

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

# OPTIMAL LOCATION REVIEW

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## Introduction

The Optimal Location Review process (OLR), establishes a systematic and objective framework for determining the best location for the Continental Divide Trail (CDT).

The optimal location of the trail is one that best meets statute and policy regarding location, maximum outdoor recreation potential, and providing for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant resources, qualities, values, associated settings, and the primary uses of the CDT.

This document:

1. Describes the objectives of an OLR and when it may be necessary to conduct one
2. Prescribes the process for completing an OLR

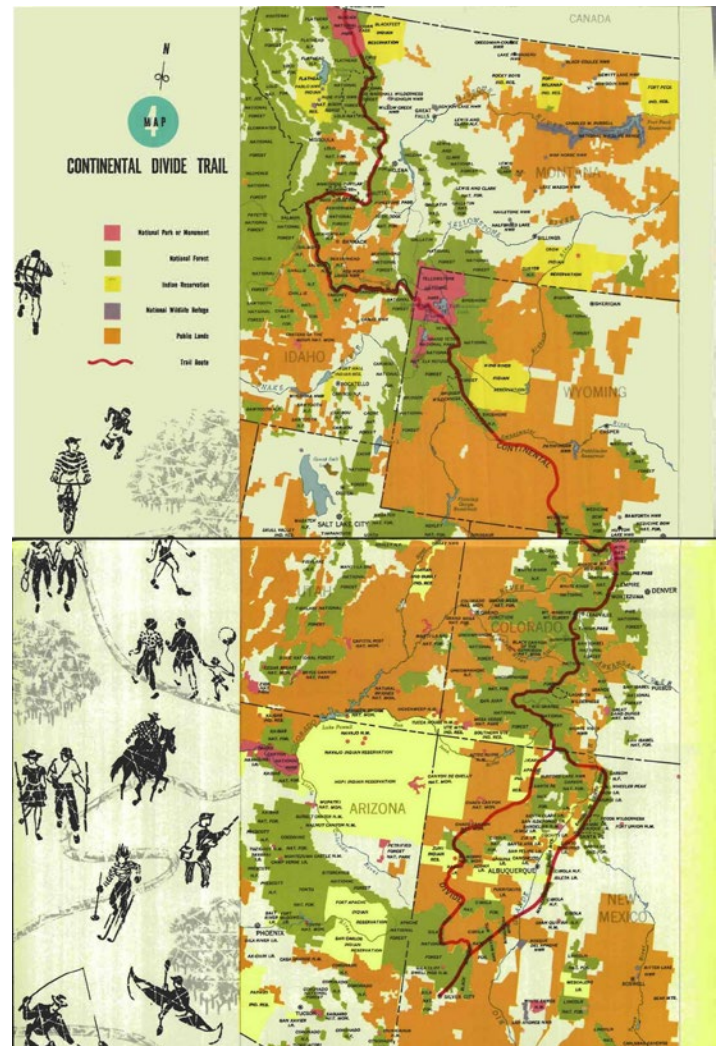
## About the CDT

The CDT was designated by Congress under the National Trails System Act in 1978. The US Forest Service is the lead administering agency for the entire trail, working in close cooperation with local managers regardless of jurisdiction. The Rocky Mountain Regional Forester is the lead federal official for coordinating matters concerning the planning and operations of the CDT.

The CDT extends 3,100 miles through the states of New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. Approximately 275 miles (8%) of the Trail cross non-federally owned lands (i.e. State, County or privately owned). Many of the existing sections of the CDT on federal lands are on motorized routes, have low scenic integrity, lack of water sources or are at risk of encroachment from incompatible uses and development.

## How does an OLR inform NEPA?

Relocating a portion of a National Scenic Trail is a federal action. All federal actions are subject to compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The OLR process informs the purpose and need for NEPA analysis to relocate a Trail segment. The OLR report does not substitute for NEPA compliance.



*Original CDT Planning Map from 1966 Trails for America Report.*

# Objectives



*“the routes of national scenic trails...should avoid, insofar as practicable; established highways; motor roads; mining areas; power transmission lines; existing commercial and industrial developments; range fences and improvements; private operations; and any other activities that would be incompatible with the protection of the trail in its natural condition and its use for outdoor recreation.”*  
-National Trails System Act



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**The OLR process is a collaborative effort between local land managers and the Continental Divide Trail Coalition to identify the best possible location for the trail corridor.**

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**The purpose of an OLR is to identify the best possible location for the CDT corridor that:**

- 1** Meets the intent of Congress to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential within the scenic landscapes along the Continental Divide.
- 2** Ensures a trail location that is sustainable and blends with the environment in a cost-effective manner.
- 3** Provides reasonable separation from motorized uses, residential, commercial and industrial development.
- 4** Provides access to water sources.
- 5** Provides public access.
- 6** Achieves consistency with design criteria for location outlined in the CDT Comprehensive Plan.

# Trail Corridor



*“The nature and purposes of the CDNST are to provide for high-quality scenic, primitive hiking and horseback riding opportunities and to conserve natural, historic, and cultural resources along the CDNST corridor.”*

*-CDNST Comprehensive Plan (2009)*



## National Trail Management Corridor

The establishment of the National Trail Management Corridor is a land use allocation decision made through agency plans such as Resource Management Plans or Forest Land Management Plans that are the responsibility of each National Trail managing agency, by jurisdiction, along segments of the trail. Selection of the National Trail Management Corridor is guided by the direction provided in the trail-wide Comprehensive Plan; the inventory of resources, qualities, values, and associated settings; and the primary use or uses. It will include the National Trail Right of Way, where established, or the potential National Trail Right-of-Way, but may encompass resources, qualities and values beyond that boundary.

The OLR identifies the best possible location for the CDT regardless of land ownership or construction needs. Acquisition of the easement or land surrounding the Trail and completion of relocations may at times require a long or uncertain wait. This should not deter land managers from pursuing the location deemed most desirable. Land ownership conditions change over time and provide opportunities to acquire the optimal location. Land management agencies should pursue alternate locations to those identified as “optimal” if unique circumstances warrant using an alternate route.

## Ensuring that CDT is Located within a Protected Scenic Corridor

To meet the OLR goals and objectives and to ensure that the CDT route lies within a protected scenic corridor, managing agencies should consider the following:

- Seek routes on lands with natural scenery and on lands where the new corridor can be protected.
- On public lands with scenery management systems such as VRM or SMS, look for areas with objectives that protect natural scenery.
- Do not depend on vegetation to screen the trail from incompatible views. Vegetation may burn or be cut down.
- Consider potential future threats to the trail setting from possible re-routes. Avoid locating the trail in areas with declining vegetative health, active timber base, or areas where there are proposed nearby land uses that would alter the scenic setting (e.g., mining, transmission lines, and wind farms), and areas near zoning that could lead to development.
- Utilize GIS and aerial photos to identify potential re-routes, but always field verify the re-route locations.
- Ensure that potential OLR routes are addressed in land management plans.

# Process

## 1 Determine if an OLR is needed.

The following factors may dictate the need for an OLR:

- Trail “gaps,” where official treadway does not yet exist
- Road walks or motorized trail segments
- Excessive disturbance within the corridor or viewshed due to existing or potential residential, commercial, or industrial forest development
- Resource damage, such as erosion, pollution, creation of multi-tracks, or general degradation of lands
- A lack of the desired recreation qualities or scenery conditions
- Chronic, recurring maintenance demands or problems due to unsustainable trail location.
- Safety hazards to trail users
- Circuitous routing
- Threats to corridor connectivity that effect wildlife and ecosystems.

## 2 Form the OLR team.

The OLR Project Team consists of a project team leader, Agency specialists, and key non governmental personnel. Suggested Team Includes:

- Recreation and/or trails staff
- Landscape architect
- Wildlife biologist
- Archaeologist
- Realty and or Lands specialist
- Hydrologist
- Continental Divide Trail Coalition staff

## 3 Define the scope & scale of the OLR.

Decide on length of trail to be reviewed, scope of issues and identify the timeline of the process. To determine the scope of the OLR consider these factors:

- How will land uses and developments alter the desired recreation setting and scenery?
- Are there severe ecosystem disturbances such as floods or fires?
- Safety concerns.
- Length of co-aligned motorized segments.
- The existing recreational experience
- Unique circumstances such as newly identified habitat for an endangered species.
- Land uses and developments that impede the use of the CDNST corridor as a connectivity corridor for habitat and ecosystems.
- Cultural Resources

Frequently, an OLR will evaluate lands across administrative boundaries providing sufficient size to consider alternatives regardless of land ownership.





## 4 Initial team meeting & data review

**Gather the following data prior to the meeting for evaluation and review.**

- Review Land Ownership, surveys, deeds, easements (Contact land owners prior to field review)
- Existing or potential future threats (development, proximity to private land, roads)
- Resource Concerns (Wildlife, T&E Species, Hydrology, Cultural, Soil Type)
- Existing or Potential Land Uses (mining, timber, motorized use, energy development)
- Opportunities (water access, unique features)
- Identify all potential route locations
- GIS information (Hydrology, slope, aspect, viewshed, cultural and historical resources)
- Law and Policy
- Relevant Planning Direction (forest plan, resource management plan)
- Desired conditions for recreation and scenery (ROS, VRM and SMS)
- Topographic maps
- Property ownership maps

## 5 Full field review

**Conduct a field review to validate the data from step 4. GPS potential alternate routes and associated features such as viewpoints, water access, etc. Note any specific opportunities or issues for each route.**

- Seek a highly scenic, predominantly natural setting (FS – Scenic Integrity Objective (SIO) of Very High or High, BLM VRM - Class I or II).
- Use natural topography to reduce visual impacts by human-made features where possible.
- Avoid paralleling roads and utility corridors or other human-made features.
- Minimize impacts within riparian corridors, except at designated access points or crossing sites.
- Respect wildlife water sources and range permit/lease water improvements (trail should not be closer than 1/4 mile).
- Avoid or mitigate potentially unsafe trail building conditions.
- Consider opportunities for connector/side trails to enhance the trail experience and connect to communities or points of interest.

## 6 Post Field Review

- Select the optimal “Trail Corridor.”
- Prioritize problems and needs to reach target solution.
- Plan budget and assign specific actions with timelines to responsible parties.
- Document the OLR procedure findings, future actions, and planned meetings, and send a full report to all OLR Team members (Page 10-11)
- Implement solutions.

# Documentation

## 1 Description of the current route:

Describe the location of the current route from South to North.

## 2 Statement of the problem:

Describe why there is a need to do an optimal location review. Identify known problems, issues, and concerns with the existing trail. (Process Step #1) Describe the outcome of any public meeting(s) that may have been held.

## 3 Trail Objectives:

Describe the objectives for the trail in the area under review. These objectives should follow the guidelines outlined in the CDT Comprehensive Plan, the National Trails System Act. List the improvements or added benefits of moving the trail.

## 4 Alternative routes considered: (Process #4)

Compare different route possibilities that will meet trail objectives, including the current route. List benefits and potential negative impacts of each. Assign a unique identifier to each alternative route considered. Evaluate each route based on the same objectives of the OLR outlined in the objectives (page 5)

## 5 Optimal trail location:

Provide a description of which alternative provides for an optimal trail location, and describe how it resolves concerns while meeting trail objectives. It may be determined that the existing route is already the optimal trail location.

## 6 Trail acquisition corridor:

For the selected optimal trail location, identify its trail corridor and any parcels proposed for acquisition within this trail corridor. Identify any “Priority 1” and “Priority 2” acquisition parcels. (See Appendix pg. 14)



## 7 Maps:

Include a topographic map(s) of each route considered. GIS maps will provide a visual depiction of the CDT corridor, locations, alternatives, and areas of greatest concern and potential opportunities as described within the OLR Report. The appropriate map(s) will accompany each OLR report/document. Identify parcels proposed for acquisition with a parcel ID cross-referenced to the report's acquisition table.

## 8 Photographs:

Include digital photography of the existing recreation setting and its scenic character, as well as problem areas demonstrating opportunities to improve CDT conditions and settings through the OLR process. Provide Geo-referenced photos if possible.

## 9 Document approval of OLR report:

Once the OLR partners reach consensus and the OLR team completes the OLR document, the Forest Service CDT administrator will obtain final review, acceptance and signatures from the local land management agency unit line officer and CDTC Executive Director.

***NOTE: Approval of OLR document does not indicate an environmental decision has been made.***

# Appendix



## Law

**The National Trails System Act, P.L. 90-543 (NTSA)**, signed into law Oct 2nd, 1968, established policies and procedures for a system of congressionally designated, interconnected, linear landscapes for recreation, conservation and interpretation. The National Parks and Recreation Act of November 10, 1978 amended the NTSA of 1968 (16 U.S.C. 1241-1251) and established and designated the CDT (Pub. L. No. 95-625, 92 Stat. 3467).

- Sec. 2(a): In order to provide for the ever-increasing needs of an expanding population and in order to promote the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation, trails should be established...
- Sec. 2(c): ...it is further the purpose of this Act to encourage and assist volunteer citizen involvement in the planning, development, maintenance, and management, where appropriate, of trails.
- Sec. 3(a)(2): National scenic trails...will be extended trails so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural or cultural qualities of the area through which such trails may pass.
- Sec. 7(c): The use of motor vehicles along any national scenic trail shall be prohibited...but limited motorized use may be allowed to: meet emergencies, provide landowner access, provide for motor vehicle crossings.
- Sec. 7(c): Reasonable efforts shall be made to provide sufficient access opportunities to such trails and, to the extent practicable, efforts be made to avoid activities incompatible with the purposes for which such trails were established.
- Sec. 7(c): Other uses along the CDT which will not substantially interfere with the nature and purposes of the trail, and which, at the time of designation (Nov. 10, 1978) are allowed by administrative regulations, including the use of motor vehicles, shall be permitted by the Secretary charged with administration of the trail.

**Executive Order 13195** (Trails for America in the 21st Century, 2001): “Federal agencies will... protect, connect, promote, and assist trails of all types... This will be accomplished by... protecting the trail corridors associated with National Scenic Trails... to the degrees necessary to ensure that the values for which [the] trail was established remain intact.”

## Policy

**CDT Comprehensive Plan:** Developed in response to Sec. 5(f) of the NTSA, this document, signed by the Chief of the US. Forest Service, serves as the authority for broad based policy and direction for the development and management of the CDT. This document applies to the entire CDT, not just NFS units.

- Sec. II A: The nature and purposes of the CDT are to provide for high-quality, scenic and primitive hiking and horseback riding opportunities and to conserve the natural, historic, and cultural resources along the CDT corridor.
- Sec. III E.: Land and resource management plans are to provide for the development and management of the CDT as an integrated part of the overall direction for the land area through which the trail passes.

### Trail Location:

- Sec. IV. B(1)(b)(1): Where possible, locate the CDT in primitive or semi-primitive non-motorized ROS classes, provided that the CDT may have to traverse intermittently through more developed ROS classes to provide for continuous travel.
- Sec. IV. B(1)(b)(2): Locate a CDT segment on a road only where it is primitive and offers recreational opportunities comparable to those provided by a trail with a designed use of Pack and Saddle Stock.
- Sec. IV. B(1)(b)(3): The trail shall be located as close to the geographic divide as possible...

### Scenery:

- Sec. IV(4)(c)(1): The CDT is a concern level 1 travel route. The scenic integrity objective is to be high or very high. The inventory will be performed as if the trail exists even in sections where it is proposed for construction or reconstruction.

### FSM 2300, Chapter 50 (Trail, River and Similar Recreation Opportunities)(Excerpt):

- FSM 2353.42: Administer National Scenic and National Historic Trail corridors to be compatible with the nature and purposes of the corresponding trail.
- FSM 2353.44(b)(1)(a): Except where the CDT traverses a wilderness area and is governed by wilderness management prescriptions, establish a management area for the CDT that is broad enough to protect natural, scenic, historic, and cultural features; b. Prescribe desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines for the CDT...”
- FSM 2353.44b(7): The one-half mile foreground viewed from either side of the CDT travel route must be a primary consideration in delineating the boundary of a CDT management area.
- FSM 2353.44b(9): Trail segments should fall into Trail Class 2 or 3 and have a designed use of Pack and Saddle Stock...

## Lands Acquisition Inventory

After identifying the Trail corridor boundaries, the OLR shall identify all of the private lands located within this boundary. The OLR team will categorize the land parcels as either acquisition “Priority 1”, “Priority 2”, or “Priority 3”.

**Priority 1** parcels are near an area where there is no protected corridor and where the current land management actions or policy in the area are not consistent with the nature and purpose of the CDT.

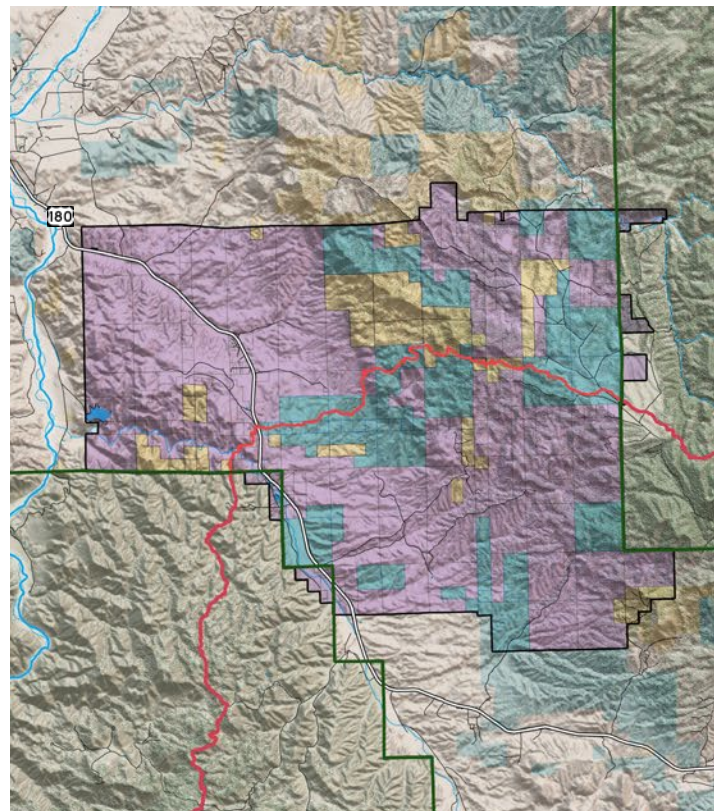
**Priority 2** parcels are near an area where there is no protected corridor and where the current land management actions or policy in the area are consistent with the nature and purpose of the CDT. These parcels underlie a route identified as ideal for the Trail and/or Trail corridor.

**Priority 3** parcels are public parcels with management issues not consistent with the CDT. As this Lands Acquisition Inventory deals only with private lands, Priority 3 parcels need not be listed.

**Priority 4** parcels have some factor that prevents the completion of a Trail route or prevents the meeting of certain CDT Comprehensive Plan Directions.

The OLR team leader will list parcels in a table that includes: a parcel ID that will cross-reference with the assessor’s parcel number (APN) on a map provided of the OLR area; a legal description; whether there is an easement; assessor parcel number; acres; landowner; and acquisition priority.

The CDTC, with oversight from the CDT Program Manager, will maintain a “Lands Acquisition Inventory” database of the CDT protection priorities. Priorities identify areas most in need of protection and assists with securing funding and resources to pursue land acquisition. The CDT prioritization system can be found in the CDT Completion Strategy Issue Identification Framework.



| Priority Level | Parcel ID | Legal Description | Assessor’s Parcel Number | Parcel Acres | Land Owner  | Easement present? |
|----------------|-----------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------------|
| 1              | A         | S 20, T19N, R15E  | XXX-XXX-002              | 54           | Mr. Smith   | Yes               |
| 2              | D         | S 20, T19N, R13E  | XXX-XXX-003              | 125          | Mrs. Smith  | Yes               |
| 4              | E         | S 21, T18S, R12W  | XXX-XXX-017              | 219          | Dr. Liz Lou | Yes               |



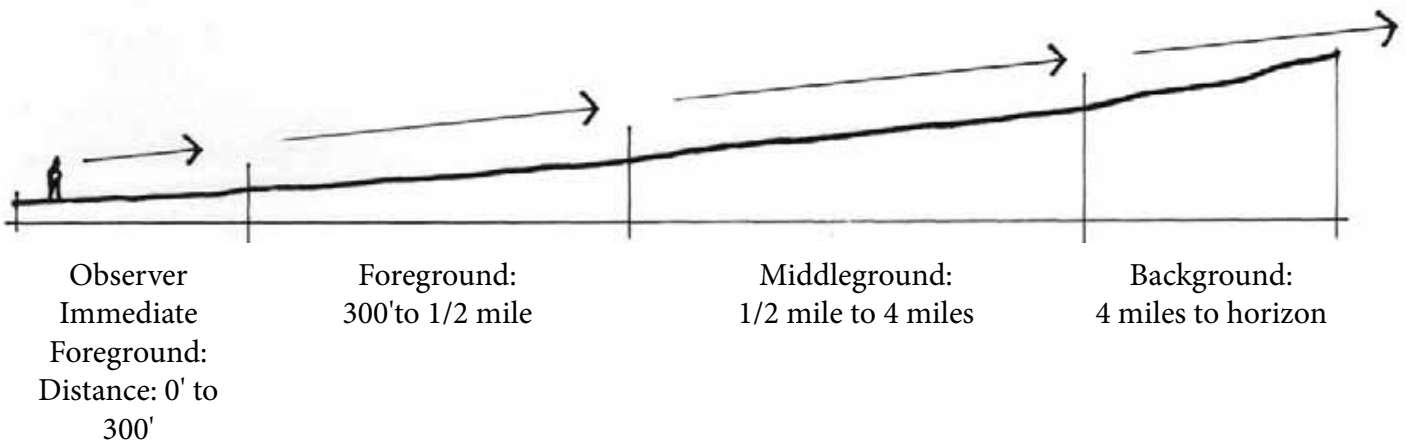
## Landscape Viewshed Analysis:

Preserving the natural appearing scenery is an important part of the Trail Experience and of the integrity of the CDT as a National Scenic Trail. The purpose of a landscape viewshed analysis is to identify the relative importance of what is seen and perceived in the landscape. Landscape viewshed analysis done in GIS will determine the area that can be “seen” from the optimal trail location.

The Distance Zones described in the USDA Agriculture Handbook Number 701: “Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management” will be used to guide the process.

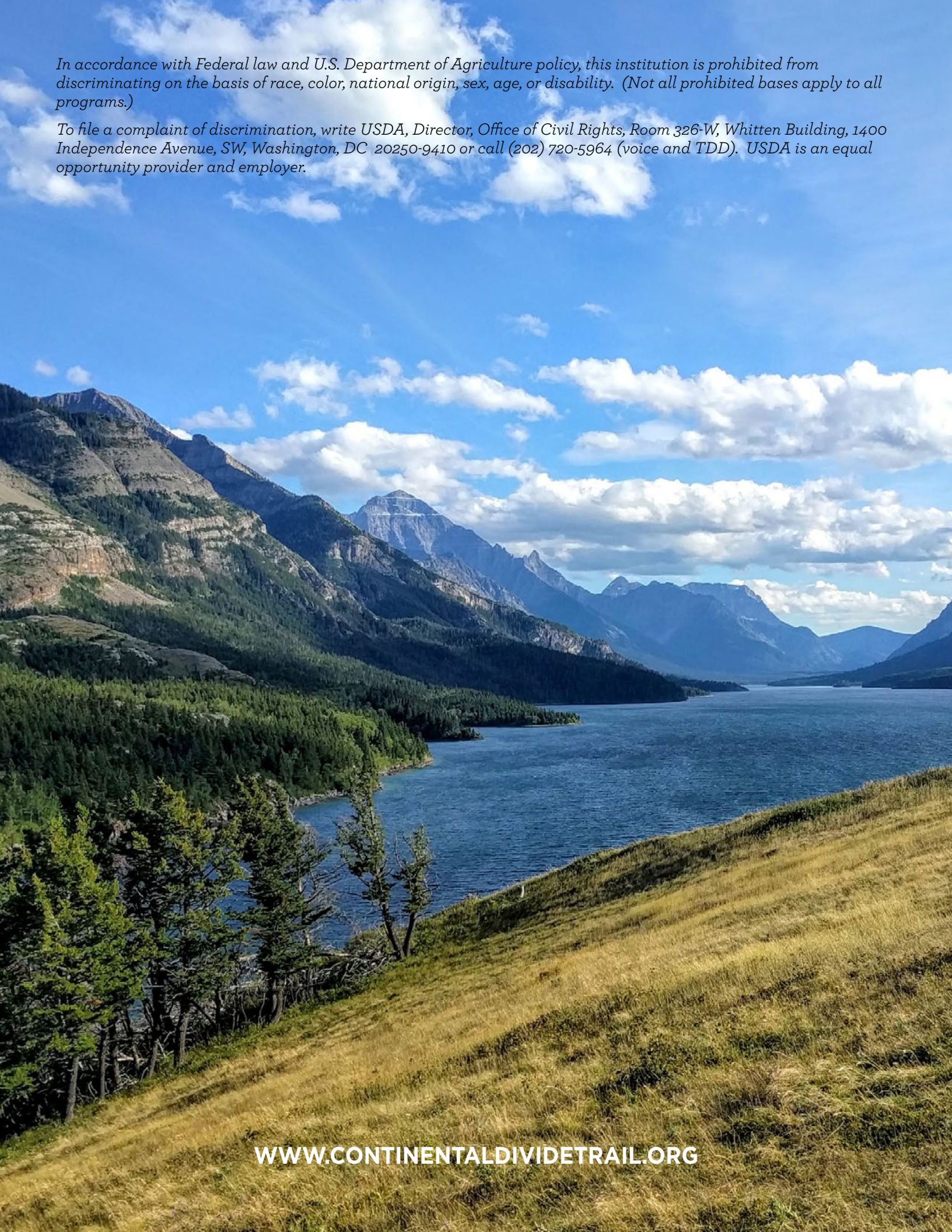
The defined viewshed areas should be a factor in determining the corridor width in addition to other analysis factors.

### Distance Zones:



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