volumes to accommodate bicycles.

- **Bicycle Touring**—includes long distance rides of a half-day or more. Preferred facilities include a continuous, scenic, paved multi-use trail or roadways suitable for bicycling.
- **In-Line Skating**—requires a paved multi-use trail surface of adequate width (min. 10’-wide) to accommodate skating.
- **Non-Motorized Boating (Kayaking, Canoeing, Rafting)**—requires adequate flows in river to float boats, access points to park and unload boats, landings and rest spots along the river, portages around rapids, passageways through dams, marking of hazards and degree of difficulty rating information. Boating uses also include whitewater paddling and slalom competition.
- **Angling**—requires water quality, fish stocking, access points, angler trails along river bank where appropriate, access for people with disabilities, access to launch boats for float fishing.
- **Wildlife Viewing, Outdoor Education and Interpretation**—improvements include viewing blinds, interpretive trails, wayside exhibits and sites for stewardship projects and monitoring.

Resource Stewardship Components

- **Conserve**—To maintain the resource values of land, water, and recreational amenities.
- **Developed/Improved Land**—Land that has had some type of deliberate human change from its natural state, for instance pastureland, housing development, extensive grading, etc.

- **Floodplain**—The channel and the relatively flat area adjoining the channel of a natural stream or river that has been or may be covered by floodwater.
- **Open Space**—Any parcel or area of land or water essentially unimproved and set aside, dedicated, or otherwise reserved for public or private use.
- **Preserve**—To protect, rehabilitate, and/or restore areas, sites, structures and artifacts.
- **Riparian**—Land that is traversed or bounded by a natural watercourse to which it is ecologically linked.
- **Stewardship**—Active care for and management of resources with the goal of maintaining and improving its health.
- **Undisturbed Land**—Land that is basically in the same natural condition as it would have been before agriculture and industry began to impact the valley. This could be disturbed land that has been restored to natural condition. This land may have existing pathways, access roads, ditches, etc. that do not deter or limit the movement of wildlife.

Guiding Principles

The following principles set the framework for the planning, development and long-term stewardship of the Lower Colorado River Valley Trail and River Corridor. These principles should be adhered to in planning and development of the trail and river corridor.

Trails and Recreational Facilities

1. There should be a continuous non-motorized multi-use trail (accommodating, where feasible, equestrians, wheeled uses, and pedestrians) along the length of the Colorado River Valley from Glenwood Springs to the Garfield County line west of Parachute. This would connect to the trails heading east and south out of Glenwood Springs and eventually connect to the trails work ongoing in Mesa County.
2. The trail system should serve as a main spine trail along the length of the river valley. This spine trail should connect local trail loops, tributary trails and safe on-street routes that lead to communities and other destinations along the length of the valley.
3. Trails and trail facilities should be designed to minimize adverse impacts on homes, places of business, agriculture/ranching, mineral extraction and the natural environment.
4. All trail and trail improvements shall balance reasonable financial constraints with design excellence. Trails should be safe and affordable to build and maintain.
5. All trail improvements should be designed for minimal visual intrusion and impact on the surrounding environment.
6. The trail system should be properly designed and adequate to avoid/minimize user conflict and overcrowding.
7. There should be a variety of trail outing lengths that provide a range of opportunities, from a 20-minute workout to a daily commuter route, to a multi-day journey.
8. Where feasible, trails should run through pleasant and serene settings, offering a variety of experiences and connecting to places of interest.
9. In developed areas, trails should exploit educational opportunities, i.e., interpretive signage concerning gravel pit mining, natural gas extraction, landfills, wastewater treatment plants, etc.
10. Wherever feasible, the trail alignment should provide connections to “way-stations” (places to stop to buy food and water or spend the night) with drinking water, toilets and shelter from weather.
11. There should be an integrated and adequate information system including safety and degree of difficulty/accessibility signage, user way-finding, directional and milepost signage and educational/interpretive systems.
12. The trail system would incorporate river access at numerous points along the river for use by anglers and paddle craft (canoes, rafts and dories).
13. Where feasible, at-grade road crossings shall be avoided. Grade-separated crossings such as underpasses and overpasses shall be considered.
14. Where feasible, trails should serve multiple objectives such as recreation, transportation, drainageway maintenance, emergency access, etc.
15. Youth volunteers and local communities should be involved in the management and maintenance activities (where feasible) of

the trail and river corridor, to foster their stewardship of the trail and the invaluable river corridor.

Interface with Developed/Improved Lands Adjacent to the Trail Corridor

1. Promote the conservation of sustainable agricultural and ranching activities along the river valley.
2. Integrate current and future industrial needs of our valley that are to be located within the river corridor, including mineral extraction and utility corridors.
3. Capitalize on opportunities to educate about the resources, needs and realities of existing uses within the river corridor. For instance, a trail has been created within one of the landfills in Mesa County for educational and awareness purposes. They have over 30,000 visitors each year.
4. Buffer adjacent developed lands from resource conservation lands, and scenic areas from adjacent developed lands in order to minimize or mitigate potential adverse impacts. Open space should not create nuisances or adversely impact adjacent land uses (subdivisions, agriculture, mineral extraction, utility corridors, critical wildlife habitat and recreational activities).

Resource Stewardship of Undisturbed Land

1. Conserve the scenic, ecological, paleontological, and cultural integrity of the Colorado River Valley. Resource conservation lands should be naturalistic, undeveloped and managed for optimal wildlife and scenic values. Open space could be privately or publicly owned.
2. Adequately buffer resource conservation lands and scenic areas from potential adverse impacts by adjacent land uses including

development, agriculture, mineral extraction, utility corridors and recreational activities.

5. Wherever possible, limit disturbance of the natural drainage of the Colorado River and its tributaries and minimize impact on the river's natural floodplains.
6. Wherever possible, establish and preserve continuous, interconnected open space corridors along the river of adequate width to accommodate natural plant communities, movement of wildlife, water quality, and scenic qualities.
7. Wherever possible, preserve mountain, mesa, and rangeland vistas when viewed from the river valley, adjacent roadways (including I-70) and other important prospect points.
8. Wherever practical and appropriate, facilitate public access to resource conservation lands.
9. Promote interpretive and educational opportunities and the involvement of youth and volunteers in stewardship activities.
10. Conservation lands should be safe and affordable to set aside and maintain.

Part of a Potential Trans-Colorado Trail

Ultimately, The LOVA Trail may form a key link in a potential Trans-Colorado Trail—a 400-mile scenic bicycle and pedestrian corridor extending from the Utah border to the Kansas border. Already, significant segments of this trail system are in place including: the Glenwood Canyon Trail (Glenwood Springs to Dotsero), the Eagle County Core Trail (Avon to Vail), The Vail Pass Trail (Vail to Silverthorne), as well as segments along Clear Creek between Silver Plume and Idaho Springs and in Mesa County

between Fruita and Grand Junction. The *Trans-Colorado Trail* could become an outstanding local recreational resource and international tourist attraction displaying the full range of Colorado's diverse landscapes and communities.

