

Greater Observatory Mesa Area Trail Plan Draft

May 13, 2025



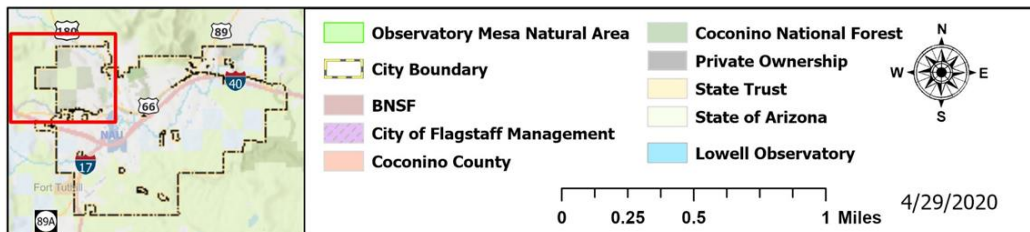
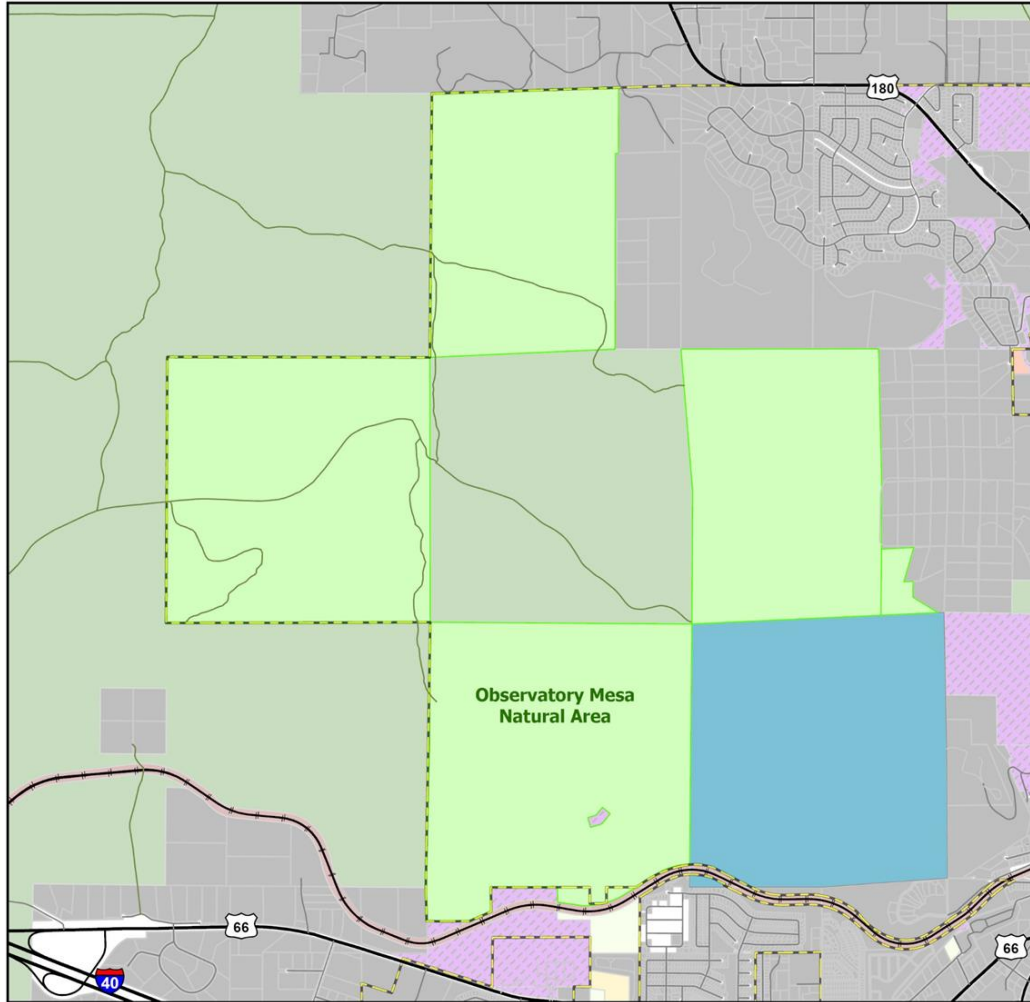
General Overview



- **Background**
- **Public Process & Evolution of the Trail Plan**
- **Final Trail Plan Review**
- **Next steps**
- **Opportunity for Feedback**



Overview
Observatory Mesa Natural Area



Greater Observatory Mesa Area

- Property purchase
- Adjacent land use



Background - Land Managers



- Observatory Mesa Natural Area
- Lowell Observatory
- Coconino National Forest
- Arizona State Parks and Trails

Greater Observatory Mesa Partners:





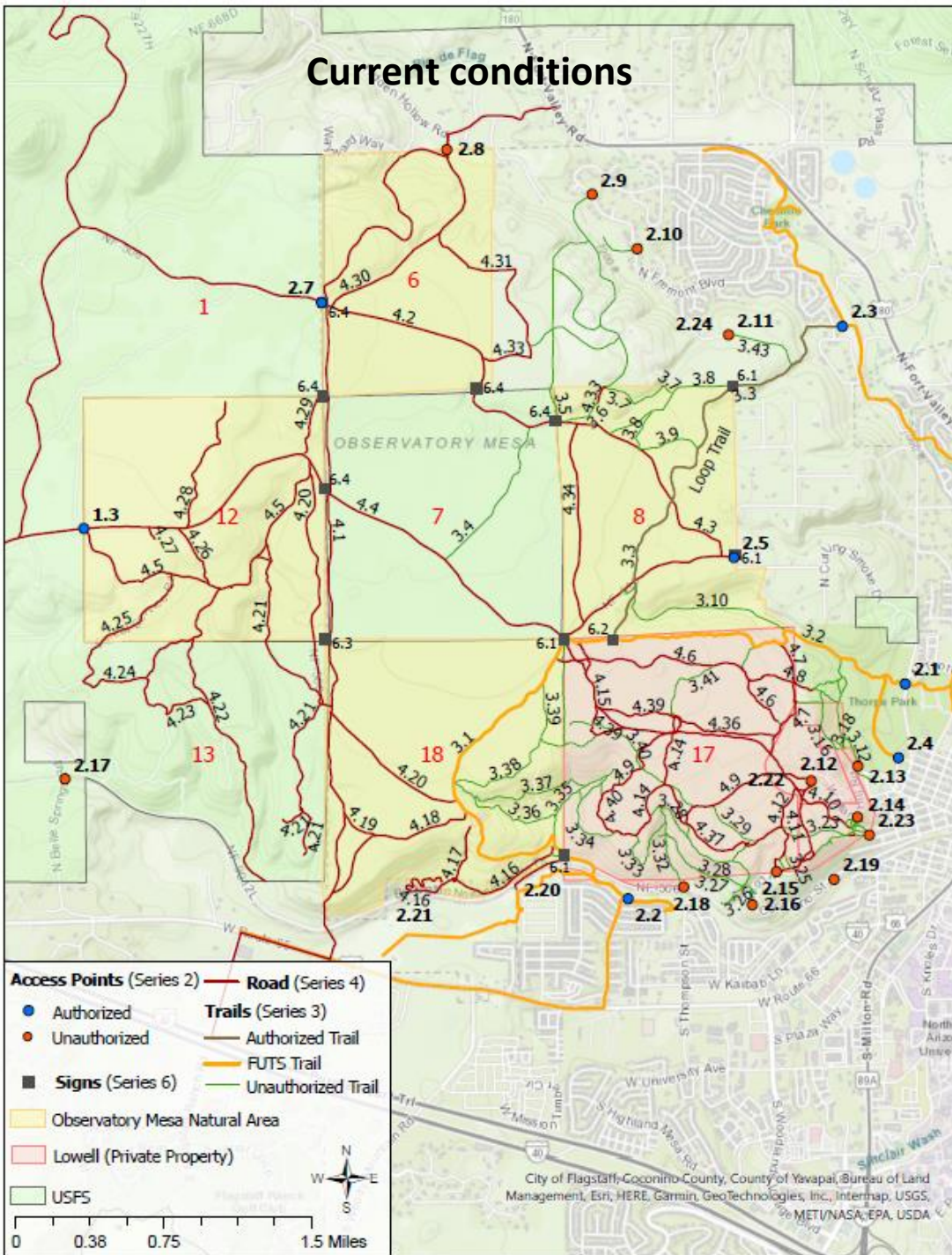
Background - Current Conditions



Current Conditions

- 20-30,000 users/year
- Broad array of recreation
 - Hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing
- Minimal access
- 5.8 miles of formal trail
- Un-managed recreation and public use (~15 miles of user-created unauthorized trails)





- 5.8 miles of trail (FUTS & Loop Trail)
- ~8 miles of unauthorized trail (OMNA/USFS)
- 27 miles of existing roads (OMNA & USFS)
- 2 authorized parking areas
- 2 unauthorized parking areas
- 9 wayfinding/regulatory signage



Management Considerations

- Cultural Site Protection
- Watersheds and Springs
- Wildlife
- Ecologically Sensitive Areas





Management Considerations

- Property Management
- E-bikes
- Fire Forest Management
- Invasive Weeds
- Guiding Documents





Public Interest In The Area



Flagstaff Trail Initiative public survey

(<http://flagstafftrailsinitiative.org/>)

- 1,700 public comments received
- 120 of the comments were about Observatory Mesa, distilled into the following five recommendations:

1. Construct a new stacked loop system
2. Connect Fort Valley and Observatory Mesa
3. Adopt unauthorized trails on Lowell Observatory property as part of trail system
4. Evaluate unauthorized trails for closure and naturalization
5. Connect Fort Valley to FUTS with a commuter route



FLAGSTAFF
TRAILS
INITIATIVE



Trail Plan Objectives

Propose a sustainable trail system plan for the Greater Observatory Mesa Area that:

- Addresses management and community concerns and desires
- Benefits conservation of the area (wildlife, natural resources)
- Provides managed recreation opportunities and community access

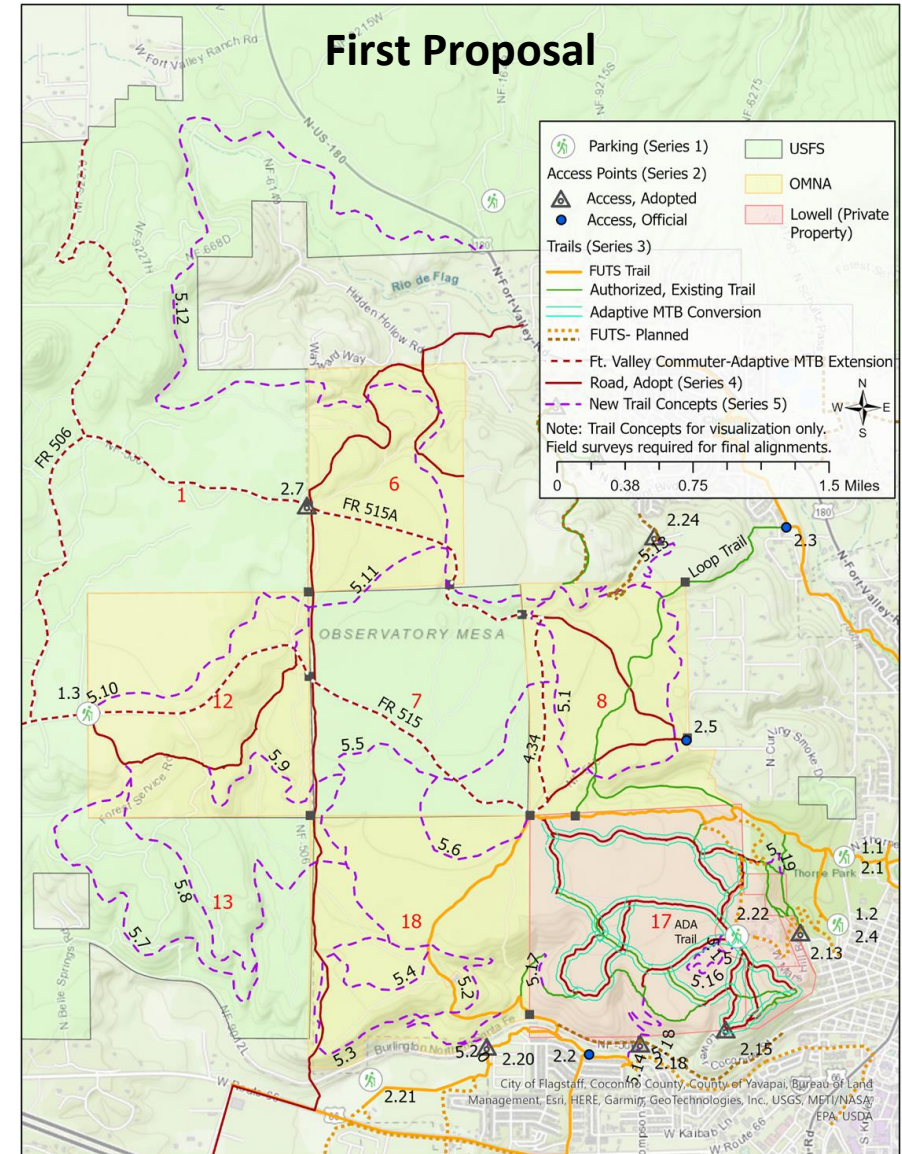




First Trail Plan Design



- Designed with staff and land manager input
- Existing trail maintenance
- Restoration
 - Unauthorized trails: 6 miles
 - Abandoned roads: 12 miles
- 4 additional access points and 2 parking areas
- Additional single-track trails: 24 miles
 - Travel route
- Accessible trails
 - ADA: .8 miles
 - Adaptive mountain biking: 7 miles
- Wayfinding and educational trail signage





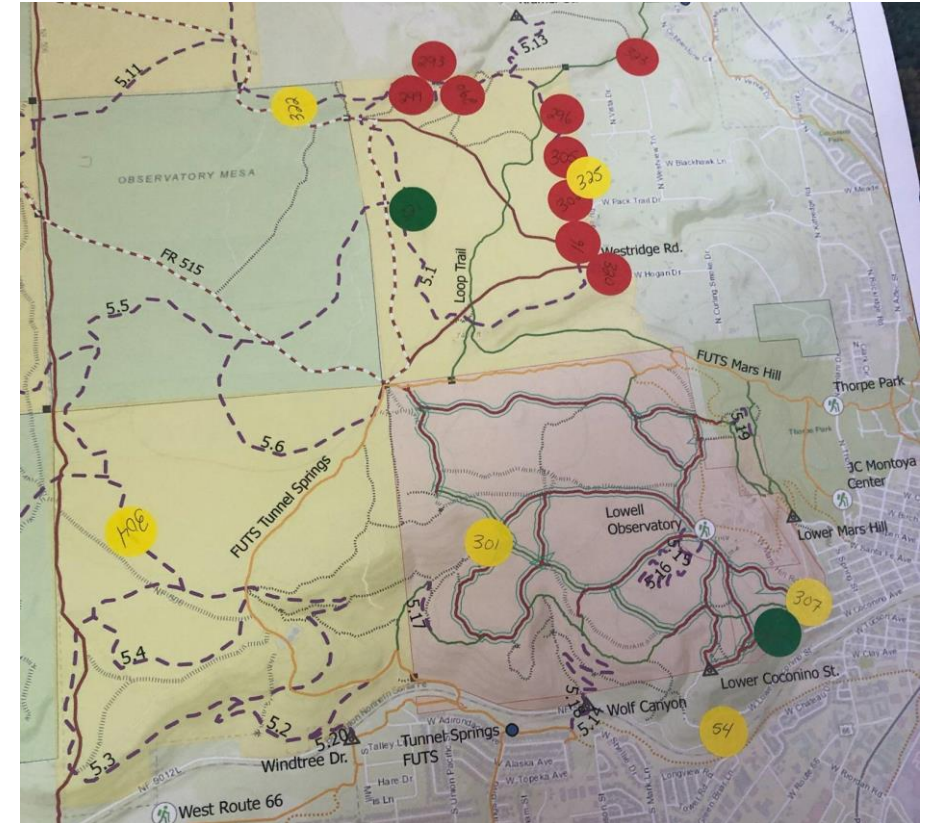
Public Engagement Overview

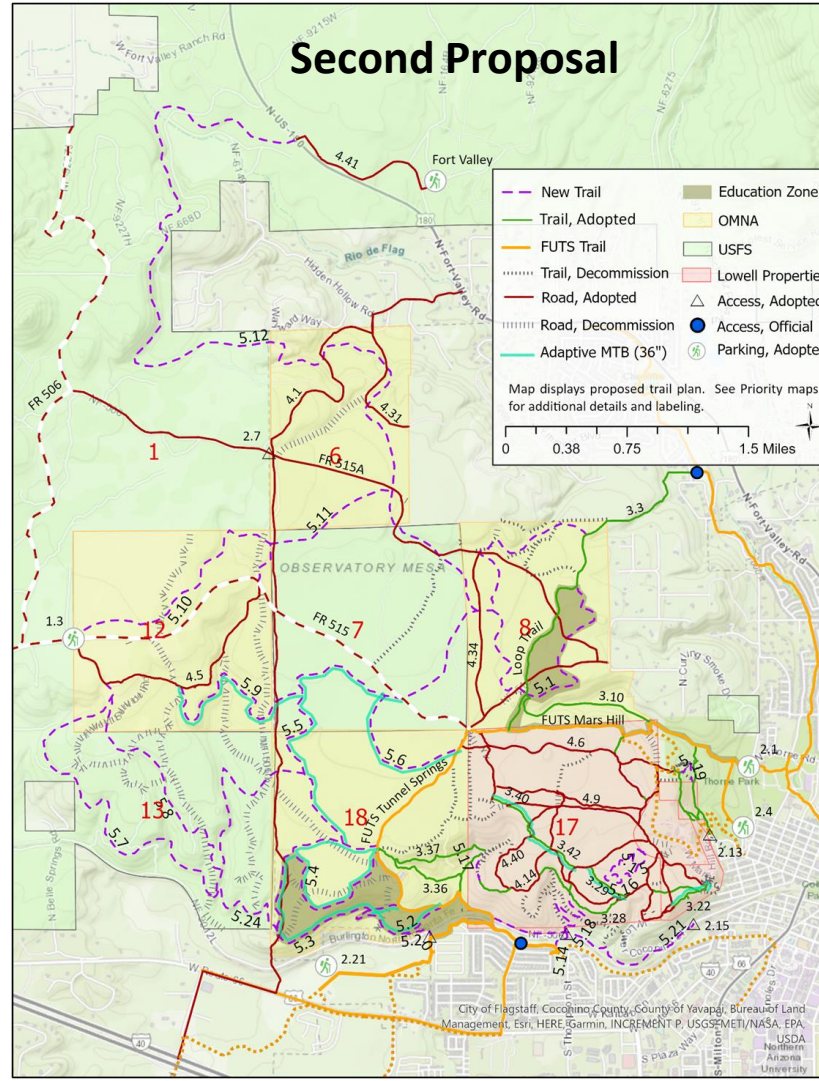
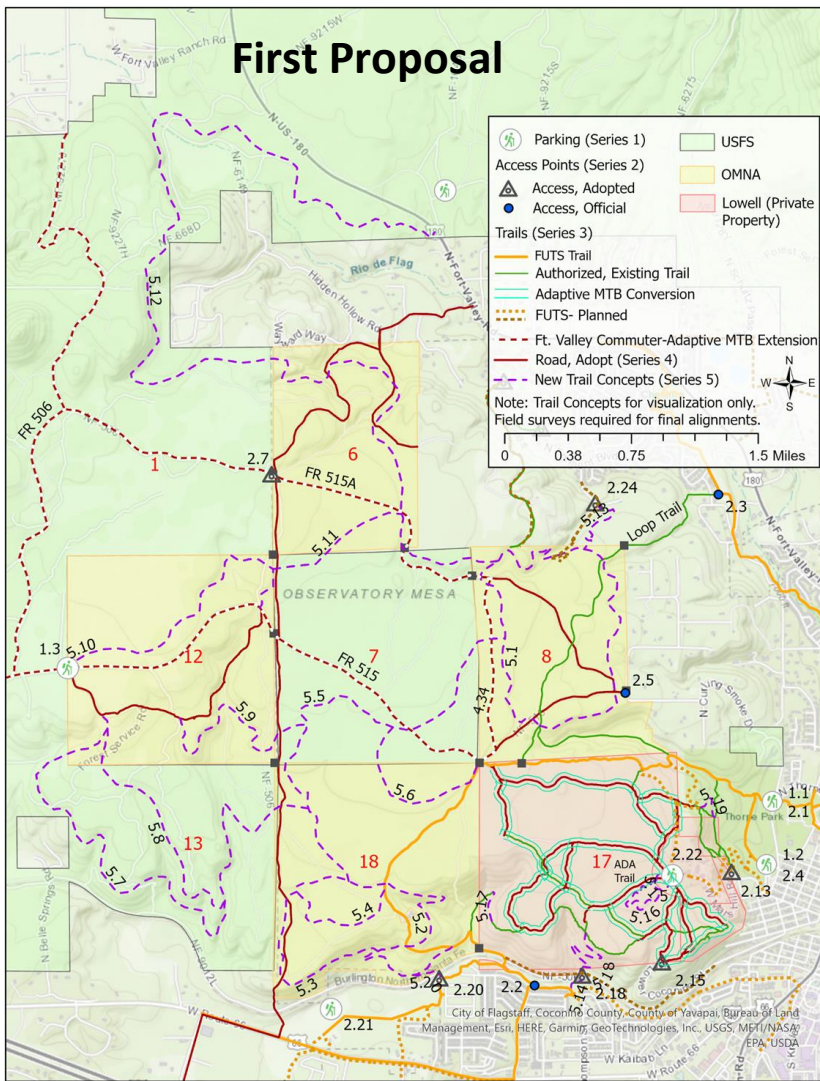




First Public Comment Feedback

- Neighborhood concerns
 - Buffer/visual impacts
 - Potential increased impacts (traffic, illegal camping, etc.)
 - Publication of neighborhood access
- Recreation experience
 - Alignment locations, redundancy
 - Improved adaptive trails
 - Educational zones
 - Equestrian
 - Varied difficulties
- Environmental concerns (wildlife, springs)





- Adaptive bike trail design improved
- Trails for advanced skill levels
- Improved loop options
- Alignments near private property moved farther from boundaries
- Buffer zone increased from 1,000 ft. to 1,320 ft. near springs
- Eliminated private property access
- Educational zones

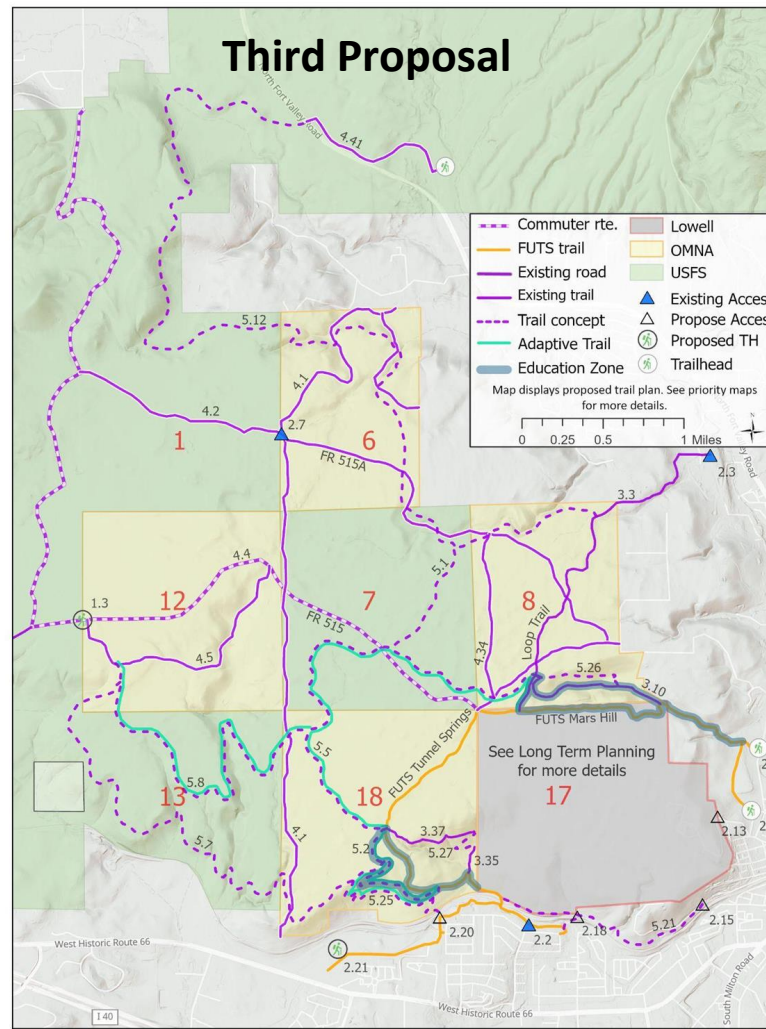
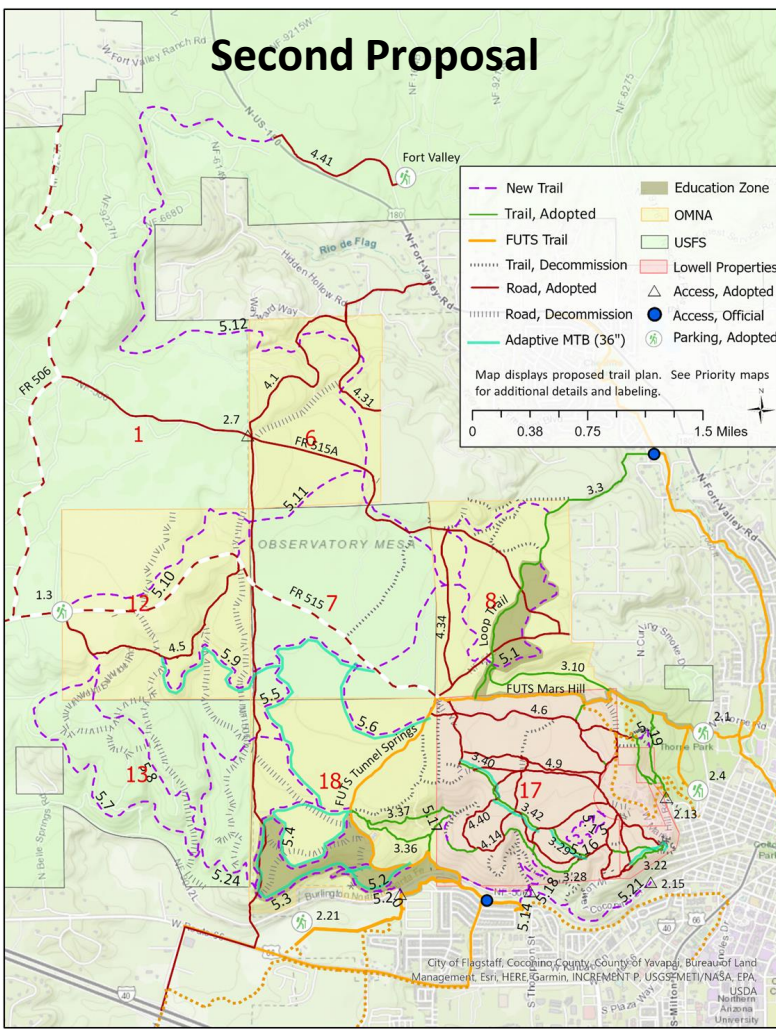
What changed?



Second Public Comment Feedback

- Environmental concern (springs, wildlife, more restoration)
- Further increase neighborhood buffer/reduce visual impact
- Desire for enforcement and management information
- Trails
 - Improved alignments for biking and adaptive biking
 - Reduced density and mileage of trails
 - Support for use of abandoned roads as trails
 - Support for directional trails
 - Consider e-bikes
- Lowell Observatory Master Planning
- Open Space Commission recommendations:
 - Maintain multiuse and bidirectional trails
 - E-bikes on certain alignments only
 - Remove certain alignments due to wildlife concerns





- Moved Section 17 and railroad access to long-term planning
- Used existing roadbeds to vary user experience & reduce impact
- Decreased density of new trails - 24 to 18 miles (25% reduction)
- Further adjusted/removed alignments to address residential and habitat concerns
- Adjusted aMTB alignments (similar mileage)
- Kept trails as multi use/bidirectional
- E-bikes allowed on roads and FUTS
- Added section on management

What changed?



Third and Final Public Comment Feedback

- Community disagreement on appropriate experience
 - High density vs low density
 - Formalized vs not
 - Outdoor recreation vs preservation and quiet
- Some preference for Version 2 (more trails), some preference to “leave it as it is”
- Desire for more mountain biking experience
- Environmental concerns



Third and Final Public Comment Feedback

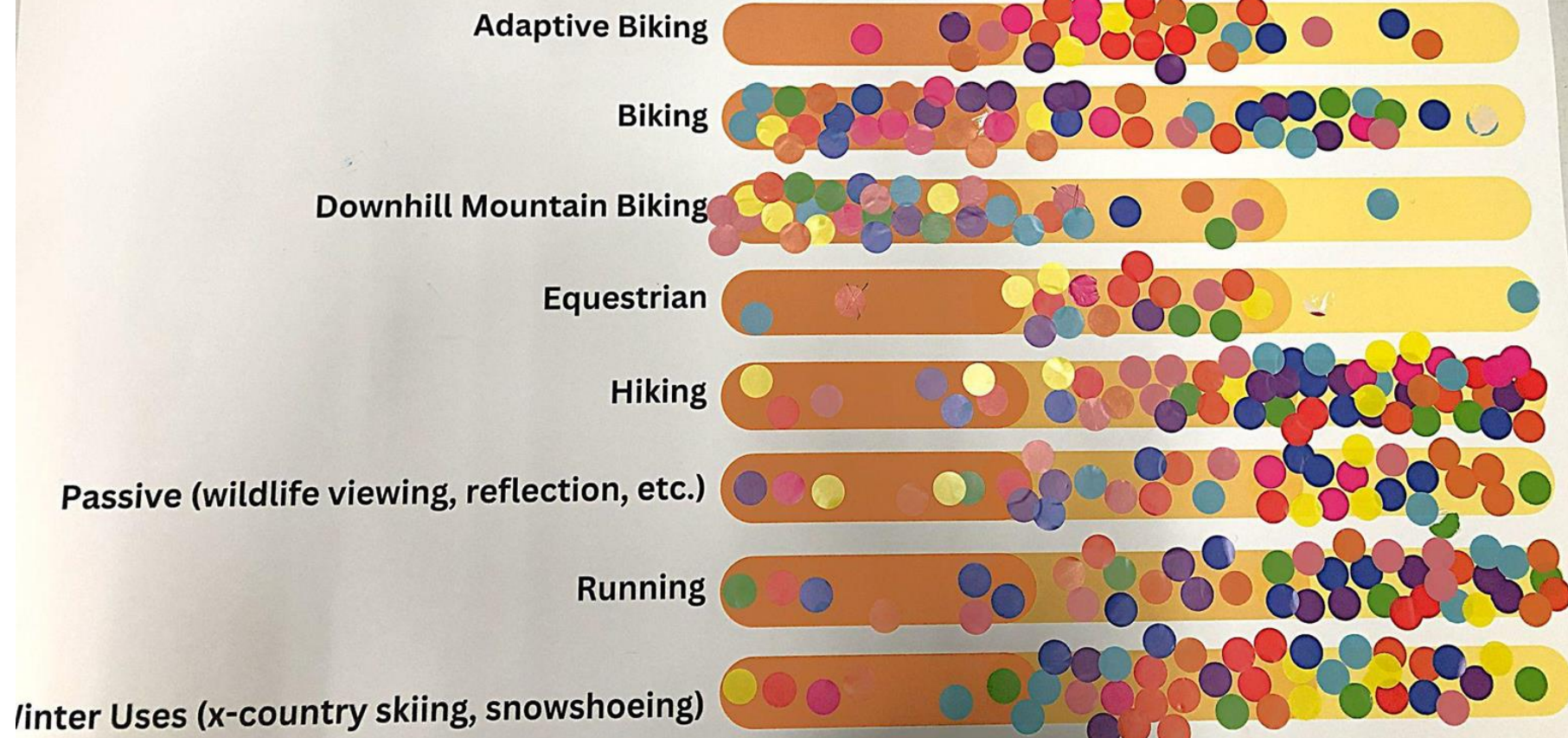


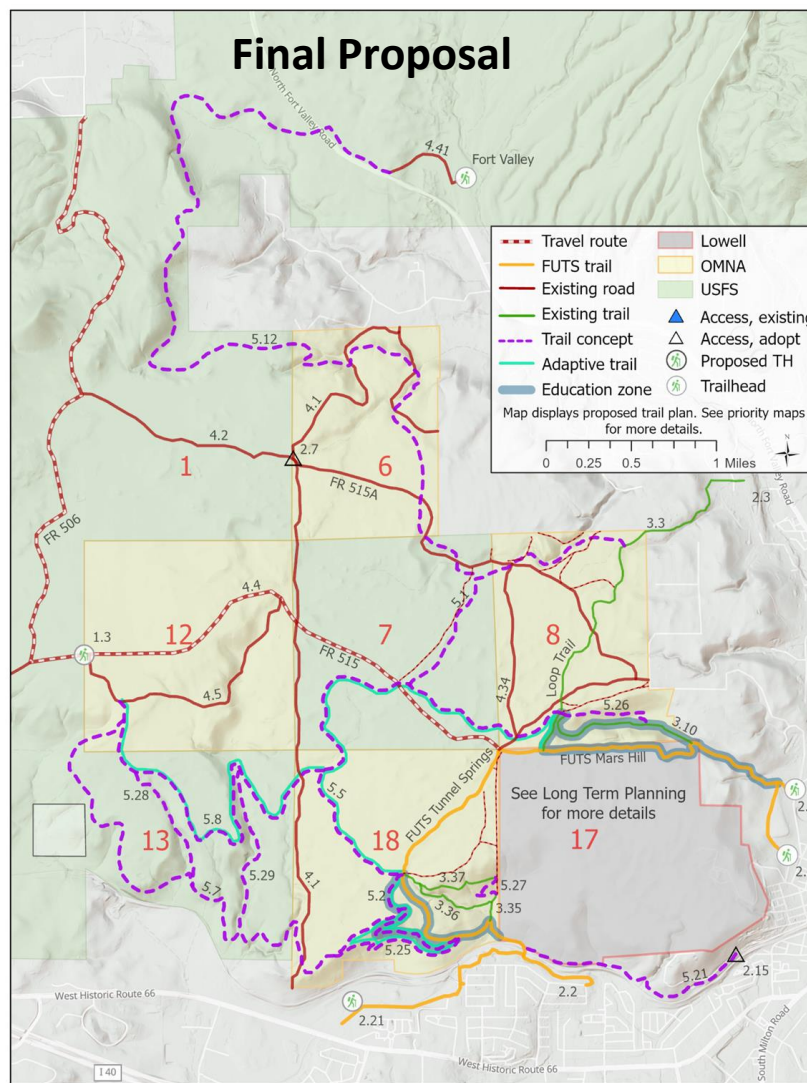
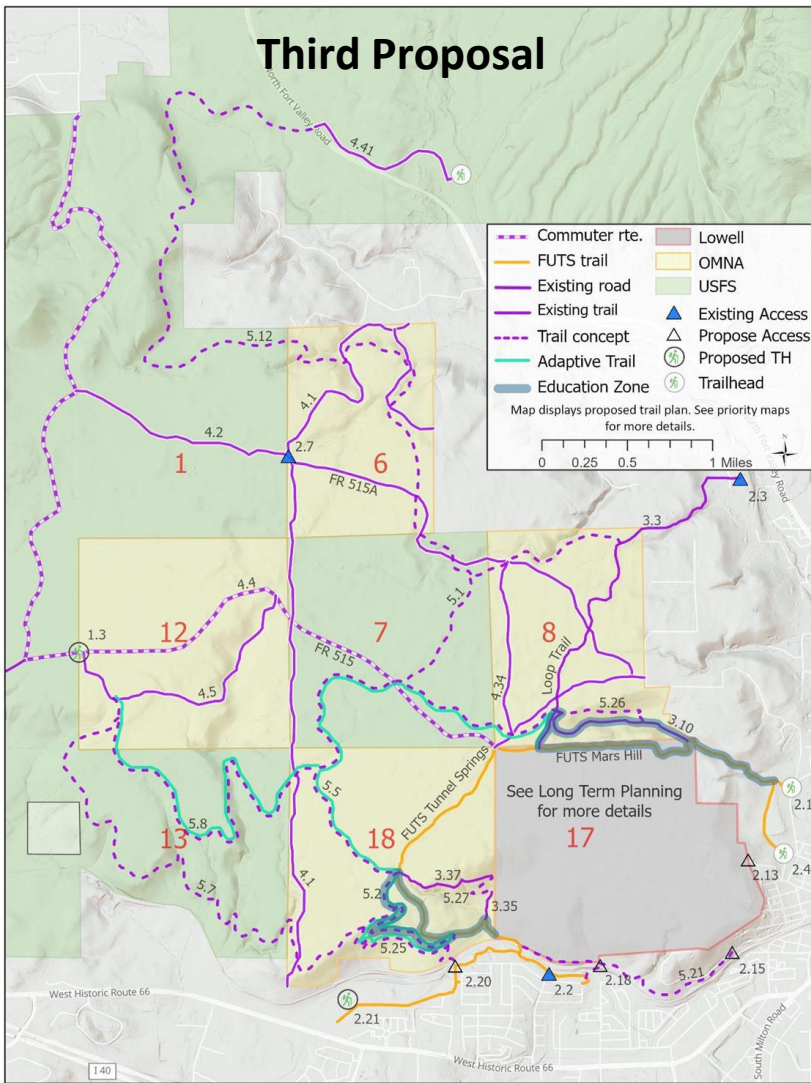
Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan

5.2

How well does the Trail Plan meet your desired recreation experience?

Not well I can live with it Great!





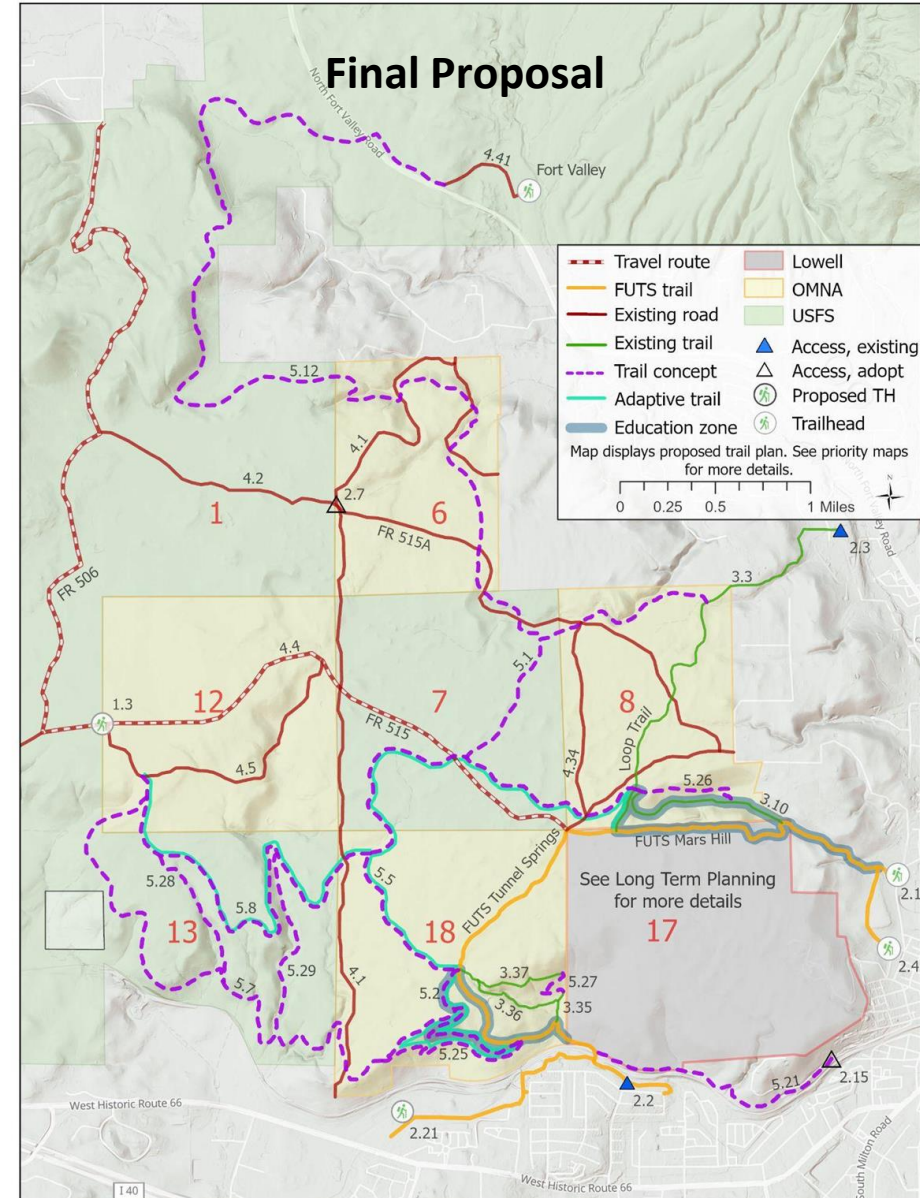
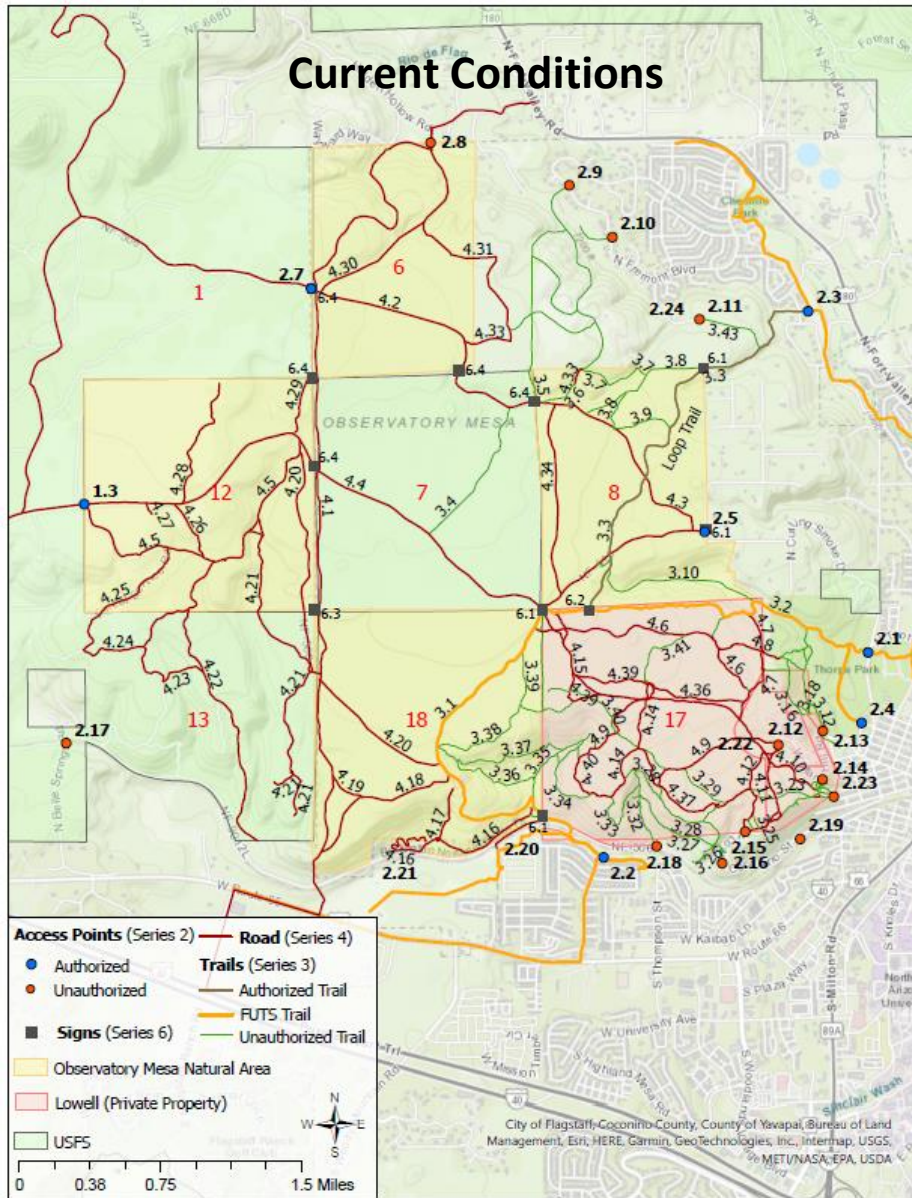
Included three alignments -

- 3.36 (Hot Pockets): 0.42 miles
- 5.28: 0.65 miles
- 5.29: 0.85 miles

What changed?



Final Draft Plan: Proposal Map





Trail Plan Review



Approximately 20 miles of additional natural-surfaced single-track trail

- 7 miles of adaptive trails

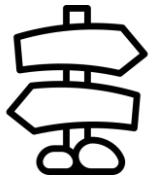


The addition of 2 more formal access points, which will result in a total of 8

- 2 access points with additional parking along Route 66 near the Public Works Yard and at the western boundary on Forest Road 515



Restoration of 4.5 miles of unauthorized trails and 10.5 miles of roads



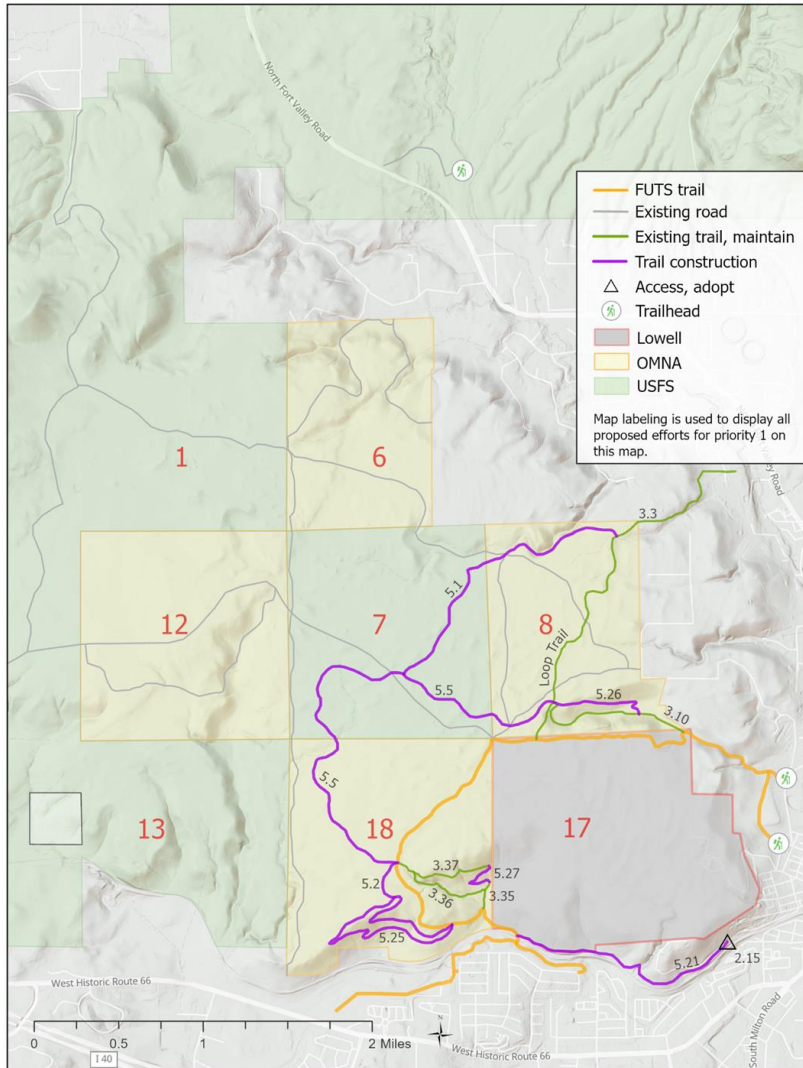
Trail sign recommendations for wayfinding, regulations, and etiquette



Two educational zones for interpretive signage to increase awareness of environmental, cultural, and historical significance



Trail Plan Review

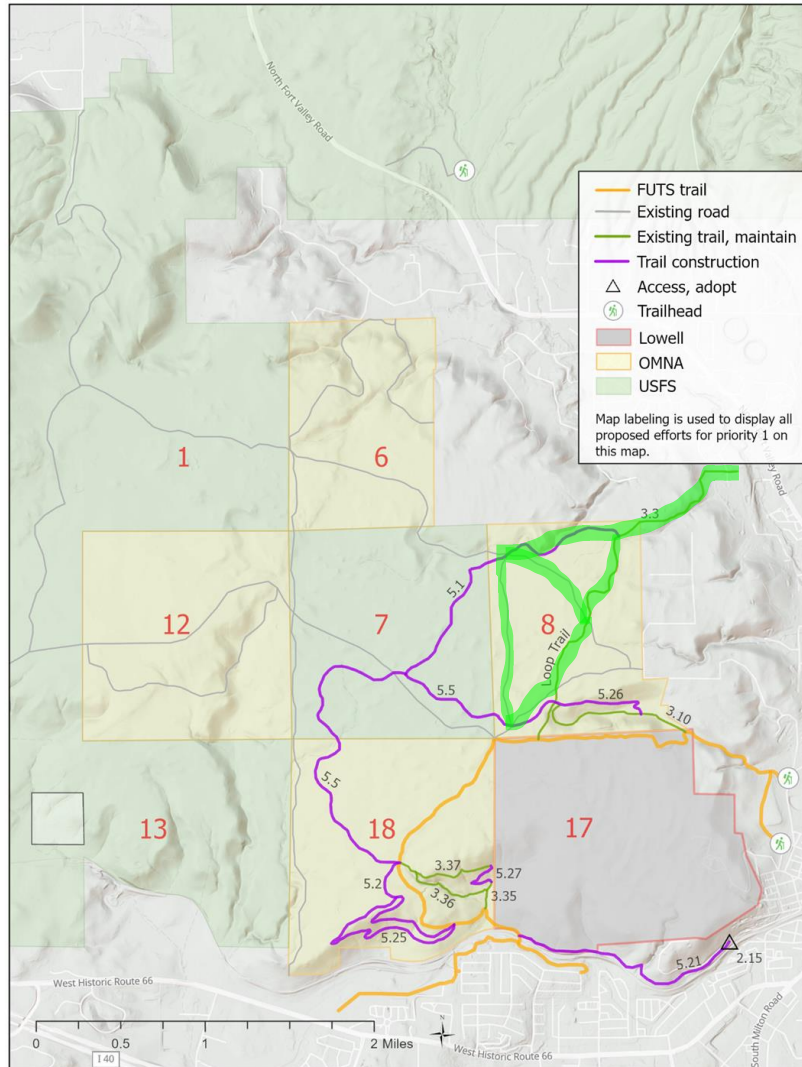


Priority 1

- Construct, maintain, and adopt trails close to access points
- Provide loop opportunities where trail users currently use GOMA most
- Increase managed trail opportunities before closing user-created trails



Trail Plan Review

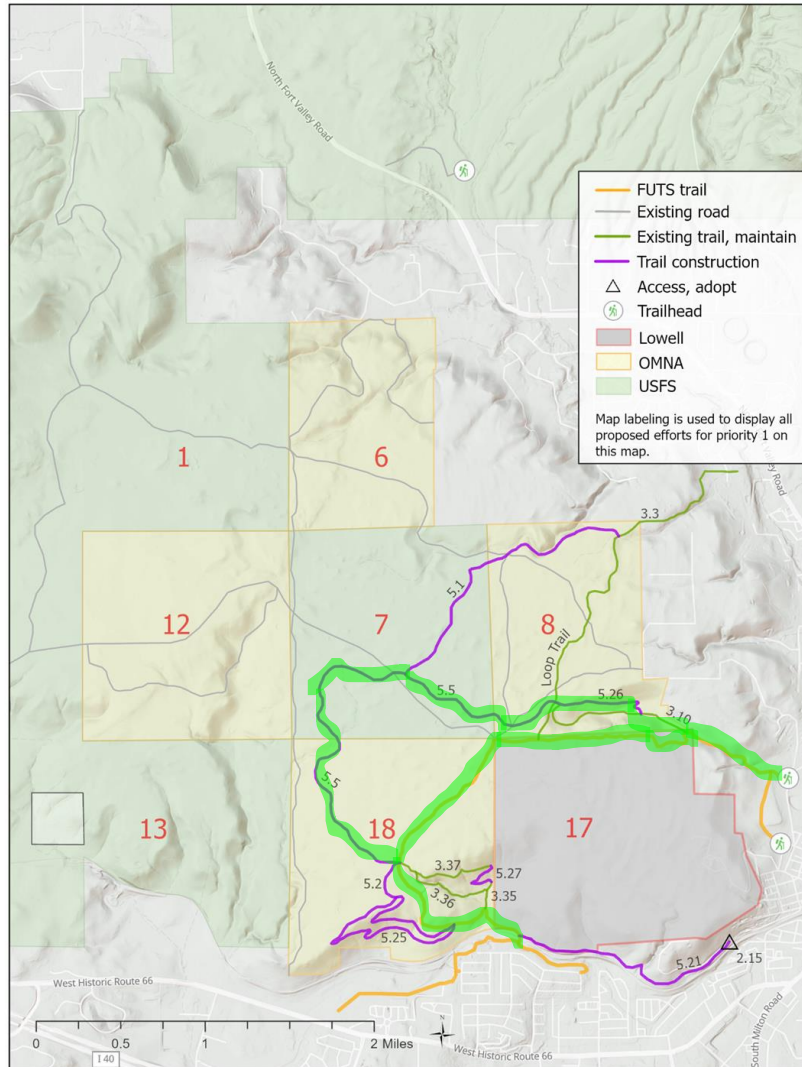


Priority 1

- Construct, maintain, and adopt trails close to access points
- Provide loop opportunities where trail users currently use GOMA most
- Increase managed trail opportunities before closing user-created trails



Trail Plan Review

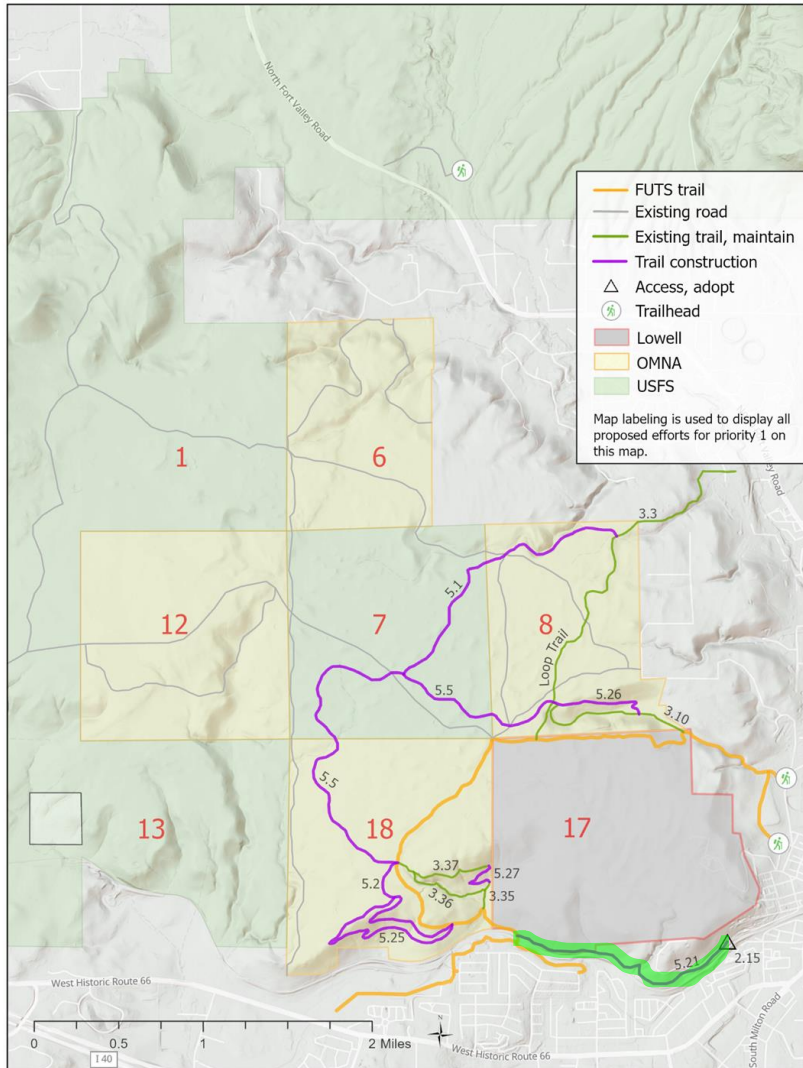


Priority 1

- Construct, maintain, and adopt trails close to access points
- Provide loop opportunities where trail users currently use GOMA most
- Increase managed trail opportunities before closing user-created trails



Trail Plan Review

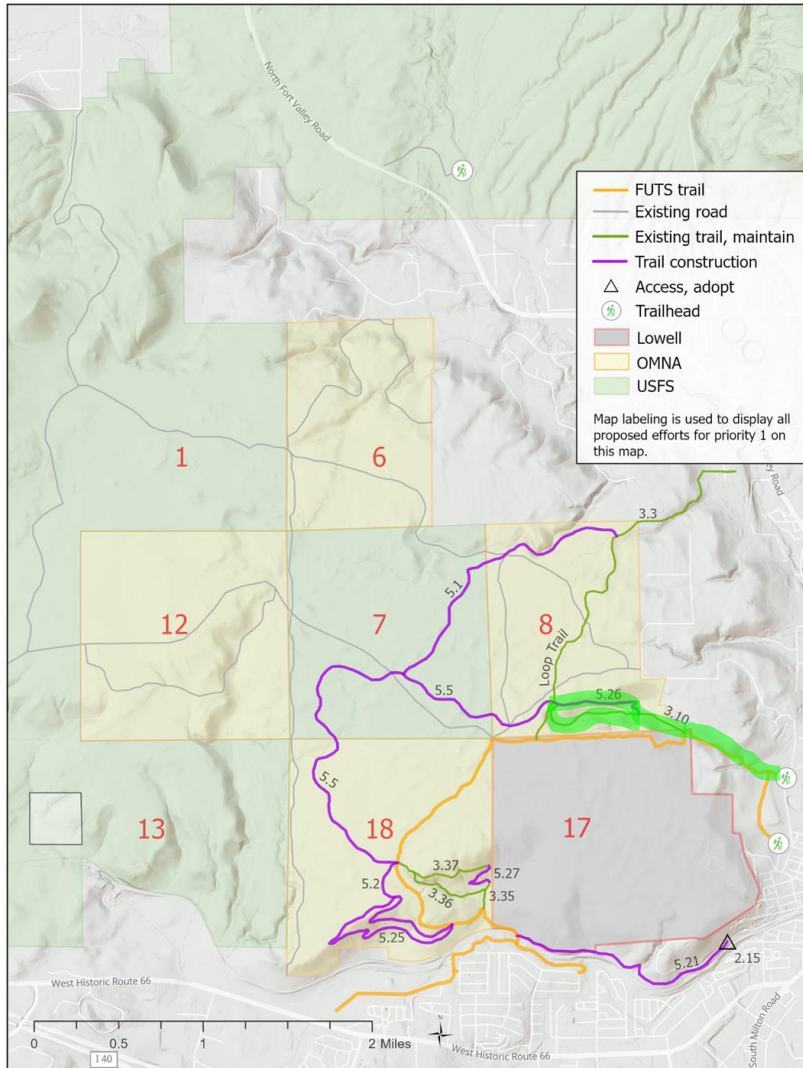


Priority 1

- Construct, maintain, and adopt trails close to access points
- Provide loop opportunities where trail users currently use GOMA most
- Increase managed trail opportunities before closing user-created trails



Trail Plan Review

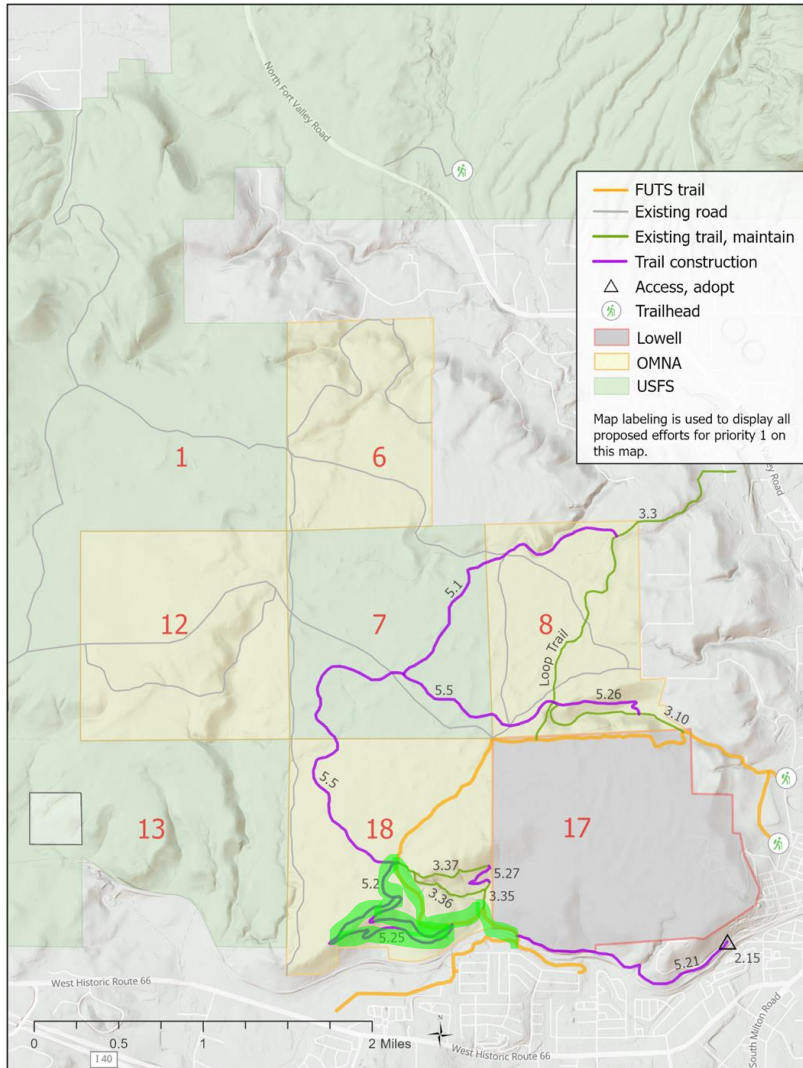


Priority 1

- Construct, maintain, and adopt trails close to access points
- Provide loop opportunities where trail users currently use GOMA most
- Increase managed trail opportunities before closing user-created trails



Trail Plan Review

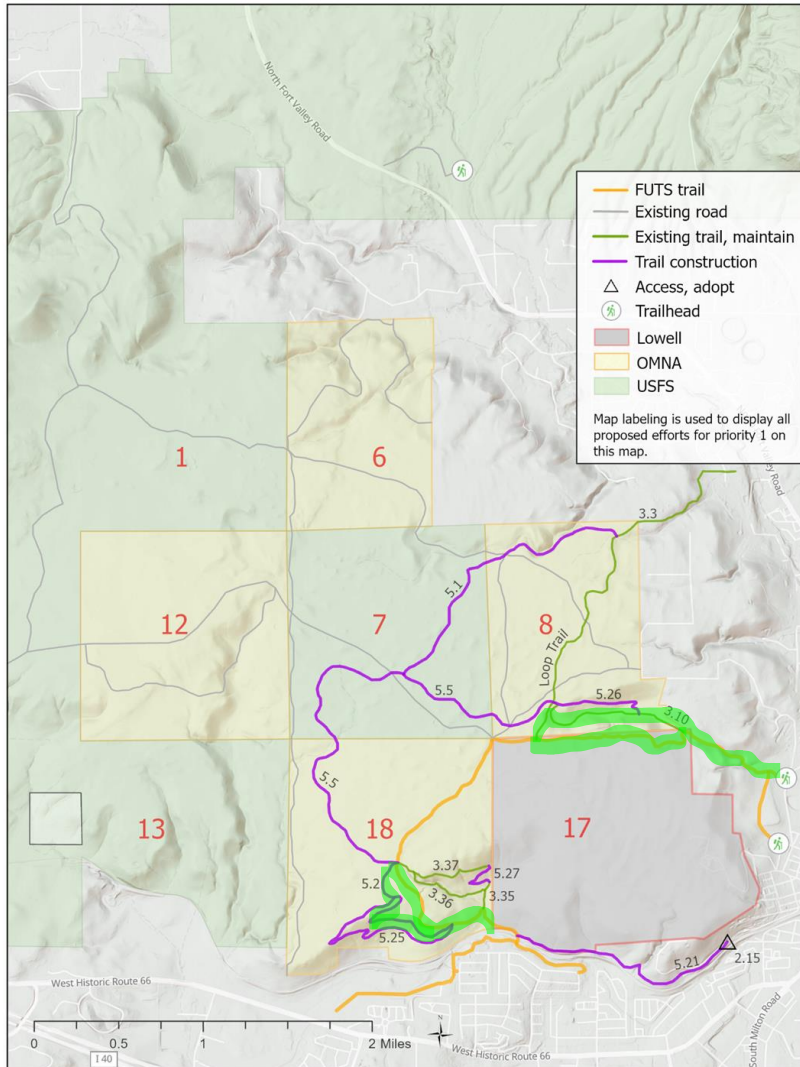


Priority 1

- Construct, maintain, and adopt trails close to access points
- Provide loop opportunities where trail users currently use GOMA most
- Increase managed trail opportunities before closing user-created trails



Trail Plan Review

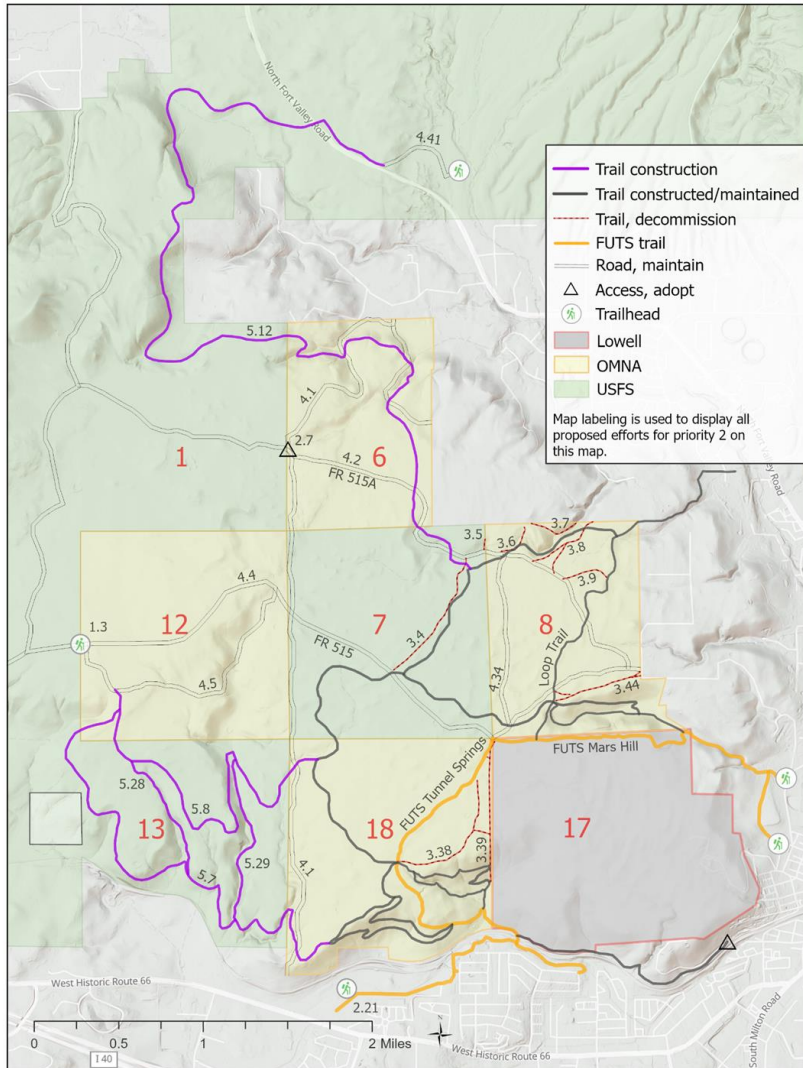


Priority 1

- Construct, maintain, and adopt trails close to access points
- Provide loop opportunities where trail users currently use GOMA most
- Increase managed trail opportunities before closing user-created trails



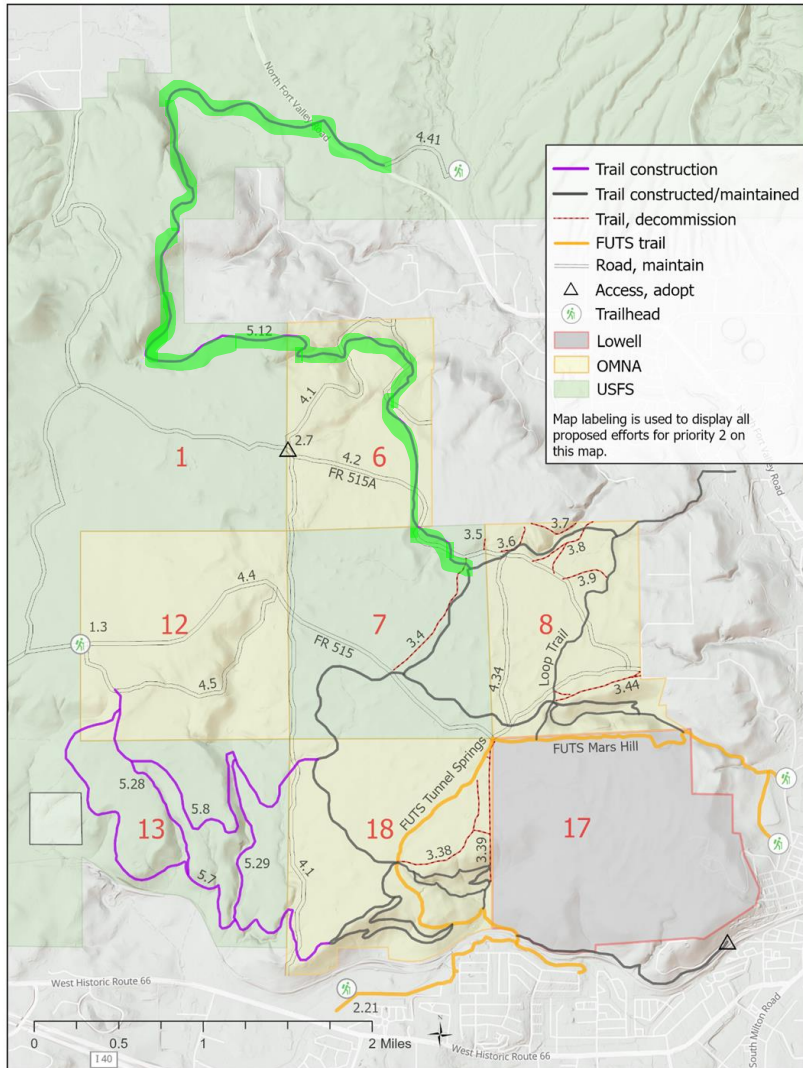
Trail Plan Review



Priority 2

- Expand trail system for longer distance opportunities
- Connect to the Fort Valley trail system
- Complete trail system with trails for a variety of experiences
- Restore user created trails where Priority 1 trails are already established

Trail Plan Review

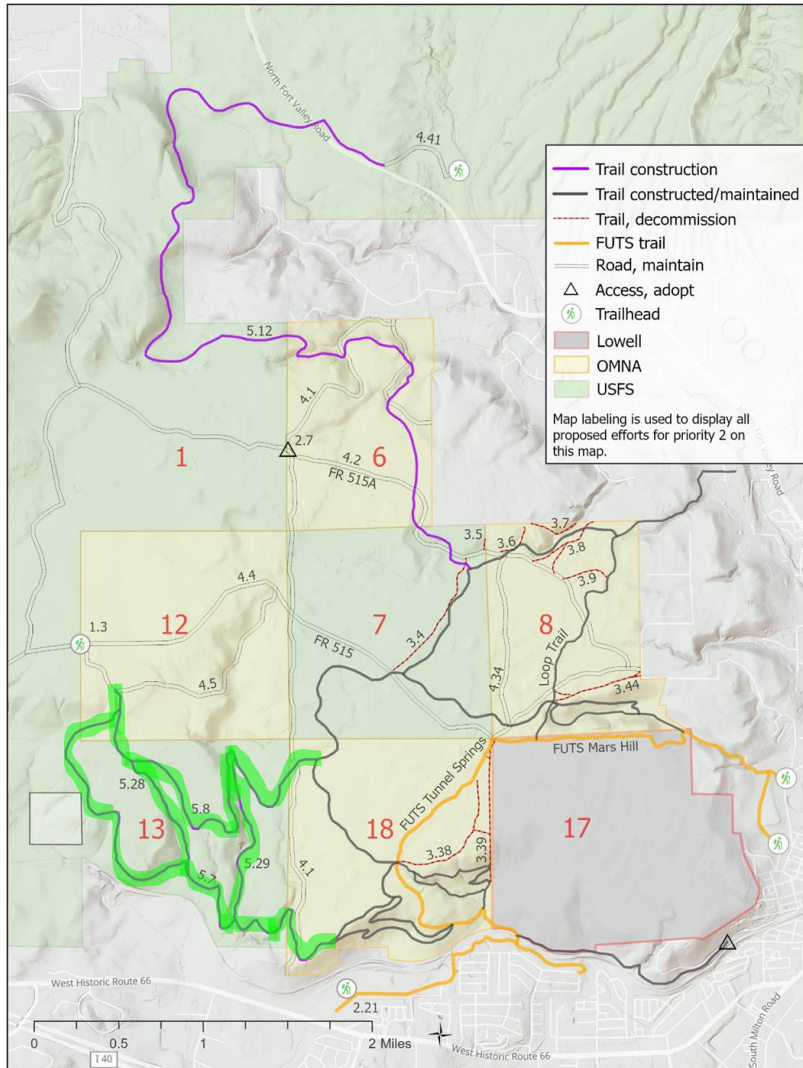


Priority 2

- Expand trail system for longer distance opportunities
- Connect to the Fort Valley trail system
- Complete trail system with trails for a variety of experiences
- Restore user created trails where Priority 1 trails are already established



Trail Plan Review

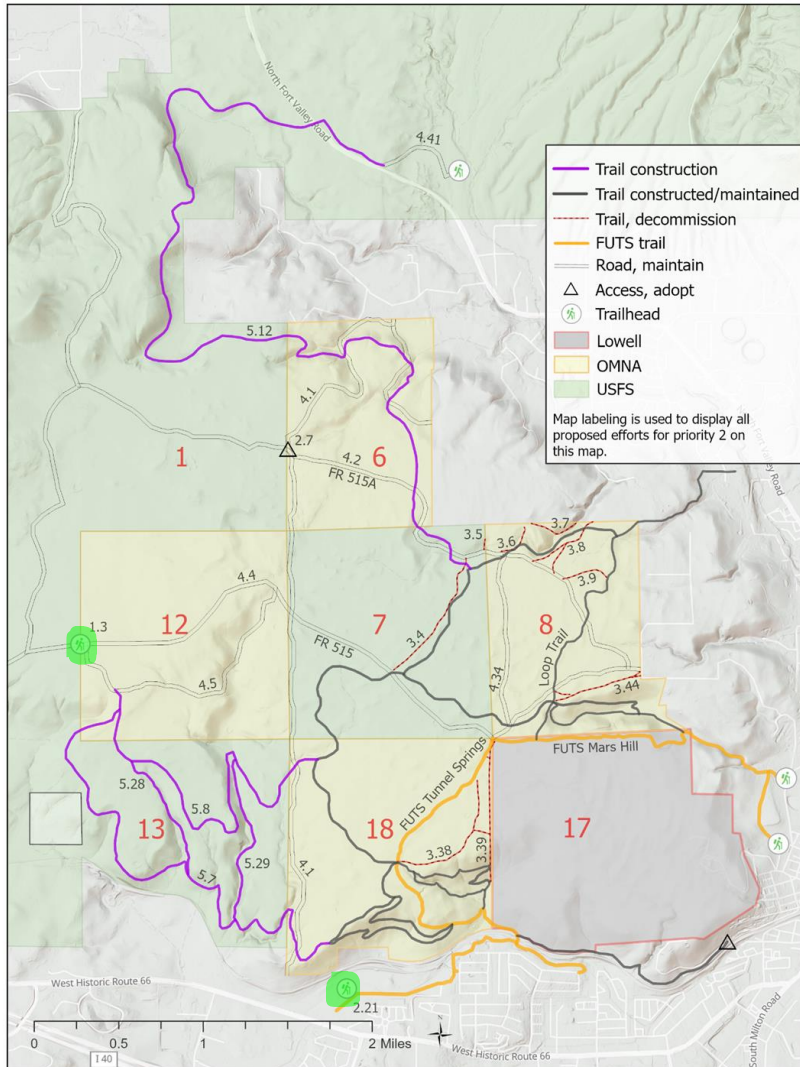


Priority 2

- Expand trail system for longer distance opportunities
- Connect to the Fort Valley trail system
- Complete trail system with trails for a variety of experiences
- Restore user created trails where Priority 1 trails are already established



Trail Plan Review

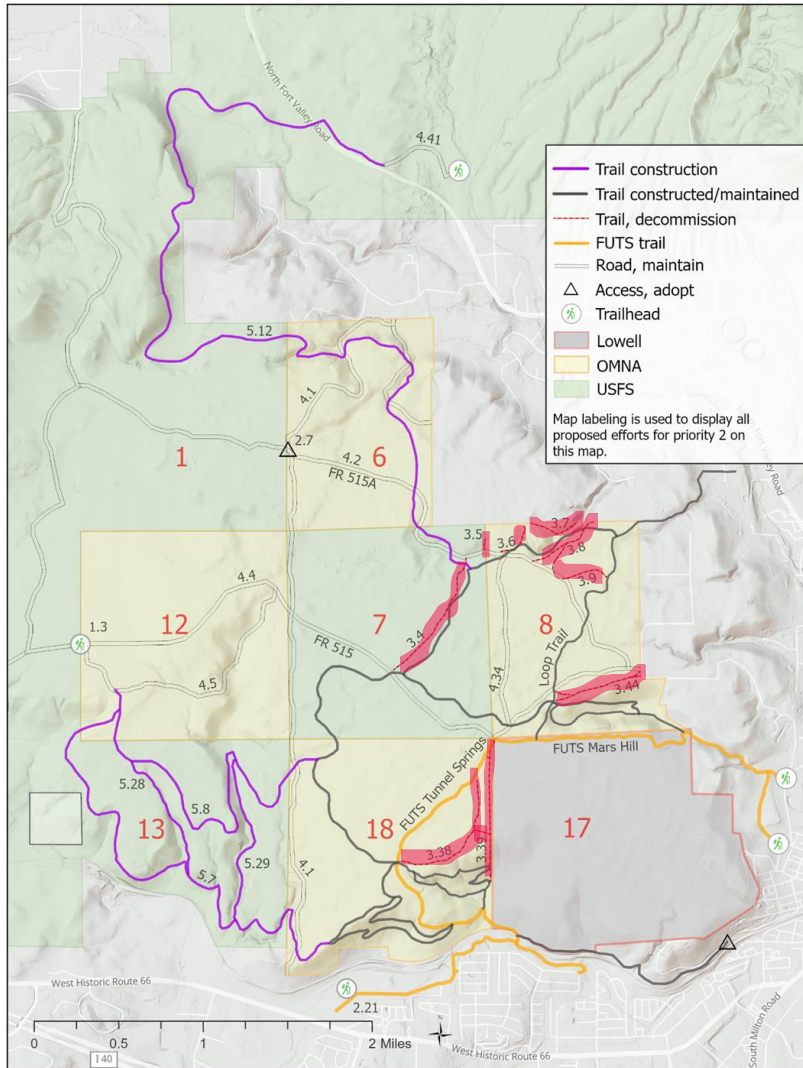


Priority 2

- Expand trail system for longer distance opportunities
- Connect to the Fort Valley trail system
- Complete trail system with trails for a variety of experiences
- Restore user created trails where Priority 1 trails are already established



Trail Plan Review

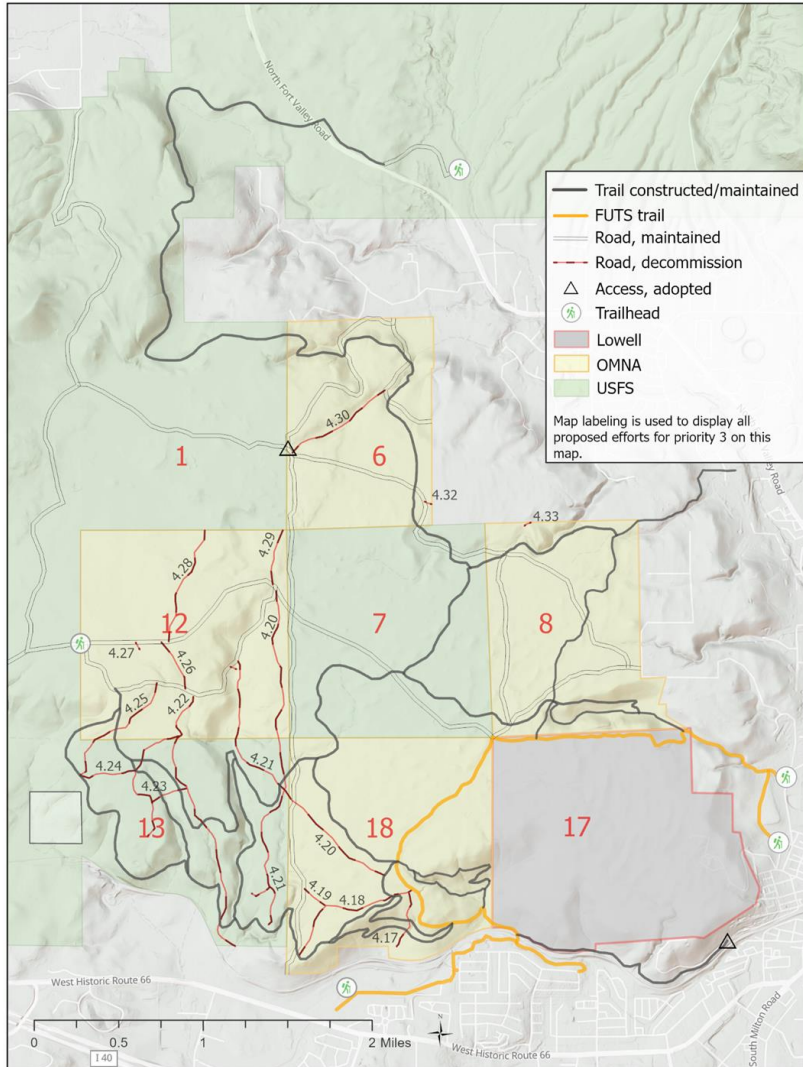


Priority 2

- Expand trail system for longer distance opportunities
- Connect to the Fort Valley trail system
- Complete trail system with trails for a variety of experiences
- Restore user created trails where Priority 1 trails are already established



Trail Plan Review

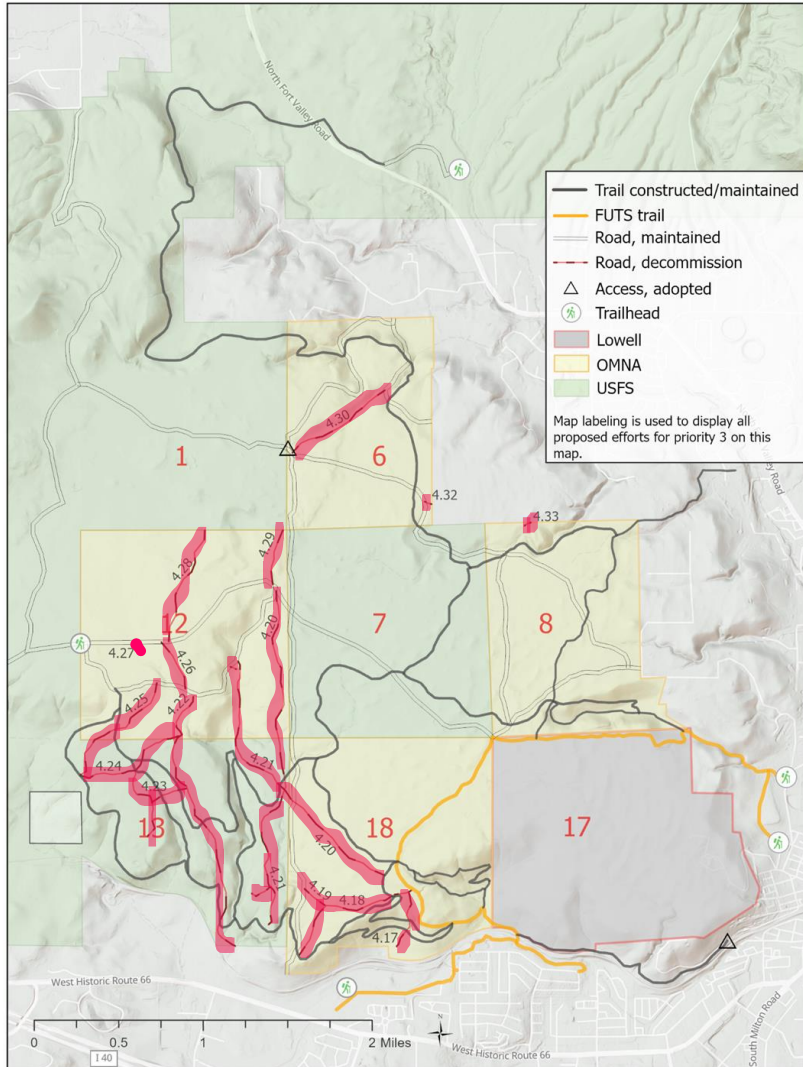


Priority 3

- Restore all roads for a non-motorized area



Trail Plan Review

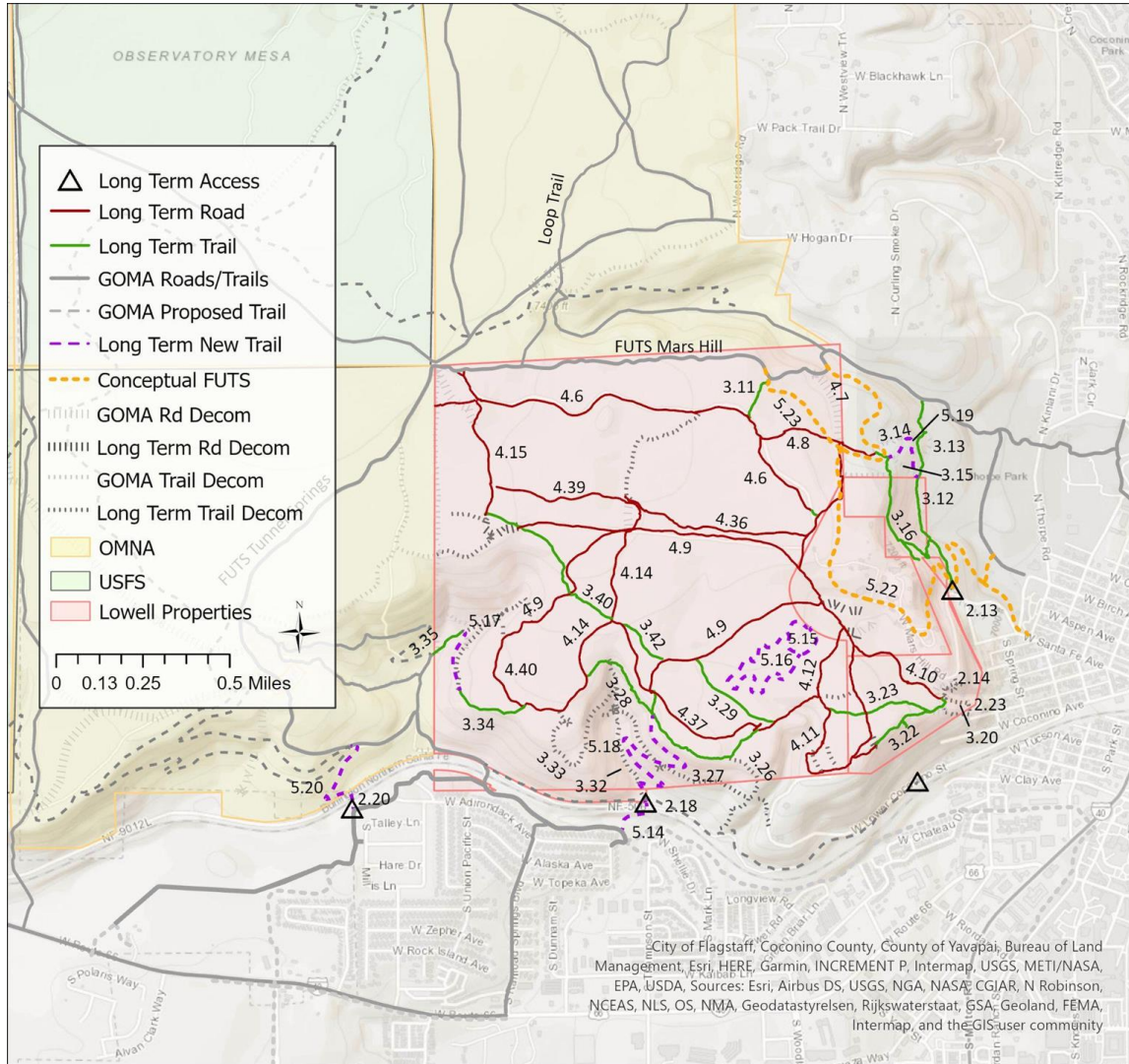


Priority 3

- Restore all roads for a non-motorized area



Trail Plan Review

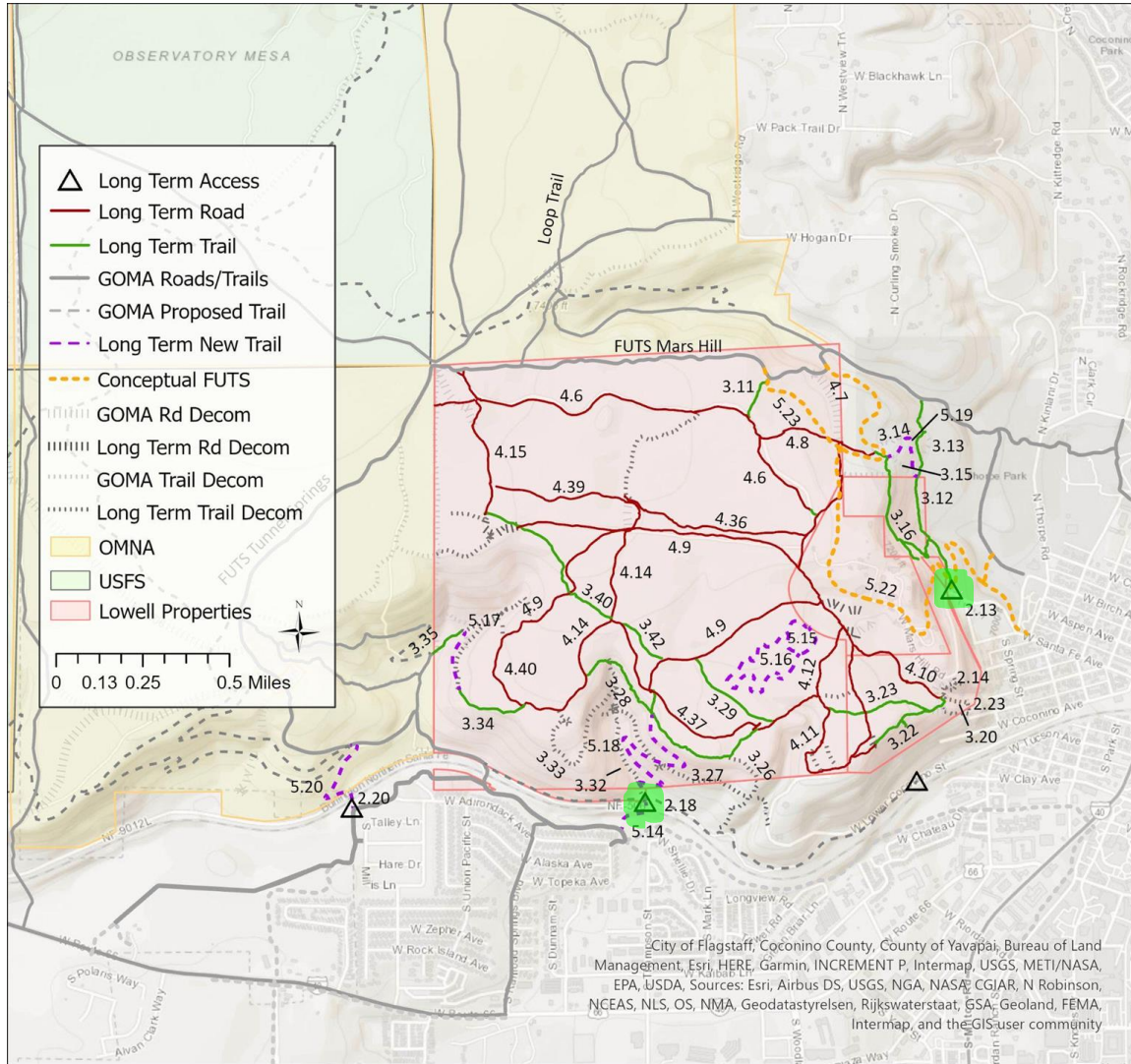


Long Term

- Lowell Observatory- Current internal planning underway, not the right time
- Railroad underpasses- Will require extensive engineering, funding, and cooperation



Trail Plan Review

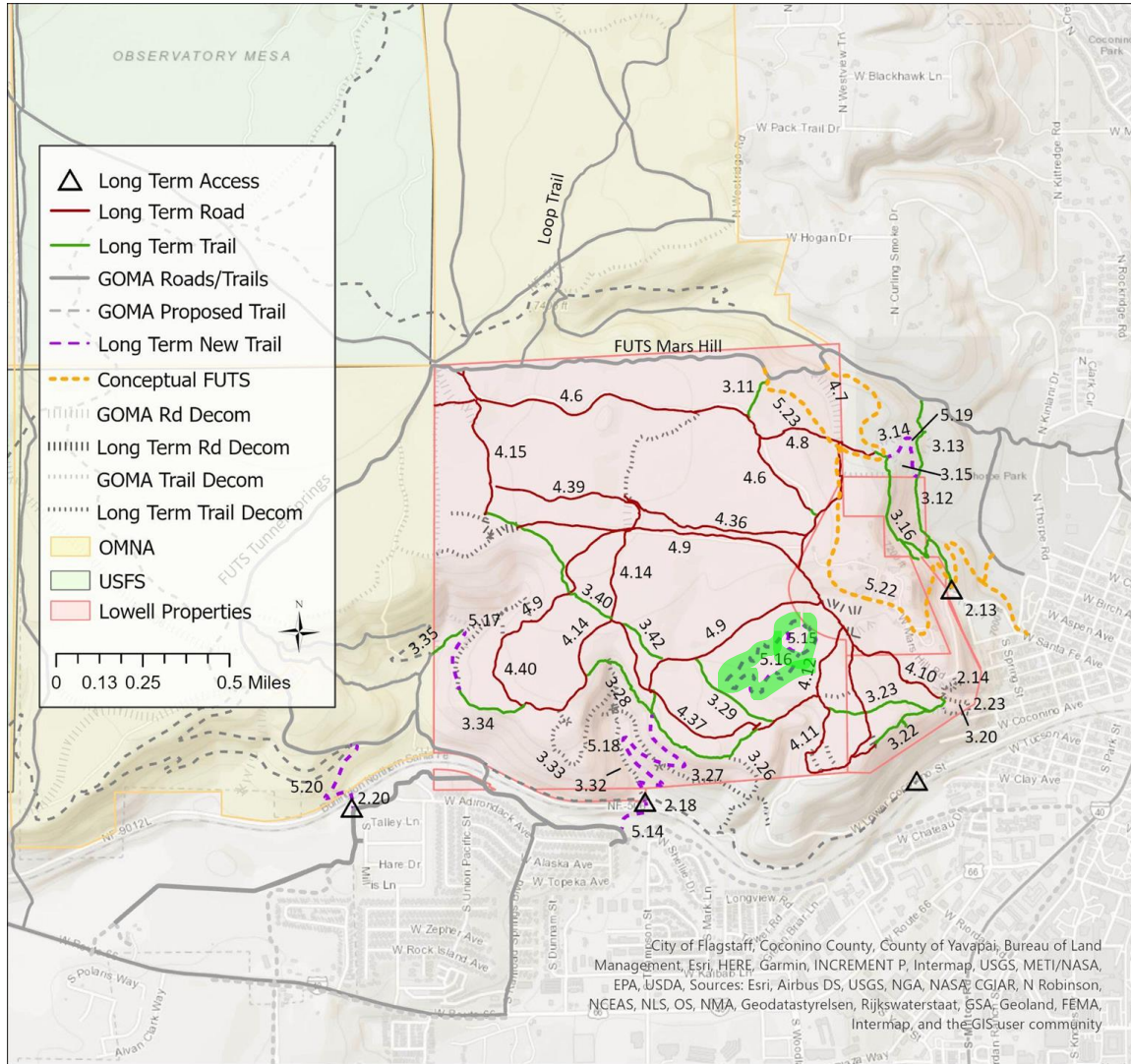


Long Term

- Lowell Observatory- Current internal planning underway, not the right time
- Railroad underpasses- Will require extensive engineering, funding, and cooperation



Trail Plan Review

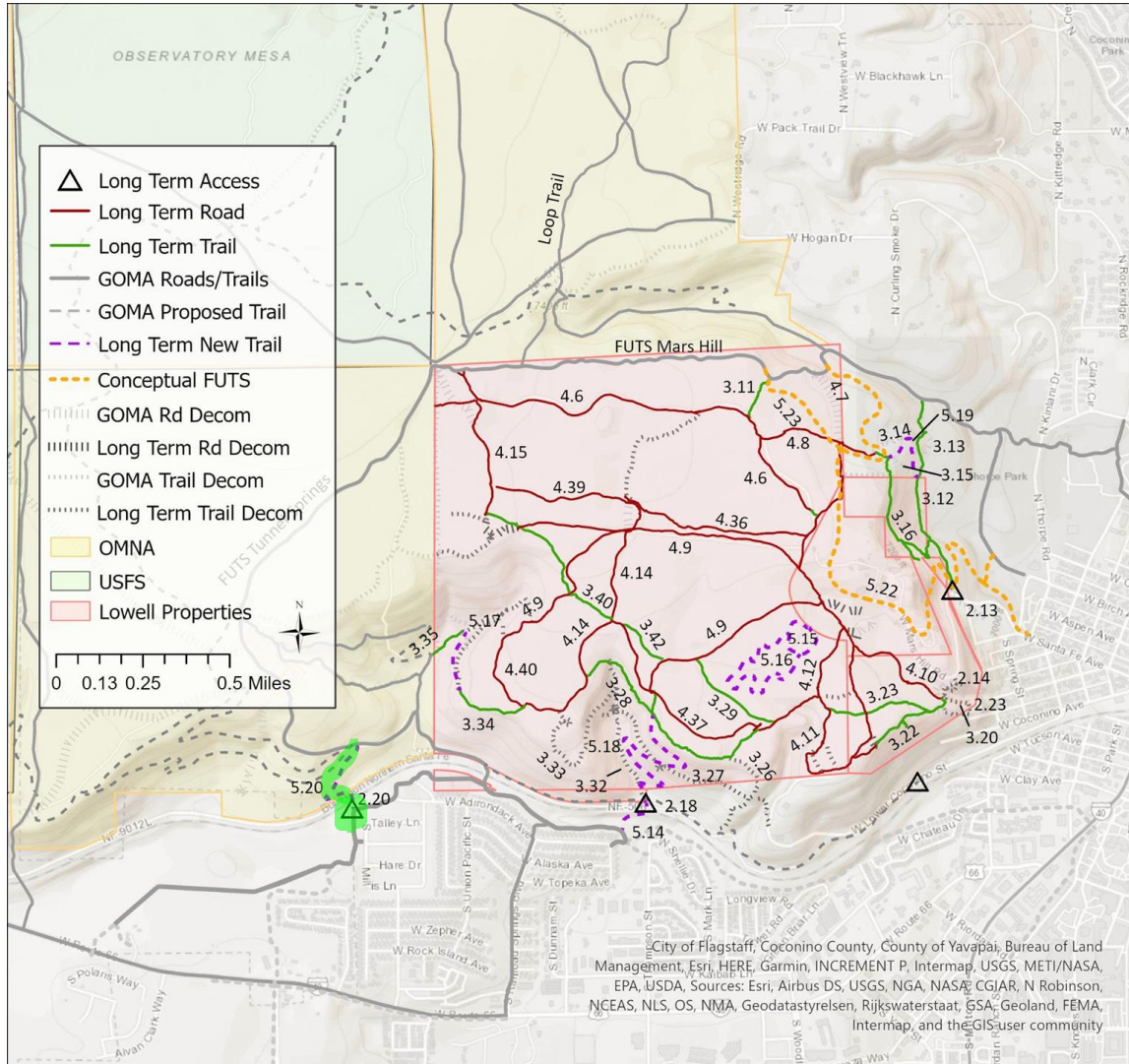


Long Term

- Lowell Observatory- Current internal planning underway, not the right time
- Railroad underpasses- Will require extensive engineering, funding, and cooperation



Trail Plan Review



Long Term

- Lowell Observatory- Current internal planning underway, not the right time
- Railroad underpasses- Will require extensive engineering, funding, and cooperation



Next Steps

2020-2022

Summer 2022

Summer 2023

Fall 2024

Summer 2025

**Summer/
Fall 2025**

2028-

**Trail Plan
Drafting
with
Partners**

**Public
Comment
Stage 1**

**Public
Comment
Stage 2**

**Public
Comment
Stage 3**

**City Council
Review
and
Final Plan
Resolution
Adoption**

**State
Review,
Permitting,
Surveys**

**Funding
and
Building**

Council Questions?

Public Comments



City Council Comments and Direction

