

**Mr. Matt Klein, Realty Specialist
Eagle-Holy Cross Ranger District
24747 US Highway 24, Minturn, CO 81645**

Nov 1, 2016

Re: Suggested options for mitigation and enhancement of recreation use values in response to proposed Berlaimont Estates subdivision

Matt,

Please find attached a concept design for alterations and improvements to existing recreational travel routes in the Berry and Beard Creek areas north of I-70 in Edwards, CO.

As you are aware, these public lands have a long history in Eagle County with multiple user groups including hikers, mountain bikers, motorized users, and hunters. The proposed housing development on the private inholding known as Berlaimont Estates, and associated access road upgrades to FSR 780 and 774, stand to significantly impact all user groups.

As potential mitigation for recreational impacts from the proposed development, we present a variety of options to improve the Berry/Beard Creek venue that remove pedestrians and cyclists from paved roads, integrate with the existing USFS system roads and trails, and concentrate new recreation travel routes in or near previously impacted land corridors.

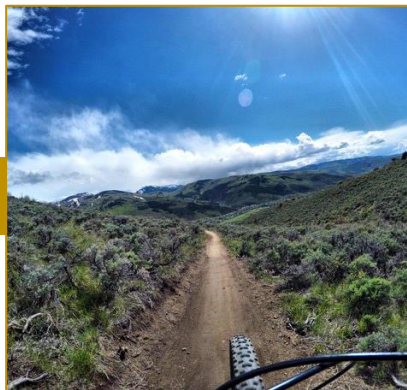
Proponents of Berlaimont Estates have expressed openness to the inclusion of recreation mitigation early in the subdivision's larger NEPA process. Proponents have agreed to consider and potentially support 3rd party suggestions such as this concept proposal in the development's review, if it is determined that such options provide feasible solutions to multi-user group impacts.

As always, if you require additional information or have questions regarding the concepts described in this proposal, please contact Jamie Malin (246-866-2457) or myself (970) 471-6216 at your convenience. Regards,

Bill Hoblitzell
Vail Valley Mountain Bike Association
970 471-6216 (c) billhoblitzell@yahoo.com

CC
Aaron Mayville, WRNF, awmayville@fs.fed.us
Paula Peterson, WRNF, pkpeterson@fs.fed.us
Jens Werner, Berlaimont Estates, jens@recommglobal.com
Andy Hensler, Berlaimont Estates, andy@huperetesadvisors.com
Jamie Malin, VVMBA, jamiemalin@yahoo.com
Rich Carrol President, Vail Valley Trails Connection, richcarroll4@comcast.net

Berlaimont Estates Recreation Impacts Mitigation



Prepared for
White River National Forest
Eagle Holy Cross Ranger District
Matt Klein, Realty Specialist
matthewklein@fs.fed.us

Prepared By
Bill Hoblitzell
Vail Valley Mountain Bike Association
vailvmba@gmail.com

Berlaimont Estates Recreation Mitigation Proposal

Vail Valley Mountain Bike Association

1 Project Introduction

1.1 Purpose and need

This proposal describes conceptual design options for multi-use singletrack trails and trailhead facility improvements to mitigate the loss and/or change of recreation access and the alteration of preferred travel patterns due to subdivision development and road improvements associated with the proposed Berlaimont Estates. The proposed development will impact WRNF system routes including Berry Creek Trail, FSR 780, 774, 778, and 7171A.

The concepts for an expanded multi-use trail system presented are simply one idea for how an improved system might look. They should not be viewed as a final or complete version of trail alignments, trail mileages, and trailhead facilities. Should any project alternative proceed, all system alterations and improvements would require public input processes and agency review.

These trail concepts are not designed solely to mitigate Berlaimont Estates impacts, but also recognize the value of the Berry and Beard Creek areas as high-use recreation venues that have received increasing visitorship by all user groups as Eagle County's population increases. As such, it is also sensible to consider the proposed trail system independent of the final outcome of Berlaimont Estates review, should that project discontinue.

Recognizing that alterations or additions to system trails may be outside the present resource capabilities of WRNF, it is understood that pursuing additional mileage in this venue may require alternate or unique management options including innovative public/private partnerships between WRNF, local governments, and NGOs. Innovative management models could include designation of the Berry Creek venue as a small-acreage Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), transference of trails to a non-system permitted trail system that is managed by local governments, or other options.

It is not the intent of this concept proposal to fully explore management and funding, which will require a more extensive stakeholder process with WRNF. This proposal seeks to provide conceptual trail layouts in a timely manner to allow opportunities for WRNF staff who are conducting preliminary NEPA analysis and field work associated with Berlaimont Estates to efficiently include these concepts in the greater effort.

2 Trail concepts

2.1 Principles for system design

The trail system modifications are guided by the following principles. While both WRNF and VVMBA have invested considerable resources to Berry Creek Trail in the last 3 years, the potential development of Berlaimont Estate has created a timely opportunity to consider the current system routes north of Edwards in a more holistic fashion. We believe this opportunity allows land managers and the recreation community to take a long term view and consider not just how the routes and traffic patterns operate today, but what routes might optimally serve users for the next 25+ years, independent of short-term resource constraints.

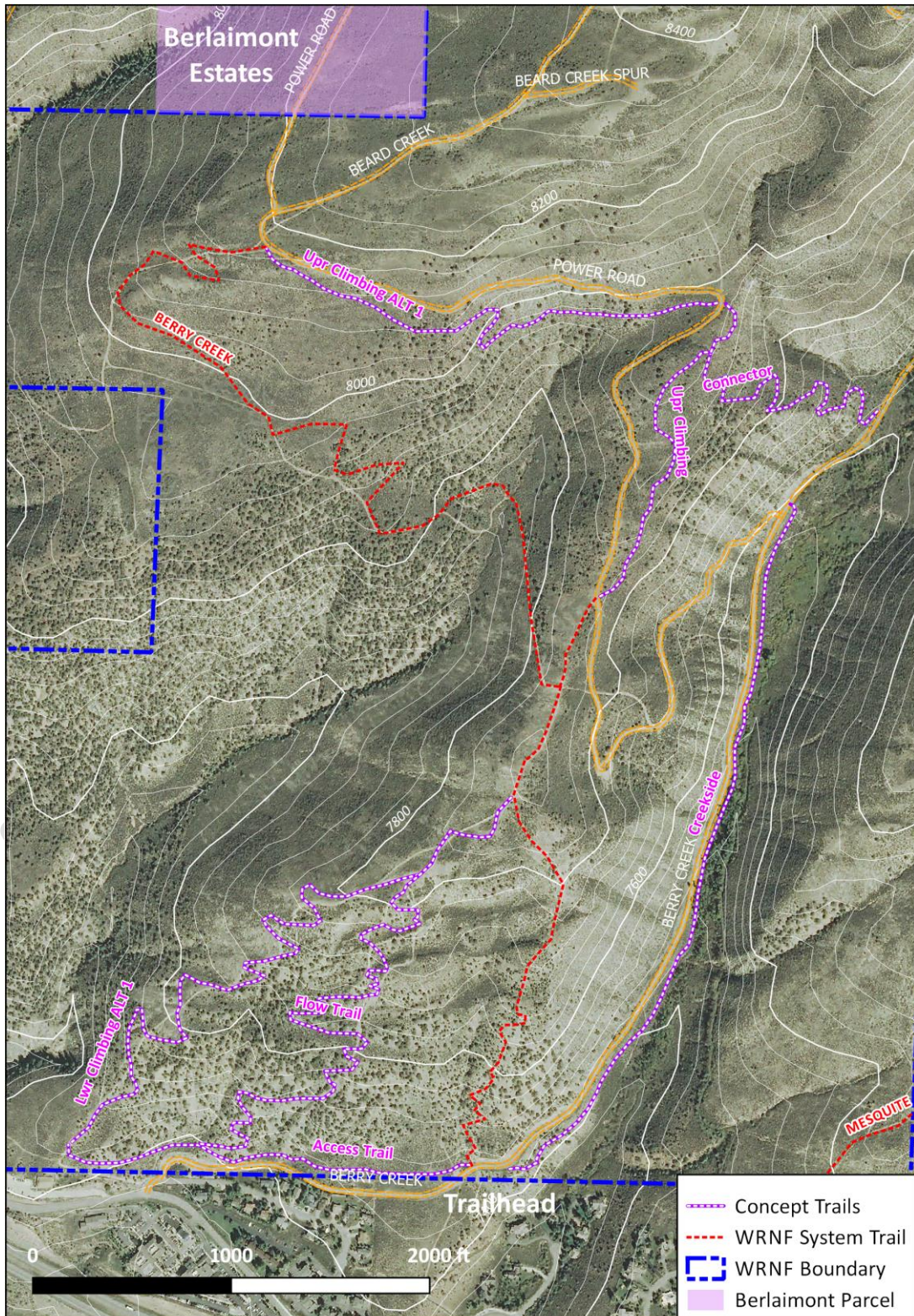
Guiding principles for proposal:

- *Re-envision the Berry Creek/Beard Creek zone as a limited stacked loop system* that better-integrates with community population centers and neighboring public lands.
- *Control and distribute the ever-increasing amount of recreation traffic* to pre-empt user conflicts and better-match trail offerings to the local recreational user community.
- *Utilize an area that is already impacted*, and in some cases, degraded, from prior motorized and pedestrian user-created routes.
- *Concentrate recreational use in an area that is already trending away from a backcountry-style public lands experience* due to swelling population in Edwards and Avon, and a potential new subdivision development with a major paved access road improvement.

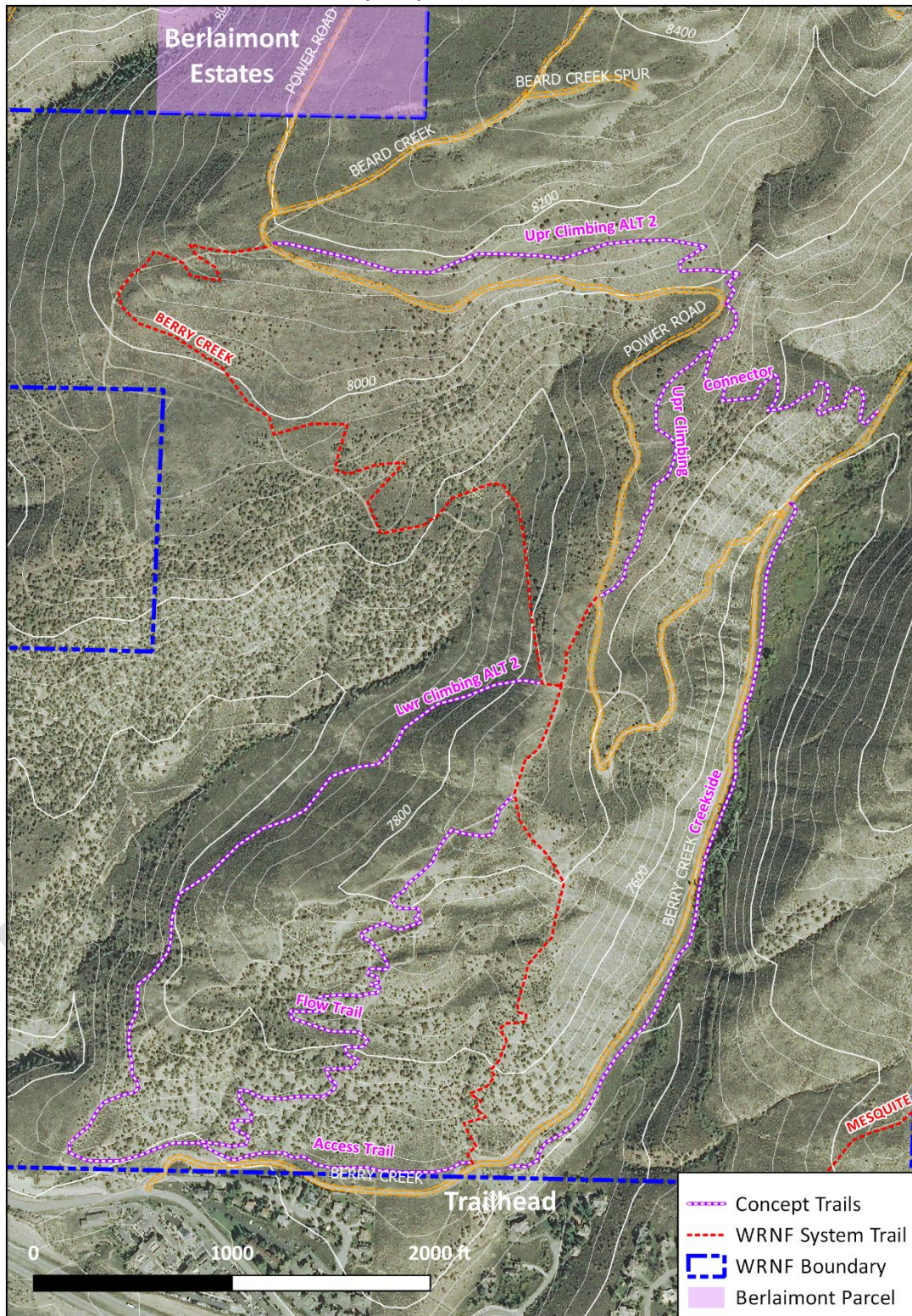
The remainder of this section contains two maps displaying alternative system design ideas. These layouts provide for looping or out and back options of multiple distances and time for non-motorized user groups in the lower Berry Creek area. Additional alternatives or trail options can easily be created, this serves only as a starting point for discussion. A short description providing a rationale for each of the suggested new trails or existing trail alterations follows after the maps.

2.2 Trail maps

Example System Alternative 1



Example System Alternative 2



2.3 Narrative trail descriptions

Climbing Trail

Lower Segment: Trailhead to Gravestone Knob

Upper Segment: Gravestone Knob to Pt. 8,216' on FSR 780.

Paved improvements to FSR 774/780 to access Berlaimont's inholding will increase vehicle traffic and speed, creating pedestrian and cyclist safety concerns as well as eliminating the quiet, soft-surface user experience that recreation users of the Berry Creek area seek. Creation of a single-track climbing option from the existing Berry Creek trailhead that ties first into the gravestone knob and then continues up to the upper Berry Creek trailhead on FSR 780 at Pt. 8,216'. This trail would effectively have two segments, a *Lower Climbing Trail* terminating at the Gravestone Knob, and an *Upper Climbing Trail* continuing to the existing upper Berry Creek trailhead.

The lower segment of this trail (Berry Creek lower trailhead up to Gravestone Knob) would be bi-directional for hikers and up-only for bikes. This will minimize speed-differentials between user groups. The upper segment (Gravestone Knob to Pt. 8,216') could parallel the Berlaimont Access road (currently FSR 780) along the flatter ridge line, then as the road turns west at approx 8,000' the trail could continue slightly below the road alignment or utilize an alternate alignment on the uphill side of the road.

Connector Trail, 780-to-717.1A

Many local users utilize 717.1A (Edmund Power Pole Rd) to link the Berry Creek zone to June Creek, the West Avon Preserve, the recently re-built Mesquite Trail, the upper Red and White system, or as a circumnavigation route around Singletree neighborhood. The paving and upgrades to FSR 780 and 774 will bisect these linkages and disconnect the soft-surface system. A gently graded (6%-7.5% average) multi-use connector trail that climbs the moderate ramping terrain between the 717.1A intersection and the 8,000' curve on FSR 780 will satisfactorily re-connect these systems for non-motorized users. This trail would effectively link users of the eastern travel routes behind Singletree neighborhood up to the proposed *Upper Climbing Trail* in the Berry Creek system.

Flow Trail

Trends in federal public land agencies elsewhere have moved to recognize the bike community's desire for downhill-trails and separation from foot-based traffic in limited circumstances. Examples include , the *Teton Pass downhill system* (Bridger Teton NF), *Ginormous* and *Son of Ginormous* trails in the Prince Creek zone near Carbondale (Colorado River Valley BLM district), *Pool and Ice Rink* in Eagle and *Black Jack Trail* (Pike-San Isabel NF). Providing these trail options helps shift the portion of bikers interested in faster downhill riding off of multi-use trails where riding styles may engender user conflicts due to biker/pedestrian speed differentials. The existing lower Berry Creek segment below Gravestone Knob would remain multi-use but could receive improvements including grade reduction to decrease current erosion issues and increase the long-term sustainability of the trail. Subtle alignment alterations could also help slow rider speeds, reducing user conflicts on this multi-use portion. Riders seeking an alternate descent experience would be shifted to the *Flow Trail*.

Creekside Trail

The paving and improvement between Moonridge Drive and FSR 780 will increase vehicle traffic and speed, creating pedestrian and cyclist safety concerns as well as eliminating the quiet, soft-surface user

experience that recreation users of the Berry Creek area seek. Establishment of a beginner trail paralleling the road and creek up to the 717.1A intersection will remove pedestrians and riders from the paved road. This area receives the highest utilization by dog-walkers in the entire area due to its proximity to water features. This trail could feature an IMBA-type beginner multi-use design, with a tread surface of 36-48" maintaining a very low gradient to allow for safe passing of users in opposite directions.

2.4 Trailhead Facilities Changes

Paving the access to Berlaimont Estates will make the existing parking and access situation no longer viable. During busy times, several dozen cars are parked in whatever available pull-off or disorganized pattern is available anywhere between the turnoff on Moonridge Drive up to the Berry Creek trailhead. Development of additional parking out of the road corridor at the lower trailhead is likely necessary to keep the road passable. A secondary parking and turnaround sized for trailers for motorized users to continue access to 717.1A and additional system routes north of Singletree may also be necessary.



Crowded parking on a weekday afternoon, Thursday 6/2/16

3 Policy and management items

3.1 Forest Plan principles for new trails

The 2002 Forest Plan contains general guidelines relating to trail systems on the WRNF, including maintaining the following strategies for new trail construction:¹

- Construct near human populations
- Construct loop trails where feasible
- Coordinate with trail systems developed by municipalities, counties, states, other federal agencies, and partners.

¹¹¹ 2002 White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, Chapter 2 Travel System Infrastructure, *Standards and guideline 2-39*.

The mitigation concepts and system connectors presented here align with these Forest Plan principles. All new trails proposed here must go through the appropriate NEPA process. A portion of the concepts proposed here for existing trail segments, restoration areas, or user-created routes could potentially qualify for a Decision Memorandum and eligibility for Categorical Exclusions such as FSH 1909.15 Ch. 30 §32.2 Categories 1 and 20 (respectively: *Construction and Reconstruction of Trails* and *Restoration/rehabilitation of lands occupied by roads and trails to a more natural condition*).

3.2 Consistency with other WRNF management goals

The entire zone covered in this concept proposal is designated by the Forest Plan as Management area 5.41 – Deer and Elk Winter Range. Therefore, seasonal closures to protect ungulate winter range could be applicable to protect wildlife populations during sensitive time periods. This is consistent with existing management regimes for lower-elevation south facing terrain in the Eagle Valley such as North Trail and Game Creek Trails.

However, the construction of the paved Berlaimont access road and subdivision will create continuous, long term, and irreversible impacts to wildlife in the area that will alter travel and use patterns of elk and deer. This situation challenges the continued applicability of Category 5.41 designation for the lower Berry Creek area transected by the new paved access road. In the long term, it may be more appropriate to designate lands near the access road with an alternative management type while keeping the 5.41 designation for the upper Berry Creek watershed above the FSR 780/774 intersection. A road buffering analysis and literature review of identified impact distances from residential roads can be developed to support this change in designation.

Berry Creek Rd FSR 774 is currently a wintertime *Designated Motorized Route in Restricted Area*, open to over-snow motorized vehicle routes. This designation poorly reflects the actual conditions of annual snow coverage, which is generally absent or intermittent to an elevation of between 8,500’-9,000’ in most typical years. It is recommended that the lower Berry Creek area (below the intersection of Berry Creek Trail and FSR 780) be removed from winter travel management.

3.3 Resource impacts

Proposed development of subdivisions, paved access roads, and new trails will impact vegetation, wildlife, and cultural resources. The purpose of including recreation mitigation in the larger Berlaimont Estates review process is so that resource impacts of new or altered trail systems may be considered holistically as part of the subdivision project review by WRNF staff. The primary goal is to determine physical and biological resources. The responsibility for fair characterization of the extent and relevancy of resource impacts lies with WRNF staff throughout the process.

3.4 System management and operation

The purpose of this concept proposal is only to provide a basis for stakeholder discussions regarding appropriate mitigation for Berlaimont Estates development and long term system ideas for the Berry Creek zone. Should the discussion proceed beyond conceptual design, funding and management issues including long term operation and maintenance can occur as a separate stakeholder process.