



May 24, 2019

Karen Schroyer  
District Ranger, Aspen-Sopris Ranger District  
White River National Forest  
620 Main Street  
Carbondale, CO 81623

RE: Pitkin County Proposal – Carbondale to Crested Butte Trail; Redstone to McClure Pass Segment

Dear Ms. Shroyer:

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails is proposing to construct and maintain a seven-mile, natural surface, non-motorized, multi-use trail from Redstone to the summit of McClure Pass. About five miles of this seven-mile trail segment is located on National Forest System land managed by the White River National Forest (WRNF).

Pitkin County is seeking to initiate the approval process to construct and maintain the proposed trail on WRNF land. This process is anticipated to include National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance, as well as other regulatory requirements. A project proposal describing the proposed trail segment is attached. To initiate the NEPA process, we request a site visit and initial coordination meeting with WRNF staff to identify issues and discuss steps forward.

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails has a long history of proactive and open communication with WRNF. We look forward to continuing this collaborative relationship as we move forward with the NEPA compliance process for the proposed Redstone to McClure Pass Trail Segment. If you have any questions, please contact Lindsey Utter or myself at 970-920-5232.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gary Tennenbaum", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gary Tennenbaum  
Director

Enclosure

# **Project Proposal**

## **Redstone to McClure Pass Trail**

**Aspen-Sopris Ranger District  
White River National Forest**

**Updated July 2019**

Pitkin County, Colorado, proposes to construct and maintain a natural surface, nonmotorized, multi-use recreation trail from Redstone south to the summit of McClure Pass. The proposed trail would be about 7 miles long and would be located primarily on National Forest System land managed by the White River National Forest (WRNF).

The northern 2 miles would be within the State Highway 133 right-of-way, while most of the remaining 5 miles would be on WRNF. The proposed trail would follow the route and existing roadbeds of the historic Rock Creek Wagon Road and Old McClure Pass road. A non-system social trail currently exists along the route within WRNF.

Pitkin County is seeking to initiate the approval process to construct and maintain the proposed trail on WRNF land. This process is anticipated to include National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance, as well as other regulatory requirements.

### **Background on the Project**

The proposed project is a component of the long-envisioned Carbondale to Crested Butte Trail. This 83-mile regional trail connection would eventually traverse multiple river drainages and mountain ranges connecting the communities of Carbondale, Redstone, and Crested Butte.

After decades of studies, discussion, and consideration, Pitkin County initiated a planning process for the Carbondale to Crested Butte Trail in 2017. This planning process evaluated a range of issues and options for trail connections through the Crystal River Valley between the existing terminus of the trail and McClure Pass. This process included detailed environmental and engineering studies and an extensive public input and engagement process. (In a parallel process, Gunnison County, the Town of Crested Butte, and the Grand Mesa Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests developed trail recommendations for areas south of McClure Pass.) The Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners adopted the comprehensive Carbondale to Crested Butte Trail Plan in December 2018.

The Trail Plan identified the Proposed Project (Redstone to McClure Pass segment) as the first priority for implementation. The Trail Plan also includes recommendations for habitat enhancement projects and wildlife studies throughout the Crystal River corridor. Those projects are not part of this Project Proposal. The proposed trail project is shown on the attached maps.

The Carbondale to Crested Butte Trail Plan, and supporting documents, can be found here:  
<https://www.pitkinostprojects.com/carbondale-to-crested-butte-trail-plan.html>

## **Purpose of the Project**

The overarching goal for the *regional* Carbondale to Crested Butte planning project is to, “Design and construct a recreation and transportation trail from Carbondale to Crested Butte following the West Elk Scenic and Historic Byway.” Through the planning process, Pitkin County Open Space and Trails developed a plan that builds on the Scenic Byway’s original vision and addresses the following objectives:

- Promote and coordinate access and management of non-motorized, multi-modal transportation;
- Enhance safety for non-motorized users, and Highway 133 and Kebler Pass motorists;
- Steward the environment and biodiversity through sensitive route selection and long-term management;
- Design a trail that utilizes best practices to minimize impacts and seeks aesthetic compatibility with the landscape;
- Provide ADA-accessible recreation to the extent possible on wider multi-use trail segments; and
- Enhance and expand opportunities for recreation, education, interpretation and appreciation of the unique natural, cultural and historical resources along the corridor.

In support of these overarching regional objectives, the immediate goals for the proposed Redstone to McClure Pass Trail are to:

1. Provide a safe, off-highway trail connecting Redstone, the communities and neighborhoods along Highway 133, the top of McClure Pass, and existing recreation destinations.
2. Construct a sustainable trail that provides a quality user experience while utilizing historic road cuts and minimizing impacts to wildlife and other environmental resources.
3. Implement a proposed trail section that can stand on its own but also is a segment in the regional Carbondale to Crested Butte trail.

While the Redstone to McClure Pass Trail is a key part of the regional Carbondale to Crested Butte trail corridor, it also serves as a high-priority stand-alone project that meets current needs for recreational access, safe trail connections, and sustainable resource management.

## **USFS Guidance and Decision**

Pitkin County is seeking authorization from WRNF to construct and maintain the portions of the Redstone to McClure Pass Trail on National Forest System land – about 4.6 miles. Authorization would occur through a Special Use Authorization (or similar mechanism, as appropriate).

The proposed trail is within the following management area designations (per the WRNF Land and Resource Management Plan 2002 Revision):

- 1.31 – Backcountry Recreation – Non-Motorized
- 4.4 – Recreation Rivers – Designated and Eligible
- 5.42 – Bighorn Sheep Habitat

The trail is proposed to be evaluated and documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) that meets U.S. Forest Service standards for NEPA compliance. In addition, Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) compliance and approvals will be required for activities within the Highway 133 right of way.

Pitkin County is requesting that the WRNF initiate the NEPA process in 2019.

**Proposed Design Specifications**

The proposed trail would be designed and constructed to be a soft-surface or natural surface trail, 3 to 5 feet wide depending on location.

- **WRNF Land** – For the 5 miles on national forest land, the existing non-system social trail would be reconfigured or improved to meet standards for trail sustainability and visitor use.
- **CDOT ROW** – In the northern 2 miles, closest to Redstone (primarily within CDOT right-of-way), a new trail would be constructed along the shoulder of the highway consisting of natural surface or crusher fine trail. Where the trail approaches a tall cliff along a curve in the highway, the trail could be constructed on a raised structure (retaining wall and elevated platform with a pedestrian railing) to provide separation from vehicular traffic.

Anticipated trail design specifications are summarized in the following table by segment:

| ID | Trail Plan Segment  | Length (miles) | Landowner          | Design Width | Surface                 | Construction Difficulty | Description                                                                              |
|----|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Castle              | 0.98           | CDOT/Pitkin County | 3-5'         | Natural or crusher fine | Low                     | West shoulder of Hwy 133                                                                 |
| 2  | Hawk Creek          | 0.48           | CDOT               | 3-5'         | Natural or crusher fine | High                    | Elevated trail along west shoulder of Hwy 133                                            |
| 3  | Hays Falls          | 0.57           | CDOT/WRNF          | 3.5'         | Natural or crusher fine | Moderate                | Shoulder of Hwy 133                                                                      |
| 4  | Bear Creek          | 1.45           | WRNF               | 3'           | Natural                 | Low/Moderate            | Historic wagon road; existing social trail; one stream crossing; several gully crossings |
| 5  | Placita             | 0.64           | CDOT/WRNF          | 3'           | Natural                 | Moderate                | West shoulder of Hwy 133                                                                 |
| 6  | McClure Pass        | 2.52           | WRNF               | 3'           | Natural                 | Low/Moderate            | Old McClure Pass road; existing social trail                                             |
| 7  | Top of McClure Pass | 0.27           | CDOT               | 3'           | Natural                 | Low                     | West shoulder of Hwy 133                                                                 |

The proposed trail is shown on the attached maps.

**Parking Areas**

Three existing parking areas currently exist – Elk Park in Redstone, Redstone East Creek north of Redstone, and the top of McClure Pass. Two new, informal parking areas would be developed, one on the east side of Highway 133 near the Bear Creek and Placita area boundary, and one along Highway 133 near the base of the pass in the Placita area.

**Proposed Construction and Management**

The proposed trail would be constructed by Pitkin County, with the assistance of qualified professional and/or volunteer trail builders. Both mechanized and non-mechanized construction techniques would be used, depending on the location, access, and complexity of the trail. Pitkin County would work with WRNF and CDOT to determine the most appropriate methods for access and construction.

### **Anticipated Issues to Consider**

Based on information gathered during the 2017 environmental review process and subsequent community and stakeholder outreach, the following issues are anticipated to be of concern in the NEPA process:

- **Wildlife** – The proposed trail crosses through winter range for elk, summer range for bighorn sheep, and potential habitat for lynx, hoary bat, peregrine falcon, flammulated owl, and Northern goshawk.
- **Vegetation** – The proposed trail crosses through potential habitat for Harrington’s penstemon, and two stream corridors with riparian communities and potential wetlands.
- **Cultural Resources** – The proposed trail utilizes the historic Rock Creek County Road and the Old McClure Pass road.
- **Visual Resources** – Portions of the trail would be visible from Highway 133.
- **Recreation Resources** – The proposed trail is currently used as a non-system social trail; completion of the project is likely to benefit recreation access opportunities.
- **Community Resources** – The proposed trail would likely benefit some residents and businesses, but the public process has also demonstrated that some community members do not support the completion of any trail segment in this area.

### **Next Steps**

Following the review of this project proposal by WRNF, Pitkin County proposes the following next steps:

1. July 2019 – Field reviews for wildlife or vegetation species of concern
2. August/September 2019 – Coordination with CPW, CDOT, and other partner agencies
3. October 2019 – Initiation of formal NEPA review process

### **Project Contact Information**

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Planning and Outreach Manager  
Pitkin County Open Space and Trails  
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[Lindsey.utter@pitkincounty.com](mailto:Lindsey.utter@pitkincounty.com)

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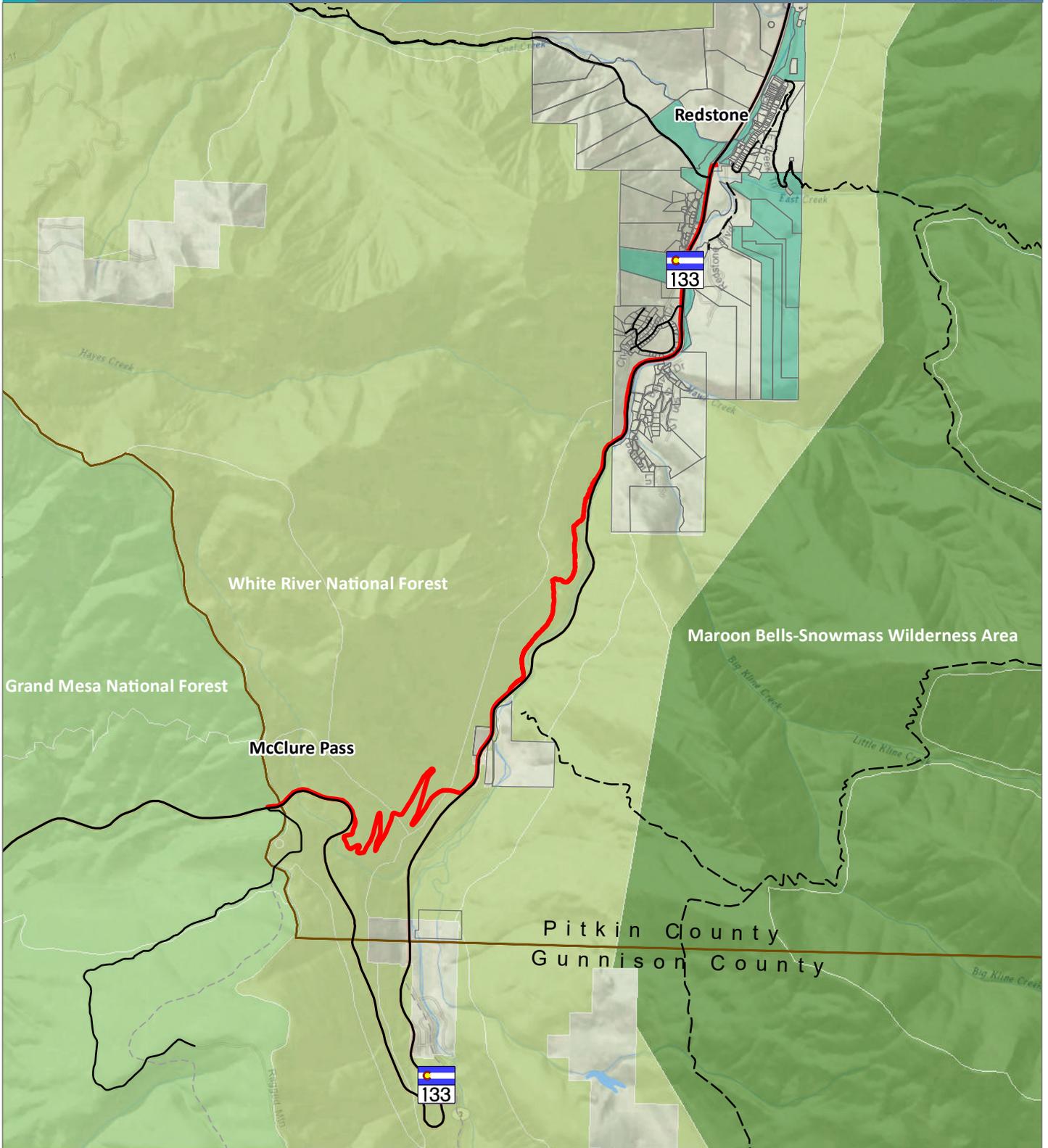


Figure 1. Study Area



0 2,000 4,000 feet

July 11, 2019

- Trail Alignment
- Existing Trail
- Pitkin County Open Space
- Grand Mesa National Forest
- Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area
- White River National Forest

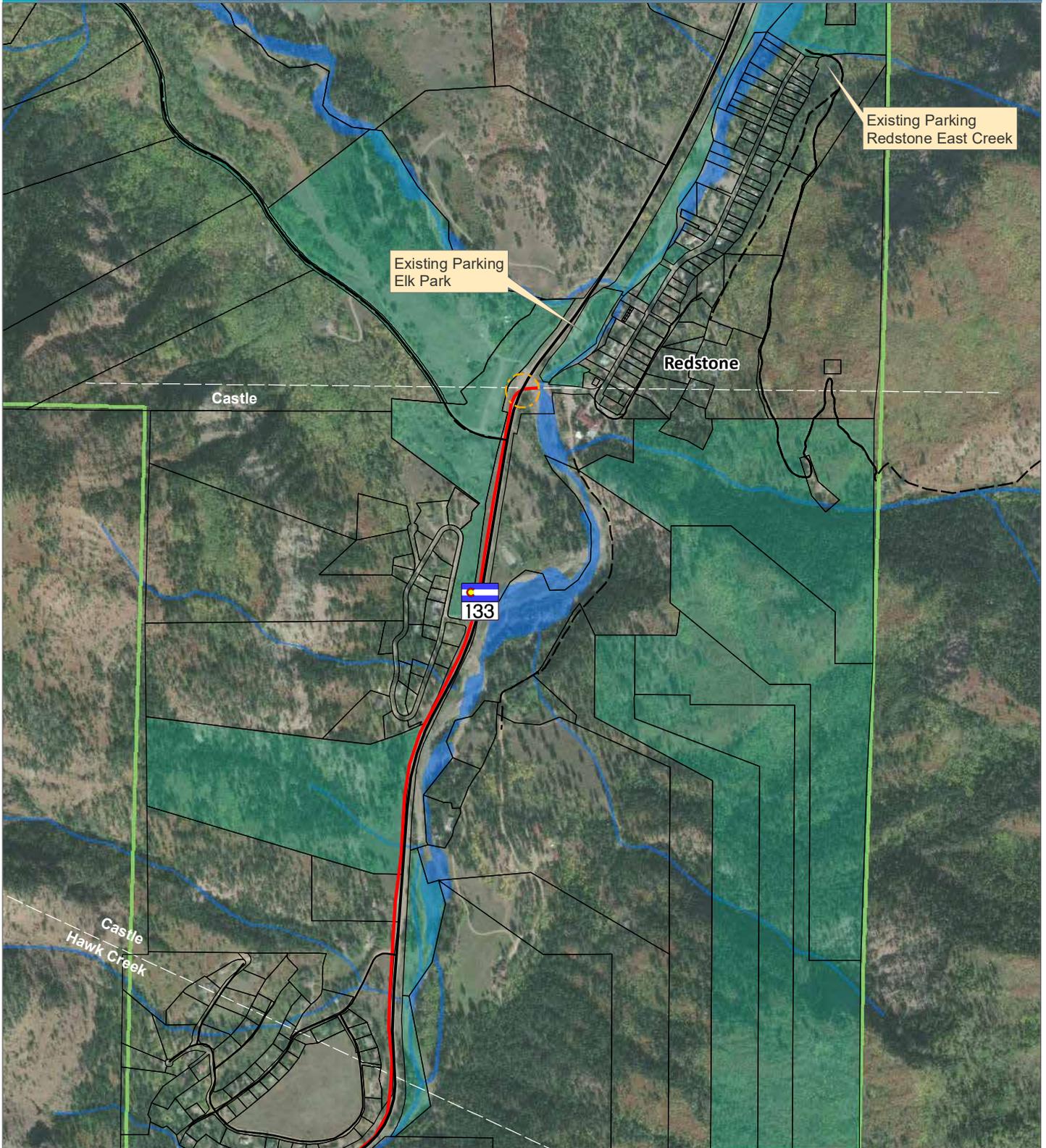
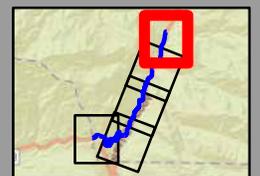


Figure 2. Trail Segments – Redstone to McClure



- Trail Alignment
- Existing Trail
- Trail Section
- Trail/Access Crossing
- NWI Stream/River
- Pitkin County Open Space
- White River National Forest



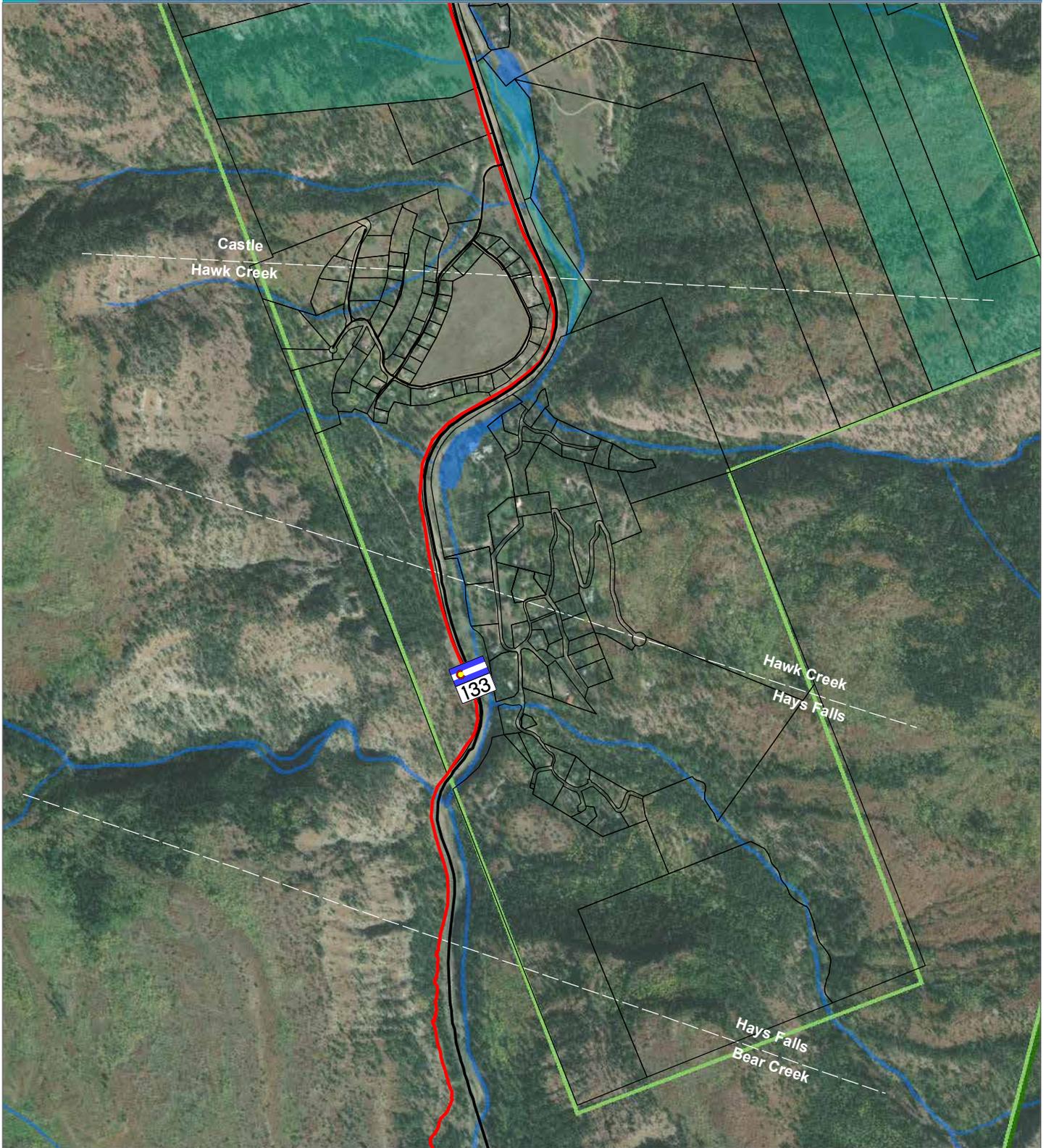
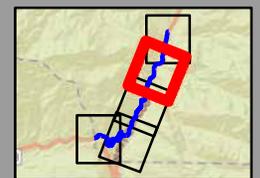


Figure 3. Trail Segments – Redstone to McClure

- Trail Alignment
- Trail Section
- NWI Stream/River
- Pitkin County Open Space
- Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area
- White River National Forest



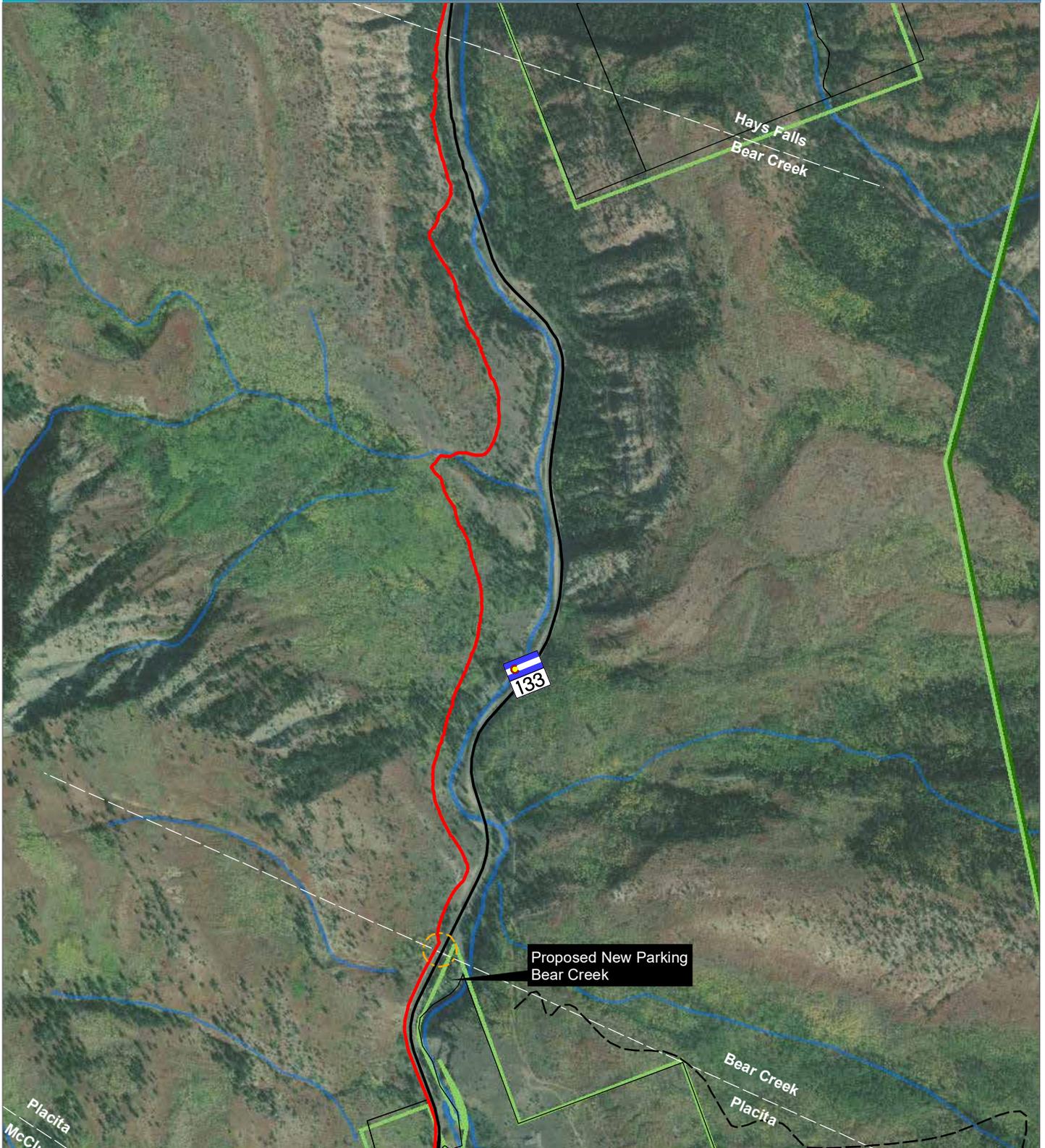
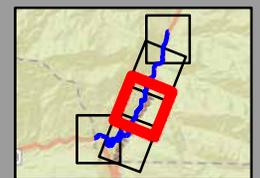


Figure 4. Trail Segments – Redstone to McClure

- Trail Alignment
- Existing Trail
- Trail Section
- Trail/Access Crossing
- NWI Stream/River
- Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area
- White River National Forest



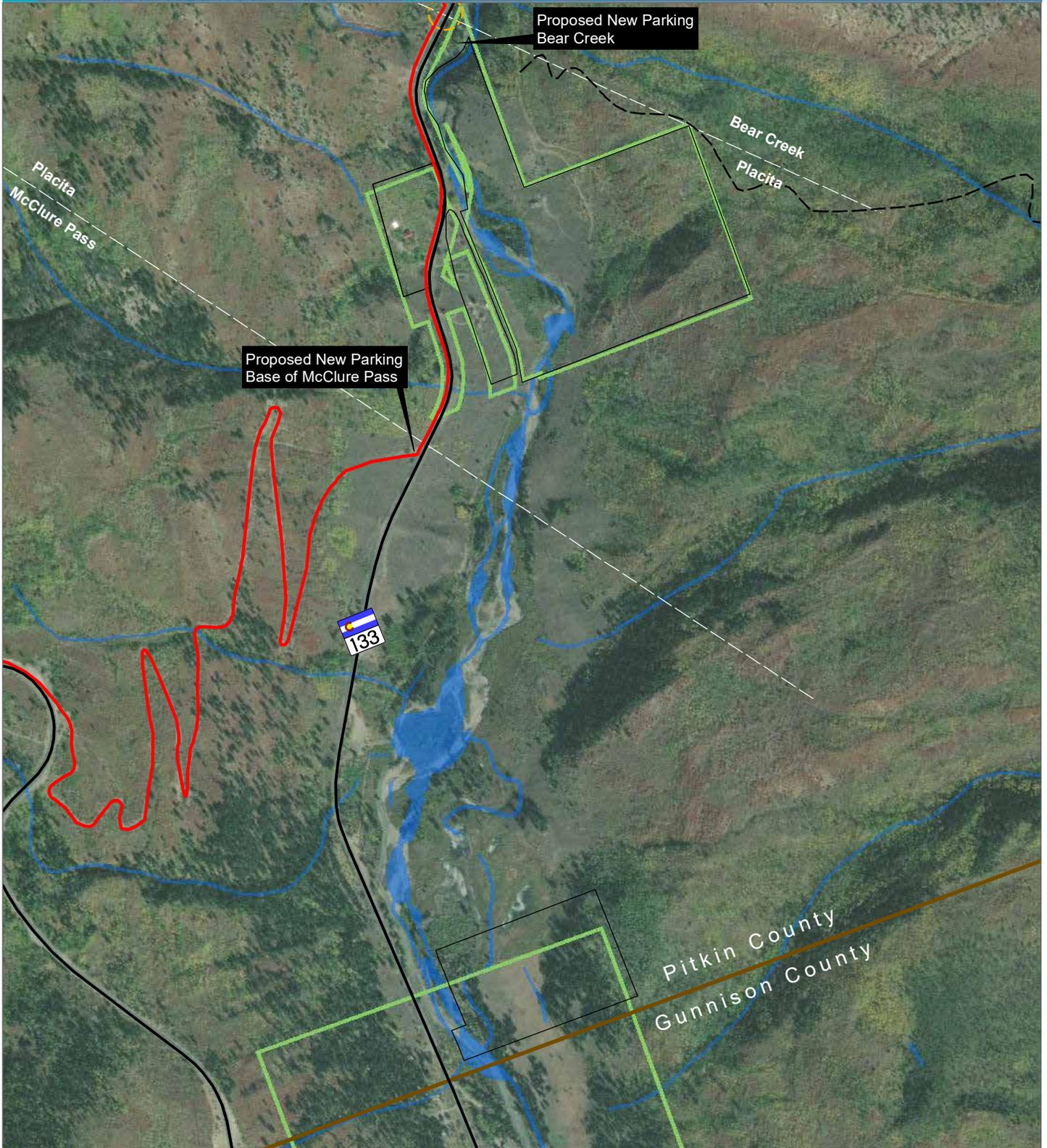
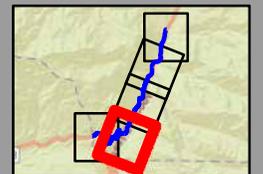


Figure 5. Trail Segments – Redstone to McClure



- Trail Alignment
- Existing Trail
- Trail Section
- Trail/Access Crossing
- NWI Stream/River
- White River National Forest



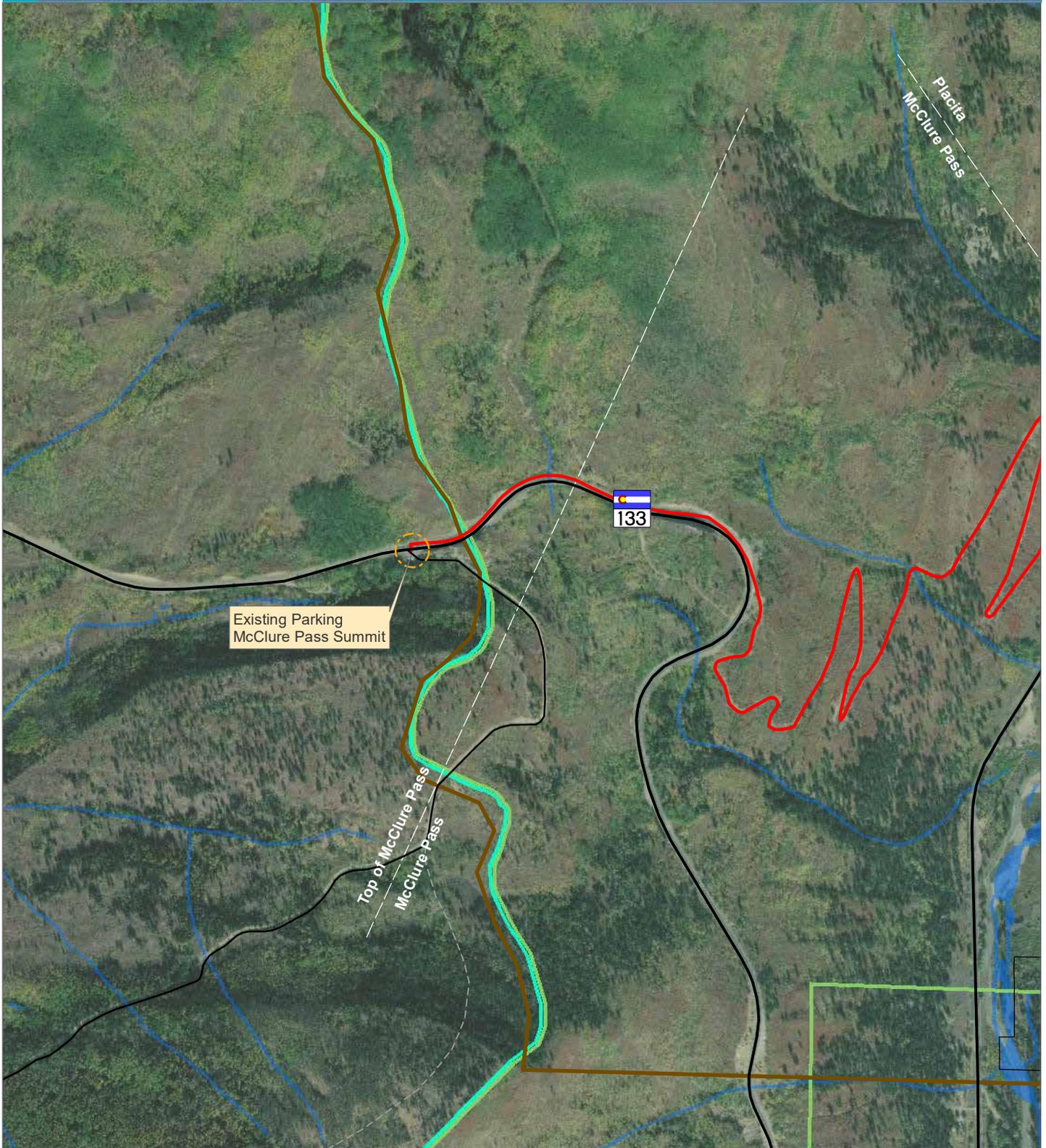


Figure 6. Trail Segments – Redstone to McClure

- Trail Alignment
- Trail Section
- Trail/Access Crossing
- NWI Stream/River
- Grand Mesa National Forest
- White River National Forest

