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Title:

Comments: I have lived in Carbondale for 15 years, and moved there largely because of my life-long interest in many forms of outdoor recreation, including hiking, road biking, and to a lesser extent, mountain biking, all of which are enhanced by viewing natural scenery and wildlife. I am 75 years old and have been doing these activities for some 60 years, and continue to do so at a level that is representative of people who are fairly active, but not super athletes. For example, I would consider 30 miles on a road bike with 2,000 feet elevation gain to be a good day's workout.

I have had a career as a civil engineer and am particularly aware of the importance of honestly evaluating the cost-effectiveness of proposed expenditures for recreational facilities. That should involve an estimate of capital and operating costs in relation to the INCREASE in recreational usage that can reasonably be predicted. That will then enable a calculation to be made as to the cost per projected user-mile or user-day, enabling people to apply their own opinions as to whether that would be "cost-effective."

In making that judgment myself, I would consider other factors, such as:

1. The availability of similar recreational facilities in the area. In that respect, I note that some (such as Maroon Bells) are becoming so crowded that restrictions are being placed on their usage as the demand for such facilities continues to increase. I also note, however, that Pitkin County is also considering an extension of the trail along the Crystal River from Carbondale to Redstone. Having bicycled the entire route from Carbondale to McClure Pass (and hiked the old wagon road to the pass) I can state with assurance that an extension of the trail to Redstone -- especially if located to the east of the Crystal River in the old railroad grade there -- would provide far more recreational use (especially by "average" hikers and bicyclists) than an improved trail to McClure Pass. Considering that funds for recreational improvements are limited, the project having the greatest cost-effectiveness should get priority.
2. Economic benefits to places such as Redstone and Carbondale. Such benefits should be based on projected increases in net revenues (i.e., profitability), and NOT on projected increases in gross sales as is frequently cited by people promoting projects at the expense of others.
3. Environmental impacts. The environmental impacts of hiking and biking trails constructed according to standard practice are usually negligible -- especially in areas surrounded by vegetation that provides cover for wildlife. People who claim to "love wildlife" tend to grossly underestimate the ability of wild animals to use natural cover to avoid contact with non-hunting, non-motorized humans, if they choose to do so. Use of these trails would presumably be restricted to non-motorized, non-hunters.

Without more specific information on the projected costs and projected benefits of these proposed projects, I would consider either project to be "cost-effective" at \$2.00 per projected user mile or less. In estimating future recreational usage of these proposed trails, a good place to start would be to measure the actual usage of the existing Crystal River trail south from Carbondale.

A final comment on the proposed trail to McClure Pass is this. The idea of extending it from there to Crested Butte is completely impractical, because only the most hard-core long-distance bicyclists would use it. A much better idea for the long-term goal of a trail to Crested Butte would be to run it from Marble up the Crystal Valley, where it would appeal primarily to day users riding to the town of Crystal.