



Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan Public Input Synthesis

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Prepared by: Southwest Decision Resources

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Section 1. Background

The City of Flagstaff Parks and Recreation, Open Space, and Events (PROSE) Division contracted with [Southwest Decision Resources](#) to help with the facilitation of public engagement for the [Greater Observatory Mesa Trail planning](#) efforts.

Public engagement to date has occurred primarily in two phases which are detailed below:

Phase 1: June - July 2022

Public meeting

PROSE hosted a public meeting on Wednesday, June 29th, from 5:00 to 7:00 PM virtually (via Microsoft Teams) and in-person on the second-floor staff room of Flagstaff City Hall (211 W. Aspen Ave) to receive public input regarding the first draft of the Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan.

Following a presentation by Robert Wallace (City of Flagstaff Open Space Specialist), the public was asked to participate in an interactive activity. For the activity, participants were asked to place numbered sticky dots on three maps:

1. Station 1: Naturalization and restoration proposal
2. Station 2: Access points/parking and signage/education zones
3. Station 3: Alignments, roads, and trails

The participants had a choice of red, green, or yellow sticky dots which signified “I have a concern about this”, “I love this”, and “I have a new idea” respectively. Upon placing the sticky dot, participants could use a datasheet to write their comments to go with the sticky dot they had placed on the maps. To see all comments and associated dots, please see this [comment datasheet](#) and these [map photos](#).

For a list of the evening’s participants, see this [participant attendance sheet](#).

The results of this public meeting were synthesized. You can [review the results here](#).

Phase 2: May - July 2023

Phase two outreach to stakeholders and public engagement resulted in 2,913 individual topical comments considered. Each comment was grouped into common themes for consideration. Themes were compiled and reviewed to understand public sentiment regarding general impressions, place-based recommendations, and responses to specific questions asked.

You can review all comments received from the [phase two comment period here](#).

Stakeholder meetings

Prior to the 40-day public comment period (May 2023), outreach to 35 identified stakeholder groups was performed to discuss updates to the draft trail plan.

Stakeholder groups included:

- City of Flagstaff commissions
- Homeowners Associations adjacent to Observatory Mesa Natural Area properties
- Local environmental organizations
- Local outdoor recreation organizations
- Federal, state, and local land management agencies

Sixteen meetings were held with stakeholder groups to discuss recommendations for the draft plan and four formal comment letters were received resulting in 42 individual comments.

Public meeting

The second public meeting was held on June 14th, 2023 from 5:00-7:00 pm at the Flagstaff Aquaplex (1702 N Fourth St, Flagstaff, AZ 86004) to receive public input regarding the second draft of the plan. There were 35 participants (not including City Staff or volunteers), and a total of 104 comments were received from this event.

Following a presentation ([recording here](#)) by Robert Wallace (City of Flagstaff Open Space Specialist) and Mark Loseth (Southwest Decision Resources), the public was asked to participate in interactive activities developed from phase one comments and questions and intended to provide additional direction for trail planners.

Participants were asked to place dots on three maps to provide comments for:

1. Naturalization and restoration proposal
2. Proposed trail alignments: reduced and proposed
3. Road and trail restoration proposal

The participants had a choice of red, green, or yellow sticky dots which signified “I have a concern about this”, “I love this”, and “I have a new idea” respectively. Upon placing the sticky dot, participants could use a datasheet to write their comments to go with the sticky dot they had placed on the maps.

Three additional interactive stations asked for general impressions on sticky notes for specific topics, including:

1. Adaptive Bikes: trail alignments proposed to be constructed at 36 inch width
2. Single-use vs. multiple use station: the appropriateness of designating trail directionality and/or single uses on proposed trails
3. E-bike station: The appropriateness of allowing e-bikes within the planning area.

You can review the [station posters and activity directions here](#).

See the [public meeting participant list here](#).

Community forum

The online Community Forum comment period was held for 40 days between June 6th and July 16th, 2023. 183 survey questionnaires were received during this period (see [community forum report here](#)). Additionally, 52 comments were received via email during this comment period.

Overall, 74% of Community Forum respondents felt that the second plan draft was an improvement over current conditions on the Greater Observatory Mesa area (Figure 1).

Would the proposed formal trail system for the greater Observatory Mesa area be an improvement of the current conditions? (see maps, above and review the draft plan linked in the survey introduction)



Figure 1. Community Forum respondents’ (n=179) perceptions of how the second draft plan would improve or not improve current conditions.

Additional comments and input on the Trail Plan received during phase two of community outreach are synthesized by theme below (themes 1-7). Key recommendations based on this input are detailed in the final section of this report.

Theme 1: Preferences for Allowed Trail Uses

Single-use trails vs. multi-use trails

Positive feedback for single-use trails

- Single-use trails can
 - Improve the experience for all allowed trail users
 - Reduce conflict by separating users seeking different experiences and reducing volume on individual trails
 - Allow mountain bikers opportunities without potential conflict with other users
 - Provide additional trail features and challenges not currently available if designated for bikers only
 - Reduce conflict and provide intentional experiences for hikers if designated for hikers only

Positive feedback for multi-use trails

- Trails constructed for intentional biking experiences can be shared by all with appropriate signage and messaging
- Multi-use trails potential location: Section 6. Utilize natural terrain to create an interesting trail

Concerns for single-use trails

- Single use trails...
 - May lead to increased conflict or increased accidents
 - Are potentially not practical or enforceable
 - Would require lots of signage
 - Are not necessary as current conflict is not substantial
 - Could lead to need for more trails
 - Are perceived as exclusive
 - Single use trails set a precedent for high speeds and negatively impact user interactions
 - Single use trails for biking is not inclusive of all allowed uses
 - Does not respect the idea of "community" use

Directional and specific user-designed trails

Support for directional trails and specific user-designed trails

- 71% of Community Forum respondents supported trails designed for specific user types but open to all users (e.g., directional trails, biking trails) (Figure 2)
- Directional trails can:
 - Reduce conflict between trail users
 - Reduce congestion
 - Increase safety
 - Provide short loop opportunities close to neighborhoods and places of business
 - Improve user experience
- Some desire directional trails open to regular and e-bikes

Do you support the inclusion of the following trail design types in the Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan? (1 = No, 2 = neutral, 3 = Yes)

Trails intended for specific uses (ex. directional trails, mountain biking, hiking) but open to all users



Figure 2. Community Forum respondents' (n=181) level of support for trails intended for specific uses but open to all users.

Concern for directional trails

- Lack of support due to proximity of the Mesa to city parks and neighborhoods (multi-use trails preferred in these areas)

Location-specific recommendations for directional trails

- Directional mountain biking trails potential locations:
 - Section 8- north of 3.10: the south facing slope
 - Section 13
 - Section 18: south slopes
 - Section 18: west of FUTS Tunnel Springs
 - Section 18: 3.36 (Hot Pockets)
 - East side of the mesa: area on the north side of the drainage of 3.10
 - Outside of Section 17 on the other side of the current FUTS Trail
 - Near Thorpe Park

Adaptive mountain biking

Positive feedback about adaptive mountain biking trails

- 71% of community forum responses supported the inclusion of adaptive biking trails on Observatory Mesa (Figure 3)
- Favorable views of accommodating adaptive biking
 - “That the Plan has consideration of adaptive use trails is admirable”
 - “It's a wonderful, far sighted idea. Love it”
 - “Yes! Make the outdoors an inclusive experience!”

Do you support the inclusion of the following trail design types in the Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan?
(1 = No, 2 = neutral, 3 = Yes)

Adaptive Biking Trails (trails with 36-inch width)



Figure 3. Community Forum respondents (n=181) level of support for adaptive bike trail designs in the trail plan.

Concerns for adaptive mountain biking trails

- Safety: EMS ability to reach the riders, especially on the mesa
- Trail width: “is 36 inches really wide enough?”
- Lack of wheelchair access ability

Recommended changes for adaptive mountain biking trails

- Include a diversity of difficulty levels for adaptive mountain biking trails
- Include more trails for adaptive biking
- Include trails for other accessible uses (e.g., wheelchair)

E-bikes

Positive feedback for E-bikes

- 36% of Community Forum respondents supported allowing Class 1 E-bikes on the trail system, with an additional 43% of respondents supporting their use on certain trails on the Mesa (Figure 4)
- 43% of Community Forum respondents supported the inclusion of trails open to Class 1 E-bikes on the Mesa (Figure 5)
- Observatory Mesa’s proximity to residential areas makes it an ideal venue for Class 1 E-bikes
- E-bikes can improve accessibility for those who would not otherwise have the opportunity
- E-bikes are perceived by some to not have any greater impact than other forms of recreation
- E-bikes are increasing in popularity and are “the future” to some, therefore they should be considered
- Creating a legal space for use of E-bikes can reduce conflict and enforcement challenges
- E-bikes can help reduce vehicle usage to access trails

Should Class 1 E-bikes be allowed on the proposed trail system for the greater Observatory Mesa area? There may be an opportunity to allow E-bike use within the planning area. Class 1 E-bikes are pedal-assist bikes that can travel at speeds up to 20 miles an hour.



Figure 4. Level of support from community survey respondents (n=182) for Class 1 E-bikes as an allowed use on Observatory Mesa.

Do you support the inclusion of the following trail design types in the Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan? (1 = No, 2 = neutral, 3 = Yes)

Trails open to Class 1 E-bikes (i.e., pedal-assist bikes limited to 20 miles per hour)



Figure 5. Level of support for the inclusion of trails open to Class 1 E-bikes on Observatory Mesa from Community Forum respondents (n=181).

Concerns for E-bikes

- E-bikes can conflict with other users and may pose a danger due to their speed and weight
- E-bikes are perceived to conflict with passive recreation experiences due to their speed and motor
- E-bikes on single-track trails present a larger safety risk due to narrow trails and high speeds of E-bikes
- E-bikes have the ability to travel further, potentially exacerbating their impacts
- Allowing E-bikes on Forest Services lands on Observatory Mesa could lead to changed precedent for the US Forest Service which currently prohibits E-bike use on non-motorized trails
- Inexperienced E-bike users lead to exacerbated impacts and dangerous conditions
- There are enforcement challenges associated with E-bikes
 - Challenge enforcing the use of only Class 1 E-bikes (instead of Class 2 and 3)
 - Difficulty ensuring that E-bikes stay only on trails that they are allowed to be on
- E-bikes may pose an increased fire risk due to their battery
- E-bikes may have an increased impact on trails and wildlife due to their speed, weight, and ability to travel far distances

Recommended changes for E-bikes

- Consider permitted E-bike use for disabled and elderly (as Park City, Utah has)
- Include Class 2 E-Bikes as they are also limited to 20 mph
- Consider bike speed limits to reduce potential danger and trail impact
- Limit use on only certain trails and roads (e.g., wide paths, good lines of sights, on directional trails only, on single-use paths only)

Theme 2: Balancing Recreation and Preservation

Maintaining natural character and scenic value

Positive feedback for natural character and scenic value

- 69% of community forum respondents felt that the current trail plan well addressed maintaining sensitivity to natural and cultural resources (Figure 6)

How well do you think the plan addresses the following priorities? (1 = poorly addressed, 2 = neutral, 3 = well addressed) (review the draft plan linked in the survey introduction)

Maintains sensitivity to natural and cultural resources (i.e., sufficient buffer around wildlife habitat, sensitive watersheds and springs, cultural resources)



Figure 6. Community Forum respondents' (n=172) perceptions of how well the trail plan maintained sensitivity to natural and cultural resources.

Concerns regarding maintaining scenic and natural character

- Concern about prioritizing recreation over natural character and scenic value
 - “Many of my neighbors as well as myself spoke to the importance of wildlife, ecosystems, and the beauty of this area. I speak with present users daily about their love of this area and desire to maintain it as is for the sake of the mesa, not the increased spider-web of trails that is being proposed to provide bikers in particular recreational opportunities.”
 - “I’m concerned that the fundamental character of the mesa and user experience will be dramatically changed by developing and promoting Observatory Mesa as a recreation area, rather than a natural area. The mesa is one of the few places close to town that provides a peaceful, quiet area to connect with nature. The trails on the mesa should be designed to provide for a true connection with nature, rather than thrill seeking challenges, which I fear could lead to overuse that would significantly impact the wildlife, solitude, and quiet currently found on the mesa.”
- Trail density reduces natural character
- Some trail design for advanced technical skills or high-speed riding are potentially in conflict with maintaining a natural area and experience
 - “In the spirit of providing a connection with nature and respite from the pressures of today’s fast paced life, all of the trails should be designed for all users. Technical trails and high speed bicycle travel is available in the Dry Lake Hills/Mount Elden area. Observatory Mesa should provide an alternative for those seeking a quiet experience. Designing a trail for high speed use and posting a sign that warns users that they should “STAY ALERT! High Speed Traffic Ahead” (page 20), are contrary to the idea of a natural area. Please remember that this is not a designated recreation area.”
 - “Recreation should not be elevated to such an important part of the mesa's use. A natural area should be just that - natural. The proposed large system of trails with signs, potential directional

trails, and "advanced skills trails," etc. will fundamentally and, in my opinion, detrimentally affect the character of the mesa."

Recommended changes to maintain scenic and natural character

- Utilize existing roadbeds to reduce impact
- Create quiet areas in the open space where trail density is low

Protecting wildlife values

Concerns about protecting wildlife values

- Observatory Mesa is becoming increasingly important for wildlife (e.g., birds, deer, pronghorn, elk) as development elsewhere in Flagstaff increases
- Current proposed trail density is perceived as too high, potentially leading to more wildlife impacts
- Trail construction can lead to impacts for wildlife
- Some permitted recreational uses are perceived by some as in conflict with a natural area/protecting wildlife (e.g., high speed bikes, e-bikes)
- Increased visitation of the Observatory Mesa could have negative impacts on wildlife including:
 - Increased noise (talking, music, etc.) from visitors
 - Increased conflict with dogs and wildlife
- Concern about the prioritization of recreation experience over wildlife
 - "Observatory Mesa, especially the western portions of it, should be managed for wildlife first and recreation second."

Recommended changes to address wildlife impacts

- Where feasible, avoid wildlife waters/tanks/springs by .25 miles
- Close roads for motorized use and reduce illegal motorized use
- Reduce density of trails
 - Reduce redundant trails
 - Utilize old road beds to minimize impact
- Restrict some recreational use (i.e., E-bikes)
- Create large untrailed portions of the Mesa preserved for wildlife

Specific areas of concern for wildlife

- Section 6:
 - Goshawk nesting area: "Goshawks are noise sensitive and the buffer may not be sufficient to protect nesting areas from noise. Current trail density in this section is too high"
 - 5.12: "switchbacks across a tiny chokepoint of forest service land wedged between private land (Hidden Hollow and Fort Valley). This is the only area where migrating wildlife do not have to cross private land, which may have fences or other infrastructure that could impede wildlife movement"
 - 5.11: "This is a logical connection. If the wildlife concern is Goshawk perhaps consider a temporary closure during breeding season?"

- Section 8:
 - The western part of 5.1 : “the proposed trail cuts through elk calving area and pronghorn feeding area”
 - 5.1 and 4.34: “I do not support having both these trails. Wildlife cross this area consistently and two trails close to each other create another barrier for them.”
- Section 12:
 - “Section 12 has “the highest wildlife conservation potential” according to Arizona Game and Fish. However, the draft plan has a trailhead (which will eventually get heavy use), a proposed trail (5.10), a commuter trail, an adopted road, and portions of four trails in the southern part of the section”
 - 5.10: redundant, near the wildlife corridor
 - Commuter trail: near wildlife corridor
- Section 18:
 - Section 18 5.5: “Attach it to existing north-south road...elk move through this area, rest here”
 - Section 18 5.6: Elk movement and calving area
 - Section 18: “Two drainages that are proximal to Tunnel Spring plus the spring itself form a sensitive and important habitat complex for wildlife.... Adopting the social trails in this area compromises wildlife values and reduces habitat effectiveness. The trail that parallels the steeper of the two drainages should not be adopted because it is located in the drainage proper”

Theme 3: Parking and Access

Parking

Positive feedback about parking

- 49% of Community Forum respondents felt that the plan addressed sufficient parking (Figure 7)

How well do you think the plan addresses the following priorities? (1 = poorly addressed, 2 = neutral, 3 = well addressed)

Provides sufficient parking



Figure 7. Community Forum respondents’ (n=176) perception of how well the trail plan addresses sufficient parking.

Concerns for parking

- Too much emphasis on parking in the plan
- Parking is needed at all access points
- Lack of ADA/accessible parking to access the Mesa
- Emissions generated by potentially encouraging driving with parking at trailheads

Recommendations for changes for parking

- Include bathrooms at key access points
- Include dedicated accessible parking
- Include lighting at trailhead parking

Access

Positive feedback about access

- 64% of Community Forum respondents felt that the Trail Plan provides appropriate access points (Figure 8)

How well do you think the plan addresses the following priorities? (1 = poorly addressed, 2 = neutral, 3 = well addressed)

Provides appropriate access points



Figure 8. Community Forum respondents input (n=177) regarding their thought on how well-addressed the priority of providing appropriate access.

Recommendations for changes for access

- Increase access for pedestrians only
- Specific location recommendations for increased access
 - More direct connection from Woody Mountain and Route 66 to the Mesa
 - More direct connections to Cheshire and northern Coconino Estates to avoid the steep loop trail single track becoming crowded
 - A legal access point from further west in Cheshire
 - Direct access under the railroad tracks rather than Railroad Springs
 - Access at FR515 on West Ridge, including road maintenance and a parking lot

Theme 4: Trail Development

Providing sufficient number of trails for use

Positive feedback about trail development

- Almost 72% of Community Forum respondents felt that the current trail plan conceptual trail alignments were sufficient for formal trail expansion (Figure 9)
- Favorable views of creating trails:
 - “I support a stacked loop trail system and increased trails and access. By officially recognizing trails it will decrease social trail building and keep recreation away from wildlife habitat.”
 - “I like the idea of more loops creating opportunities for longer rides and connecting to the other trail systems”

How well do you think the plan addresses the following priorities? (1 = poorly addressed, 2 = neutral, 3 = well addressed)

Maintains or creates a sufficient number of trails for use



Figure 9. Community Forum respondents’ (n=174) perceptions of how well the trail plan maintained or created sufficient trails for use.

Concerns regarding new trail development

- Some proposed trail are too near private property
- Some proposed trails are redundant with nearby trails or roads
- The density of trails proposed is too high

Balancing road adoption and new trail development

QUESTION 7

Several dirt roads in the focus area will be retained for administrative uses. Should these roads be used as trail connectors to reduce overall impact, or would you prefer a new trail be developed adjacent to some of these existing roads to provide additional user experience? (see maps, above)





Figure 10. Community Forum respondents' (n= 180) preferences for utilizing road beds or new trails.

Positive feedback for utilizing existing road beds for recreation

- 27% of Community Forum respondents indicated a desire to use road beds instead of new trails (Figure 10)
- “The 2 track roads are nice to walk on with a friend. I do not want more trails up there, the current system is fine.”
- “I am quite happy walking on the existing roads and would prefer to use them rather than see new trails being built. Walking on an old road does not impact my ability to connect with nature.”
- “Existing roads are pleasant enough, you still feel like you're in the forest. I'd prefer for funds to be saved for other projects.”
- “506 and 515 are decent roads, especially for running. The surfaces are great for the novice and older trail runner.”
- “As a mountain biker, these roads are nice to climb on and help get to other areas of trail. Climbing on the roads are fine, and it provides better room to pass hikers and dogs.”
- “Preservation of the forest will be prioritized by utilizing existing roads as trail connections.”

Positive feedback for balancing road and trail experiences

- 37% of Community Forum respondents indicated a preference for a balance of road connectors and new adjacent trail experiences (Figure 10)
- “There is a need for both roads and trails. Some people enjoy recreating on roads, too.”
- “Depends on which direction(s) users are expected to use the route. An up route for bikes is fine on a road. Wide roads are nice to walk dogs especially if there is a group of people. If the route is steeper, trails are preferred.”
- “I'm always going to side with new trails but if the existing roads can be adopted into good trail than that makes sense to me.”
- “Single-track trails provide a great user experience over an existing road but I see the value in both.”
- “I prefer riding singletrack trails when possible, but am not opposed to the trail system incorporating unimproved roads where convenient.”
- “It's a tough balance. I FAR prefer trails over roads, but impact is a serious issue. So, balance.”
- “I certainly prefer running the trails vs. the roads as they exist now. To minimize impact, I would support using the roads in a limited capacity as connectors.”
- “I believe a mix of roads and trails will better accommodate a mix of riders at all skill levels who want to use the trails. It will also leave more space between trail users to pass and maneuver around each other

including bikes, dog walkers, hikers etc. This area will most likely be a through way for many gravel bike riders coming back to town from the A-1 and Wing mountain areas and a good selection of roads will benefit them.”

- “I think that the outcome is most important. If using an existent road is best, environmentally, then I think that's a great choice. However, I don't think connectors and new trails shouldn't be used when needed.”

Positive feedback for developing new trails

- 31% of Community Forum respondents indicated a preference for new trails instead of roadbeds for recreation (Figure 10)
- “Trails have a more nature-tuned relaxed vibe without a specific destination. Well constructed mountain bike trails are also runner friendly.”
- “Where possible I prefer a trail, but impact should be priority.”
- “I prefer singletrack trails with character. Using roads as trails is lacking from a user experience perspective.”
- “A more wild, less urban/developed experience. More engaging walking/biking surface/design than a roadbed.”
- “Existing roads do not make interesting trails that use the terrain and features to appreciate the area.”
- “When possible new single-track is always preferable to roadbeds.”
- “I feel more with nature on a trail than a road.”
- “Trails create a better user experience and allow people to feel more connected to the outdoors, which many people are using this space to do. It is also safer as there is less people and vehicle interaction.”

Providing educational zones

Positive feedback about educational zones

- Approximately 47% of Community Forum respondents indicated that educational zones were well-addressed in the plan (Figure 11)

How well do you think the plan addresses the following priorities? (1 = poorly addressed, 2 = neutral, 3 = well addressed)

Provides educational zones



Figure 11. How well-addressed educational zones are in the plan according to Community Forum respondents (n=176).

Location specific recommendations for education

- “The section corner of 7,8,17,18 [can] be a handy location to observe 3 different forest management strategies. Perhaps extend the Education Zone to include that location.”
- “For the educational part- plant native plants/flowers and label them. Perhaps have a sign with a picture of invasive species to help people recognize them.”

Providing adequate signage

Positive feedback about signage

- Almost 63% of Community Forum respondents felt signage recommendations were appropriate (Figure 12)

How well do you think the plan addresses the following priorities? (1 = poorly addressed, 2 = neutral, 3 = well addressed)

Addresses appropriate signage



Figure 12. How well the trail plan addresses appropriate signage according to Community Forum respondents (n=173).

Concerns related to signage

- Current conditions do not provide enough directional signage
 - “I rarely hike observatory mesa now because I find it confusing and fear I am using not authorized trails.”
- Proposed signage content may be confusing or in conflict with one another
 - “I think signage that a trail is intended to be uphill only but yet all directions allowed, so if you're going the "non-intended way" could be confusing, but I hope you pull it off.”
 - “According to the draft plan, one of the potential messages to be put on kiosks includes “Do not startle wildlife.” Another proposed sign says that users should be careful because of “High Speed Traffic Ahead.” I believe these two messages are incompatible and that facilitating high speed traffic should not be a consideration when designing trails.”
 - “As a minor issue, the proposed signage (“High Speed Traffic Ahead”) is a bit vague and does not serve to inform users or deconflict trail use.”

- Signage frequency may impact scenic value
 - “Signs are one of the banes of modern day life and urbanization and they should be kept to a minimum on the mesa trails. Seeing trail signs at every junction would significantly alter the user experience. Signs with maps and interpretation at the entry points to the mesa should provide sufficient guidance and help mitigate the need for signs at the trail junctions.”

Recommendations related to signage

- Include language for preferred direction if appropriate for multi-use, bi-directional trails
- Include messaging about amplified music and the dangers of headphones
- Improve messaging and the need to balance desired uses with wildlife considerations
- Better-communicate regulations of dogs on leash
- Install signage at authorized trails to identify appropriate trail uses
- “Rather than reinvent the wheel the city should copy the proven signage that the Coconino [National Forest] utilizes for certain trails in the Sedona area (Highline, Pigtail, etc.). The signs on these trails a) create specific expectations for trail users and b) modify the traditional trail-yielding priorities on these trails to enhance user safety.”

Providing appropriate mountain bike alignments

Positive feedback about mountain bike alignments

- 56% of Community Forum respondents believe that conceptual trail alignments provide beneficial mountain bike alignments (Figure 13)
- Location specific opportunities
 - “I would like to see additional mountain bike specific trails added to the south side of Observatory Mesa in the Railroad springs area. There is significant demand for challenging purpose built trails in this area. I think an additional directional mountain bike preferred trail on the South side of the Mesa would help alleviate downhill traffic on other trails on the Mesa. Thus reducing user congestion and potential conflicts.”
 - “A cool MTB descent between 5.1 and 3.3 would be a good zone for a cool trail with some more vert in it, again optimally directional, but ok for multi-use if needed.”

How well do you think the plan addresses the following priorities? (1 = poorly addressed, 2 = neutral, 3 = well addressed)

Provides appropriate mountain biking alignments



Figure 13. Community Forum respondents' (n=174) indication of how well the Trail Plan addressed appropriate mountain biking alignments.

Concerns for mountain bike trail alignments

- Plan is too mountain bike focused
 - "The interests and desires of the pedestrian based user groups need to be solicited and incorporated into the proposal."
 - "Will all of Flagstaff's USFS and open space areas become mountain biking destinations with fast and technical riding? Everyone should feel safe and respected on all of the trails."

Recommendations for changing mountain bike alignments

- Construct more trails of easy and moderate difficulty in the Flagstaff area, with the terrain of Observatory Mesa ideal to provide these experiences
 - "We need more "green" trails in flag with some "blue" - so hopefully it won't all be blue and black technically."
 - "The Mars Hill and Tunnel Springs FUTS trails are notoriously steep. Providing longer switchback trails up to the top of the mesa from both south and east sides of the GOMA would go a long way toward making the system more inclusive to users of mixed physical ability."
 - "Various difficulties of trails help keep the fun level high and works well for providing a positive outcome for all the members of my family."
- Retain challenge on existing single-track trails and provide additional challenging trail experiences
 - "Any improvement would be great really and thank you. However some technical and flow style trails would be awesome."
 - These trails should afford a range of opportunities for different skill levels and incorporate jumps, berms and constructed features
- Include more mountain biking options than currently proposed
 - Additional trail connection between 5.1 and 3.10 near the existing Flagstaff Loop trail
 - Two or more downhill trails off of the side of the mesa near the Tunnel Springs and Old Town Spring area
 - More trail opportunities along the rim of the mesa
- Improve the Loop Trail
 - "The loop trail is sorely in need of tread repair and narrowing. There are multiple braids and the two locations in need of armoring are currently impassable and must be walked by the majority of cyclists. Overall, the alignment is good and would require few if any reroutes to enhance sustainability."
- Consider a FUTS style trail
 - "The cost is indeed prohibitive, but if we are hoping to encourage citizens to commute or shop in town by bike a better surface will encourage them. Perhaps making the trail a FUTS grade trail in the future could be a long term, low priority goal?"

Theme 5: Trail Decommissioning

Positive feedback about trail decommissioning

- Over 70% of community forum respondents felt that the plan appropriately addresses trail decommissioning (Figure 14)
- “I use trails and am generally supportive especially the part about decommissioning trails to enhance the use of the remaining trails.”

How well do you think the plan addresses the following priorities? (1 = poorly addressed, 2 = neutral, 3 = well addressed)

Rehabilitates a sufficient number of trails for conservation or reduces redundancy



Figure 14. How well the plan addresses rehabilitating a sufficient number of trails for conservation or to reduce redundancy according to Community Forum respondents (n=176).

Recommended changes for trail decommissions

- Close illegal trails for resource damage
 - “The unpermitted trails/routes illegally constructed by mountain bikers should be rehabilitated and redesigned, where appropriate, or totally closed if they are causing resource damage.”

Theme 6: Trail Adoption

Positive feedback about trail adoption

- Support for adopting unauthorized trails
 - “I’m happy to see “unauthorized trails” being adopted instead of shut down. These trails are the community’s input and our way to add to the trail system. We put in work with our own blood sweat time and labor. Thank you for embracing this and helping us.”
 - “Many of the unauthorized trails were built to fill a missing gap in Flagstaff trails. Mountain bikers want and like fun trails. If these types of trails not built or worse are reduced, people will build trails in unexpected places again in the future to fill this gap.”
- “Overall, I support the Plan because new trails will be an asset for Flagstaff. That the Plan has consideration of adaptive use trails is admirable, as is the holistic view taken towards adoption of certain popular user-created trails (such as Hot Pockets) while closing poorly aligned social trails.”

Concern for trail adoption

- Lowell agreement
 - “I am also concerned that part of the proposed adoption of a social trail in this area crosses into Section 17 and Lowell properties yet there is no formal agreement with Lowell. This could set a precedent for the builders of social trails and trail widening, erosion, etc. could occur in the absence of a formal agreement. Approval of this proposed route might be construed as tacit support from the City for trails on Section 17 in spite of lands in other ownership. This is confusing.”

Specific recommendations for additional trail adoption

- “Please incorporate and adopt more mountain bike specific trails on the Railroad Springs (steeper) area of Observatory Mesa.”
- “Adopt 3.36, 3.37, 3.35 and 3.34 for a mtb experience. 3.36 should be directional”
- These trails shouldn't be obliterated as they have been in our neighborhood for over 20 years (3.35). Trails 3.38 and 3.39 also provide a single-track route that almost connects to the Observatory Mesa trail which should be added to the plan.
- “The existing trail 3.41 is a very nice single track trail and I'd encourage incorporating it into the new trail system rather than abandoning it.”

Theme 7: Other

There were a handful of comments that did not align with the other themes. These comments and their takeaways are summarized below.

Wildfire

- One respondent indicated concern about increased wildfire risk associated with increased recreational access on Observatory Mesa
- Another respondent indicated a desire for more wildfire mitigation planning on Observatory Mesa

Law enforcement presence

- One respondent expressed concern about the need for increased law enforcement capacity for responding to calls on Observatory Mesa. They suggested that increased access to the Mesa would require increased surveillance and call-response for issues such as illegal camping, campfire, user conflicts, hunter dangers to recreationists, and wildlife harassment by dogs and people.

Winter recreation

- “I don't see any attention given to these trails that will be used by cross country skiers, fat-bikers, and snowshoers during winter time. I'd like to see the City and their partners think about how they can make

this trail system usable by winter recreators too. Can you please consider how these trails will be graded and signed for xc-skiing, etc.? I would like to see separate trails for snowshoeing/fat-biking and skiing. Making this a supreme winter recreation area opens up more possibilities for our town - adaptive winter races, loppets, biathalons, fat-bike races, etc. Making OMNA and the surrounding FS land a freely accessible winter recreation zone could also limit snowplay traffic in dangerous areas, like along 180.”

- “FR 505a is a good access point for firefighting purposes, therefore should be maintained as primitive forest road. Also good for skiing in winter.”

Safe pedestrian crossing

- “I live in Timber Sky and with the growth in this development it would be great to incorporate a viable solution for crossing RT 66 on bike or foot to access the trail system and link with what exists to the south of Observatory Mesa.”

Infrastructure recommendations

- Utilize gates to restrict motorized access
 - “at N terminus at Pipeline road/ FR 506 there should be a gate to prevent motorized access - a perennial problem”
- Utilize fencing/barriers to separate trails from private property
- Improve the sight of the City Yard
 - “The city yard at this location (Thorpe Rd and Kinlani Dorms) continues to be a major eyesore. Landscaping materials, old trailers, and other junk should be removed and not stored at this field. Suggest moving these materials to the City motor facility on West 66.”

Financial cost estimates and sources

- “I commented on the lack of any financial information. The financial resources of the City of Flagstaff and every other level of government are not unlimited. This plan must include financial information in order for responsible action to be taken.”

Recommendations for Plan Modifications and Next Steps

Based on the feedback received during phase two of public outreach for the Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan, Southwest Decision Resources makes the following overall recommendations for plan modifications and next steps for trail planning (see below). Additional, more specific recommendations from community input will be discussed and evaluated by the trail designer and City of Flagstaff PROSE.

Big picture modifications to the trail plan

- To strike a better balance between recreation and preservation, reduce the density and mileage of trails. Prioritize reducing trails where there is redundancy or where there are potential increased impacts (e.g., near private property, near wildlife values)

- Design new trails on both interesting and sustainable terrain. High-quality trails will offset overall reduced mileage
- To address wildlife concerns, increase the buffer distance surrounding key wildlife values (e.g., springs) and reduce trail density, especially in the western half of Observatory Mesa Natural Area
- Provide a balance of single-track trails (adopted and new) and old roadbeds for recreation. Utilizing existing roadbeds reduces impacts and meets some preferences for recreation (e.g., wide trails for dog walking or walking in pairs). Adopting or creating single-track meets other preferences for trail use (e.g., more intentional scenic views, increased challenge)
- To address concerns over high-speed bike riders and desires for mountain bike intended trails, adopt trail 3.36, and develop trails near FUTS Tunnel Springs and near FUTS Mars Hill for directional mountain biking
- Comments regarding allowing E-bikes were wide-ranging and not definitive. Ensure the final decision regarding E-bikes aligns with City of Flagstaff Open Space management directives, with supporting documentation if necessary. Three options include:
 - Do not allow E-bikes on any natural surface trails (continue allowed use on roads and FUTS trails)
 - Allow E-bikes on all approved roads and trails
 - Allow E-bikes on roads, FUTS trails, and proposed trail 5.12, providing connectivity to the motorized Fort Valley Trail System
- Trails for passive use in the Flagstaff area have been historically multi-use, but concerns and desires in this synthesis detail differing ideas over authorized uses. Incorporate one of the following recommendations:
 - All new and existing trails are multi-use, with any trails containing mountain bike features being identified with signage
 - Develop (construct or adopt) approximately equal mileage for mountain bike-only and hiking-only trails near formal access points for a wider variety of experiences in the high volume areas

Trail planning next steps

- Work with the Open Space Commission to address remaining land management policy-based question
- Based on Open Space Commission input and the content of this report, modify the trail plan to address major concerns and include feasible recommendations
- Open the third phase of community feedback with a 40-day comment period using a Community Forum. Consider sending mail invitations to complete the Community Forum to get robust public response
- Present the updated Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan to Flagstaff City Council for adoption