



Questa to Red River Trail Project



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Questa to Red River Trail Project Final Environmental Assessment



Bridge over Red River at Eagle Rock Lake. USDA Forest Service photo by Ladoshie Holman.



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For More Information Contact:

Amy Simms
Questa District Ranger
amy.simms@usda.gov

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act	NMCRIS	New Mexico Cultural Resource Information System
ATV	all-terrain vehicle	NMDOT	New Mexico Department of Transportation
BLM	Bureau of Land Management	NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
BMP	Best Management Practice	NWSR	National Wild and Scenic River
CAF	Carson National Forest	OHV	off-highway vehicle
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality	ORV	outstandingly remarkable value
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations	PDC	Project Design Criteria
EA	Environmental Assessment	RME	Rocky Mountain Ecology
ECTA	Enchanted Circle Trails Association	ROS	Recreation Opportunity Spectrum
ECTP	Enchanted Circle Trails Plan	SCC	Species of Conservation Concern
EO	Executive Order	SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact	SIO	Scenic Integrity Objective
FSM	Forest Service Manual	SMS	Scenery Management System
GIS	Geographic Information Systems	SUA	Special Use Authorization
HUC	Hydrologic Unit Code	SWPPP	Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan
IDT	Interdisciplinary Team	TEU	Terrestrial Ecological Unit
IMBA	International Mountain Bicycling Association	U.S.	United States
IRA	Inventoried Roadless Areas	USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding	USC	United States Code
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act	USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
NFS	National Forest System	UTV	utility task vehicle
NFST	National Forest System Trail		
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act		



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1. Purpose and Need for Action

1.1 Background

In spring 2024, on behalf of the communities of the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River, the Enchanted Circle Trails Association (ECTA) submitted a proposal to the Carson National Forest (CAF) to construct an approximately 11.9-mile multi-use trail and associated infrastructure between the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River communities in north-central New Mexico. The concept for this proposed trail originated with the creation of a corridor along the Red River, following the removal of mining infrastructure that led from the existing Chevron Questa Mine site (formerly known as the MolyCorp Mine) to the Village of Questa. Parts of this corridor were subsequently deemed suitable to be repurposed into a recreation trail.

The proposal was developed in close coordination with the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River to ensure alignment with local needs and priorities. The initial planning for trail development (Phase I) was led by the National Forest Foundation at the request of the CAF and took place over a two-year period, concluding in 2018. Multiple working group sessions were held to consider all aspects of the development and potential impacts of this trail, as well as the gateway businesses in Questa and Red River that would benefit economically from a new trail. These meetings were open to the public, and working group members included elected officials, public land managers, user-group organizations, and the local community.

The proposed project constitutes a federal action that has the potential to affect the condition of the physical, biological, and human environment of public lands administered by the Forest Service. As such, this project must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Under NEPA, federal agencies must carefully consider environmental concerns in their decision-making processes and provide relevant information to the public for review and comment. The CAF has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with NEPA and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This EA discloses the potential effects on the physical, biological, and human environment that are anticipated to result from the implementation of the Proposed Action.

This EA contains analyses consistent with NEPA regulations and Forest Service policy at the time of its initiation (including [36 Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\) 220](#)) and the 2020 version of Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (previously at [40 CFR 1501](#)). The CEQ regulations were repealed effective April 11, 2025 ([90 Federal Register 10610](#)), and agency-specific NEPA regulations were rescinded on July 3, 2025 ([90 Federal Register 29632](#)). Under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) interim final rule for implementing NEPA, the Forest Service has the discretion to determine which NEPA procedures to apply to individual proposals. Until the effective date of the final rule, the agency may "continue using the versions of USDA and agency-specific NEPA regulations in place before publication of [the] interim final rule, as well as the 2020 version of the CEQ NEPA regulations, where it makes sense for proposals that are at a certain stage in the applicable NEPA process" ([90 Federal Register 29632 section II.C](#)). Because the scoping period, preparation of the Draft EA, and Draft EA comment period for this project were all conducted under previous regulations, the CAF has decided to finalize the Decision following those previous regulations.

1.2 Project Area

The project area encompasses the proposed trail alignment, buffered by approximately 30 meters on either side of the alignment (i.e., 60 meters in total width). The proposed trail is approximately 11.9 miles in length, consisting of about 10.6 miles of engineered soft-surface path and 1.3 miles of primitive trail, as well as 13 bridge crossings. The project area also includes approximately 2.6 acres of associated parking access points and trailheads. **Figure 1** – Project Overview Map shows an overview of the project area.

1.3 Purpose and Need

The **purpose** of the Proposed Action is to provide a sustainable connection between the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River communities in north-central New Mexico. The actions proposed are **needed** to:

- Connect currently independent trail systems and recreation opportunities in the Enchanted Circle region;



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- Develop a connection that accommodates multiple-use recreation to improve community health; and
- Provide a safe and sustainable multi-use connection between the two communities.

The existing conditions driving the need for action are described further in the following paragraphs.

1) Connect currently independent trail systems and recreation opportunities

Several trail systems in the area are accessible via either the Village of Questa or the Town of Red River; however, these trail systems lack a safe, off-highway connection between the communities. Therefore, there is a need for a connection between the two communities to improve connectivity between existing trail systems, as well as to connect to recreation opportunities in the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument and surrounding areas.

2) Develop a connection that accommodates multiple-use recreation to enhance community health

There is a need to develop a connection between the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River that accommodates multiple-use recreation and allows a variety of trail users to access the area. Currently, there are limited trail opportunities within close proximity to the two communities that accommodate multiple-use recreation (walking/hiking/running/biking/etc.) for people of all abilities. This limits the types of users who can visit and enjoy the area and disproportionately impacts low-income community members. Further, providing more equitable access to public lands in the area is needed to allow locals to benefit from the physical, mental, and social benefits that recreating on public lands can provide.

3) Provide a safe and sustainable multi-modal connection between the two communities

New Mexico State Road 38 is currently the only route connecting the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River. This route experiences heavy motor vehicle traffic, and current conditions make walking/hiking/running/biking along the road shoulder unsafe and unsustainable for commuters and recreation users. Therefore, there is a need to provide a safe and reliable means of commuting/traveling between the two communities by developing a connection that is designed to decrease the likelihood of vehicular collisions with commuters and recreation users.

Rationale for Specific Project Location and Timing

As part of a community vision for a post-mining economy, the concept of the proposed trail was sparked by the communities near the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River attempting to redefine their identity. The concept and design of this trail were developed collaboratively between the CAF, surrounding communities, and ECTA to address the identified need for connectivity and provide safe, sustainable, multiple-use recreation opportunities. The project team selected the proposed corridor between Questa and Red River based on the importance to local communities and the collaborative planning that created a shared vision for the trail.

The corridor was also selected as it provides the most direct, feasible, and least environmentally impactful route between the two communities that can meet engineering, safety, and recreation objectives and take advantage of a contiguous swath of public land between the two communities. Previous feasibility assessments conducted by the CAF and ECTA identified this alignment as the corridor best able to avoid sensitive environmental resources and minimize impacts to private property while achieving regional connectivity goals outlined in ECTA's regional Enchanted Circle Trails Plan (ECTP).

The timing of the project reflects increasing recreation demand in the region, heightened safety concerns along New Mexico State Road 38, and newly available funding opportunities. Recent increases in outdoor recreation, multimodal use, and E-Bike activity in the Enchanted Circle region have intensified the need for safe recreation infrastructure that serves both residents and visitors. Community support and the Town of Red River's successful acquisition of funding to complete the NEPA process have enabled the project to advance from conceptual planning to the environmental review stage. Completion of this NEPA process is a prerequisite for pursuing additional state and federal construction funding programs, including but not limited to: the Federal



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Lands Access Program, the Recreational Trails Program, the Transportation Alternatives Program, and New Mexico's Outdoor Recreation Trails+ Grant.

Additionally, the project is designed to achieve desired conditions, prioritizing community-based planning and management that is consistent with the standards and guidelines outlined in the 2022 CAF Land Management Plan (2022 Forest Plan). Refer to [Section 2.3 Land Management Plan Consistency](#) for additional information.



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2. Proposed Action

2.1 No Action Description

Under the No Action Alternative, the proposed trail would not be constructed. Existing conditions and trends for all resources in the project area would remain the same. In accordance with [Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 40, Section 41.22](#), and [36 CFR § 220.7\(b\)\(2\)\(ii\)](#), and in an effort to streamline the NEPA analysis, this EA shall not include an analysis of the No Action Alternative.

2.2 Proposed Action Description

The CAF proposes constructing an approximately 11.9-mile multi-use trail and associated infrastructure (e.g., bridges, parking access points, and trailheads) to meet the purpose and need of the project. The proposed trail would roughly follow the course of New Mexico State Road 38 between the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River; this road traverses the Sangre de Cristo Mountains through portions of the CAF. The proposed trail would cross the Red River multiple times via bridges (approximately 12 bridges) and also cross Columbine Creek once (1 bridge).

The proposed trail would be located on the Questa Ranger District of the CAF in Taos County, and would fall primarily on public lands on the CAF (refer to **Figure 1** - Project Overview Map). There are some portions of the proposed trail that currently cross non-Forest Service land. The Forest Service is currently in discussions with Chevron Mining Company to obtain several private land parcels owned by Chevron through a land donation/acquisition process, anticipated to be finalized in 2026. In addition, the Forest Service plans to negotiate trail access across private lands owned by Willow Ponds, LLC near the Town of Red River through a landowner agreement.

The proposed trail would start on National Forest System (NFS) land at the Eagle Rock Lake Day Use Area near the Village of Questa and terminate at the western edge of the Town of Red River, where NFS land meets Town of Red River land. Recreation opportunities that would be supported by the proposed trail would include:

- Walking
- Hiking
- Biking – including Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes
- Horseback riding
- Wildlife viewing
- Picnicking
- Fee site camping
- Fishing
- Winter recreation opportunities, including Nordic skiing and snowshoeing

Trail Design

The majority of the proposed trail (approximately 10.6 miles) would be an engineered path (i.e., an unpaved soft surface, native surface, or compacted crusher fines) to allow for multimodal recreation opportunities. Trail design for the proposed trail would follow Forest Service standards for outdoor accessibility (including the [Forest Service Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines](#) [FSORAG 2015] and the [Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines](#) [FSTAG] 2013) as much as feasible, with a corridor width of approximately 10 feet - 12 feet and a tread width of approximately 6 feet - 8 feet where possible. The proposed trail would be designed to protect natural resources and wildlife habitats and minimize impacts to watersheds. Trail design would also provide opportunities to integrate river and wetland restoration opportunities.

In addition to the primary engineered path, there would also be a “primitive” portion of the proposed trail extending approximately 1.3 miles along mostly NFS lands near the Town of Red River. This primitive trail would provide users with an option to move away from the highway corridor as the trail approaches the Town of



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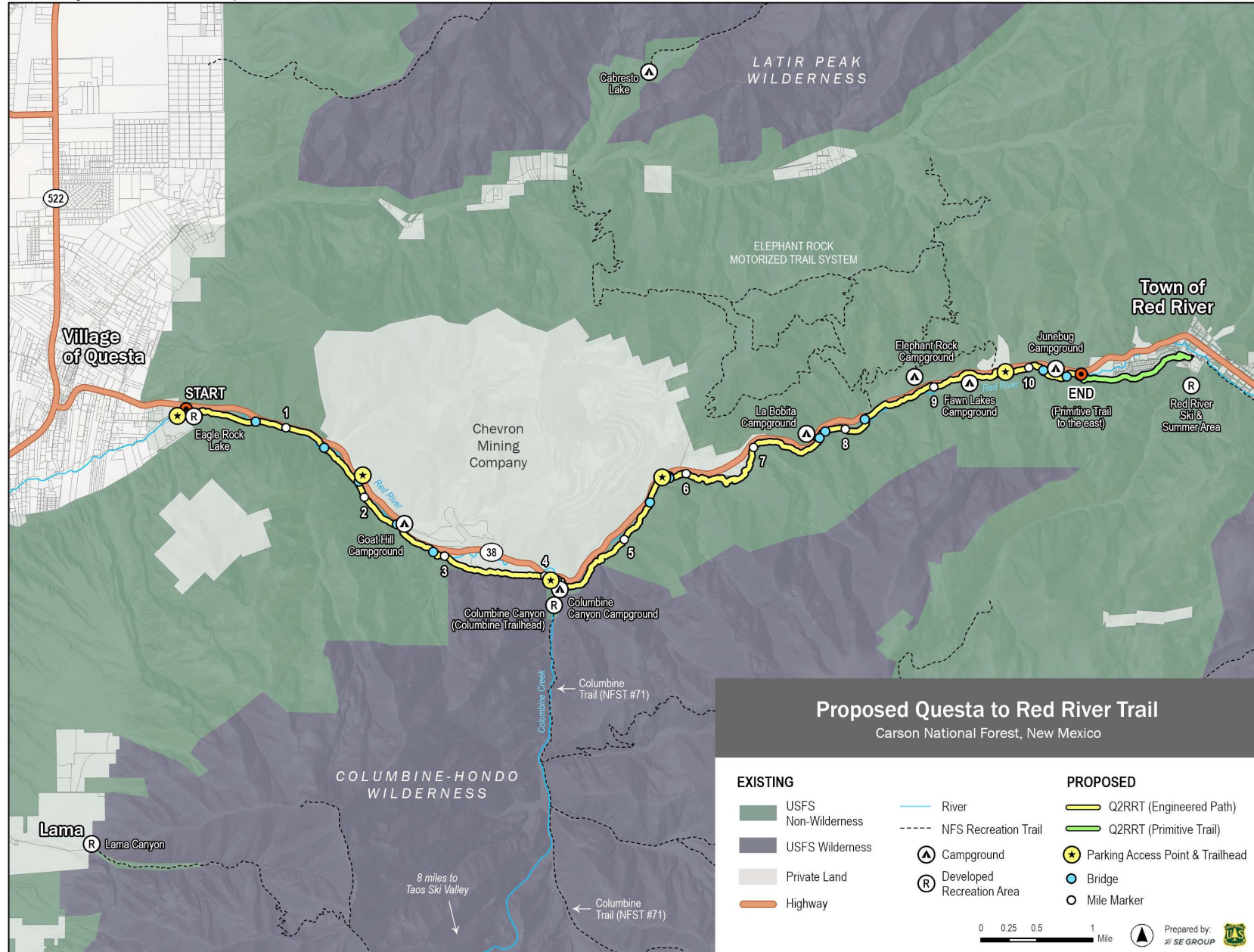


Red River. This primitive trail would be designed as a [Class II or III trail](#) (with a corridor width of approximately 6 feet - 8 feet and a tread width of approximately 1.5 feet).

To facilitate trail access, parking access points would be developed at various points along the proposed trail. These parking access points would be either paved with asphalt and concrete or unpaved (i.e., soft surface, native surface, or compacted crusher fines), to be determined during the trail design and construction phase as appropriate to the setting and user needs.

The proposed trail could offer educational and interpretive opportunities (e.g., wildlife and habitat viewing areas, interpretive displays, and signage) for locals and visitors to learn more about the natural resources and cultural history of the surrounding area. Additionally, the proposed trail would provide opportunities to connect people to existing tourism attractions (e.g., the Questa historical marker and Red River Nature Trail) and existing recreation opportunities on other public lands in the area.

Figure 1 - Project Overview Map





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Trail Alignment

A detailed description of each segment of the proposed trail is outlined in **Table 2.2-1**.

Table 2.2-1 Trail Alignment Description

Trail Segment	Description of Proposed Action Along Trail Segment
Mile 0: Trailhead at Eagle Rock Lake Day Use Area	The existing development at Eagle Rock Lake would be designated or serve as the western origin trailhead. (Refer to the Proposed Trailheads, Parking Access Points, and Associated Facilities section for additional detail.)
Mile 0 - Mile 1	This segment would be constructed to utilize the existing pipeline alignment along the Red River south of the Questa Ranger Station. There would be one river crossing via a newly constructed bridge (Bridge 1) at mile 0.7. The proposed trail would require a shoulder enhancement from approximately mile 0.85 to 0.9 along New Mexico State Road 38.
Mile 1 - Mile 2	The proposed trail would require a shoulder enhancement from mile 1.0 to 1.35 along New Mexico State Road 38 before crossing over the Red River to the south at Bridge 2 (mile 1.4). At mile 1.7, the proposed trail would intersect with the existing Bear Canyon Area. A bridge (Bridge 3) would cross the Red River at mile 1.85. This bridge would connect the proposed trail to a parking access point that would be developed to allow access to the proposed trail (refer to the Proposed Trailheads, Parking Access Points, and Associated Facilities section for additional detail). The proposed trail would remain on the south side of the Red River.
Mile 2 – Mile 3	The proposed trail would follow the alignment of the existing powerline access road along the south side of the Red River. The area between mile 2.0 to 2.3 is particularly scenic and could support day-use activities such as picnicking or fishing. There would be a north side of Red River trail alignment after Bridge 4 (mile 2.4), which would cross at Goat Hill Campground. This existing campground currently offers primitive camping opportunities (no water, 1 vault toilet) that are managed by a concessionaire and provides access to Red River fishing and hiking opportunities. This campground would help to connect existing CAF infrastructure to the proposed trail. Short sections of shoulder enhancement may be required at mile 2.6 and 2.8 along New Mexico State Road 38. Bridge 5 (mile 2.9) would likely require a long, elevated span to stay above the riparian area at this location, before the proposed trail would switch back onto the north-facing slope south of the Red River.
Mile 3 – Mile 4	The proposed trail would follow an old road cut above Chevron water treatment facilities, then continue contouring above Chevron property and remaining within NFS land until mile 3.95, where it would cross Chevron property in order to access the New Mexico State Road 38 right-of-way. ¹ The proposed trail would require a shoulder enhancement beginning at mile 3.97 along New Mexico State Road 38.
Mile 4 – Mile 5	The shoulder enhancement would continue through mile 4.05. At mile 4.05, a proposed parking access point would be developed on Chevron property at the entrance to the Columbine Canyon Developed Recreation Area (refer to the Proposed Trailheads, Parking Access Points, and Associated Facilities section for additional detail). This proposed trail segment would also intersect with the existing developed Columbine Campground, which offers tent camping, trailer camping, picnic tables, 6 vault toilets, drinking water, and parking. The proposed trail would cross Columbine Creek via a small bridge at mile 4.1 (Bridge 6).

¹ The Forest Service is currently in discussions with Chevron Mining Company to obtain several private land parcels (owned by Chevron) that intersect the proposed trail through a land donation/acquisition process, anticipated to be finalized in 2026.



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	Between mile 4.5 and mile 5, the proposed trail would ascend and contour along the sidehill above the riparian area.
Mile 5 – Mile 6	At mile 5.1, the proposed trail would utilize an old two-track at the base of the hill. At this location, there would be opportunities for day-use and fishing. The proposed trail would then cross to the north side of the Red River at mile 5.4 (Bridge 7) near the Chambers Spring Canyon Area. At mile 5.7, a proposed parking access point/turnout would allow trail users to access the proposed trail. At mile 5.8, the trail would cross again to the south side of the river (Bridge 8). At mile 5.9, the trail would ascend through a steep bench in the sidehill to remain on NFS land above private property.
Mile 6 – Mile 7	The proposed trail would contour above Chevron property with sidehill construction to avoid private property. At mile 6.75, the trail would cross into an approximately 0.02-acre segment of Chevron property along an old road cut. ² At mile 6.9, the trail would cross back into Chevron property through to mile 7.1 as it follows an old road cut. ³
Mile 7 - Mile 8	The proposed trail would follow a utility easement from mile 7.0 to 7.2, where it would cut under a sharp cliff before accessing a lowland area with opportunities for day-use and fishing. The proposed trail would cross to the north side of the Red River at mile 7.7 (Bridge 9); an access spur would connect to La Bobita Campground north of New Mexico State Road 38. The trail would again cross south at mile 7.8 (Bridge 10).
Mile 8 - Mile 9	The proposed trail would follow the base of the foothills until mile 8.25, where it would then cross the river to the north side (Bridge 11). At mile 8.3, the proposed trail would become a shoulder enhancement along New Mexico State Road 38. Unstable soils and the frequent clearing of debris from New Mexico State Road 38 would necessitate co-location with New Mexico State Road 38 to avoid impacting debris clearing. The shoulder enhancement would continue to mile 8.5, where there is more space to move away from New Mexico State Road 38. ⁴
Mile 9 - Mile 10	The proposed trail would approach the Fawn Lakes Area near mile 9. The Fawn Lakes Campground currently provides overnight facilities, water, and several vault toilets. The Fawn Lakes Area is currently being considered for reconstruction as part of a separate project; this reconstructed area may include fishing, birdwatching, hiking, and other day-use activities. At mile 9.75, an additional parking access point on the south side of New Mexico State Road 38 would service the proposed trail, as well as the motorized Elephant Rock Motorized Trail System Area north of New Mexico State Road 38 (refer to the Proposed Trailheads, Parking Access Points, and Associated Facilities section for additional detail).
Mile 10 – Mile 10.6	At mile 10.03, the proposed trail would climb back to New Mexico State Road 38 to avoid a steep erosive area, before co-locating with the entrance to Junebug Campground, a concessionaire-maintained facility that includes camping and vault toilets. The trail would exit the Junebug Campground at mile 10.19, crossing the river (Bridge 12). On the south side of the river, the trail would climb to the lower bench above the river and traverse the bench

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The CNF recognizes the potential for regular washouts and the need for debris removal/stockpiling operations in this area, and understands the operational constraints placed upon NMDOT maintenance crews. The CAF is committed to coordinating closely with NMDOT to ensure that the final trail alignment and subsequent maintenance operations for the proposed trail alignment would not impede NMDOT's necessary debris removal, stockpiling, or access to this portion of the road. This coordination would ensure that the trail's design and placement 1) accommodates NMDOT's operational needs for road maintenance and access and 2) mitigates the potential for significant damage to the trail during flash flood events, or establishes clear protocols for trail maintenance and repair that do not rely on NMDOT resources.



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	to mile 10.5, where it would cross the river north again (Bridge 13). The trail would then climb via a series of climbing turns to connect with an old 2-track road at mile 10.55, which would then connect back to the New Mexico State Road 38 shoulder at mile 10.6.
Mile 10.6 +	The proposed trail would then transition into a shoulder enhancement/sidewalk into the Town of Red River proper. There would also be an approximately 1.3-mile primitive trail built on the east side of the proposed trail (Town of Red River side) that would go along NFS lands south of the Town of Red River, terminating at Willow Ponds, LLC. As stated previously, the Forest Service plans to negotiate an access agreement with the respective landowners across this parcel for the proposed trail.

Proposed Trailheads, Parking Access Points, and Associated Facilities

Under the Proposed Action, the existing development at Eagle Rock Lake would be designated or serve as the western origin trailhead. This trailhead would feature a kiosk/ or utilize an existing kiosk, providing visitors with information on the proposed trail's route and length, the recreation activities supported by the trail, points of access, and key points of interest along the route for interpretive/education opportunities. No formal parking area is proposed for construction at this trailhead as part of this project. Visitors would rely on existing opportunities around the Eagle Rock Lake Day Use Area for parking, including informal parking currently on Village of Questa property.

To support recreation access and opportunities along the proposed trail, the Proposed Action would include the construction of a parking access point where the proposed trail would intersect with the existing Bear Canyon Area (mile 1.7). This proposed parking access point would consist of a car park (approximately 6 car spaces).

Additionally, under the Proposed Action, at mile 4.05, a proposed parking access point would be developed on property (currently owned by Chevron) at the entrance to the Columbine Canyon Developed Recreation Area. This parking access point would provide connectivity to the proposed trail from the popular Columbine Trail and Columbine Campground. Additional parking would be constructed at this parking access point to accommodate users. Additionally, this proposed trail segment would provide access to the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness and fishing opportunities along Columbine Creek within the CAF.

The proposed parking access point/turnout at mile 5.7 would serve as a mid-trail access point. This area could accommodate up to 5 cars and also provide access to fishing and hiking.

The main parking access point that would serve the east side of the trail is proposed at mile 9.75, near the entrance to the Elephant Rock motorized trail system north of New Mexico State Road 38. This parking access point could accommodate approximately 20 vehicles and would serve as the main parking access point for Elephant Rock as well as the east parking access point for the proposed trail.

As stated previously, the parking access points may be paved to allow for increased accessibility for various user groups, or would be unpaved (i.e., soft surface, native surface, or compacted crusher fines), to be determined during the trail design and construction phase as appropriate to the setting and user needs.

Construction Activities and Access

The proposed trail would be constructed over the course of approximately 24 months, dependent on funding. If necessary, construction may extend beyond 24 months.

Construction activities may include tree/vegetation clearing and removal, as well as ground clearing for the proposed trail and associated infrastructure.

- Tree removal may occur by hand felling with chainsaws and/or heavy equipment. Heavy equipment would be used on terrain that is accessible in accordance with design elements.
- Wood material produced from construction activity may be made available to the public for personal use and/or commercial use, dependent on volume (predicted to be fairly low), accessibility, and location. Log deck sales could potentially be an option if enough merchantable material is produced. Material may be removed by vehicles as large as log trucks.



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The trail would be field-fitted within the survey corridor to minimize tree/vegetation clearing to the extent feasible, preserving visual screening of the trail from New Mexico State Road 38.

Access to the proposed trail for construction activities would primarily occur from New Mexico State Road 38. If necessary, during construction, materials and machinery would be staged in designated construction staging areas identified by the CAF to minimize disturbance. Access would be intended to accommodate travel by light machinery, such as mini-excavators and utility task vehicles (UTVs), to support construction crews. For heavy machinery, travel would be limited to existing roads for maintenance of the trail. Heavy equipment could be used for the initial construction of the proposed trail, material clearing where the trail alignment may be impacted by seasonal weather events, as well as for the installation and maintenance of bridges, following Best Management Practices (BMPs).

The construction of temporary roads and landings may be necessary to provide access for mechanical equipment. These temporary roads and landings would be strategically located to avoid sensitive resources such as wetlands and highly erodible soils. Any temporary access roads would be deconstructed/removed following completion of the proposed trail; landings would be regraded and revegetated as appropriate after completion of the proposed trail.

Project Design Criteria (PDC), included as part of this Final EA (**Appendix A**), identify conditions and/or areas within the proposed trail alignment area where temporary access road construction would be prohibited to minimize resource impacts from these roads.

Maintenance and Management

The CAF, potentially in coordination with the Village of Questa and/or the Town of Red River and other partners, would be responsible for the maintenance and management of the proposed trail. As part of project implementation, CAF may require a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), long-term maintenance agreement, or Special Use Authorization (SUA)⁵ with the Village of Questa and/or Town of Red River to ensure proper maintenance and management of the proposed trail and trailheads/parking access points/associated infrastructure along the proposed trail. Tasks and activities authorized would be similar to normal CAF maintenance activities that are taken to maintain trails, parking access points, and trailheads over time.

The formal execution of MOUs is an administrative and legal step that occurs after completion of the NEPA process and issuance of a project decision (i.e., Decision Notice). This sequence ensures that such agreements do not prejudice the outcome of the NEPA review or commit the agency to a specific course of action before environmental effects have been fully evaluated. If the Proposed Action is selected for implementation, the Forest Service could then initiate and finalize MOUs or similar agreements with appropriate partners to clarify maintenance responsibilities, funding arrangements, and management roles consistent with the selected alternative and any PDC adopted in the decision prior to implementation of the trail. Trail user conflicts and maintenance concerns could be addressed through a combination of trail design, education, and partnership agreements. Specific PDC could help lessen user conflicts, including the following measures:

- a typical 8-foot trail width to allow safe passing and adequate sight distance in open segments;
- clear and consistent signage at trailheads and key intersections, emphasizing standard yielding protocols (e.g., cyclists yield to pedestrians; all users yield to equestrians);
- appropriate signage to encourage safe speeds and responsible riding behavior; and
- gates, bollards, and/or signage to restrict unauthorized motorized vehicles (e.g., all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-highway vehicles (OHVs), UTVs, dirt bikes, etc.), as necessary.

⁵ A SUA is a legal document such as a permit, term permit, lease, or easement, which allows occupancy, use, rights, or privileges of National Forest land. The authorization is granted for a specific use of the land for a specific period of time.



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Other adaptive management measures may be implemented as needed in response to user conflicts and/or maintenance needs. ECTA and partner organizations may also undertake education and outreach campaigns promoting trail etiquette and safe interaction practices. Future maintenance responsibilities, including management of animal waste, could be addressed through MOUs or similar cooperative agreements developed among the CAF and local partners prior to implementation, as well as after construction. (Refer to **Appendix A** for the full list of PDC for the project.)

Coordination with the New Mexico Department of Transportation

The proposed trail alignment does not cross New Mexico State Road 38 and would remain on the south side of the roadway for its entire length. However, recreationists may still cross the highway at certain locations to access existing infrastructure (e.g., campgrounds and adjacent recreation opportunities). Additionally, some segments of the proposed trail would utilize an enhanced shoulder of New Mexico State Road 38, which would bring trail users into close proximity to the roadway.

The CAF is actively involved in discussions with the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) to consider the CAF's development of appropriate safety measures, as NMDOT has jurisdiction over the state highway and has been designated as a Cooperating Agency for the project. Proposed safety measures, which could be incorporated during project implementation (post-NEPA), may include:

- **High-Visibility Signage and Pavement Markings:** Installing prominent warning signs on the highway approaches, as well as distinct pavement markings (e.g., crosswalks, rumble strips) on the highway, to alert motorists to the crossings and pedestrian activity.
- **Traffic Control Devices:** Installing advanced warning devices (e.g., pedestrian-activated flashing lights or signals) to alert motorists to the crossings and pedestrian activity.
- **Safe Sight Distances:** Ensuring that the proposed trail design provides adequate sight distance for both trail users and motorists.
- **Design Standards:** Ensuring that any crossing infrastructure would adhere to current American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and Federal Highway Administration design standards for shared-use paths and highway crossings.

Based on CAF's ongoing discussions and coordination with NMDOT, there may be slight adjustments to the trail alignment, placement of bridges and trailheads, etc.⁶

2.3 Land Management Plan Consistency

Pertinent specialists have reviewed the Proposed Action, including the PDC, and provided supporting analysis and rationale for determinations in the project record. The following are specialist determinations regarding project consistency with applicable standards and guidelines outlined in the 2022 CAF Land Management Plan (2022 Forest Plan). For additional details on resource-specific standards and guidelines, refer to the technical reports in the project record.

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| • Botany: Consistent | • Engineering: Consistent |
| • Cultural/Heritage: Consistent | • Fisheries: Consistent |

⁶ Any proposed work or improvements within the NMDOT right-of-way would require an Access Permit and/or Right-of-Way Use Agreement. As part of future NMDOT permitting process coordination efforts, NMDOT would review the proposed plans for conformance with state and federal roadway safety standards. Additionally, the CAF would coordinate with NMDOT to identify and accommodate areas of overlap between the proposed trail alignment and ongoing NMDOT maintenance activities (including operations and access) within the NMDOT right-of-way to ensure that these activities are not hindered.



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- **Fuels:** N/A
- **Hydrology:** Consistent
- **Lands and Special Uses:** Consistent
- **Minerals:** N/A
- **Range:** N/A
- **Recreation:** Consistent
- **Scenic Resources:** Consistent
- **Soils:** Consistent
- **Silviculture:** Consistent
- **Special Management Areas:** Consistent
- **Wildlife:** Consistent
- **Other Resources:** Consistent

Additionally, the proposed project is designed to be consistent with the Forest Service's multiple-use mandate established under the [Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960](#) and the [National Forest Management Act of 1976](#). The proposed trail alignment and design do not preclude future vegetation or timber management activities that may be identified under subsequent projects or site-specific analyses. Such activities would remain subject to separate environmental review and decision-making processes consistent with Forest Service policy. Therefore, the proposed project supports multiple-use management while prioritizing public safety and recreation connectivity, consistent with the 2022 Forest Plan goals and objectives.

As noted previously, the project team selected the proposed corridor between Questa and Red River based on the importance to local communities and the collaborative planning that created a shared vision for the trail. The advancement of the proposal is responsive to changing public desires and demands, and would provide opportunities for various types of recreation as defined in the 2022 Forest Plan. To be consistent with the 2022 Forest Plan, the project is designed to make progress toward desired conditions and objectives. The following are desired outcomes with associated forest plan component codes in parentheses:

- "The unique cultural, historical, and ecological resources of the Carson are featured through recreation opportunities, education, and interpretation. A variety of high-quality developed and dispersed recreation opportunities and activities are available to a diverse group of forest users, including persons with disabilities." (FW-REC-DC-1, 3)
- "Recreation activities important to traditional communities (e.g., hunting, fishing, camping, family and group gatherings, fuelwood and piñon nut collecting, and scenic driving) are available." (FW-REC-DC-2)
- "Trails are sustainably-designed; well-marked and maintained; provide safe and reasonable access for public travel, recreation uses, traditional and cultural uses, and land and resource management activities; and contribute to the economic, cultural, and social vitality of surrounding communities." (FW-REC-DC-4, FW-TFA-DC-1, 3)
- "Recreation opportunities, including motorized and non-motorized trails, are responsive and adaptable to changing uses and trends and are available commensurate with public interest, resource capacity, and other natural and cultural resource values." (FW-REC-DC-5)
- "A system of motorized and non-motorized trails is available in a variety of settings that provide differing levels of challenge, types of experiences, and linkages to local neighborhoods, communities, and other public lands." (FW-REC-DC-13)
- "Partners and volunteers are a collaborative network that increases capacity for managing forest resources, assists in communicating with and educating the public, and is a crucial component to achieving short- and long-term stewardship (e.g., restoration, monitoring, sustainable traditional and cultural uses, and sustainable recreation)." (FW-PART-DC-1, 2)
- "Volunteer and partnership opportunities continue to expand over time but remain within the Carson's management capacity." (FW-PART-DC-4)
- "The uniqueness, values, long history and ties of rural historic communities and traditional uses are recognized and valued; the traditional uses important for maintaining these cultures are supported and contribute to the social and economic sustainability of local communities." (FW-RHC-DC-1,2)
- "High-quality scenery dominates the landscape in areas that the public values highly for scenery such as scenic byways, major roads and trails, and developed recreation sites." (FW-SCEN-DC-6)



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2.4 Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail

The alternatives considered but not brought forward for additional consideration in this Final EA include:

- An alternative that starts the trail near the Village of Questa at the MolyCorp Field Spur. This alternative was not carried forward for further consideration, given that the Village of Questa has made no determination to date on the long-term plan or vision for the future use of the MolyCorp Field Spur.
- An alternative that includes enhanced trailhead amenities, such as restrooms. After conducting internal and external scoping efforts, as well as conversations with potential funding partners, the CAF determined that enhanced trailhead amenities would not be included in this project at this time. Further information about the use of the trail is needed to understand the need for and capacity of such facilities. The dismissal of this alternative in this EA does not preclude consideration of enhanced trail amenities in a future separate NEPA process.
- An alternative that includes expanded parking capacity (more than 6 spaces) near Bear Canyon, near mile marker 1.7. The project team determined through a detailed site analysis that the available flat area and manageable slope at this location impose strict limitations on the developable footprint. Expanding the lot beyond 6 spaces would require additional grading and excavation, potentially resulting in greater soil disturbance, vegetation removal, and visual impacts inconsistent with the project's design objectives for resource protection.
- An alternative involving a corridor-wide, fully surfaced trail meeting all Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. The project team considered but dismissed this alternative due to technical infeasibility and environmental constraints. Constructing an ADA-compliant, bonded surface throughout the Questa-Red River corridor would require extensive regrading, cut-and-fill operations, rock excavation, and the installation of retaining walls to meet slope and cross-slope requirements. These modifications would expand the construction footprint, increase risks of slope instability and erosion, and generate considerable impacts to soils, vegetation, hydrology, and visual resources, contrary to the project's purpose of providing a sustainable, low-impact recreation opportunity.
- A wider, fully surfaced tread (approximately 10 feet) was specifically evaluated but determined to be infeasible along much of the corridor due to steep canyon terrain and environmental sensitivities. Such a width would more closely align with an urban greenway standard, which is inconsistent with the Rural to Roaded Natural Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) settings for this area and would introduce long-term maintenance needs and costs that are not practicable. The Proposed Action instead maintains an approximately 8-foot tread with a compacted native-aggregate surface, consistent with Forest Service Trail Class 4 parameters and 2022 Forest Plan objectives for user safety, resource protection, and long-term sustainability.⁷
- An alternative that designates the proposed trail as one of the following:
 - **Non-equestrian only:** This option would not meet the project's purpose and need to provide a multi-use regional connection serving the widest feasible range of users. The trail is intended to serve pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians consistent with ECTA's regional ECTP and equitable access goals. While equestrian users have other regional opportunities, this corridor

⁷ As described in **Section 2.2 (Proposed Action Detail)**, the Proposed Action retains a compacted native aggregate (soft-surface) design for most of the proposed trail corridor to balance accessibility, environmental protection, and sustainability. This native aggregate design may achieve (or closely achieve) a firm surface that could provide some close-to accessible opportunities. The proposed trail is anticipated to be useable for adaptive riders. Additionally, accessibility improvements along the proposed trail would be incorporated where feasible, including ADA-compliant trailheads, parking access points, and initial approach segments designed in accordance with the Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG 2013) and Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines (FSORAG 2015).



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serves as a key community connection, and excluding equestrian use would disproportionately limit access for this group.

- **Closed to Class I and Class II E-Bikes:** This option would limit access for a segment of non-motorized users and is inconsistent with current Forest Service direction (36 CFR §§ 212, 261, 295), which allows site-specific designation of Class I and II E-Bikes on NFS trails. The Proposed Action includes E-Bike access to support a broader range of users, including those who rely on pedal-assist due to distance, elevation, or accessibility needs.
- **Open to general motorized recreation:** Allowing heavier, higher-speed motorized vehicles would introduce safety conflicts and detract from the intended low-impact recreation experience. The trail is designed to provide a separate, human-powered (or equestrian) route linking Questa and Red River. The Taos County area already features United States (U.S.) Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, U.S. Forest Service-designated roads, and the fully developed New Mexico State Road 38 corridor, for motorized travel. This project complements, rather than duplicates, those existing opportunities.

Overall, a combination of technical, environmental, and cost-related factors informed the screening process for the alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail. The Proposed Action represents the least environmentally impactful and most feasible option consistent with the project's purpose and need.



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3. Environmental Impacts

The following sections describe how the project complies with the relevant laws, regulations, policies, and the 2022 Forest Plan, which provide the basis for thresholds for significance. This consistency ensures that the Proposed Action does not exceed thresholds for significance, and supporting analysis and rationale for consistency are provided to reach a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

3.1 Issues Considered for Analysis

Informed by both internal and external scoping efforts, Forest Service resource specialists identified several issues requiring detailed analysis in this Final EA regarding the implementation of the project. These issues have been considered and incorporated into the Proposed Action and Final EA analyses and are not believed to be a reason for developing another alternative. These are further described in [Table 3.1-1](#).

Table 3.1-1 Resources and Issues Considered for Analysis

Resource	Rationale for Inclusion
Recreation	The Proposed Action has the potential to enhance the existing recreational experience by increasing connectivity of existing recreational opportunities and providing additional opportunities for various user groups in the project area and on nearby NFS lands through the construction and use of the proposed trail. The Proposed Action has the potential to improve public safety, as the project would add a designated off-highway trail to the local transportation network, thereby reducing the number of pedestrians on New Mexico State Road 38 and minimizing pedestrian conflicts with vehicle traffic.
Scenery	The Proposed Action has the potential to impact the scenic integrity of the project area and viewpoints on surrounding NFS lands from the construction and use of the proposed trail.
Designated Areas	The Proposed Action has the potential to impact Congressionally-designated areas on nearby NFS lands, namely the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness, the Columbine-Twining National Recreation Trail, and the Deer Creek to Columbine Trailhead section (Q-9) of Columbine Creek (which has been deemed eligible for National Wild and Scenic River (NWSR) status, but no suitability analysis or designation has occurred to date). The Proposed Action has the potential to increase access to these areas.
Socioeconomics	The Proposed Action has the potential to benefit local socioeconomics surrounding the project area due to the potential for increased visitation, tourism, and revenue from the proposed trail.
Cultural Resources	The Proposed Action has the potential to impact previously identified or unidentified historic properties, as well as cultural sites within the project area, due to the construction and use of the proposed trail.
Wildlife	The Proposed Action has the potential to impact migratory bird species within the project area from the construction and use of the proposed trail.
Soils	The Proposed Action has the potential to impact soil conditions and erosion within the project area from the construction and use of the proposed trail.
Hydrology	The Proposed Action has the potential to impact hydrological resources within the project area from the construction and use of the proposed trail.

3.2 Issues Dismissed from Detailed Analysis

Resources that Forest Service specialists determined would not be impacted and, therefore, are not further analyzed in this Final EA include the following: air quality and climate change, federally-listed plant species/Forest Service Region 3 Plant Species of Conservation Concern (SCC), federally-listed wildlife species,



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Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), noise, and transportation. **Table 3.2-1** provides a brief rationale regarding why these resources were considered but dismissed from detailed analysis.

Table 3.2-1. Resources and Issues Dismissed from Detailed Analysis

Resource	Rationale for Dismissal
Air Quality and Climate Change	The Proposed Action would not alter or impact the existing air quality conditions on the CAF, as no tailpipe emissions or greenhouse gas emissions would increase as a result of the Proposed Action, except for some minor emissions resulting from the temporary construction of the trail and associated infrastructure. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not meaningfully alter the air quality within the region. In addition, implementing the Proposed Action would not meaningfully contribute to climate change or be impacted by climate change processes, as changes in temperature and precipitation are not anticipated to significantly impact the project area, or alter the Forest Service's ability to provide trail-based recreational opportunities.
Invasive species	Resource specialists conducted invasive species surveys along the proposed trail corridor in May and June of 2025. Surveyors recorded four invasive species, as defined by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture. The spatial extents of these species are small and localized, with only one or two individuals present in most cases. The Proposed Action could facilitate the spread of invasive plant species through ground disturbance and increased human and animal traffic along the trail corridor. However, to minimize the spread of invasive species, specific PDC related to invasive species would be required as part of the project. (Refer to Appendix A .) Therefore, this issue has been considered and dismissed from detailed analysis.
Federally-listed Wildlife Species	Based on field surveys and confirmation of lack of presence of habitat, the project area does not contain proposed or designated critical habitat for any of the federally-listed wildlife species for the proposed project area (Mexican spotted owl, southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, New Mexico meadow jumping mouse, and silverspot butterfly) obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS, December 2025). Information, Planning, and Conservation System (refer to the Biological Assessment for additional detail). Due to the lack of critical habitat and/or general habitat suitability, occupancy and use of the project area is considered unlikely for all five of these federally endangered and threatened species. Consequently, specialists reached a no effect determination for federally-listed wildlife species. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to these species, and this issue has been considered and dismissed from detailed analysis.
Inventoried Roadless Areas	The Proposed Action is not anticipated to impact IRAs, as there are no IRAs in or adjacent to the project area.
Noise	The Proposed Action is not anticipated to permanently introduce new noise sources, nor alter or impact the existing noise conditions in the project area. There may be some minor, short-term noise impacts associated with construction activities. However, these impacts would be temporary and cease after construction. Additionally, the project area is already a heavily trafficked area for motorists and recreationists in the region. Regarding E-Bikes, the CAF considers Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes and traditional mountain bikes to be similar in nature, and has determined that their use would result in similar noise impacts on the project area.
Transportation	The Proposed Action is generally expected to improve, rather than adversely affect, local transportation and traffic. This is because more people are anticipated to use the proposed trail as a commuting option between the communities of



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	Questa and Red River. Therefore, the Proposed Action is not anticipated to increase congestion on New Mexico State Road 38. There may be some minor, short-term traffic impacts associated with construction activities. These temporary effects could include the presence of equipment transport, materials delivery, and contractor staging. However, given the existing capacity and use levels of the byway, this increase is expected to be minor and short in duration, with limited disruption to typical travel patterns. These activities are anticipated to cease after construction. Additionally, the Forest Service would require a traffic control plan as part of standard practice to minimize impacts to traffic from the project.
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To measure the effects of the project on the issues identified in **Table 3.1-1**, the following sections describe the potentially affected environment and environmental consequences, including cumulative effects, for each of the resources.

3.3 Recreation and Scenery

The following analysis is a summary of the Recreation and Scenery Technical Report for the project, prepared by SE Group on behalf of the CAF. Refer to the technical report included in the project record for additional details. (Note that parenthetical citations included in this analysis refer to citations provided in the technical report.)

Spatial and Temporal Bounds

The spatial bounds of this analysis for direct effects are defined by the project area. The spatial bounds for indirect effects are the project area buffered by approximately 0.5 miles on either side. This buffer includes nearby recreation sites that may experience changes in recreation patterns and scenic integrity, such as Eagle Rock Lake, Bear Canyon, Columbine Canyon, and the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness. This buffer does not extend farther given the area's rugged topography, forested vegetation cover, and the generally secluded alignment of the proposed trail, which together limit recreation access and sightlines. In total, the project analysis area covers approximately 7,250 acres, including approximately 5,515 acres of NFS lands and 1,735 acres of private inholdings.

Short-term effects are expected to occur within 5 years of project implementation. This considers that forbs, grasses, and seedlings are likely to re-establish within one year of disturbance, while meaningful ground cover typically develops over a 2- to 5-year period. In comparison, long-term effects are expected to span from 5 to 30 years. This timeframe captures patterns of revegetation and soil stabilization under consistent recreational use from the proposed project.

The spatial bounds for cumulative effects include the proposed project components, existing recreation trails and associated amenities immediately surrounding the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River, and all existing recreation trails and associated amenities across the broader Enchanted Circle region of northern New Mexico.

Cumulative effects are considered from approximately 2009 through the foreseeable future. This timeframe captures the publication of the existing 2009 CAF Travel Management Plan (USDA Forest Service 2009) and the subsequent period during which formal motorized route designations and associated recreation patterns have influenced the project analysis area. It also assumes that the proposed project would be constructed as designed and actively utilized.

For a detailed description of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects in the project analysis area, in addition to those projects that could have cumulative impacts on recreation, refer to **Appendix B**.



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Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)

The management of recreation resources on NFS lands in the project analysis area is directed by the 2022 Forest Plan and informed by the ROS, a recreation classification system used in the 2022 Forest Plan.

The ROS is a tool that zones for different recreation opportunities across NFS lands based on certain attributes, including zone size, distance of the zone(s) from roads, and degree of development inside the zone(s). The ROS guides the planning of existing and potential recreation activities on NFS lands and provides a baseline against which future conditions and management actions can be prepared. The ROS classifies NFS lands into six categories (i.e., settings), defined by the recreation experiences allowed therein, including: Primitive, Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized, Semi-Primitive Motorized, Roaded Natural, Rural, and Urban.

Table 3.3-1 describes the ROS settings that intersect the proposed project components. Only the settings Roaded Natural and Rural are applicable to the project area; these settings are applicable year-round. For additional details about ROS settings, refer to the 2022 Forest Plan.

Table 3.3-1. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting by Project Component

Proposed Project Component	ROS Setting	Overlap in the Project Area
Proposed Trail (Engineered Path)	Roaded Natural	7.5 miles
	Rural	2.0 miles
	None – Private Land	1.1 miles
Proposed Trail (Primitive Trail)	Roaded Natural	1.2 miles
	None – Private Land	0.1 miles
TOTAL	---	11.9 miles
Parking Access Points and Trailheads	Roaded Natural	1.8 acres
	Rural	0.3 acres
	None – Private Land	0.5 acres
TOTAL	---	2.6 acres

Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs)

Related to the ROS, the Forest Service uses the Scenery Management System (SMS) as the framework for integrating scenery management data into all levels of Forest Service planning. The 2022 Forest Plan specifically uses four Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs) from the SMS as a means of identifying the level of scenic integrity to be maintained on the CAF: Low, Moderate, High, and Very High. (Refer to the 2022 CAF Scenic Integrity Objectives Report for detailed descriptions of each SIO (USDA Forest Service 2022a). While existing scenic integrity refers to current on-the-ground conditions, the SIOs are a desired level of scenic integrity. **Table 3.3-2** describes the SIOs that intersect the proposed project components.

Table 3.3-2. Scenic Integrity Objective (SIO) by Project Component

Proposed Project Component	SIO	Overlap in the Project Area
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Proposed Trail (Engineered Path)	Low	9.5 miles
	None – Private Land	1.1 miles
Proposed Trail (Primitive Trail)	Low	1.2 miles
	None – Private Land	0.1 miles
TOTAL	---	11.9 miles
Parking Access Points and Trailheads	Low	2.1 acres
	None – Private Land	0.5 acres
TOTAL	---	2.6 acres

Overall, only the SIO classification of “Low” is applicable to the proposed project components, and this classification is applicable year-round. The Forest Service defines this SIO as follows:

- **Low:** In areas with low SIOs, the scenic character may appear moderately altered. Management activities, including manmade structures and facilities, may begin to dominate the scenic character but use scenic attributes to blend into the landscape (i.e., repeat the scenic attributes of size, shape, form, line, color, texture, or patterns common to the scenic character) (USDA Forest Service 2022a).

Affected Environment

Recreation Trends in the Region

The Enchanted Circle region of northern New Mexico has experienced steady growth in outdoor recreation over the past two decades, reflecting both regional tourism patterns and increased local demand for access to public lands. Trail-based activities—including hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, and horseback riding—continue to grow in popularity. Motorized recreation, including OHV travel and snowmobiling, remains an important use across designated routes on the CAF and surrounding areas. The 2009 CAF Travel Management Plan formalized many existing motorized routes, helping to reduce user conflicts and environmental impacts, but increasing interest in dispersed recreation continues to place pressure on infrastructure (USDA Forest Service 2009). In total, the CAF attracts approximately 1 million visitors annually (USDA Forest Service 2022b).

The Enchanted Circle region gets its name from the Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway. This 84-mile designated roadway on the CAF loops through northern New Mexico and circles Wheeler Peak, the highest point in the state at 13,161 feet. The Enchanted Circle region includes the entire area encompassed by the scenic byway, covering approximately 1,310 square miles. It contains portions of two counties (Taos County and Colfax County) and over 362,000 acres of federal public lands managed by the CAF and the BLM. This area includes the communities of Taos, Taos Ski Valley, Arroyo Hondo, Arroyo Seco, Questa, Red River, Eagle Nest, and Angel Fire. In addition to the federal lands managed by the CAF and the BLM, the area also encompasses nearly 9,800 acres of land owned by the State Land Office, over 36,000 acres managed by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and more than 280,600 acres of private land. Many of these lands are used for traditional or cultural purposes by indigenous groups such as the Taos Pueblo. In the Enchanted Circle region, there are approximately 987 miles of existing trails and 1,590 miles of existing roads (ECTA 2017).



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ECTA Regional Trails Plan

In 2017, ECTA developed an ECTP to provide “a blueprint for a comprehensive, cohesive, and connected trail system that can improve quality of life and community health throughout the Enchanted Circle” (ECTA 2017). The ECTP captures the recreational needs and desires of the communities in the Enchanted Circle region.

The ECTP identified five primary goals: 1) determine community priorities for new trails; 2) inventory existing trails in the Enchanted Circle area; 3) identify missing links within the existing trail system; 4) focus attention on the benefits of trails and build additional public support for trails; and 5) develop strategies for implementing the community’s priorities. In total, the ECTP evaluated over 150 trail segments to derive a tiered list of trail priorities in the region. Although this process did not explicitly call out the proposed trail as a priority trail segment, an “Alternate Hiking and Mountain-Biking Route from Questa” and a “[Town of Red River] Community Center Trail” both made the Tier 1 list. In addition, the Questa-Red River segment of New Mexico State Road 38 received a moderate score for “road biking priorities” (ECTA 2017).

Surveys conducted for the ECTP found there is very strong support for expanding the Enchanted Circle’s trail system. More than 86 percent of survey respondents support expanding the trail system, while approximately 5 percent do not.

Surveys for the ECTP also specifically asked respondents to identify trail investments that would encourage them to use the Enchanted Circle trail system more in the future. The highest priority for trail investments is creating new pathways to improve safety.

Recreation on NFS Lands

The proposed trail alignment traverses a scenic portion of the CAF, which includes a diverse range of existing recreational opportunities that draw both local and regional visitors. Near the Questa-Red River area, recreational use is primarily concentrated in the narrow canyon carved by the Red River, and access to existing recreational opportunities along the river is provided by New Mexico State Road 38. Along this corridor, developed day-use and overnight recreation opportunities are well-established. Although camping is allowed in six developed campgrounds, there are no designated dispersed camping areas in the corridor, and the Forest Service does not manage for or allow dispersed camping in the corridor. Recreational use in this area is available year-round, but summer and fall are typically the busiest seasons for trail-based activities.

Recreation amenities in the Questa-Red River area of the CAF are mainly managed by the Questa Ranger District, with maintenance responsibilities carried out by the CAF and concessionaire permit holders. Developed sites, such as campground areas, are maintained through a combination of federal funding and concessionaire agreements, which support routine upkeep of restrooms, signage, parking areas, and fee collection infrastructure. Trail maintenance is conducted periodically by CAF crews and volunteer groups; however, resource limitations can affect the frequency of these maintenance activities. The 2022 Forest Plan includes visitor management strategies, such as posted rules, informational kiosks, and designated use areas, to reduce user group conflicts and environmental degradation across the Forest.

Day Use Recreation

Day-use recreation is the most common form of outdoor engagement in the Questa-Red River area and includes trail-based activities (e.g., hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian use), rock climbing, fishing, wildlife viewing, picnicking, downhill and nordic skiing, OHV use, and scenic driving.

One of the most prominent developed day-use sites is Eagle Rock Lake, located immediately east of the Village of Questa. Managed by the CAF, this 3-acre reservoir offers a walking path, accessible fishing platforms, picnic tables, and scenic views. The lake is regularly stocked with fish by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and underwent environmental remediation and infrastructure improvements in 2015, making it a family-friendly destination. Fishing access is also available at various points along the Red River, with pullouts and



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informal access points providing opportunities for anglers and picnickers. The river supports cold-water fisheries and provides habitat for species such as brown and rainbow trout.

The nearby Elephant Rock Trail System supports trail-based recreation. This includes short loop trails suitable for both non-motorized and motorized use through mixed conifer stands and rocky terrain. However, only motorcycles are permitted in this area, and other OHVs (i.e., ATVs, UTVs) are not permitted. This area is managed under the 2009 CAF Travel Management Plan (USDA Forest Service 2009). Bear Canyon and Chambers Spring Canyon provide informal hiking opportunities and wildlife viewing in more primitive settings. Limited informal rock climbing opportunities also exist in the region, especially along basalt walls in areas east of the Village of Questa, although these are relatively undeveloped and primarily used by local climbers. In backcountry areas, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are possible in upper elevation zones of the CAF when snow conditions permit. Snowmobiling is also permitted on designated routes northeast of the Town of Red River, consistent with the 2009 CAF Travel Management Plan (USDA Forest Service 2009).

While the region supports a variety of recreation types, increasing use has led to user conflicts, particularly between motorized and non-motorized users. OHV use on designated roads on the CAF is a popular activity and an allowed use. However, currently, there are no formal OHV trail opportunities in the Questa-Red River area aside from motorcycle use within the Elephant Rock Trail System, although some informal OHV use has been observed. Both the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River have passed ordinances allowing OHVs on certain paved roads within their municipal limits. However, no such ordinance exists for New Mexico State Road 38, which prevents visitors staying at developed campgrounds along the Red River corridor from traveling to or from these sites on an OHV.

In winter, conflicts may also occur among different winter recreation users, depending on snow conditions. These dynamics underscore the need for intentional trail design, separation of uses where feasible, and clear wayfinding to reduce friction among recreation groups and to protect the quality of the user experience.

Camping

The project corridor features multiple developed CAF campgrounds that accommodate both tent and RV camping. These campgrounds are fee-based and include: Columbine Canyon Campground, Junebug Campground, Elephant Rock Campground, Fawn Lakes Campground, Goat Hill Campground, and La Bobita Campground (USDA Forest Service 2025a). Dispersed camping is difficult to impossible along the Red River corridor due to its narrow geography, high visitor use, sensitive riparian habitat, and off-road parking restrictions; therefore, dispersed camping is prohibited along this corridor. As a result, camping is concentrated at designated campgrounds with formal infrastructure. These campgrounds help manage use intensity, reduce resource degradation, and support overnight recreation needs along the corridor.

Recreation in the Village of Questa

The Village of Questa (population of approximately 1,960) functions as an important recreation gateway for northern Taos County and offers several community-based amenities that support local outdoor activity (U.S. Census 2020a). Questa Municipal Park serves as the primary recreation hub, including athletic fields, a skate park, a playground, and picnic areas. The park hosts seasonal events and provides accessible recreation for local families and youth. In addition, small open spaces and school facilities support informal walking/biking, sports, and gatherings, but trail-based or nature-oriented recreation remains limited within the village boundary (Village of Questa 2025).

The Village of Questa is located near extensive public lands, including the CAF and the BLM-managed Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. Congressionally-designated in 2013, the national monument is located approximately 5 miles west of Questa. However, there are no safe, sustainable connections linking the village to these neighboring recreation destinations. Most trailheads and campgrounds are only accessible by vehicle. The North Central Regional Transit District (NCRTD) provides limited public transit routes, but they do not offer direct access to specific recreational sites.



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Recreation in the Town of Red River

The Town of Red River (population of approximately 550) offers several of its own recreational amenities (U.S. Census 2020b). One of the most accessible options is the Red River Nature Trail, a relatively flat, 1.6-mile multi-use trail that runs parallel to the river through town, providing opportunities for walking/running, biking, and wildlife viewing. The trail is popular for its proximity to lodging and downtown, offering an easy and scenic option for casual recreation. Additionally, the town maintains a network of public parks, riverfront access points, and community spaces that support activities such as picnicking, fishing, and outdoor events throughout the year. Informal walking and biking routes are common along residential streets, especially during peak tourist seasons. In the winter, the Red River Ski & Summer Area on the south edge of town becomes a primary draw for snow-based recreation. The ski area offers downhill skiing, snowboarding, tubing, and other resort-based amenities; its operations are on both private and CAF lands through a special use permit (Town of Red River 2025a).

Despite the town's recreation-oriented economy and proximity to public lands, there is currently no safe, sustainable trail connection between the Town of Red River and many nearby recreation areas. However, the town operates a free, on-demand shuttle service (Miners Transit) that utilizes New Mexico State Road 38. Its service area includes town limits; the Junebug, Fawn Lakes, and Elephant Rock recreation areas; and other destinations to the east of town towards Eagle Nest. However, ridership is limited relative to regional demand (Town of Red River 2025b).

Recreation on Private Lands

The proposed trail corridor is intentionally positioned primarily on public lands managed by the CAF, but it also intersects private lands.

There are several parcels of private land between Questa and Red River associated with the MolyCorp Mine (now known as the Chevron Questa Mine), a former molybdenum mine that is currently undergoing long-term closure and environmental remediation. Although the mine is no longer active, access across or near mine-associated lands remains restricted, and no formal public recreation access is permitted through the Chevron property. The Forest Service is currently in discussions with Chevron Mining Company to obtain these parcels through a land donation/acquisition process, anticipated to be finalized in 2026.

Likewise, there are parcels of private land (owned by Willow Ponds, LLC) near the terminus of the proposed primitive trail segment in the Town of Red River. The Forest Service plans to negotiate trail access in this area through a landowner agreement.

Trailhead Parking

Parking along the proposed trail corridor is limited to a mix of developed CAF trailhead pullouts and campground parking areas, as well as informal roadside spaces along New Mexico State Road 38. Key developed parking areas include designated parking at the Columbine Trailhead. Smaller gravel parking areas are provided at Eagle Rock Lake and the Junebug, Fawn Lakes, and Goat Hill campgrounds. Both day-use and overnight parking are generally permitted at CAF parking areas, although fees may apply.

The communities of Questa and Red River each offer limited formal public parking infrastructure. In the Village of Questa, parking is typically available at local businesses, municipal facilities, and recreational sites, such as Eagle Rock Lake. However, the village center lacks large, dedicated public lots, and visitors typically rely on on-street or small lot parking, some of which is fee-based. The Town of Red River provides free public parking throughout town, including several designated lots and on-street spaces. Nonetheless, during peak seasons, such as winter ski months and summer festivals, parking demand increases considerably and can exceed capacity.

Other informal parking occurs at scenic pullouts and fishing access points along the Red River. However, these areas are often narrow, unsigned, not included in the 2009 CAF Travel Management Plan, and may pose safety



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concerns due to limited sight distance or proximity to the travel lane. During peak visitation periods, such as summer weekends and fall foliage season, these limited facilities often experience congestion and overflow, especially where trailheads and campgrounds are clustered in narrow segments of the canyon. There are currently no large, centralized parking areas (e.g., park-and-rides or formal transit hubs) in the corridor. Eventually, as recreation demand continues to increase, existing parking capacity may be insufficient to support safe, sustainable trail access if expanded infrastructure or improved traffic management strategies are not prioritized.

Scenic Character and Visitor Experience

The proposed trail travels through forested uplands, riparian corridors, and mountainous foothills. The setting features a rich mosaic of ponderosa pine and mixed-conifer forests, open meadows, and exposed rock outcrops. Intermittent panoramic views of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, particularly along open slopes, enhance the scenic character of the corridor and contribute to a strong sense of place. Seasonal shifts (such as fall foliage, spring runoff, summer flowers, and snow-covered hillsides) support dynamic and year-round scenic appreciation.

Near the Village of Questa, views are predominantly characterized by small-scale development and modified natural features. The village includes buildings and roadways that partially fragment the landscape; however, zoning ordinances regulate building height limits, allow for buffer zones, and support aesthetic consistency. New Mexico State Road 38 (part of the Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway) passes through the Village of Questa and remains adjacent to the proposed trail towards the Town of Red River. This roadway, although part of a National Scenic Byway, does not have a unique SIO assigned to it; rather, the entire proposed trail is in a “Low” SIO zone (USDA Forest Service 2022a).

The nearby Chevron Questa Mine encompasses approximately 14,300 acres and shows substantial evidence of human disturbance on the landscape. This area includes abandoned mine buildings, milling operations, and tailings impoundments. Highly disturbed slopes and industrial infrastructure introduce geometric lines, landscape scarring, and large patches of gray and brown hues that contrast against the deep greens of the surrounding forest. The mine itself does not have an SIO designation because it is located on private lands, but an SIO classification of “Low” surrounds the mine. An SIO designation of “Low” is appropriate in this area because SIO guidelines state that within “Low” zones, manmade structures and facilities are permitted to begin to dominate the scenic character. Generally, remediation of the Chevron Questa Mine is expected to enhance the scenic integrity and quality of this area over time.

East of Questa, the proposed trail transitions into a more enclosed and vegetatively intact environment, passing through piñon-juniper woodlands and mid-elevation conifer stands. While the trail corridor remains part of a “Low” SIO zone, the scenic character in this zone exhibits moderate landscape cohesion. Existing NFS recreation sites are located along the corridor, but they are set back from New Mexico State Road 38 and partially screened by vegetation. Therefore, visitor expectations in this area include views of developed roadway infrastructure along the scenic byway (e.g., vehicles, parking areas, and power lines), transitioning into developed recreational infrastructure (e.g., campgrounds and trailheads), and eventually to more primitive features upslope (e.g., trails). To the south, the neighboring Columbine-Hondo Wilderness retains an SIO of “Very High.” Under the Wilderness Act of 1964, this Wilderness area prioritizes naturalness, unaltered landscape patterns, and feelings of remoteness and solitude. (Refer to [Section 3.4 Designated Areas](#) and the project’s Designated Areas Technical Report for more details.)

As the proposed trail ascends into the canyon setting of the Town of Red River, steep slopes and built elements associated with recreational infrastructure (e.g., lifts, ski runs, and tourism-based lodging and amenities at the Red River Ski & Summer Area) define the scenic character. As in the Village of Questa, zoning ordinances help to regulate building height limits, allow for buffer zones, and support aesthetic consistency.

Overall, the proposed trail corridor demonstrates interplay between ecological patterns, human history, and evolving land use.



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Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

Recreation Trends in the Region

Under the Proposed Action, the recreation trends described in the affected environment are expected to continue, with growing demand for trails that support community connectivity, enhance off-road safety, and accommodate multiple user groups. Implementation of the proposed trail would help meet this demand by providing a multi-use corridor aligned with these regional recreational priorities.

The Proposed Action is generally expected to result in a modest increase in recreational use of NFS and municipal lands in the project analysis area compared to the No Action Alternative. Given that the proposed trail would be an addition to the existing regional trail network, it is designed to enhance recreational access and provide a critical community connector within the broader Enchanted Circle system.

The project may result in a slight increase in local participation in trail-based activities such as hiking and biking (including E-Bike use), while also attracting recreationists from outside the region. This anticipated increase is primarily due to the trail's unique characteristics (a relatively long, low-gradient corridor), which are uncommon in the existing regional trail network. Simultaneously, by expanding the overall trail network and providing new access points, the project is expected to help disperse recreational use more broadly across CAF lands, thereby alleviating pressure on currently used sites.

Recreation on NFS Lands

As previously described for regional trends, the proposed project is expected to enhance the connectivity of the larger Enchanted Circle trail system on NFS lands compared to the No Action Alternative by adding a new trail corridor that links to existing recreational opportunities. The proposed trail would support a wide range of activities, including hiking, biking, and horseback riding, thereby enhancing the diversity of recreational experiences available in the region. Given its elevation range, the trail would also enable year-round recreational use, with potential for snow-based activities. By establishing a designated off-highway trail connection as part of the local transportation network, the project would reduce the number of pedestrians traveling along New Mexico State Road 38, thereby minimizing conflicts with vehicle traffic and improving overall traveler safety. This separation of uses would support a more predictable travel environment, benefiting both non-motorized and motorized users. Furthermore, by incorporating Forest Service standards for outdoor accessibility (including the FSTAG and FSORAG) as much as feasible, the trail would expand inclusive access to outdoor recreation, aligning with the project's purpose to enhance sustainable and safe recreation infrastructure.

Considering the scale of the Proposed Action and the support that the Town of Red River, Village of Questa, and ECTA could provide in managing recreational opportunities, the potential increase in recreational use of NFS lands in the Enchanted Circle region from the implementation of the project is not expected to burden the Forest Service's ability to manage recreation resources on the CAF. Those choosing to participate in recreation on NFS lands beyond the project analysis area are expected to have experiences and opportunities similar to existing conditions.

However, the project may result in localized adverse effects on recreation, particularly during construction and the early implementation phase. Short-term disruptions could include temporary closures or congestion near trailheads, increased vehicle traffic from construction crews, and noise or dust impacts in areas where the trail passes near quiet recreation settings. Once completed, increased visitation may also put pressure on existing CAF parking areas; however, the proposed parking access points would provide additional parking capacity and help alleviate these concerns.



Questa to Red River Trail Project



The presence of a new trail corridor could also lead to conflicts between user groups, especially if non-motorized and motorized uses are not adequately managed. There is also potential for increased off-trail use or resource degradation in areas lacking clear signage or regular maintenance along the proposed trail. These risks are greatest at high-traffic trailheads or where trail users inadvertently enter sensitive riparian areas near the Red River corridor. To mitigate these effects, project design could include surface durability specifications and user education strategies (e.g., signage, kiosks, and wayfinding). Ongoing collaboration between the Forest Service, local governments, and recreation partners, such as ECTA and trail corps/volunteer crews, would be critical to ensuring sustainable trail stewardship, maintenance, and user management over time.

Overall, no direct effects are anticipated to Federally-Designated Recreation Opportunities (i.e., Designated Areas); however, minor indirect effects, including shifts in recreation access patterns to Designated Areas and a slight increase in construction-related traffic, are anticipated. (Refer to [Section 3.4 Designated Areas](#) and the project's Designated Areas Technical Report for more information.)

Recreation in the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River

Implementation of the proposed trail is expected to result in long-term, beneficial effects to recreation access and user experience in both the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River. These communities currently support popular amenities, such as Eagle Rock Lake, Questa Municipal Park, Brandenburg Park, and the Red River Nature Trail; however, they lack a continuous connection to one another and to nearby public lands. Trail users and recreationists must rely on New Mexico State Road 38 for travel between destinations, which limits access for those without vehicles, creates safety concerns, and contributes to congestion during peak visitation periods.

In the short term, the project may result in localized adverse effects on recreation in the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River, particularly during construction and early implementation. Short-term disruptions could include an increase in vehicle traffic from construction crews, and noise or dust impacts in areas where the trail enters municipal boundaries and borders residential areas. Once completed, increased visitation may also put pressure on existing municipal facilities and parking areas; however, the proposed parking access points would provide additional parking capacity and help alleviate these concerns.

In the long term, the proposed trail would establish a regionally impactful multi-use trail, creating the first formal, off-highway corridor between the two municipalities and improving access to surrounding CAF recreational infrastructure. This new connectivity would expand opportunities for hiking, biking, nature observation, and active transportation, particularly for local residents who currently have limited options for trail-based recreation close to home. The project is anticipated to support improved physical health and mental health and well-being, increased daily physical activity, and broader community engagement with outdoor spaces.

Recreation on Private Lands

The proposed trail would primarily traverse public lands managed by the CAF. However, the trail alignment would overlap or run in close proximity to several private parcels.

Short-term adverse effects may occur to private lands during trail construction, especially in areas where the corridor passes within view of residential or undeveloped private parcels. These impacts could include temporary increases in noise, dust, and equipment traffic, as well as short-term reductions in privacy or scenic character during grading and surfacing work. In some areas, access routes for construction equipment may require temporary use of nearby roads or road shoulders, potentially creating traffic or parking challenges for adjacent landowners.

In the long term, the presence of a formal trail corridor may result in perceived or actual reductions in privacy, increased foot traffic, or user trespass if trail users stray from the designated corridor. These adverse effects may be particularly relevant where private lands are unfenced or poorly signed, or where informal trails may currently exist. Increased visitation may also lead to minor parking congestion at nearby trailheads or road shoulders, potentially spilling over into adjacent residential areas without proper management or enforcement.



Questa to Red River Trail Project



However, the proposed trail would also provide long-term benefits to adjacent private lands. In many rural and gateway communities, proximity to well-maintained trails can increase property values, improve neighborhood walkability, and enhance quality of life (ECTA 2017). The proposed trail would connect residential zones in Questa and Red River to nearby recreation assets, parks, and public lands, making adjacent properties more desirable for residents seeking easy access to outdoor amenities. For rural landowners, this may also present opportunities for small business development (e.g., lodging, guide services, or trail-friendly retail) if land use regulations allow.

To minimize adverse effects, the project could incorporate strategies such as clear trail alignment, wayfinding signage, and public education to ensure users remain on designated routes. Trail segments near private land would be designed to incorporate buffer zones, screening vegetation, or fencing where feasible. Additionally, continued coordination with landowners, particularly near the former Chevron Questa Mine, where legacy industrial lands intersect with private parcels, would be critical to ensure that trail siting avoids conflict zones and respects property boundaries.

Trailhead Parking

The proposed trail would include the development of new designated parking areas at key access points along the trail corridor, addressing long-standing limitations in formal trailhead infrastructure. Currently, parking is limited to a mix of campground lots, trailhead pullouts, and informal roadside spaces along New Mexico State Road 38, some of which lack signage, striping, or safe access. New parking areas as part of this project would reduce reliance on these constrained sites, provide safer and more organized trail access, and help distribute visitation more evenly across the corridor. These facilities would be designed to Forest Service standards and may include gravel surfacing, signage, and ADA-accessible features, depending on location and site conditions. (For a full list of required PDC that meet Forest Service standards, refer to [Appendix A](#).)

In the short term, trail construction may temporarily reduce access or cause minor congestion at existing parking areas, particularly near Eagle Rock Lake and Columbine Canyon. In the long term, new parking areas are expected to result in overall beneficial effects, alleviating pressure on high-use sites, mitigating unsafe roadside parking, and improving the overall visitor experience. However, residual concerns may remain in narrow segments of the Red River Canyon or where additional capacity is difficult to site due to terrain or proximity to private land. Without ongoing monitoring and management, increased visitation may still lead to overflow parking during peak periods or encourage the use of informal access points that are not designed to handle high volumes.

In-town parking effects may also occur in Questa and Red River, particularly at access points near commercial centers or parks. Coordination with local governments would be necessary to ensure that parking infrastructure is well-integrated with town planning and recreation management.

Scenic Character and Visitor Experience

The proposed trail would introduce a new linear feature into a landscape characterized by a mix of natural elements, historical land disturbance, and rural development. As the trail travels through forested uplands, riparian corridors, and mountainous foothills, it would offer users a range of visual experiences.

In the short term, the construction and use of the proposed trail may result in localized and temporary scenic disturbances, such as vegetation clearing, exposed soils, and the presence of construction-related equipment. Over the long term, the trail's physical footprint is expected to remain relatively narrow, and in forested sections, vegetation would provide natural screening that minimizes visual contrast. In areas where the trail traverses open terrain, newly cut trail may be perceptible to viewers, although these visual changes would likely remain subordinate to the broader natural landscape.

Near the Village of Questa, the trail would pass through areas where the visual environment is already modified by human presence. Therefore, the overall scenic character is already defined by mixed natural and built elements. In proximity to the Chevron Questa Mine, where industrial and disturbed landforms dominate, the



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introduction of a recreational trail would represent only a minor visual change within a setting already characterized by a “Low” SIO. The presence of the trail in this location would not substantially alter views for trail users or adjacent observers. The project design may include interpretive signage opportunities to understand the area’s land use history and ongoing remediation efforts.

East of the Village of Questa, the trail would enter a more enclosed and visually cohesive environment. These conditions would reduce the likelihood of the trail diminishing scenic quality, while offering users a sense of seclusion and immersion in the landscape. However, the trail corridor’s proximity to the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness introduces additional visual sensitivity. While the proposed trail does not enter wilderness boundaries, it may be visible from limited vantage points near the Wilderness area’s northern edge, particularly in open terrain. However, the intervening vegetation, elevation changes, and general seclusion of the trail alignment would reduce the likelihood of noticeable scenic intrusion into wilderness viewsheds. Therefore, the “Very High” SIO classification for this Wilderness area (and other surrounding SIOs) would not change or be ultimately affected.

Near the Town of Red River, the proposed trail would align with existing visual patterns. This could enhance visitors’ experience by improving trail-based access to this tourism-oriented destination.

Overall, trail development in most locations along the corridor would remain visually subordinate to the natural or built context. In some areas, the presence of a new natural-surfaced path may enhance the scenic experience for New Mexico State Road 38 travelers by signaling a recreational opportunity and encouraging appreciation of the surrounding landscape. Where potential exists for effects on scenic character, particularly near open slopes or Designated Areas, screening, topographic variation, and design considerations are expected to minimize adverse impacts.

Impacts from Class I and Class II E-Bike Use

Regarding E-Bikes, the CAF considers Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes and traditional mountain bikes to be similar in nature (refer to [Section 3.8 Soils](#) for additional detail). The proposed trail would be specifically designed to accommodate year-round, multi-use travel by both non-motorized and motorized users (specifically Class 1 and 2 E-Bike users) across a broad user base. The trail’s planned width, surface durability, and alignment are intended to support a variety of user types (including Class 1 and 2 E-Bikes) and minimize congestion. However, the potential for user conflict remains, particularly between non-motorized and motorized users, or between slower trail users (e.g., users on foot) and higher-speed users (e.g., traditional mountain bike and Class 1 and 2 E-Bike users). To address these concerns, this project includes a range of potential PDC, including designated use areas, clear signage, user education, and regular trail maintenance. (For a full list of required PDC, refer to [Appendix A](#).)

It is important to note that allowing Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes on the proposed trail would provide various benefits as well, including making the trail more accessible to a wider range of user abilities and providing a sustainable alternative mode of transportation between the two communities.

Cumulative Effects

The implementation of the proposed project is generally anticipated to complement the ongoing trend of recreation growth in the Enchanted Circle Region and across northern New Mexico. The proposed trail would connect the existing but fragmented trail network between the municipalities of Questa and Red River, offering approximately 11.9 miles of new multi-use trail and 2.6 acres of associated parking access points and trailheads constructed to NFS standards. This added trail mileage and improved infrastructure would provide trail users with new opportunities for both non-motorized and motorized recreation, while helping to disperse increasing use across the region.

When considered alongside broader increases in recreation across the CAF and adjacent public lands, the project could play a beneficial role in alleviating user pressure on heavily trafficked areas by offering a managed



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alternative within a high-demand corridor. The inclusion of ECTA as a partner in ongoing maintenance and user management could further increase the capacity of the CAF to steward this project and future trail resources. ECTA's active role in signage, outreach, and stewardship programs would help to ensure that any increases in use are guided by a coordinated management framework.

Conversely, the introduction of new high-quality trail infrastructure may contribute to a broader regional increase in visitation, including additional use of nearby public and private lands not directly managed under the project. This potential "ripple effect" could result in future challenges for both Forest Service managers and adjacent landowners, particularly in areas not currently equipped with formal access, parking, or trailhead facilities. The magnitude and direction of these effects would depend on a range of external factors, including tourism trends, trail marketing, and population growth in the region.

Overall, ECTA's regional master planning and community engagement processes have helped to balance recreation development with local input and management feasibility. By aligning project implementation with broader trail planning frameworks and adaptive management strategies, the proposed trail is expected to contribute positively to recreation outcomes while remaining responsive to concerns about overuse and capacity across the greater Enchanted Circle region.

3.4 Designated Areas

The following analysis is a summary of the Designated Areas Technical Report for the project, prepared by SE Group on behalf of the CAF. Refer to the technical report included in the project record for additional details. (Note that parenthetical citations included in this analysis refer to citations provided in the technical report.)

Spatial and Temporal Bounds

The spatial and temporal bounds for this analysis are the same as described for Recreation and Scenery.

Affected Environment

The 2022 Forest Plan states that Designated Areas are "areas that contain special, exceptional, or unique values that provide important ecosystem services," and are "established by Congress or administratively designated by authorities such as the Regional Forester or Forest Service Chief." Once established, a designation continues until a subsequent decision by the appropriate authority removes the designation. **Table 3.4-1** describes the existing Designated Areas on the CAF that overlap the project analysis area.

Table 3.4-1. Designated Areas in the Project Analysis Area

Designated Area	Overlap in the Project Area (Proposed Trail 60m Buffer, Direct Effects)	Overlap in the Project Analysis Area (Proposed Trail 0.5-Mile Buffer, Indirect Effects)
Columbine-Hondo Wilderness	None	526.2 acres
Columbine-Twining National Recreation Trail	None	0.3 miles
New Mexico State Road 138 segment of the Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway	None	11.6 miles
Deer Creek to Columbine Trailhead segment of Columbine Creek*	None	0.5 miles

* Represents an eligible but not designated NWSR corridor.



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The project analysis area does not overlap other Designated Areas identified in the 2022 Forest Plan, including IRAs, Wild Horse Territories, the Sangre de Cristo Pea Clam Zoological Area, or the Haplopappus Microcephalus Botanical Area.

Columbine-Hondo Wilderness

The Columbine-Hondo Wilderness encompasses approximately 43,706 acres in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of northern New Mexico. Overall, approximately 526.2 acres overlap the project analysis area. Elevations in the Wilderness area range from approximately 7,500 to 12,700 feet, supporting a range of high-elevation ecosystems. Designated by Congress under the 2014 Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Act ([Public Law 113-291](#)), the CAF manages this area to preserve its undeveloped character, prohibit mechanized use, and provide opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Several key factors that drove the Wilderness area designation include: watershed protection, biodiversity and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, cultural and historical significance, and community support (U.S. Congress 2014).

Wilderness Characteristics

The 2014 Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Act did not provide a detailed definition of "wilderness." However, as of 2015, the Forest Service has developed a framework that identifies 5 wilderness characteristics intended to guide management and monitoring efforts across all designated Wilderness areas. These 5 characteristics—Untrammeled, Natural, Undeveloped, Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or a Primitive and Unconfined Type of Recreation, and Other Features of Value—serve as evaluative benchmarks rather than strict legal requirements (Landres et al. 2015). The Columbine-Hondo Wilderness currently aligns with all 5 of these characteristics.

Wilderness Access

Visitors to the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness engage in a variety of non-motorized activities in the area, including hiking, horseback riding, hunting, camping, and enjoying scenic views. The most heavily used access points are located along New Mexico State Road 150 in Hondo Canyon, near Taos Ski Valley, where several National Forest System Trails (NFSTs) lead to landmarks such as Lobo Peak and Gold Hill. Recreational access also occurs from the Columbine Trailhead off New Mexico State Road 38 (a portion of the Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway), although use levels are generally lower on the northern side of the Wilderness area (USDA Forest Service 2025b).

The Columbine-Hondo Wilderness approaches the project area at its northern boundary near the Columbine Trailhead. This area is between mile markers 3 and 5 of the proposed trail alignment. The proposed trail does not enter designated wilderness; however, it is within approximately 60 feet of the wilderness boundary at its closest point near mile marker 4. It remains closely parallel to the wilderness boundary for a total of approximately 1.5 miles between mile markers 3 and 5. Additionally, the proposed parking access point near Columbine Canyon is located approximately 350 feet from the wilderness boundary. The wilderness boundary parallels New Mexico State Road 38, a paved and frequently traveled portion of the Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway. The presence of vehicle traffic, road noise, and occasional roadside development (e.g., powerlines) already influences the sensory environment along the wilderness edge.

The Columbine Trailhead is approximately 5 miles east of the Village of Questa and 7 miles west of the Town of Red River, off New Mexico State Road 38. Existing amenities at the trailhead include a small paved parking lot within the Columbine Canyon Campground, including approximately 14-16 parking spaces; a restroom; and interpretive signage. The existing Columbine Canyon Campground is immediately adjacent to the east of the trailhead and features 26 campsites. The campground operates seasonally under a concessionaire special use permit, typically opening in late May and closing in early September. The primary route into the Wilderness area from the Columbine Trailhead is the Columbine Canyon Trail (NFST #71), which climbs approximately 14 miles and connects to the Lobo Peak Trail (NFST #57) and Gold Hill Trail (NFST #64). CAF staff actively address management concerns throughout the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness, including unauthorized bicycle and motorized use.



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Note: The Latir Peak Wilderness is located approximately 3.5 miles north of the project area. Because this Wilderness area is located outside the project analysis area, impacts from the proposed project are anticipated to be negligible. Consequently, the project Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) did not consider indirect impacts on this Wilderness area in detail.

Columbine-Twining National Recreation Trail

The Columbine-Twining National Recreation Trail is a 14-mile, point-to-point route through the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness on the CAF. Overall, approximately 0.3 miles overlap the project analysis area. Designated by the Forest Service in 1978 under administrative authority granted by the National Trails System Act of 1968 ([Public Law 90-543](#)), the trail connects the Columbine Canyon Campground in the Questa-Red River area to the Twining Campground in Taos Ski Valley, ascending to over 12,700 feet near Gold Hill. The route gains approximately 5,200 feet in elevation and passes through diverse ecosystems ranging from riparian corridors and mixed conifer forests to alpine tundra above the tree line. Key segments include the Columbine Trail (NFST #71), Deer Creek Trail (NFST #69), and Gold Hill Trail (NFST #64). The trail offers panoramic views, solitude, and primitive recreation opportunities, including hiking, backpacking, equestrian use, and camping. Use is relatively high, particularly during summer and fall (American Trails 2025).

Deer Creek to Columbine Trailhead Section of Columbine Creek

NWSRs are rivers or river segments protected under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 to preserve their free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs), such as scenery, recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, geology, or cultural significance. These rivers are classified as Wild, Scenic, or Recreational based on the level of development and access along the corridor. A river segment is deemed eligible for designation if it:

1. Is free-flowing, meaning it exists in a natural or semi-natural condition without impoundments or major channel modifications; and
2. Possesses at least one ORV—a regionally or nationally significant feature related to scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or similar resources.

Eligibility is typically determined during land management planning (e.g., Forest Plan revisions), followed by suitability analysis and, ultimately, potential Congressional designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-542). During its 2022 Forest Plan revision process, the CAF identified the 1.3-mile-long Deer Creek to Columbine Trailhead segment of Columbine Creek as eligible.⁸ Considering almost all of this segment (1.2 miles, or 92%) is on the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness, the CAF tentatively classified the segment as “Wild.” A Wild river is one that is “free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted” (USDA Forest Service 2022c).

This river segment possesses ORVs related to recreation. The recreational ORV can be attributed to the river segment’s proximity to and integration with the Columbine-Twining National Recreation Trail, which provides opportunities for hiking, backcountry access, nature viewing, and other non-motorized recreational experiences (USDA Forest Service 2022c).

⁸ The CAF Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Evaluation (an appendix to the 2022 Forest Plan) identifies this eligible NWSR as “Columbine Creek from Deer Creek to Columbine Trailhead.” (USDA Forest Service 2022c).



Questa to Red River Trail Project



Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway

The Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway is an 84-mile designated roadway on the CAF that circles around Wheeler Peak, the highest point in New Mexico at 13,161 feet. Overall, approximately 11.6 miles overlap the project analysis area.

The byway begins and ends in the Town of Taos, passing through several communities, including Questa, Red River, Eagle Nest, and Angel Fire. The byway traverses a range of landscapes, including alpine forests, mountain valleys, and high desert terrain, and provides access to a mix of recreational opportunities such as hiking, fishing, skiing, and roadside scenic overlooks. The byway functions as a major scenic and tourism corridor for New Mexico's Enchanted Circle region. NMDOT traffic counters estimate that, on average, approximately 2,000 vehicles travel on the byway between Questa and Red River each day. In comparison, approximately 1,100 vehicles (45% less) travel on New Mexico State Road 150, which leads to Taos Ski Valley (NMDOT 2025).

Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

Columbine-Hondo Wilderness

Under the Proposed Action, no direct impacts to the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness are anticipated. The proposed trail alignment does not enter designated wilderness, and all construction and ground-disturbing activities would occur outside of the wilderness boundary. At its closest point, the proposed trail would pass approximately 60 feet from the boundary, maintaining a physical buffer between the Proposed Action and wilderness.

Wilderness Characteristics

Indirect effects on wilderness characteristics are expected to be minor. The nature of these potential impacts is discussed as follows.

- **Untrammeled:** Untrammeled wilderness is degraded by deliberate human activities that control or alter ecological systems within the wilderness. While the Proposed Action has the potential to increase visitation to the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness, visitation in this area is already occurring. Visitation impacts are anticipated to be similar to existing conditions (i.e., from non-motorized trail use). Non-motorized trail use is "not an intentional management action that alters the biophysical environment" (Landres et al. 2015). In addition, no new development is proposed within the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness as part of the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project is not anticipated to impact the untrammeled character of the Wilderness.
- **Natural:** A Wilderness area is considered to have natural characteristics if its ecological systems are "substantially free from the effects of modern civilization" (Landres et al. 2015). No new development is proposed within the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness under the Proposed Action; visitation is already occurring on the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness, and any increased visitation would increase the use of existing trails. Over time, higher visitation may contribute to resource impacts on the wilderness from activities such as trail braiding, informal campsite creation, localized vegetation loss, and/or littering. However, these changes would result from visitor behavior, not physical development within the wilderness, and could be addressed through continued education and monitoring. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not meaningfully alter the natural character of the wilderness.
- **Undeveloped:** Wilderness is considered undeveloped when it does not have permanent improvements or signs of human habitation, where "man himself is a visitor who does not remain" (Landres et al. 2015). The Proposed Action does not propose any temporary or permanent installations within the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness and thus would not impact the undeveloped character of the wilderness.



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- **Has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation:** This characteristic is degraded by modern intrusions such as crowding, infrastructure, or restrictions on visitor behavior that reduce opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation (Landres et al. 2015). While the Proposed Action may result in a modest increase in non-motorized use of existing trails, use within the wilderness is expected to remain relatively low due to its rugged terrain, limited access, and remote location. Visitors would continue to experience opportunities for solitude and self-directed, primitive recreation. No facilities, signage, or management restrictions would be introduced in the wilderness as part of the Proposed Action. It is possible that recreational use on the proposed trail, such as conversations, bike tires on gravel, or group activities, may be audible from the nearby wilderness. However, any additional noise or visual presence from trail users would be largely indistinguishable from the existing ambient conditions. Vegetation screening between the proposed trail corridor and the wilderness boundary would further limit visibility and reduce potential for line-of-sight intrusions. Therefore, the proposed project is not anticipated to diminish this characteristic.
- **Other Features of Value:** This characteristic refers to unique ecological, geological, scenic, cultural, or scientific features that enhance the value of a Wilderness area (Landres et al. 2015). The Proposed Action does not involve activities or development within the wilderness that would affect Gold Hill or features of value. Therefore, the proposed project is not anticipated to diminish this characteristic.

Wilderness Access

Overall, the Proposed Action would improve access to the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness by enhancing connectivity to the Columbine Trailhead, a primary access point to the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness. By establishing a continuous, designated route from adjacent public lands and developed recreation sites, the proposed project would facilitate easier access to the wilderness boundary for users, reducing their reliance on vehicular access. This enhanced access would facilitate opportunities for hiking, backpacking, and nature observation in the Columbine Canyon area and higher-elevation portions of the wilderness. In addition, by dispersing trail-based recreation more evenly across the Enchanted Circle region, the proposed trail may help alleviate localized pressure at other popular trailheads while encouraging sustainable use of existing wilderness trails.

Columbine-Twining National Recreation Trail

The proposed trail may impact the Columbine Trailhead and the adjacent Columbine Canyon Campground by providing increased access to the trailhead and campground. Benefits of this increased access include enhanced enjoyment of public lands and improved trail network connectivity for people coming from (and/or going to) Questa and Red River. However, this increased access could lead to increased foot traffic into the northern portion of the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness (particularly along the Columbine Trail (NFST #71), part of the Columbine-Twining National Recreation Trail), thus potentially indirectly impacting wilderness characteristics (as discussed in detail in the previous section).

Over time, as on the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness, higher visitation may contribute to resource impacts on the national recreation trail from activities such as trail braiding, informal campsite creation, localized vegetation loss, and/or littering. However, these changes would result from visitor behavior, not physical development along the trail, and could be addressed through continued education and monitoring. Ultimately, these impacts would be negligible considering existing levels of visitation to and use of the area. The character and user experience along the Columbine-Twining National Recreation Trail, including its challenging and scenic backcountry setting and designation under the National Trails System Act, would remain intact.

Deer Creek to Columbine Trailhead Section of Columbine Creek

The proposed trail alignment intersects Columbine Creek, outside of the eligible NWSR segment that ends at Columbine Trailhead. The project design for the proposed trail includes one designated bridge crossing at the northern section of Columbine Creek to avoid direct impacts to the stream channel or riparian vegetation. In addition, PDC would be required during project construction to minimize erosion, sedimentation, and other indirect effects. (Refer to **Appendix A** for a complete list of required PDC.) Therefore, the proposed trail



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alignment would not affect the ORV related to recreation for the eligible NWSR segment, would not affect the free-flowing condition of the river, and would not impact the eligibility of this segment.

Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway

Under the Proposed Action, no direct impacts are anticipated to the Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway itself. The proposed trail would not alter the roadway alignment, require road construction, or restrict access along the byway. No trail crossings of the byway are proposed.

The project may result in short-term, indirect impacts during the construction phase, including an increase in construction-related traffic along the byway. These temporary effects could include the presence of equipment transport, materials delivery, and contractor staging. However, given the existing capacity and use levels of the byway, this increase is expected to be minor and short in duration, with limited disruption to typical travel patterns.

Longer-term indirect effects may include a modest increase in recreation-related traffic, particularly near the Columbine Canyon area, as the proposed trail would enhance access to public lands and nearby trailheads. However, the byway's existing capacity, along with continued maintenance by NMDOT, is expected to accommodate this increase without disruption; the proposed parking access points would also help to accommodate increased vehicle capacity. Parked vehicles and trail users may become more visible near the new Columbine Canyon parking access point; however, the trail would remain set back from the byway and buffered by vegetation. Higher vehicle speeds along New Mexico State Road 38 (approximately 55 mph) would also limit both the duration and prominence of views from the roadway.

Overall, the proposed trail would provide byway users with enhanced access to existing recreation opportunities on public lands, including trailheads, campsites, and trails (e.g., the Columbine-Twining National Recreation Trail). By creating a formal, designated route along the byway corridor, the proposed project would improve recreational connectivity between communities and support the project's purpose of increasing safe, sustainable, and equitable access to recreation across the Enchanted Circle region.

Impacts from Class I and Class II E-Bike Use

The proposed project could introduce a limited amount of low-speed, motor-assisted use along the trail corridor (e.g., Class I and Class II E-Bikes). However, the proposed trail (and associated E-Bike use) would not overlap the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness, Columbine-Twining National Recreation Area, or National Scenic Byway and would therefore not directly impact these areas. Existing motorized use restrictions would remain unchanged for the wilderness area. While E-Bike users could attempt to enter these restricted areas from trails connected to the proposed trail, this indirect effect would be no different from what is already possible from many other trail intersections across the Forest.

Cumulative Effects

Since 2009, the Questa-Red River area has experienced a steady increase in recreation development, reflecting a broader regional effort to enhance public access and outdoor infrastructure on surrounding public lands. Notable projects include facility upgrades at CAF, developed campgrounds along the Red River corridor, and a major multi-agency restoration project at Eagle Rock Lake (the origin of the proposed trail near the Village of Questa). Other resource-based initiatives, such as riparian restoration along the Red River and the 2013 designation of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, have expanded recreational opportunities while also improving ecological conditions. ECTA has played a key role in advancing these regional goals through the conceptualization of ongoing and future projects in the ECTP, including the New Mexico State Road 150 Multi-Use Pathway, the Foothills trail system, and trail connections in Largo Canyon.

The project, developed in partnership with ECTA, would build upon this regional momentum by enhancing non-highway connectivity between communities, increasing access to public lands, and supporting a range of recreational uses such as hiking and biking. In the short term, construction-related activity may overlap with



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peak use periods at nearby recreation sites, but any disruptions are expected to be localized and temporary. Over the long term, continued trail development may contribute to growing use pressures on Designated Areas, including the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness. Increased access through the Columbine Trailhead may incrementally affect wilderness characteristics, particularly solitude and resource conditions, through increased foot traffic and human presence. CAF management efforts would concentrate on keeping motorized users of the proposed trail out of the designated wilderness area. Signage and education strategies could help mitigate localized effects. Still, the project would contribute to a broader trend that underscores the need for continued coordination, management, and monitoring to preserve the ecological and experiential integrity of Designated Areas in the region.

3.5 Socioeconomics

The following analysis is a summary of the Socioeconomics Memorandum for the project, prepared by the CAF. Refer to the memorandum included in the project record for additional details. (Note that parenthetical citations included in this analysis refer to citations provided in the memorandum.)

Spatial and Temporal Bounds

The spatial bounds for this analysis of socioeconomics are defined as Taos County, New Mexico. The U.S. Census Bureau recognizes Taos County as a Micropolitan Statistical Area, meaning that there is "at least one urbanized area with a population between 10,000 and 50,000, along with adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core, as measured by commuting ties" (USDC 2021).

The temporal and spatial bounds for this analysis (and for cumulative effects) are the same as described for Recreation and Scenery.

Affected Environment

As of the 2020 U.S. Census, Taos County has a population of approximately 34,489, which includes busy mountain resort areas and rural communities; it currently employs approximately 16,220 people. Nearly 40% of the population is over 60 years old. Income in the county is generated primarily through travel and tourism, as well as agriculture; the most dominant industries are health care and social assistance (2,185 employees); federal, military, state, and local government (2,068 employees); and accommodation and food services (1,810 employees) (Headwaters Economics 2018). Typical jobs include retail trade, arts, entertainment, recreation, construction, farming, and professional and technical services. The importance of tourism to the economic base of Taos County is reflected in the prevalence of these industries. However, tourism and the expanding economy have also resulted in an increased demand for available real estate; therefore, the county has a growing real estate, rental, and leasing sector.

The communities of Questa and Red River are immediately adjacent to the CAF. Taos Pueblo is located just to the south of the project area and is among several federally recognized tribes with historic ties to the area. Long-standing use of the CAF and its natural resources is fundamental to the interconnected economic, social, and cultural vitality of many local inhabitants. Important collected forest products include plants for ceremonial, medicinal, and subsistence uses (e.g., piñon nuts and osha); fuelwood for heating and cooking; and wood for construction (e.g., latillas and vigas).

The Town of Red River functions as a multi-season recreation destination, where the primary recreational offerings are developed winter recreation in the form of skiing and snowboarding. The winter and summer recreational opportunities available at Red River Ski and Summer Area generate visitation for Taos County and its municipalities, specifically Red River and Questa.

Traditional Communities and Uses

The term "traditional community" refers to a federally recognized tribe or a rural, land-based community with a long-standing history in and around lands managed by the Forest Service. Within the boundaries of the CAF,



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there are numerous small unincorporated communities, as well as several adjacent federally recognized tribes and small incorporated towns and villages. These communities are geographically and historically connected to a specific landscape. Local heritage, cultural practices, traditions, and values have been passed down through generations and predate U.S. management of the Forest. The long-standing use of forest resources is fundamental to the interconnected economic, social, and cultural vitality of many inhabitants in northern New Mexico, including federally recognized tribes, as well as Spanish and Mexican land-grant communities and acequias with ancestral ties to the project area.

The CAF is responsible for managing the natural resources and landscapes that sustain these traditional communities, their cultures, and their traditions. Traditional uses of the forest include fuelwood gathering; collection of wood; soil and rocks for building materials; hunting; fishing; gathering edible or medicinal plants; grazing; use of common waters; religious and ceremonial use of lands and waters; and others.

Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is expected to affect the quality of life in traditional and local communities, including potential impacts on local economies. In the short term, construction activities are likely to temporarily disrupt existing recreation uses along the Red River corridor, including fishing, camping, hunting, and OHV use. Key areas may become temporarily inaccessible, thereby altering use patterns. These disruptions may also affect outfitter operations in the project area. As certain areas become unavailable, other more accessible locations may experience increased use. (For example, hunting outfitter permittees could be indirectly impacted by reduced access or displaced users.) However, because many permitted outfitters operate both within and beyond the project area, they may be able to adjust operations to alternative locations during construction. Forest Service personnel would coordinate with affected outfitters to reduce operational disruptions and ensure consistency with the CAF Visitor Capacity Analysis and Recommendations for Outfitter-Guide Allocation (USDAFS 2018).

Over the long term, the Proposed Action is anticipated to improve the connectivity of existing trails and expand multiple-use recreation opportunities across the Enchanted Circle region, contributing to sustained socioeconomic benefits for surrounding communities. The proposed trail is anticipated to foster social and economic benefits by functioning as a shared public space and community asset. By linking Questa and Red River, the proposed trail could enhance social interaction and community identity, while also supporting local economic vitality. This increased activity may benefit small businesses, such as cafés and lodging, especially during shoulder seasons when tourism typically declines. These effects would be particularly valuable for the traditionally underserved region of northern New Mexico, including the Village of Questa, which has experienced economic challenges since the closure of the Chevron Questa Mine, its former primary economic driver (ECTA 2017).

While the Proposed Action may generate some additional economic activity in Questa and Red River, the broader travel- and tourism-based economy in Taos County is expected to reflect current trends, with only incremental growth in visitation anticipated. The primary risk of adverse impacts to traditional or local communities stems from short-term disruptions in access to valued forest resources during implementation. These risks would be mitigated through continued coordination with communities to address concerns and support access during and after project implementation.

Impacts from Class I and Class II E-Bike Use

Increased Class I and Class II E-Bike use is not anticipated to meaningfully contribute to a change in socioeconomics due to the relatively small population base in the area and the subset of this population that would use E-Bikes. However, there may be a slight increase in local demand for E-Bike rentals, repairs, and/or related services in the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River.



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Cumulative Effects

Forest Service decisions within the project area, along with county-approved private land development, have contributed to economic growth in the Enchanted Circle region over the past several decades. Travel and tourism continue to play a central role in the Taos County economy. Regardless of past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions in the project area, overall economic growth in the county is expected to continue. Although the Proposed Action may result in some localized economic effects, these are considered minor within the broader county context, and no cumulative economic impacts are anticipated.

3.6 Cultural Resources

Cultural resources are the present expressions of human culture and the physical remains of past activities, such as buildings, structures, districts, landscapes, archaeological sites, and objects. They also can include locations that can be significant in national, regional, or local history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture. They include sites and natural features of traditional and cultural significance to contemporary communities or peoples. NEPA requires a consideration of “important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our natural heritage.” This includes independent compliance with the applicable procedures and requirements of other federal and state laws, regulations, and executive orders. The principal federal law addressing cultural resources is the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended ([54 United States Code \[USC\] 300101 et seq.](#)) and its implementing regulations found at [36 CFR 800.3](#).

These regulations, commonly referred to as the Section 106 process, describe the procedures for identifying and evaluating historic properties, for assessing the impacts of federal actions on historic properties, and for project proponents consulting with appropriate agencies to avoid, reduce, or minimize adverse effects. Historic properties are cultural resources that meet specific criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). NRHP eligibility is evaluated for its significance in its historical context; its overall value in terms of engineering, artistic, architectural, or informational; and its integrity with respect to preserving the qualities and characteristics that convey its significance. The CAF considers impacts to cultural resources that are eligible for or listed on the NRHP, assesses whether those impacts would adversely affect the qualities that cause the site to be eligible or to have been listed, and then requests concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on that assessment.

The following analysis summarizes the Class I and Class III cultural resources inventories for the project, prepared by Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc. (Metcalf) on behalf of the CAF.⁹

Spatial and Temporal Bounds

The spatial bounds of this analysis are the cultural resources Area of Potential Effect and the corresponding survey limits for the project. This includes the project area,¹⁰ a 200-foot buffer centered on the proposed trail

⁹ Class I cultural resources inventory refers to a records-based review of existing site files, archival sources, and previous surveys. Class III cultural resources inventory refers to an intensive, pedestrian field survey designed to identify and document cultural resources within the proposed project area.

¹⁰ The project area encompasses the proposed trail alignment, buffered by approximately 30 meters on either side of the alignment (i.e., 60 meters in total width). The proposed trail is approximately 11.9 miles in length, consisting of about 10.6 miles of engineered soft-surface path and 1.3 miles of primitive trail, as well as 13 bridge crossings. The project area also includes approximately 2.6 acres of associated parking access points and trailheads.



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centerline, and a 50-foot buffer surrounding the proposed parking access points.¹¹ In total, this analysis area covers approximately 334 acres, including about 295 acres of NFS lands and 39 acres of private inholdings.

The temporal bounds for short-term and long-term effects are the same as described for Recreation and Scenery.

The spatial bounds for cumulative effects encompass the broader Questa-Red River corridor, where past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions may influence cultural resources. This includes the project area; lands adjacent to New Mexico State Highway 38 and the Red River; developed and previously disturbed areas near Questa, Red River, and the Chevron Questa Mine; and nearby recreation sites and access routes such as Eagle Rock Lake, Bear Canyon, and Columbine Canyon.

The temporal bounds for cumulative effects extend from occupation of the project area (starting in the late 1800s generally for post-contact Euro-American sites, and as early as 10,000 to 12,000 years ago for pre-contact sites) through the foreseeable future during which the proposed trail is open and in use.

Affected Environment

Class I Inventory

Metcalf conducted several online files search inquiries with the New Mexico Cultural Resource Information System (NMCRIS)¹² prior to fieldwork in summer 2024. The primary check covered the project area out to about a one-mile buffer and included retrieval of spatial data from NMCRIS for previously recorded sites and previous inventories. An in-person check of records with the CNF Zone Archaeologist also occurred in summer 2024, during which time Metcalf reviewed files and records for recorded sites and previous inventories. Prior to the 2025 fieldwork effort, NMCRIS and the CAF in-person records were rechecked to assess whether any new entries for sites or inventories had been added since the 2024 search, which confirmed no new records post-dating the 2024 searches.

The files search results for prior inventories show 103 inventories within 1000 meters of the project area, of which 80 are within 500 meters, and of those, 41 intersect the project area. The intersecting inventories were for a wide mix of project types, including Forest Service developments and improvements, work along New Mexico State Road 38 for NMDOT, forest health and fuels treatment projects, and municipal and utility developments for Red River and Questa, among others. Metcalf did not exclude any areas from new inventory due to coverage by prior inventories, as there was not significant contiguous area to exclude and/or the age of the prior inventory put it out of the general range of still being considered adequate coverage.

Sites returned from the files search results include 38 archaeological sites (29 within 500 meters, five intersecting the project area), 15 HCPI sites (seven within 500 meters, one intersecting), and five National or State Register listed properties (three within 500 meters, none intersecting. Note that one site, the Questa Citizens South Ditch, is listed in both the archaeological site dataset (LA83968) and the HCPI dataset (HCPI#

¹¹ Because the project does not propose any modification to New Mexico State Road 38 or any construction on its north side, the southern edge of the highway served as the northern survey boundary wherever the trail centerline lies within 100 feet of the roadway. The same approach applies to the Red River: in areas where the proposed trail is routed within 100 feet of the river, the edge of the river channel served as the survey boundary.

¹² Four NMCRIS datasets were checked for previously recorded sites and previous inventories: the Historic Cultural Properties Inventory, National and State Register properties, Site Boundaries for sites, and Previous Inventories. These data sets were cross-checked against CNF records, to end up with as complete a look at prior work and previously recorded sites as is reasonable available.



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44457). The sites are, with one exception (LA32472), postcontact EuroAmerican or Hispanic sites. The lone exception is an Ancestral Puebloan site. It is not intersected by the project area, but is within 500 meters. The remaining resources reflect a mix of residential structural and archaeological sites, mining-related structure and archaeological sites (ranging from single prospect pits to the Chevron Questa Mine), with a preponderance of postcontact cultural material scatters, most of which are characterized as small dumps, and small mining and prospecting sites that, based on the limited remains at the site, did not produce marketable quantities of ore. The results of the inventory mimic this distribution of types of sites and their general frequency.

In the case of the five previously recorded sites that are intersected by the project inventory area, forms for these sites were acquired from either or both NMCRIS and the CNF. Four of these sites were found. The area of the fifth site has been significantly altered by highway and campground upgrades and natural processes, and remains of this site were not found. All recordings have been updated to include the results from this inventory.

Class III Inventory

The Class III inventory resulted in the discovery of 19 new cultural sites, the updating of 5 previously recorded sites, and 17 isolated finds. All cultural resources, including sites and isolated finds, are historic in nature. No pre-contact resources were identified. The majority of the recorded resources are related to late 19th-early 20th-century mining and prospecting in Red River Canyon, though habitation sites, ditches, and Forest Service administrative buildings were also recorded.

Findings

Two cultural resource sites are recommended as eligible for the NRHP. The Questa Citizens South Ditch (LA83968) is recommended as eligible for its significant role in the settlement, development, and growth of the Questa area. The Questa Ranger Station (LA135055) is recommended as eligible for its role in the early development of the Forest Service in the region and the impact of that development in the local economy of the area. Both of the recommended-eligible sites are previously recorded, and the prior recorders also recommend that they be considered eligible.

The remaining resources are all recommended not eligible for the NRHP due to a combination of loss of historic integrity, destroyed or highly deteriorated and degraded features and artifacts, lack of historic documentation, little to no subsurface archaeological potential, and limited potential for sites to yield additional data significant in addressing regional research questions pertaining to the area.

Overall, the proposed trail's construction and use are not anticipated to impact the qualities of the sites recommended as eligible for the NRHP and would not diminish the key aspects of integrity supporting the sites' eligibility. For these reasons, a finding of "historic properties affected—no adverse effect" is recommended for the proposed project.

All reports and recommendations will be reviewed and accepted by the Forest Service archaeologist and provided to the SHPO as part of the Forest Service's obligation to consult with the SHPO. These findings will be consulted on with the SHPO.

Impacts from Class I and Class II E-Bike Use

The proposed trail and associated amenities would be sited during field-fitting to avoid all eligible historic properties based on survey results; therefore, no adverse effects to historic properties are anticipated from the use of the proposed project, including the use of E-Bikes on the trail.

Cumulative Effects

Past and ongoing actions in the Questa-Red River corridor, such as mining and reclamation activities associated with the Chevron Questa Mine, roadway construction and maintenance along New Mexico State Road 38, and dispersed recreation and tourism development, have contributed to existing patterns of ground disturbance and cultural resource alteration in the landscape. These previous activities largely established the



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current condition and integrity of cultural resources in the area and represent the primary drivers of past effects on historic sites.

When considered with these past and reasonably foreseeable activities, the Proposed Action is not expected to contribute meaningfully to cumulative effects on cultural resources. Project design avoids impacts to eligible historic properties, introduces limited new ground disturbance, and does not alter the historic features that contribute to site significance. Because the project aligns with existing disturbance corridors and does not introduce new development in previously undisturbed areas of high cultural sensitivity, its incremental contribution to cumulative effects on cultural resources is expected to be negligible.

3.7 Wildlife

The following analysis is a summary of the Biological Assessment and Wildlife Report for the project, each prepared by Rocky Mountain Ecology (RME) on behalf of the CAF. Additionally, RME prepared an SCC Report to document project compliance with the 2022 Forest Plan's desired conditions, standards, and guidelines related to SCC. Refer to the documents included in the project record for additional details. (Note that parenthetical citations included in this analysis refer to citations provided in these documents.)

Spatial and Temporal Bounds

The spatial and temporal bounds for this analysis are the same as described for Recreation and Scenery.

Affected Environment

The project area occurs within the Crystalline Mid-Elevation Forests Sub-region of the Rocky Mountains (Griffith, G.E. et al. 2006). The project area is dominated by species of the Upper and Lower Montane Coniferous Forest and Montane Riparian vegetation types (Dick-Peddie 1993).

The greater project area is dominated by a spruce-fir, mixed conifer transition zone. The dominant tree species include ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), white fir (*Abies concolor*), Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*), and aspen (*Populus tremuloides*). Common understory species include gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos oreophila*), Wood's rose (*Rosa woodsii*), New Mexico locust (*Robinia neomexicana*), Arizona fescue (*Festuca arizonica*), mountain muhly (*Muhlenbergia montana*), squirreltail (*Sitanion hystrix*), Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), mutton grass (*Poa fendleriana*), and various sedges (*Carex*, spp.).

Riparian and wetland vegetation is present along the Red River. Vegetation associated with the streambanks of this feature includes Rocky Mountain maple (*Acer glabrum*), rock sedge (*Carex saxatilis*), Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), orchard grass (*Dactylis glomerata*), smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*), cow parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*), horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*), Wood's rose (*Rosa woodsia*), gray willow (*Salix glauca*), planeleaf willow (*Salix planifolia*), alder (*Alnus incana*), and various sphagnum mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.).

Species of Conservation Concern

This project is compliant with the 2022 Forest Plan and will support the persistence of SCC found within the project area (refer to the SCC Plan Consistency Report for additional detail).

Migratory Birds

Nine migratory birds of conservation concern have the potential for occupancy in or adjacent to the project area and could be affected by the Proposed Action. This list is based on the USFWS 2021 Birds of Conservation Concern Report for the Southern Rockies and Colorado Plateau Bird Conservation Region (USFWS 2021). These species include:

- Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*);
- Brown-capped rosy-finch (*Leucosticte australis*);



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- Cassin's finch (*Carpodacus cassinii*);
- Clark's nutcracker (*Nucifraga Columbiana*);
- Evening grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*);
- Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*);
- Grace's warbler (*Dendroica graciae*);
- Lewis' woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*); and
- Olive-sided flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*)

Resource specialists did not observe any of these migratory bird species during surveys in summer and fall 2024; however, based on habitat associations and literature reviews, the potential for occupancy in the project area exists for each of these species.

Federally-Listed Species

Due to the lack of critical habitat, general habitat, or occurrence, specialists reached a no effect determination for federally-listed wildlife species. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to these species.

Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

Migratory Birds

Due to the presence of suitable habitat for 9 migratory bird species (Bald eagle, Brown-capped rosy-finch, Cassin's finch, Clark's nutcracker, Evening grosbeak, Golden eagle, Grace's warbler, Lewis' woodpecker, and Olive-sided flycatcher) in the project area, implementation of the Proposed Action may result in limited instances of individual disturbance and displacement of these species during construction activities. However, these effects are expected to be temporary and localized and are not expected to result in lasting effects to habitat suitability or function for any of the aforementioned species. Long-term human presence is expected to increase due to the proposed project; however, species displacement is likely limited, as many species may already avoid existing disturbances such as New Mexico State Road 38, campgrounds, and activity near the Chevron Questa Mine. Temporary direct effects may occur during construction but are expected to resolve post-implementation.

Overall, the Proposed Action is not expected to result in unintentional take or population declines in migratory bird species, based on: 1) the availability of abundant high-quality habitat nearby, and 2) the expectation that species presence and behavior is expected to return to normal after implementation is completed.

Impacts from Class I and Class II E-Bike Use

The use of E-Bikes on the proposed trail is anticipated to have impacts consistent with those of other traditional recreational uses. The analysis, presented elsewhere in this document (refer to [Section 3.8 Soils](#)) and the technical reports (Soils Technical Report and Wildlife Technical Report), demonstrate that the operational characteristics of E-Bikes are largely analogous to those of conventional mountain bikes, particularly in terms of their physical footprint and speed profiles within a trail environment. Therefore, unique or amplified impacts to wildlife stemming specifically from E-Bike use when compared to other recreational activities on the trail are not anticipated.

Furthermore, the proposed trail and associated amenities would implement the wildlife-specific PDC stated in [Appendix A](#) to avoid impacts to migratory bird habitats. Given the trail's proximity to New Mexico State Road 38, which already presents a degree of existing human disturbance and habitat fragmentation, the additional, localized impact of the proposed trail on overall habitat fragmentation is expected to be minimal. Consequently,



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no significant impacts to wildlife are anticipated as a direct result of the trail's construction or its intended recreational uses, including E-Bikes.

Cumulative Effects

The following past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions on lands in the general project area have been identified as relevant to wildlife from a cumulative effects context: 1) activity associated with the Chevron Questa Mine, and 2) the potential reconstruction of Fawn Lakes Campground.

The Chevron Questa Mine site occurs along New Mexico State Road 38, primarily north of the proposed trail alignment, with approximately 5 acres of the proposed trail overlapping Chevron parcels. Though the mine closed in 2014, ongoing reclamation activities to restore degraded resources have been ongoing since 2015 (EPA 2025). Beyond the deleterious impacts of the initial mining activities, the restoration of the mining area would contribute to habitat improvements for wildlife, and together with implementation of the proposed trail, would not cumulatively impact wildlife or their habitats. Activity associated with the mine restoration activities (personnel and equipment), when coupled with the increased human presence of the proposed trail, could further induce wildlife to actively avoid the area. However, this impact is likely already realized by the mine activities themselves, and especially when considering the presence of New Mexico State Road 38 in the area, which is a moderately trafficked thoroughfare that likely causes more wildlife displacement than that of a hiking trail.

The Fawn Lake Campground is located near mile marker 9 of the proposed trail alignment and is currently being considered for reconstruction. This reconstruction could occur during or after the construction of the proposed trail. The use of the proposed trail, in addition to the campground, could further induce wildlife to avoid the general area. However, this impact is likely already realized due to the existing campground and use of New Mexico State Road 38 within the canyon.

3.8 Soils

The following analysis is a summary of the Soils Technical Report for the project, prepared by SE Group on behalf of the CAF. Refer to the technical report included in the project record for additional details. (Note that parenthetical citations included in this analysis refer to citations provided in the technical report.)

Spatial and Temporal Bounds

The spatial bounds of this analysis for direct and indirect effects are defined by the project area. In total, the project area covers approximately 282 acres, including approximately 253 acres of NFS lands and 29 acres of private inholdings.

The spatial and temporal bounds specific to cumulative effects are the same as described for Recreation and Scenery.

Affected Environment

Considering the majority of the project area is located on NFS lands, the CAF Updated Terrestrial Ecological Unit (TEU) Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Dataset serves as the primary source of soils information for this analysis (USDA Forest Service 2025c).

Soil Classification

For the purpose of this analysis, soils are evaluated by map unit. Each map unit represents an area dominated by one or more major soil types or distinct land cover. Each map unit has a soil type based on distinct characteristics, including but not limited to: soil depth, soil development, clay content, and rock fragment content. Taxonomic classification is to either the family level or subgroup level. Map units are only



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representative of primary characteristics and exhibit variability; a soil type in a single map unit may not be uniform but is distinguished based on primary components and characteristics.

Table 3.8-1 describes the six soil map units in the project area. Nearly all of the project area (96.8%) is occupied by map units 90, 823, and 922. These three map units share similar characteristics: they contain young, coarse-textured soils with low fertility and cold temperature regimes. Due to their high rock fragment content, these soils are considered moderately to highly erodible and generally limit deep root development. The remaining three map units each occupy 1.8% or less of the project area.

Table 3.8-1. Soil Map Units in the Project Area

Soil Map Unit(s)	Project Area (acres)	Project Area (%)
90	156.4	55.5%
823, 922	116.5	41.3%
816	5.2	1.8%
800	3.0	1.1%
973	0.5	0.2%
TOTAL*	281.6	100%

* Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding; map soil units do not overlap each other in the project area.

Soil Characteristics

Other relevant soil characteristics in the project area are summarized in the following sections. These include: a) slope range, b) soil erosion hazard ratings, c) soil compaction ratings, and d) trail limitation ratings. Each of these metrics are defined in their respective section, based on definitions included in the CAF Updated TEU GIS Dataset User Manual (USDA Forest Service 2025c). Site photographs and a map of their locations are included in the project's Soils Technical Report.

Slope Range

Table 3.8-2 describes the slope range for each soil map unit in the project area. Slope is the gradient of the ground's surface, expressed as a percentile; therefore, a slope range represents the degree of steepness across a given area. In general, slope influences surface runoff, soil stability, and erosion potential. The following thresholds are applicable:

- If slope range is 0-15%, soils are considered stable. The use of conventional, ground-based heavy equipment to implement a proposed project is not restricted.
- If slope range is 15-40%, soils are considered metastable (partially active). This is the upper limit for using conventional, ground-based heavy equipment, and it is generally not restricted.
- If slope range is above 40%, soils are considered unstable (active). Conventional, ground-based heavy equipment is not recommended.

Table 3.8-2. Slope Range in the Project Area

Soil Map Unit(s)	Slope Range	Conventional, Ground-based Heavy Equipment?	Project Area (acres)	Project Area (%)
90	0-15%	Not Restricted	156.4	55.5%



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816	15-40%	Upper Limit	5.2	1.8%
973	15-80%	Not Recommended	0.5	0.2%
800	40-80%	Not Recommended	3.0	1.1%
823, 922	40-120%	Not Recommended	116.5	41.4%
TOTAL*	---	---	281.6	100%

* Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding; map soil units do not overlap each other in the project area.

The majority of the project area (55.5%) has a slope range of 0-15%. This mainly includes the Red River canyon floor and the New Mexico State Road 38 corridor. However, another 41.4% of the project area has a slope range of 40-120%. This includes the south edge of the project area that borders the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness. The remaining portions of the project area (3.1%) have a slope range between 15-80%.

Soil Erosion Hazard Rating

Table 3.8-3 describes the soil erosion hazard rating for each soil map unit in the project area. This rating reflects the relative susceptibility of soils to sheet and rill erosion if all vegetation cover is removed. Ratings may be Slight, Moderate, or Severe.

Table 3.8-3. Soil Erosion Hazard Ratings in the Project Area

Soil Map Unit(s)	Soil Erosion Hazard Rating	Project Area (acres)	Project Area (%)
90	Slight	156.4	55.5%
816, 823, 922, 973	Severe	122.2	43.4%
800	NO DATA	3.0	1.1%
TOTAL*	---	281.6	100%

* Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding; map soil units do not overlap each other in the project area.

The majority of the project area (55.5%) has a soil erosion hazard rating of Slight. However, another 43.4% of the project area has a rating of Severe. The remaining portion of the project area (1.1%) has insufficient data to reach a determination. In general, the erosion hazard rating along New Mexico State Road 38 is Slight, and the ratings for other existing NFSTs in the surrounding area (e.g., Columbine Canyon Trail #71, Lake Fork Trail #82) are predominantly Severe.

Soil Compaction Hazard Rating

Table 3.8-4 describes the soil compaction hazard rating for each soil map unit in the project area. This rating indicates the susceptibility of soils to compaction, which may be caused by foot or non-motorized or motorized vehicle traffic. Compaction can decrease infiltration capacity, decrease soil aeration, and reduce long-term soil productivity. Ratings may be Slight, Moderate, or Severe.

Table 3.8-4. Soil Compaction Hazard Ratings in the Project Area

Soil Map Unit(s)	Soil Compaction Hazard Rating	Project Area (acres)	Project Area (%)
800, 823, 922	Moderate	119.4	42.4%



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90, 816	Severe	161.7	57.4%
973	NO DATA	0.5	0.2%
TOTAL *	---	281.6	100%

* Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding; map soil units do not overlap each other in the project area.

The slight majority of the project area (57.4 %) has soil compaction hazard rating of Severe. In addition, 42.4% of the project area has a rating of Moderate. The remaining portion of the project area (0.2%) has insufficient data to reach a determination. In general, the rating along the existing New Mexico State Road 38 corridor is Severe. The ratings for other existing NFSTs in the surrounding area (e.g., Columbine Canyon Trail #71, Lake Fork Trail #82) are also predominantly Severe.

Trail Limitation Rating

Table 3.8-5 describes the trail limitation rating for each soil map unit in the project area. This rating indicates the suitability of soils for the construction of trails. Notably, a rating of Severe indicates low suitability. Or, if trails are constructed, maintenance could be needed on a more regular basis. Ultimately, construction and adequate maintenance may be feasible if PDC are applied. This rating assumes a minimum of cutting and filling as the result of construction.

Table 3.8-5. Trail Limitation Ratings in the Project Area

Soil Map Unit(s)	Trail Limitation Rating	Project Area (acres)	Project Area (%)
90	Slight	156.4	55.5%
816	Moderate	5.2	1.8%
800, 823, 922, 973	Severe	120.0	42.6%
TOTAL *	---	281.6	100%

* Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding; map soil units do not overlap each other in the project area.

The majority of the project area (55.5%) has a trail limitation rating of Slight. However, 42.6% of the project area has a rating of Severe. The remaining portion of the project area (1.8%) has a rating of Moderate. In general, the rating along the existing New Mexico State Road 38 corridor is Slight. The ratings for other existing NFSTs in the surrounding area (e.g., Columbine Canyon Trail #71, Lake Fork Trail #82) range from Slight to Severe.

Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

Soil Erosion, Compaction, and Limitations

Soil conditions influencing erosion, compaction, and limitations vary across the project area depending on the analysis metric applied. Within the New Mexico State Road 38 corridor, soils are generally slightly to moderately erodible with slight limitations for trail construction. However, adjacent portions of the project area include steep slopes and hydrothermic scars, and approximately 44% of the area is rated as having a severe erosion hazard. These scarred zones are prone to slope failures that can periodically close the highway after heavy precipitation events, presenting both geologic and public safety concerns. Localized areas with severe compaction hazard on loamy or poorly drained soils further compound these limitations.



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In the short term, ground disturbance from conventional, ground-based heavy equipment during trail construction, particularly on steep grades or under saturated conditions, could result in localized soil compaction, rutting, and surface erosion, especially where slopes intersect with drainage features. To reduce these risks, PDC specific to soils are required as part of the project (refer to [Appendix A](#)).

Trail use by all modes (e.g., hiking; biking, including E-Bike use; equestrian use; etc.) can contribute to increased soil compaction, particularly on finer-textured or moist soils. Repeated traffic may reduce soil porosity, inhibit infiltration, and increase runoff potential. Areas with higher soil compaction hazard ratings, such as loamy or poorly drained soils, are more susceptible to long-term degradation from motorized use, especially under wet conditions or on steep grades (USDA Forest Service 2002).

Furthermore, there are several locations along the trail corridor with evidence of hydrothermal scars. Based on site photographs, the largest evidence of thermal scarring debris is located near mile marker 8 of the proposed trail. These areas may require more frequent maintenance due to their increased susceptibility to erosion. Loose and gravel-packed soils found along the proposed trail corridor, as well as minor scree fields, may also require localized stabilization. To prevent increased infiltration or sediment transport into the Red River, resource-specific PDC are included as part of the project. (Refer to [Appendix A](#) for all required PDC.)

Ultimately, many NFSTs in the region experience similar soil constraints. Through tight adherence to NFST design standards and PDC, successful construction and sustainable use of the proposed trail is feasible.

Impacts from Class I and Class II E-Bike Use

A 2015 study conducted by the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) found that soil displacement and tread disturbance from Class 1 E-Bikes and traditional mountain bikes are not significantly different, and both are much less than those associated with equestrian use or gasoline-powered motor vehicles. This highlights that equestrian use and motorized two-wheeled recreation generally pose greater risks to trail integrity. Although there is limited research on degradation of natural surfaces from different classes of E-Bikes, this finding likely holds true for both Class 1 and Class II E-Bikes, as both are limited to the same maximum speed and similar overall weight compared to traditional mountain bikes (IMBA 2015).

In the long-term, increased trail use, particularly by equestrians, is expected to contribute to compaction and erosion if not managed. Non-motorized uses and E-Bike use may also contribute to these forces over time, but effects from these modes are expected to be less severe (IMBA 2015). Similar research in this field has found that trail design is the primary factor to consider in the protection of soils and hydrology. Preventive measures such as user signage, clearly defined tread boundaries, and post-construction monitoring may also help reduce effects and allow for adaptive management where issues arise (refer to [Appendix A](#)).

Cumulative Effects

Increased recreational access in the Questa-Red River area, including trail expansions, campground upgrades, and day-use area improvements, has contributed to localized soil disturbance, erosion, and compaction, particularly in areas with steep terrain or compaction-prone soils.

In the short term, construction of the proposed trail would contribute to cumulative soil disturbance through vegetation removal, grading, and equipment use, especially in segments with steep slopes (40-120%) or severe compaction hazard ratings. If unmanaged, these activities could result in temporary loss of soil structure, increased runoff, and surface erosion, particularly where soils are fine-textured or moist. However, adherence to PDC is expected to limit the extent and severity of short-term soil impacts (refer to [Appendix A](#)).

In the long term, the proposed trail may contribute to incremental soil compaction and erosion from sustained recreational use, particularly by equestrian use and motorized use on steep or poorly drained segments. These impacts would be most pronounced in high-use zones, such as trailheads, and may mirror existing patterns of degradation observed on nearby NFSTs. However, if long-term monitoring, maintenance, and visitor education are implemented effectively, the project is unlikely to cause substantial degradation of regional soil resources.



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3.9 Hydrology

The following analysis is a summary of the Hydrology Technical Report for the project, prepared by RME on behalf of the CAF. Refer to the technical report included in the project record for additional details. (Note that parenthetical citations included in this analysis refer to citations provided in the technical report.)

Spatial and Temporal Bounds

The spatial and temporal bounds of this analysis are the same as described for Soils.

Affected Environment

The project area is located within the Middle Red River watershed (Hydrologic Unit Code [HUC] 12 130201010304), which is a sub-watershed of the Upper Rio Grande watershed (HUC 8 13020101). Several flowlines within the project area include the Red River, Columbine Creek, Pioneer Creek, and multiple ephemeral tributaries of these features (USGS 2021). In addition, a few irrigation canals or acequias are identified near Eagle Rock Lake.

Three (3) “Waters of the United States”, designated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), occur in the project area. These include the Red River, Columbine Creek, and Pioneer Creek. Pioneer Creek flows into the Red River from the south at the eastern end of the project area, in the Town of Red River. Columbine Creek also flows into the Red River from the south, in the western third of the project area.

In total, resource specialists delineated approximately 35 acres of wetlands throughout the project area (of the 36 mapped wetland polygons within the survey corridor, 13 intersect the current trail centerline)¹³. Each of these wetlands are hydrologically connected to a surface water system.

Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is not expected to result in meaningful long-term impacts to watershed health. Although trail construction would create linear stretches of bare ground, this impact would be offset by reduced off-trail use, particularly in sensitive areas such as wetlands.

Temporary disturbances to the watershed during construction would be mitigated through adherence to the project’s Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and implementation of BMPs, including erosion control measures and post-construction stabilization and seeding. The Proposed Action would not result in changes to the drainage profile within the Project Area, and given restoration of impacted surfaces following construction, no long-term impacts to the watershed are anticipated. Moreover, design features of the Proposed Action include measures (i.e., avoidance and spanning of water resources) to minimize impacts within the Riparian Management Zone.

In relation to wetlands, impacts would be avoided to the extent practicable as part of the construction process. The acres of potential disturbance to wetlands disclosed above are based on the mapped field alignment as

¹³ For the purposes of this NEPA process, the proposed trail alignment would extend from Eagle Rock Lake to where NFS lands meet Town of Red River lands on the eastern side of the proposed trail. However, hydrology surveys also occurred along MolyCorp Field Spur and Town of Red River lands in the event of potential future additions to the proposed trail. The MolyCorp Field Spur intersects two riverine wetlands totaling 1.6 acres, while the Town of Red River lands intersect four riverine wetlands totaling 1.8 acres. These 3.4 total acres have been removed from the totals in this EA.



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currently proposed; wetland delineation data collected in 2025 would guide field fitting of the trail alignment within the survey corridor to mitigate impacts to the extent possible.

If avoidance via field fitting is not feasible, temporary or permanent impacts may occur. Bridges and other spanning structures would be installed above the high-water mark to avoid altering drainage profiles or impacting riparian zones, and all construction would remain consistent with existing land use on the CAF. Because the documented wetlands are hydrologically connected to the Red River, Columbine Creek, or Pioneer Creek, they are likely jurisdictional under the U.S. Clean Water Act, and any unavoidable impacts would require Section 404 and 401 permitting from the USACE prior to project implementation.

During construction, temporary vegetation disturbance at all elements of the project would result in short-term impacts only. Where impacts occur within hydrologic features, short-term impacts to water quality could be incurred, but would likely be naturally mitigated through filtering by existing vegetation. Adherence to BMPs and mitigation measures in the SWPPP would minimize impacts to wetlands and creeks via installation of erosion control measures to retain sediment. Similarly, adherence to the mitigation measures would help in all project elements to minimize sediment transport into sensitive wetland areas, and beyond site boundaries, both during and after construction is complete.

Impacts from Class I and Class II E-Bike Use

The proposed trail and associated amenities would be sited during field-fitting to avoid impacts to watershed health and wetlands based on survey results. This includes several bridge locations to adequately span creek crossings and avoid ground disturbance in sensitive areas; therefore, no impacts to hydrology from the project, including E-Bike use, are anticipated.

Cumulative Effects

The following past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions on lands in the general project area have been identified as relevant from a cumulative effects context: 1) infrastructure maintenance and improvement activities in and around the existing Forest Service facilities, 2) maintenance and improvement activities to New Mexico State Road 38, and 3) continuance of remediation activities to the Chevron Mine.

Small maintenance and improvement projects at Eagle Rock Lake, Fawn Lakes Campground, Columbine Campground, Junebug Campground, and to New Mexico State Road 38 could result in some temporary increase to soil instability and impacts to watershed health; however, these practices are considered somewhat commonplace in the area, and both the Forest Service and NMDOT regularly engage in BMP practices to curb and mitigate for any significant impacts. Overall, these projects would primarily result in temporary impacts that are considered insignificant and discountable. Continuation of remediation activities at the Chevron Quеста Mine could also lead to temporary increases in soil instability; however, as those activities are centered on mine reclamation, the end result of those practices should result in increased soil stability with reduced impacts to watershed health.

3.10 Other Law, Regulation, and Policy Consistency

Pertinent Executive Orders

The responsible official and/or applicable specialist(s) have determined that the Proposed Action complies with the following Executive Orders (EO), which were deemed pertinent based on the nature of the project:

EO 11988, Floodplain Management

The responsible official and applicable specialists have determined that the Proposed Action would comply with [EO 11990](#), Protection of Wetlands, and [EO 11988](#), Floodplain Management, through the use of PDC designed to minimize or prevent the discharge of non-point source pollutants from Forest roads, developments, and activities. Refer to [Appendix A](#) for additional details. Refer to the Hydrology Technical Report for the project



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(summarized in [Section 3.9 Hydrology](#)) for a full description of anticipated hydrological impacts from the project.

EO 13007, Indian Sacred Sites

The Proposed Action would comply with [EO 13007](#), Indian Sacred Sites, by completion of a thorough cultural and heritage resources survey to identify any potential sacred sites within the project area. The CAF is committed to preserving and protecting sacred sites and will work to ensure that they are respected and protected in the design and implementation of the Proposed Action.

EO 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments

The project IDT consulted relevant Indian Tribal Governments on January 15, 2025, through a government-to-government scoping package. The scoping package included a cover letter that provided a brief description of the proposed project, the purpose and need for action, and an illustrative map of the project area. This process paralleled the public scoping process for the project. (Refer to [4. Consultation & Coordination](#) for more details about the specific Tribal Governments consulted and the public scoping process.)

On May 13, 2025, several members of the CAF met with Taos Pueblo for a government-to-government consultation meeting. This meeting covered several topics, including the proposed project. The Taos Pueblo asked clarifying questions about the project and did not raise any concerns.

On June 12, 2025, Amy Simms held a meeting with the Pueblo of San Felipe, per the Pueblo's request. This meeting covered several topics and projects across New Mexico, including the proposed project. The Forest Service shared relevant project status updates, and no remaining questions or action items related to the project resulted from the meeting. (Refer to the project record for detailed meeting notes.)

No other Tribal Governments have requested additional information or raised concerns about the project.

EO 13112, Invasive Species

The responsible official and applicable specialists have determined that the Proposed Action would comply with [EO 13112](#), Invasive Species. The CAF would work with relevant federal and state agencies, Tribal Governments, and other interested parties as necessary to coordinate efforts to manage invasive species and minimize their impact on native ecosystems and cultural resources. Refer to [Appendix A](#) for additional details on PDC that would be implemented to reduce the introduction or spread of noxious weeds.

EO 13186, Migratory Birds

The responsible official and applicable specialists have determined that the Proposed Action would comply with [EO 13186](#), Migratory Birds. The CAF would also consult with relevant federal agencies and other interested parties as necessary to ensure the protection of migratory bird populations and habitats in project implementation. Refer to [Appendix A](#) for additional details. Refer to the Wildlife Report for the project (summarized in the [Section 3.7 Wildlife](#)) for a full description of anticipated impacts from the project.

EO 13443, Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation

As the Proposed Action is intended to provide a safe and sustainable multi-modal recreation route for use by pedestrians and other recreators, the Proposed Action is not anticipated to expand or enhance hunting opportunities.

Travel Management Rule

In designating NFS roads, NFSTs, and areas on NFS lands for motor vehicle use, the responsible official shall consider effects on NFS natural and cultural resources, public safety, provision of recreational opportunities, access needs, conflicts among uses of NFS lands, the need for maintenance and administration of roads, trails, and areas that would arise if the uses under consideration are designated; and the availability of resources for



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that maintenance and administration. A comprehensive analysis of these general criteria is outlined in **Sections 3.3 - 3.9** above.

In addition to the general criteria outlined in the preceding paragraph, in designating NFS trails and areas on NFS lands, the responsible official shall consider effects on the following, with the objective of minimizing: (1) Damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other forest resources; (2) Harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitats; (3) Conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreational uses of NFS lands or neighboring Federal lands; and (4) Conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of NFS lands or neighboring Federal lands. In addition, the responsible official shall consider: (5) Compatibility of motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, and other factors. A detailed analysis of these specific criteria is outlined in [Table 3.10-1](#), which demonstrates consistency with the Travel Management Rule for the designation of Class I and Class II E-Bikes only on the proposed trail.

Table 3.10-1. Specific Criteria for Designation of Trails and Areas (36 CFR 212.55(b))

Criteria	Potential Effect Indicators	If yes, would use of the trail cause adverse effects? If so, how?	If the trail is designated, what measures will be taken to manage use to minimize these effects?
(b)(1) Minimize damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other forest resources.			
Minimize damage to soil and water quality.	Are there potential impacts to soil and water from Class 1 and 2 E-Bike use? Is there potential for soil disturbance associated with Class 1 and 2 E-bike use?	Yes ; all trail users would have the potential to affect the proposed trail's surface and the surrounding environment. However, the effects of Class 1 and 2 E-bike use are consistent with those of other traditional recreation uses proposed for the trail, such as mountain bikes and equestrian use.	To minimize impacts to hydrological and soil resources, BMPs for trail design would be implemented as appropriate to avoid and mitigate erosion and sedimentation into the Red River. Project-specific soil and water conservation practices would be developed where disturbances cannot be avoided in the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan. (Refer to Appendix A of the Final EA for all required PDC.) Additionally, preventive measures such as user signage, clearly defined tread boundaries, and post-construction monitoring may also help reduce effects and allow for adaptive management where issues arise (refer to Appendix A).
Minimize damage to soil and water quality.	Does the trail or area contain sensitive riparian areas, for example wet meadows, fens, etc.?	Yes ; there are documented wetlands within the Project Area.	Due to their direct connection to the Red River, Columbine Creek or Pioneer Creek, all wetlands documented in the Project Area are likely to be considered jurisdictional by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Therefore, should impacts to wetlands be required to establish the proposed trail, a Clean Water Act 404 and 401 permit would likely be required. To minimize impacts to hydrological resources, BMPs for trail design would be implemented as appropriate to avoid and mitigate erosion and sedimentation into the Red River. Project-specific soil and water conservation practices would be developed where disturbances cannot be avoided in the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan. (Refer to Appendix A of the Final EA for all required PDC.) Additionally, preventive measures such



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Criteria	Potential Effect Indicators	If yes, would use of the trail cause adverse effects? If so, how?	If the trail is designated, what measures will be taken to manage use to minimize these effects?
			as user signage, clearly defined tread boundaries, and post-construction monitoring may also help reduce effects and allow for adaptive management where issues arise (refer to Appendix A).
Minimize damage to soil and water quality.	Does the trail or area drain into a 303(d)-listed waterbody?	Yes ; the proposed trail crosses the Red River multiple times, which is listed as impaired for not supporting Cold Water Aquatic Life designated use due to Turbidity. The Red River has known water quality issues related to historic mining and naturally mineralized areas in the region. Additionally, Pioneer Creek, which is a tributary of the Red River, is listed as impaired for not supporting High Quality Cold Water Aquatic Life designated use due to Sedimentation/Siltation. Lastly, Placer Creek listed as impaired for not supporting High Quality Cold Water Aquatic Life designated use due to Turbidity (NMED 2024).	To prevent increased infiltration or sediment transport into the Red River, resource-specific PDC are included as part of the project. (Refer to Appendix A of the Final EA for all required PDC.) Notably, to minimize impacts to hydrological resources, Best Management Practices for trail design would be implemented as appropriate to avoid and mitigate erosion and sedimentation into the Red River. Project-specific soil and water conservation practices would be developed where disturbances cannot be avoided in the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan.
Minimize damage to soil and water quality.	Does the area have a hydraulic mine site or sites?	No	N/A
Minimize damage to vegetation and other forest resources.	Are TES plants known to occur in or around the trail that could potentially be affected by Class 1 E-bike use?	No ; there are no known TES plant occurrences that intersect the proposed trail.	N/A
Minimize damage to vegetation and other forest resources.	Does the trail or area include designated botanical areas (SIA, RNA)?	No	N/A
(b)(2) Minimize harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitats.			
Minimize harassment of wildlife.	Does the trail or area encompass Mexican spotted owl, and/or American goshawk nest sites?	No ; there are no known MSO or goshawk nest sites within direct proximity to the proposed trail.	N/A
Minimize harassment of wildlife.	Does the trail or area encompass known bald eagle nest sites?	No ; there are no known bald eagle nest sites within direct proximity to the proposed trail.	N/A
Minimize harassment of wildlife.	Does the trail or area contain key deer winter range?	No	N/A



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Criteria	Potential Effect Indicators	If yes, would use of the trail cause adverse effects? If so, how?	If the trail is designated, what measures will be taken to manage use to minimize these effects?
Minimize significant disruption of wildlife habitats.	Does the trail or area contain habitat for marten, wolverine, or other sensitive forest carnivores?	No	N/A
Minimize significant disruption of wildlife habitats.	Does the trail or area contain TES aquatic habitat and/or designated critical habitat?	No	N/A
(b)(3) Minimize conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreational uses of National Forest System lands or neighboring federal lands.			
Conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreational uses of neighboring federal lands.	Does the trail abut a wilderness area or National Park managed by other agencies?	Yes ; the trail abuts the Columbine Wilderness Area. However, this project has been specifically designed to ensure there are no direct impacts to the Wilderness Area. All necessary infrastructure associated with the proposed trail is planned outside the Wilderness Area.	N/A
Conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreational uses of neighboring federal lands.	Does the trail abut a non-motorized area or a developed recreation site on adjacent National Forest or other federal lands?	Yes ; the proposed trail is located near several developed recreation sites (primarily consisting of campgrounds and day use areas) on National Forest lands.	Standards for trail use would be explicitly posted and enforced. Additionally, educational signage may be used to mitigate potential user conflicts and poor user etiquette.
Conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreational uses of NFS lands	Would Class 1 and 2 E-Bike use of this trail cause new conflicts with equestrian users?	Potentially ; however, the effects of Class 1 and 2 E-bike use are consistent with those of other traditional recreation uses proposed for the trail, such as mountain bikes and equestrian use.	Standards for trail use would be explicitly posted and enforced. Additionally, educational signage may be used to mitigate potential user conflicts and poor user etiquette.
Conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreational uses of NFS lands	Would Class 1 and 2 E-Bike use of this trail cause conflicts with non-motorized visitors' desire for solitude and quiet recreation?	No ; the effects of Class 1 and 2 E-bike use are consistent with those of other traditional recreation uses proposed for the trail, such as mountain bikes and equestrian use. Additionally, the proposed trail is located within a heavily used corridor with nearby vehicle traffic and various developed recreation sites (including campgrounds and day use areas).	Standards for trail use would be explicitly posted and enforced. Additionally, educational signage may be used to mitigate potential user conflicts and poor user etiquette.
(b)(4) Minimize conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of NFS lands or neighboring federal lands.			



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Criteria	Potential Effect Indicators	If yes, would use of the trail cause adverse effects? If so, how?	If the trail is designated, what measures will be taken to manage use to minimize these effects?
Minimize conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of NFS lands or other neighboring federal lands.	Does this trail allow wheeled motor vehicle use, for other than single-track riders? If so, does this affect the safety and management of this area?	No ; the proposed trail would not be open to wheeled motor vehicle use (other than Class 1 and 2 E-Bikes).	Educational signage may be used to mitigate potential user conflicts and poor user etiquette.
Minimize conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of NFS lands or other neighboring federal lands.	Does this area cross or contain roads allowing vehicle use? Are road crossings allowed by Class 1 and 2 E-Bike riders?	Yes ; this area contains roads allowing vehicle use (i.e., New Mexico State Road 38). Class 1 and 2 E-Bikes would be allowed to use any potential road crossings.	Standards for trail use would be explicitly posted and enforced. Additionally, specific design and operational measures would be implemented to ensure the safest feasible crossing across New Mexico State Highway 38 for trail users. The CAF is actively involved in discussions with the NMDOT to consider the development of these safety measures by the CAF, as NMDOT has jurisdiction over the state highway. Proposed safety measures could include: • High-Visibility Signage and Pavement Markings: Installing prominent warning signs on the highway approaches, as well as distinct pavement markings (e.g., crosswalks, rumble strips if appropriate) on the highway, to alert motorists to the crossings and pedestrian activity. • Traffic Control Devices: Installing advanced warning devices (e.g., pedestrian-activated flashing lights or signals) to alert motorists to the crossings and pedestrian activity. • Safe Sight Distances: Ensuring that the proposed trail design provides adequate sight distance for both trail users and motorists. • Design Standards: Ensuring that any crossing infrastructure would adhere to current American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and Federal Highway Administration design standards for shared-use paths and highway crossings.
Minimize conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of other neighboring federal lands.	Does this trail receive use by motorcycle or street legal vehicles? Is this potentially creating conflicts?	No ; the proposed trail would not be open to motorcycle use or other motorized use (other than Class 1 and 2 E-Bikes).	Educational signage may be used to mitigate potential user conflicts and poor user etiquette.
(b)(5) Consider compatibility of motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, and other factors.			



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Criteria	Potential Effect Indicators	If yes, would use of the trail cause adverse effects? If so, how?	If the trail is designated, what measures will be taken to manage use to minimize these effects?
Consider compatibility of motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, and other factors.	Is the area adjacent to neighborhoods and communities?	Yes; the proposed trail would start on National Forest System land at the Eagle Rock Lake Day Use Area near the Village of Questa and terminate at the western edge of the Town of Red River, where National Forest System land meets Town of Red River land. However, Class 1 and 2 E-Bikes would not have any additional impacts relative to noise and/or emissions beyond those already experienced from vehicle use and other recreation uses in the area.	Standards for trail use would be explicitly posted and enforced.

E-Bike Policy Guidance

The allowance of both Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes on the proposed trail is consistent with the evolving practices of federal land management agencies, such as the Forest Service and the BLM. Federal direction, including the [Forest Service's 2022 E-Bike Rule \(36 CFR Part 212\)](#) and the BLM's 2020 E-Bike Regulation ([43 CFR Part 8340](#)), authorizes local officials to designate trails for E-Bike use following site-specific environmental review. These frameworks, together with broader policy initiatives such as the [EXPLORE Act \(2023\)](#) and Departmental [Secretarial Orders 3366](#) and [3376](#), encourage agencies to expand recreational access and promote equitable outdoor opportunities for all users.

The decision to include both Class 1 (pedal-assist) and Class 2 (throttle-assist) E-Bikes on the proposed trail reflects the project's localized purpose and need to provide a safe, accessible corridor between Questa and Red River. The trail's moderate grades and elevation gain make throttle-assist functionality particularly beneficial for older adults, families, and users with limited mobility who might otherwise be unable to complete the route. This approach balances accessibility, resource protection, and safety, consistent with the intent of federal policy to broaden participation in outdoor recreation through responsibly managed, sustainable trail systems. The proposed trail would be added to the CAF Travel Management System and officially designated as a motorized trail (the only motor-assisted use permitted on the proposed trail would be Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes; operation of all other motorized vehicles (e.g., ATVs, OHV), UTVs, dirt bikes, etc.) would be prohibited). This designation would be reflected on the CAF's Motor Vehicle Use Map. Furthermore, specific symbology may be added to the map (or other associated materials) to clarify the allowed classification and use of E-Bikes on the proposed trail.

The proposed trail would be signed during implementation; signage would educate and warn all trail users of potential limited sight distances, intersections, congested areas, and other trail traffic-related considerations to address safety concerns and mitigate the potential for conflict among different user groups. Other adaptive management measures could be implemented as needed to manage trail user behavior and trail safety.



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4. Consultation & Coordination

4.1 List of Preparers

Table 4.1-1 and **Table 4.1-2** detail those individuals who participated in initial scoping, were members of the IDT or consultant team, and/or provided direction and assistance during the preparation of this Final EA.

Table 4.1-1. Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team (IDT)

Team Member	Project Responsibility
Amy Simms	Questa District Ranger
Tami Torres	Project Lead & Recreation Program Manager
Jessica Barela	Environmental Coordinator
Ricardo Leon	Recreation Specialist
Craig Saum	Trails Specialist
Crystal Pitcher	Wildlife Specialist
Alyssa Radcliff	Fisheries Specialist
Nessa Rasmussen	Hydrology Specialist
Lisa Thompson	Cultural Resources Specialist

Table 4.1-2. Consultant Team

Team Member	Firm	Project Responsibility
Ash Smith	SE Group	Senior Reviewer
Amanda Biedermann	SE Group	Project Manager
Claire Gomba	SE Group	NEPA Writer; GIS Support
Clay Bowers	Rocky Mountain Ecology, LLC	Invasive Plants; Wildlife; Hydrology
Anne McKibben	Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc.	Cultural Resources

4.2 Summary of Public Comment Periods

Public Scoping

The Forest Service conducts scoping in accordance with its internal NEPA implementing regulations, found at [36 CFR 220.4\(e\)\(1\)](#). In addition to other public involvement, scoping initiates an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed in the EA and for identifying the issues related to a Proposed Action. The project has also been included in the quarterly [CAF Schedule of Proposed Actions](#) since January 2025.

The public scoping period for the project began on January 15, 2025, and ended on February 13, 2025. The CAF prepared a scoping package and sent this package to community residents, interested individuals, government officials, public agencies, and other local organizations. The scoping package included a cover letter that provided a brief description of the proposed project and the purpose and need for action, as well as an illustrative map of the project area. The CAF also published a news release for the project on the Forest



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Service's website. Additional information was also published on the project-specific website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/r03/carson/projects/67508>). In addition, the Forest Service hosted a public open house on January 22, 2025, at the Village of Questa Municipal Offices. 32 members of the public attended this meeting.

The Forest Service accepted comments from the following sources: online submissions through the project website, email, and letters submitted in person during the January 22, 2025, public open house. In response to this solicitation for public comments, the Forest Service received 52 comment submittals.

The comments covered a range of topics including: support for the anticipated positive impacts related to recreation and local communities in the project area that would result from the project; opposition for allowing E-Bikes or other motorized use on the trail and concern regarding adverse impacts of motorized use (e.g., user conflict, safety issues, wildlife impacts, erosion and sedimentation impacts, etc.); trail adaptive access and trail winter access; incorporation of interpretive signage, particularly for any cultural or historical features along the trail; and general impacts on wildlife from trail construction and use. These concerns were analyzed to consider issues and refine the Proposed Action presented during scoping.

Draft EA Comment Period

The CAF initiated a 30-day public comment period for the Draft EA on September 4, 2025, using a Forest Service Cover Letter and Legal Notice published in the Taos News. The Forest Service also made project information available on the project-specific website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/r03/carson/projects/67508>).

The Forest Service collected comments from September 4, 2025, through October 6, 2025. In response to this solicitation for public comments, the Forest Service received 22 comment submittals. The Forest Service accepted comments from the following sources: online submissions through the project website, email, mail, and in-person at the Questa Ranger District Office. No public open houses were held during the Draft EA public comment period.

The comments received during this period discussed key themes, including: support for the trail's purpose and need, concerns about E-Bike and equestrian use, requests for additional analysis of alternatives (e.g. consideration of a fully paved trail), and questions about safety, soil stability, and long-term maintenance. The Response to Comments (RTC) document included in this Final EA (refer to [Appendix C](#)) organizes these comments and responses by resource topic. Similar comments expressed by multiple individuals were combined into a single representative comment, and a single response was prepared. If applicable, comment responses direct the reader to information within the Final EA and/or technical reports; identify what was modified or updated between the Draft and Final EA; and/or indicate what additional analysis was performed.

4.3 Agencies and Persons Consulted

Given the nature of the project, the responsible official contacted and/or consulted the following agencies, organizations, tribes, and persons during development and analysis of the project:

Cooperating Agencies

- New Mexico Department of Transportation

Federal Governments

- U.S. Department of Justice – Treaty Division
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

State Agencies and Organizations

- New Mexico Acequia Commission
- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
- New Mexico Environment Department

- New Mexico Historic Preservation Division
- New Mexico Land Grant Council

Local Government Agencies

- Blue Ribbon Coalition
- Carson Forest Watch
- Chevron Questa Mine
- Local Organizations and Businesses
- National Forest Foundation
- Questa Economic Development Fund
- SAGE GIS
- Taos County



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- Town of Red River

Local Media

- The Taos News (newspaper of record)

Tribal Governments

- Apache Tribe of Oklahoma
- Comanche Nation of Oklahoma
- Hopi Tribe
- Jicarilla Apache Nation
- Kewa Pueblo
- Kiowa Indian Tribe of Oklahoma
- Navajo Nation
- Ohkay Owingeh
- Pueblo of Acoma
- Pueblo of Cochiti
- Pueblo of Isleta

- Village of Questa

- Pueblo of Jemez
- Pueblo of Laguna
- Pueblo of Nambe
- Pueblo of Picuris
- Pueblo of Pojoaque
- Pueblo of San Felipe
- Pueblo of San Ildefonso
- Pueblo of Sandia
- Pueblo of Santa Ana
- Pueblo of Santa Clara
- Pueblo of Santo Domingo
- Pueblo of Taos
- Pueblo of Tesuque
- Pueblo of Zia
- Pueblo of Zuni
- Southern Ute Indian Tribe



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Appendix A – Project Design Criteria

Project Design Criteria (PDC) would be implemented as part of the Proposed Action to avoid or minimize potential resource impacts from construction and implementation of the Proposed Action. These PDC (**Table A-1**) would supplement the list of standard Best Management Practices (BMPs) that would be incorporated into the project's Construction Implementation Plan; this Construction Implementation Plan must be prepared for CAF review prior to the start of project construction and implementation.

Table A-1. Project Design Criteria

Resource	Project Design Criteria
General	Trail construction designs shall be reviewed and approved by the Forest Service prior to implementation, allowing for field fitting to address resource concerns as necessary. Professional trail builders shall be utilized to construct trail infrastructure or Enchanted Circle Trails Association (ECTA) staff or contractors should be trained and/or certified by professional trail builders.
	Trail design shall incorporate design elements that discourage off-route use (i.e., taking shortcuts, cutting new lines, etc.)
	Trail design shall be inspected regularly during construction, and issues shall be flagged for correction and monitoring.
	To minimize user conflict and educate users, design standards and signage may be implemented to 1) educate different user types about trail etiquette and safety guidelines and 2) promote the use of adaptive mobility equipment, such as adaptive bikes.
	To minimize user conflict, gates/bollards/signs should be installed as appropriate to restrict access for unallowable motorized vehicles on the proposed trail (e.g., all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and off-highway vehicles (OHVs)), especially in areas of concern/heightened risk of ATV/OHV access (i.e., where the proposed trail is in close proximity to existing campgrounds).
	To reduce visual impacts, trail signage and any technical trail features shall be constructed with materials that blend with the landscape character, as is practicable, and meet Forest Service Manual 2380 policy for color and reflectivity, which is 4.5 on the Munsell neutral value color scale.
	Prior to starting construction activities on National Forest System lands, a Construction Implementation Plan for Forest Service approval will be submitted. Proposed construction methodologies and practices shall be reviewed for compliance with the decision and resource management direction. This plan shall include the following information: Construction Management: Project timelines, project contracts, disturbance boundaries, staging and parking areas, construction access, and any required survey information. Timber Management: Defined logging deck areas and skid paths, and protocol for timber removal. Ensure timber management is consistent with CAF Forest Plan management activities and practices to reduce risk of beetle outbreak. Erosion Control and Drainage Management: Installation of sediment fences, erosion control wattles, and sediment basins. Post-Construction Revegetation and Restoration: Methodology, locations, vegetative mixes, and soil amendments. BMPs: Forest Service Soil and Water Conservation Practices Handbook BMP list, Forest Service Guidance for Invasive Species Management BMP list, and CAF BMP list, to be employed and adhered to during project implementation.
Access	To minimize disturbance to hydrological resources and soils, temporary roads, staging areas, landings and other areas of concentrated impacts would not be located in wetlands or wet meadows. Flag access routes to ensure vehicles and equipment limit disturbance to approved access routes.
	To minimize disturbance to hydrological resources and soils, following implementation, all temporary roads and landings shall be deconstructed/removed and revegetated. All disturbed areas for construction access would be revegetated and rehabilitated to ensure ecological integrity and compliance with management guidelines. All seeding efforts would utilize a United States (U.S.)



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	Department of Agriculture-approved native pollinator-friendly seed mix of grasses and forbs to maintain and improve forage for pollinator species within the project area. To minimize disturbance to hydrological resources and soils, ground-disturbing equipment operations would be avoided on unstable, wet, or easily compacted soils, and on steep slopes, unless operations can be conducted without causing excessive rutting, soil puddling, or sediment runoff directly into waterbodies. This would be accomplished by avoidance (i.e., flagging off closures and driving around sensitive areas). To minimize disturbance to hydrological resources and soils, crossings of the Red River, in addition to other intermittent and ephemeral channels may be required, and the locations of those crossings would be designated by a qualified specialist prior to implementation. Following use of these specified crossings, a qualified specialist (Hydrologist or Aquatic Biologist) would assess the site for potential repair and/or restoration as needed.
Invasive Plants	To minimize the potential spread of invasive species, all vehicles and equipment entering and exiting the construction site shall undergo decontamination procedures (e.g., washing stations). Cleaning shall include removing all soil, mud, plant parts, seeds, vegetative matter, or other debris that could contain or hold seeds. To minimize the potential spread of invasive species, the project shall adhere to specific guidelines from the most current Forest Service Southwestern Region Guidance for Invasive Species Management to prevent the introduction or proliferation of invasive species. This includes treatment of any noxious weed in the project area prior to and following implementation activities. To minimize the potential spread of invasive species, reseed all disturbed areas with a Forest Service-approved native seed mix. Consult with FS personnel to identify appropriate seed mixes for areas to be restored. To minimize the potential spread of invasive species, construction staging areas should be located in hardened and/or previously disturbed areas, thereby avoiding soil disturbance and not requiring project-specific rehabilitation in these areas.
Wildlife	If threatened, endangered, or proposed species are found during implementation, the population would be protected from impacts by either excluding the immediate area from implementation, or if practicable, modifying the project activities in timing or scope to avoid directly negatively impacting the listed species. To minimize habitat impacts and direct disturbance of raptors and migratory birds during nesting and winter periods from new authorizations and management activities, use buffers and timing restrictions based upon New Mexico Game and Fish recommended buffer zones and seasonal restrictions for raptors or alternative best available scientific information. Effective site-specific topographic barriers may be used to modify these buffers. If active raptor nests are identified, coordinate with the district wildlife biologist to determine appropriate protection measures.
Hydrology and Soils	Due to their direct connection to the Red River, Columbine Creek, or Pioneer Creek, all wetlands documented in the Project Area are likely to be considered jurisdictional by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Therefore, should impacts to wetlands be required to establish the proposed trail, a Clean Water Act 404 and 401 permit would likely be required. To avoid removing or altering bank stabilizing vegetation, restrict tree removal in accordance with the 2022 Forest Plan direction. To minimize impacts to hydrological resources, BMPs for trail design would be implemented as appropriate to avoid and mitigate erosion and sedimentation into the Red River. Project-specific soil and water conservation practices would be developed where disturbances cannot be avoided in the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan. To minimize disturbance to wetlands, wetlands shall be flagged in the vicinity of the approved trail construction corridor. To minimize impacts to hydrological resources, retain adequate vegetation to maintain stream shading and stream temperatures. Leave existing downed trees and large woody debris that are in perennial or



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	intermittent stream channels in place unless channel stability needs, as determined by the 2022 Forest Plan.
	To minimize impacts to hydrological resources, no crossing of perennial streams by mechanical equipment would be allowed, except during construction as needed. Crossings of intermittent and ephemeral channels would be designated by a qualified specialist prior to implementation. Following use of these specified crossings, a qualified specialist (Hydrologist or Aquatic Biologist) would assess the site for potential repair and/or restoration as needed.
	To minimize impacts to wetlands to the greatest extent possible, field fit access routes to cross wetlands in the narrowest location to minimize temporary impacts.
	To minimize impacts to hydrological resources, where appropriate, temporary erosion control structures (silt fences, straw bale barriers, straw mulch, etc.) would be utilized during and after construction to minimize any project-generated sediment. Ensure the retention of sediment on-site through swift reseeding and mulching after-surface disturbance.
Pollution and Erosion Control	To reduce impacts to soils and hydrological resources, list and describe any hazardous material that would be used at the project site, including procedures for inventory, storage, handling, and monitoring; notification procedures; specific clean-up and disposal instructions for different products available on the site; proposed methods for disposal of spilled material; and employee training for spill containment.
	To reduce impacts to soils and hydrological resources, temporarily store any waste liquids generated at the staging areas under cover on an impervious surface, such as tarpaulins, until such time they can be properly transported to and treated at an approved facility for treatment of hazardous materials.
	To reduce impacts to soils and hydrological resources, implement procedures based on BMPs to confine, remove, and dispose of construction waste, including every type of debris, discharge water, concrete, cement, grout, washout facility, welding slag, petroleum product, or other hazardous materials generated, used, or stored on-site.
	To reduce impacts to soils and hydrological resources, implement procedures to contain and control a spill of any hazardous material generated, used, or stored on-site, including notification of proper authorities. Ensure that materials for emergency erosion and hazardous materials control are onsite (e.g., silt fence, straw bales, oil-absorbing floating boom whenever surface water is present).
	To reduce impacts to soils and hydrological resources, implement BMPs to confine vegetation and soil disturbance to the minimum area, and minimum length of time, as necessary to complete the action, and otherwise prevent or minimize erosion associated with the action.
	To reduce impacts to soils and hydrological resources, no uncured concrete or form materials would be allowed to enter the active stream channel.
	To reduce impacts to soils and hydrological resources, implement steps to cease work under high flows, except for efforts to avoid or minimize resource damage.



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Appendix B – Cumulative Effects Projects

The following past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects have been identified by the project's Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) as relevant for analysis of the proposed project from a cumulative effects context. Basic information provided here for each project in **Table B-1** is complemented in the corresponding analyses in the Final EA. Not all resources discussed in the Final EA have been or would be affected by all the cumulative effects projects described here. Cumulative effects analyses presented in the resource sections of the Final EA are based on these descriptions and the best available information for each project.

Table B-1. Cumulative Effects Matrix

Project	Project Location	Project Description	Project Approval / Implementation	Project Area (acres or length)	Resources Potentially Affected
Private Lands	Private lands overlapping and adjacent to the project area (i.e., near the trail origin and terminus)	Several private land parcels exist in or immediately adjacent to the project area that have the potential to affect public recreation access in and surrounding the project area. The Forest Service intends to contact landowners whose properties either overlap or border the proposed project components, to discuss appropriate field-fitting of the trail alignment and to identify safety and access measures for users. Specifically, the Forest Service plans to negotiate trail access across lands owned by Willow Ponds, LLC in the Town of Red River through a landowner agreement.	Ongoing	Multiple	Recreation (including Traffic & Parking)
Chevron Questa Mine Superfund Site	Chevron Questa Mine, overlapping and adjacent to the project area (i.e., near mile markers 1-7)	The Chevron Questa Mine (formerly the MolyCorp Mine) is a former molybdenum mine owned by Chevron Mining Company. Open-pit mining occurred from 1965 to 1983, followed by intermittent operations until the mine closed in 2014. In 2011, the United States (U.S.) Environmental Protection Agency designated the mine as a Superfund site due to soil and groundwater contamination from mining activities. Long-term remediation and monitoring continue under the Superfund program. The Forest Service is pursuing a land donation/acquisition to acquire Chevron Questa Mine parcels that overlap the project area.	Approved: 2011 Implementation: Ongoing	The Superfund site includes the mine, a milling facility, tailings impoundments, and a pipeline along New Mexico State Road 38, which span approximately 4.5 square miles.	Recreation; Wildlife; Hydrology; Soils; Cultural Resources



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Project	Project Location	Project Description	Project Approval / Implementation	Project Area (acres or length)	Resources Potentially Affected
Eagle Rock Lake Remediation Project	National Forest System (NFS) day-use recreation area, overlapping and adjacent to the project area (i.e., Questa origin)	Initiated as part of the Chevron Questa Mine Superfund cleanup, this project restored Eagle Rock Lake and enhanced fish habitat along the Red River near the Village of Questa. The project scope included dredging and relining the lake, removing contaminated sediment, improving stormwater controls, and adding stream features to support aquatic habitat. Recreation upgrades included accessible trails, restrooms, picnic areas, parking, and improved fishing access.	Approved:2015 Implementation: Completed	Eagle Rock Lake Recreation Area (approximately 3 acres)	Recreation (including Traffic & Parking); Wildlife; Hydrology; Soils; Cultural Resources
Designation of Rio Grande del Norte National Monument	Approximately 5 miles west of the project area	The Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), protects the Rio Grande Gorge, volcanic landforms, and high-desert ecosystems in Taos County. It supports recreational use, wildlife habitat, and the preservation of cultural resources.	Congressionally Designated: 2013	BLM lands (approximately 242,555 acres)	Recreation (including Traffic & Parking) Wildlife Cultural Resources; Designated Areas
Enchanted Circle Trails Plan	Enchanted Circle Region of New Mexico, centered on the Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway (Taos and Colfax Counties)	The 2017 Enchanted Circle Trails Plan (ECTP), authored by the Enchanted Circle Trails Association (ECTA), presents a community-driven vision for a cohesive trail network connecting communities and landscapes in the Enchanted Circle region of northern New Mexico. Developed through extensive outreach, including over 1,000 survey respondents, public meetings, and focus groups, the plan sets priorities for accessible in-town and backcountry trails, supports diverse user groups, and promotes active transportation while respecting agricultural, cultural, and ecological values. Refer to the ECTP for a list of prioritized projects (e.g., New Mexico State Road 150 Multi-Use Pathway, Foothills trail system, trail connections in Largo Canyon, etc.).	Published: 2017 Implementation: Ongoing	Enchanted Circle Region (approximately 1,310 square miles)	Recreation (including Traffic & Parking); Wildlife; Hydrology; Soils; Cultural Resources



Questa to Red River Trail Project



Project	Project Location	Project Description	Project Approval / Implementation	Project Area (acres or length)	Resources Potentially Affected
CAF Travel Management Plan	Carson National Forest (CAF)	Initiated under the 2005 Forest Service Travel Management Rule, the 2009 CAF Travel Management Plan designates specific roads, trails, and areas on the CAF for motorized use. The plan complements the 2022 CAF Land and Resource Management Plan (2022 Forest Plan) to establish a sustainable, legally enforceable travel system that balances public access and the protection of CAF resources.	Approved: 2009 Implementation: Ongoing (relevant to 2022 Forest Plan)	CAF (approximately 1.5 million acres)	Recreation (including Traffic & Parking)
CAF Forest Plan	Carson National Forest (CAF)	On July 8, 2022, the CAF Forest Supervisor signed the Final Record of Decision for the 2022 Carson National Forest Plan. The plan took effect 30 days after its publication in the Federal Register, replacing the 1986 Forest Plan. It establishes forest-wide desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines to guide resource stewardship, sustainable recreation, traditional land uses, and community partnerships over the next 10 to 15 years.	Approved: 2022 Implementation: Ongoing	CAF (approximately 1.5 million acres)	Recreation (including Traffic & Parking); Wildlife; Hydrology; Soils; Cultural Resources; Designated Areas
Northern New Mexico Riparian, Aquatic, and Wetland Restoration Project	NFS lands (Carson, Cibola, and Santa Fe National Forests; Kiowa National Grassland)	This project spans multiple National Forests and Grasslands. It proposes a toolbox of riparian restoration techniques, including aquatic passage improvements, instream and floodplain enhancements, riparian vegetation treatments, erosion control along roads and trails, and wetland/seeps restoration, to accelerate recovery of degraded habitats and improve watershed health across NFS lands.	Approved: 2021 Implementation: Ongoing	NFS lands (approximately 4.7 million acres of land eligible for restoration efforts)	Hydrology; Soils



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Project	Project Location	Project Description	Project Approval / Implementation	Project Area (acres or length)	Resources Potentially Affected
CAF Campground and Facility Improvements	CAF developed campgrounds, including along the Red River corridor (Questa-Red River area)	In response to storm and fire impacts in late 2021, the Forest Service completed restoration and reopened several campgrounds along New Mexico State Road 38 between Questa and Red River—including Columbine, Elephant Rock, Goat Hill, and Junebug—in July 2022. Improvements focused on hazard tree removal, road and site stabilization, re-grading, and restoring recreational access. Additional facility upgrades included the replacement of toilets, improved parking areas, reconfigured campsite layouts, updated signage, and enhancements to picnic amenities to improve safety, accessibility, and the overall user experience. The Fawn Lakes Campground is expected to undergo reconstruction either concurrently with the proposed project or at a later date.	Approved: 2022 Implementation: Completed or pending; maintenance ongoing	Refer to the CAF "Highway 38" website for site-specific details	Recreation (including Traffic & Parking); Hydrology; Soils
Questa Municipal Park Improvements	Questa Municipal Park, behind the Questa Library	This project, backed by \$112,000 in state grants and philanthropic support, helped to revitalize the Questa Municipal Park. Improvements included the installation of new playground structures (e.g., swings, climbing units), safety surfacing, shade structures, benches, picnic tables, tree plantings, signage, and upgraded irrigation systems.	Approved: 2024 Implementation: Completed	Village of Questa lands (approximately 3.5 acres)	Recreation (including Traffic & Parking)
Brandenburg Park Improvements	Brandenburg Park, downtown Red River off Main St	The Town of Red River received \$2 million in early 2025 through the State's City Parks Improvement Program to revitalize Brandenburg Park in downtown Red River. Planning is underway for upgrades to playgrounds, pavilion spaces, accessibility features, and improvements supporting major local festivals and year-round tourism.	Approved: 2025 Implementation: Pending	Town of Red River lands (approximately 2 acres)	Recreation (including Traffic & Parking)



Questa to Red River Trail Project



Appendix C – Response to Comments

Comment Process Overview

This Appendix includes synthesized representative comments received on the Questa to Red River Trail Project Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and responses to those comments.

The proposed project is situated between the communities of Questa and Red River, New Mexico, and overlaps a portion of National Forest System (NFS) lands on the Carson National Forest (CAF). Considering this overlap of NFS lands, the United States (U.S.) Forest Service must conduct U.S. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental review, including the solicitation of public comments during the course of the project. The CAF initiated a 30-day public comment period for the Draft EA on September 4, 2025, using a Forest Service Cover Letter and Legal Notice published in the *Taos News*. The Forest Service also made project information available on the project-specific website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/r03/carson/projects/67508>).

The Forest Service collected comments from September 4, 2025, through October 6, 2025. In response to this solicitation for public comments, the Forest Service received 22 comment submittals. The Forest Service accepted comments from the following sources: online submissions through the project website, email, mail, and in-person at the Questa Ranger District Office. No public open houses were held during the Draft EA public comment period.

The Forest Service reviewed the unique comment submittals and prepared synthesized representative comments and comment responses to each substantive comment identified. This Response to Comments (RTC) document organizes comments and responses by resource topic. Similar comments expressed by multiple individuals were combined into a single representative comment, and a single response was prepared. If applicable, comment responses direct the reader to information within the Final EA and/or technical reports; identify what was modified or updated between the Draft and Final EA; and/or indicate what additional analysis was performed.

Names of individuals and groups who submitted comments are part of the project record. Refer to 4. Consultation and Coordination of the Final EA for a list of federal, state, and local governments and organizations that submitted comments during the comment period. The list of commenters, along with the organization they represent (if applicable) and their assigned specific comment submittal ID number, is included in [Table C-1](#). At the end of each comment in this RTC document is a code identifying the Commenter ID. All original comment letters are also located in the Public Comment/Objection Reading Room on the project-specific website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/r03/carson/projects/67508>).



Questa to Red River Trail Project



Table C-1. Commenter ID List

Commenter	Organization (if applicable)	Commenter ID
Jane Stuehling	N/A	1
Connie Schevers	N/A	2
Kevin Ormerod	N/A	3
Kristine Willis	N/A	4
Antonia Velasquez	N/A	5
Brett Tetzloff	N/A	6
Phil Poirier	N/A	7
Deborah Espie	N/A	8
Dennis Pacl	N/A	9
Anonymous	N/A	10
Arthur Lynch	N/A	11
Lisa Westfall	N/A	12
Daniel Greenwald	N/A	13
Hannah Beck	N/A	14
Amanda Clayton	N/A	15
Don Wendell	N/A	16
Brian Braley	N/A	17
Stephen Bruns	N/A	18
Sloan Covington	N/A	19
Jack Carpenter	N/A	20
Ben Burr and Simone Griffin	BlueRibbon Coalition	21
Joanie Berde	Carson Forest Watch	22



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Representative Comment Summaries and Comment Responses

In the following paragraphs are representative comment summaries and comment responses by resource. Sub-headers break down each resource by theme, as applicable.

NEPA Process

“The scoping and comment documents indicated the need to have MOUs with either local governments or private entities such as hiking clubs. The assumption being made by the federal government is these agreements (MOUs) will occur after the environmental document is complete. The entities and at a minimum draft MOUs should appear in the environmental document as an appendix or within the document itself. The public not having this information give the feeling that these MOUs will be an afterthought.” (Commenter ID # 20)

Section 2.2 (Proposed Action Description) of the Draft EA identifies that the CAF, potentially in coordination with the Village of Questa and/or the Town of Red River, as well as other partners, would be responsible for the maintenance and management of the proposed project. As part of project implementation, the CAF may enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), long-term maintenance agreement, or Special Use Authorization (SUA)¹⁴ with these entities to ensure proper maintenance and management of the trail, trailheads, parking access points, and other associated infrastructure (signage, etc.) along the route.¹⁵ Tasks and activities authorized under these agreements would be consistent with typical CAF maintenance actions necessary to sustain trails and trail-related facilities over time.

The Final EA has been updated to include additional language in Section 2.2 (Proposed Action Description), clarifying the process and timeline for establishing these agreements. The added text explains that the formal execution of MOUs is an administrative and legal step that occurs after completion of the NEPA process and issuance of the decision (i.e., Decision Notice). This sequence ensures that such agreements do not prejudice the outcome of the NEPA review or commit the agency to a specific course of action before environmental effects have been fully evaluated.

If the Proposed Action is selected for implementation, the Forest Service would then initiate and finalize MOUs or similar agreements with appropriate partners to clarify maintenance responsibilities, funding arrangements, and management roles consistent with the selected alternative and any Project Design Criteria (PDC) adopted in the decision prior to implementation of the trail. These agreements are implementation tools, rather than components of the NEPA analysis, and are therefore not typically included as appendices to the EA.

Purpose and Need

“Why here and why now? The analysis has been going on for some time. But question of why here and why now is not answered. I expect some detail on the answer to that question.” (Commenter ID # 20)

Section 1.3 (Purpose and Need) of the Draft EA describes the rationale for the project’s location and timing. The proposed trail corridor between the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River aims to address a critical need for a safe and sustainable route connecting the two communities and linking recreational opportunities across the broader Enchanted Circle region. Currently, New Mexico State Road 38 is the only connection between

¹⁴ An SUA is a legal document such as a permit, term permit, lease, or easement, which allows occupancy, use, rights, or privileges of NFS land. The authorization is granted for a specific use of the land for a specific period of time.

¹⁵ Other portions of the Draft EA, such as Section 3.3 (Recreation and Scenery) and Appendix A (PDC), also identify the Enchanted Circle Trails Association (ECTA) as a key partner in project development and implementation. Accordingly, ECTA may also be included as an appropriate partner during implementation.



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Questa and Red River; it carries high volumes of vehicle traffic and lacks safe accommodations for pedestrians or cyclists. As a result, existing conditions pose substantial safety concerns and limit equitable access for residents and visitors who wish to travel between the communities without a vehicle.

This specific corridor was selected because it offers the most direct and feasible alignment, taking advantage of a contiguous swath of public land between the two communities while minimizing impacts to private property and sensitive environmental areas. Previous feasibility analyses conducted by the ECTA and the Forest Service identified this route as the most practical connection that can meet engineering, environmental, and safety objectives while achieving the regional connectivity goals outlined in ECTA's regional Enchanted Circle Trails Plan (ECTP).

The project's timing reflects both the growing demand for recreation and the availability of funding opportunities. Recent years have seen an increase in tourism and outdoor recreation in the Enchanted Circle region, including a rise in multimodal users and E-Bike use. These trends have intensified the need for infrastructure that can safely accommodate diverse users while supporting local economic development and community health. The project's momentum is also supported by the Town of Red River's successful acquisition of initial funding to complete the NEPA process, allowing the project to move from conceptual planning into environmental review. Completion of the Final EA is a prerequisite for several competitive federal and state grants that would fund detailed design and construction, including programs like the Federal Lands Access Program, the Recreational Trails Program, the Transportation Alternatives Program, and the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Trails+ Grant administered by the Outdoor Recreation Division.

In summary, the project is proposed "here" because this corridor provides the safest, most efficient, and least environmentally impactful connection between Questa and Red River; and "now" because rising regional demand, community support, and available funding have aligned to make the environmental review process both feasible and timely. Revised language has been incorporated into Section 1.3 (Purpose and Need) of the Final EA to state this rationale.

Additionally, the project is designed to achieve desired conditions, prioritizing community-based planning and management that is consistent with the standards and guidelines of the 2022 CAF Land Management Plan (2022 Forest Plan). Refer to 2.3 (Land Management Plan Consistency) of the Final EA for additional text that was added to the Final EA to address these concepts.

Many commenters strongly supported the proposed trail, anticipating that they would use it regularly, which would, in turn, enhance their appreciation for the area. Commenters noted that the proposed trail is expected to provide significant value by offering a predictable and safe outdoor experience for locals and visitors, while also supporting outdoor fitness and mental health. Furthermore, the proposed trail and its access bridges were highlighted as an excellent asset for connecting Northern New Mexico communities and benefiting families, older populations, and children. The proposed trail was also supported for its potential positive economic impact on the surrounding communities. (Commenter ID # 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 18, 22)

The commenters agree with the purpose and need of the proposal. Please refer to Section 1.3 (Purpose and Need) of the Final EA for a complete description of the purpose and need of the proposal. No additional edits were made to the Final EA in response to this comment.

Alternatives

"The alternative trail locations need to be shown and explained with the same rigor as the proposed trail location. The no action alternative should be explained and document with the same rigor." (Commenter ID # 20)

Forest Service NEPA procedures ([36 Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\) § 220](#)) require that agencies rigorously explore and objectively evaluate reasonable alternatives to a Proposed Action; however, only alternatives that meet the purpose and need and are technically and economically feasible must be analyzed in detail. Alternatives that are considered but eliminated from detailed study need only be briefly described, along with a clear explanation of why they were not carried forward. The No Action Alternative is required for



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comparison purposes, but does not need to be evaluated with the same level of design or technical rigor as the Proposed Action, as it simply represents the baseline condition with no new activities implemented.

To enhance clarity and transparency, the Final EA has been revised to expand Section 2.4 (Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail) and provide a more detailed explanation of the trail alignments and route concepts that were considered but dismissed from further analysis. The revised text documents the technical, environmental, and cost-related factors that informed the screening process, such as steep topography, the presence of wetlands or cultural resource sites, conflicts with existing infrastructure, and prohibitively high construction or right-of-way acquisition costs. These refinements ensure that readers understand the rationale for why certain alignments were not carried forward and confirm that the Proposed Action represents the least environmentally impactful and most feasible option consistent with the project's purpose and need.

“The trail may preclude some activities if it is implemented. I expect there to be some of discussion on future multiple use activities which could be made more difficult. There are stands of merchantable timber on the general south facing slope of the canyon. The trail due to possible visual impacts could impact use of these resources. Detailed discussion on future impacts such as timber harvest should be discussed.” (Commenter ID # 20)

The proposed project is designed to be consistent with the Forest Service's multiple-use mandate established under the [Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960](#) and the [National Forest Management Act of 1976](#). The proposed trail alignment and design do not preclude future vegetation or timber management activities that may be identified under subsequent projects or site-specific analyses. Such activities would remain subject to separate environmental review and decision-making processes consistent with Forest Service policy.

While commercial timber production is not a primary management emphasis in the immediate project area, the Final EA clarifies that the proposed trail has been designed to maintain compatibility with other existing and potential uses of NFS lands, including timber harvest and vegetation management. In addition, the scenery analysis in the Draft EA evaluated potential changes in desired Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs) and scenic character from trail construction and use, ensuring that the project remains consistent with applicable CAF Forest Plan direction for SIOs.

The Final EA has been updated to include language in Section 2.3 (Land Management Plan Consistency) that clarifies the project supports multiple-use management while prioritizing public safety and recreation connectivity, consistent with CAF Forest Plan goals and objectives.

“The trail as noted in the scoping document, and the information given to the public, indicates a soft surface trail. Since the trail does not enter the wilderness areas as per the scoping map, a surfaced trail would be more beneficial to those needing ADA equipment for trail use. The meeting of the current ADA requirements must be shown in the environmental document with associated costs.” (Commenter ID # 20)

The Draft EA described the proposed trail as a soft-surface route but did not explicitly address a fully surfaced or paved alternative. In response, Section 2.4 (Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail) of the Final EA has been updated to clarify that a corridor-wide, fully surfaced trail meeting all Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards was considered but eliminated from detailed analysis due to technical infeasibility and environmental constraints. Constructing a bonded surface throughout the corridor would require extensive regrading, retaining walls, and rock excavation to meet ADA slope and cross-slope standards. These modifications would substantially expand the construction footprint and result in substantial impacts to soils, vegetation, hydrology, and visual resources, contrary to the project's purpose of providing a sustainable, low-impact recreation opportunity. Such a design would also increase long-term maintenance needs and associated costs beyond what is considered practicable for this setting.

The Proposed Action retains a compacted native aggregate (soft-surface) design for most of the corridor to balance accessibility, environmental protection, and sustainability. This native aggregate design may achieve (or closely achieve) a firm surface that could provide some close-to accessible opportunities. The proposed trail is anticipated to be usable for adaptive riders.



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Additionally, accessibility improvements along the proposed trail would be incorporated where feasible, including ADA-compliant trailheads, parking access points, and initial approach segments designed in accordance with the Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG 2013) and Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines (FSORAG 2015).

“With regards to the parking area at mile marker 1.7 (Bear Canyon), I would like to see the proposed 6 car lot increased if possible. The area already sees significant use.” (Commenter ID # 13)

The capacity for the proposed parking area near mile marker 1.7 was determined through a detailed site analysis that evaluated site feasibility, terrain, and environmental constraints. The available flat area and manageable slope at this location impose strict limitations on the developable footprint. Expanding the lot beyond six spaces would require additional grading and excavation, potentially resulting in greater soil disturbance, vegetation removal, and visual impacts inconsistent with the project’s design objectives and CAF Forest Plan direction for resource protection.

Based on these physical and environmental constraints, it is unlikely that the parking area can be substantially increased at this location. The Final EA has been updated to include additional text in Section 2.4 (Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail) summarizing this evaluation and explaining why an expansion of the Bear Canyon lot was not carried forward for detailed analysis.

“The trail should be a minimum of 10' wide using crushed granite or a similar material.” (Commenter ID #16)

A wider, fully surfaced trail was evaluated during project development, but was determined to be infeasible along much of the corridor due to terrain and environmental constraints. The Questa to Red River corridor traverses steep canyon slopes, where widening the tread to 10 feet would require substantial grading, cut-and-fill operations, and retaining walls, thereby expanding the construction footprint and increasing risks of slope instability and erosion.

In addition, a 10-foot width would more closely align with an urban greenway standard, which is inconsistent with the desired Rural to Roaded Natural Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) settings for this corridor and the project’s intent to provide a sustainable, low-impact recreation experience. The Proposed Action therefore retains a typical tread width of approximately 8 feet with a compacted, native-aggregate surface that balances user safety, accessibility, and maintainability while minimizing environmental disturbance. This design is consistent with Forest Service Trail Class 4 parameters ([Forest Service Handbook \(FSH\) 2309.18](#)) for a multi-use trail and with CAF Forest Plan objectives for scenic and resource protection. Section 2.4 (Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail) of the Final EA has been updated to document that a 10-foot-wide trail alternative was evaluated but dismissed from detailed analysis due to these contextual constraints.

Several commenters advocated against allowing equestrian users on the trail, citing concerns about conflicts between E-Bike users and equestrian users, as well as concerns about the cleanliness of allowing horses on the proposed trail. Comments felt that equestrian users already have adequate trail access in the area. (Commenter ID # 4, 10)

The project team carefully considered designating the proposed trail as non-equestrian only. However, this alternative was eliminated from further consideration because it would not meet the project’s purpose and need, which is to provide a multi-use trail that accommodates the widest feasible range of recreational users in the region. Section 2.4 (Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail) of the Final EA has been updated to reflect this evaluation in the discussion of alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study.

Section 1.3 (Purpose and Need) of the Draft EA explains that the project aims to connect existing trail systems and recreation opportunities in the Enchanted Circle region and develop a connection that accommodates multiple-use recreation to improve community health and access. Consistent with ECTA’s regional ECTP, the trail is intended to serve pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians, thereby promoting equitable access to public lands. While equestrian users may have other trail opportunities in the broader area, this specific corridor represents a critical connection between communities that would be inequitably denied to that user group if equestrian use were prohibited.



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The Final EA clarifies how potential user conflicts and maintenance concerns could potentially be addressed through trail design, education, and partnership agreements:

- **User Conflict Mitigation:** The Final EA identifies PDC intended to reduce user conflict, including a typical 8-foot trail width to allow safe passing and adequate sight distance in open segments.
- **Signage and Education:** The Final EA identifies PDC for clear, consistent signage that could be installed at trailheads and key intersections, emphasizing standard yielding protocols (e.g., cyclists yield to pedestrians; all users yield to equestrians). ECTA and partner organizations may also undertake education and outreach campaigns promoting trail etiquette and safe interaction practices.
- **Maintenance and Cleanliness:** Future maintenance responsibilities, including management of animal waste, would be addressed through MOUs or similar cooperative agreements developed among the CAF and local partners prior to implementation.

Several commenters expressed safety concerns regarding the potential user conflict between E-Bike users and other recreation users, specifically equestrian users. These comments advocated for restricting the trail not to allow motorized use or E-Bikes. (Commenter ID # 1, 12, 15)

The project team carefully considered this request, as user safety on the proposed trail is a top priority for the CAF. However, the alternative of prohibiting E-Bikes on the proposed trail was evaluated but eliminated from further consideration because it would not meet the project's purpose and need (Section 1.3 of the Draft EA) to provide a multi-use trail accommodating the widest feasible range of recreation users in the region. The decision to allow Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes aligns with the project's core objectives and current recreational trends:

- **Multi-Modal Access:** The trail is designed to accommodate a broad spectrum of users, and E-Bikes improve accessibility for longer distances and steep terrain, benefiting older riders and those with mobility limitations.
- **Regional Consistency:** Allowing Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes is consistent with current Forest Service direction (36 CFR §§ 212, 261, and 295), which authorizes local officials to designate E-Bike use on NFS trails following site-specific environmental analysis. The project also aligns with the recommendations of ECTA's regional ECTP, which promotes inclusive, multi-use trail systems accommodating emerging forms of recreation in the region.

Additionally, the Final EA clarifies how potential user conflicts and maintenance concerns could potentially be addressed through trail design, education, and partnership agreements:

- **User Conflict Mitigation:** The Final EA identifies PDC intended to reduce user conflict, including a typical 8-foot trail width to allow safe passing and adequate sight distance in open segments.
- **Signage and Education:** The Final EA identifies PDC for clear, consistent signage that could be installed at trailheads and key intersections, emphasizing standard yielding protocols (e.g., cyclists yield to pedestrians; all users yield to equestrians). ECTA and partner organizations may also undertake education and outreach campaigns promoting trail etiquette and safe interaction practices.
- **Trail Behavior Management:** The Final EA identifies PDC for appropriate advisory signage that could be installed to encourage safe speeds and responsible riding behavior. Other adaptive management measures could be implemented as needed to manage trail user behavior.
- **Access Control:** The Final EA identifies PDC for gates, bollards, or signage that could be installed to restrict unauthorized motorized vehicles (e.g., all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-highway vehicles (OHVs), utility task vehicles (UTVs), dirt bikes, etc.), as necessary.

Section 2.2 (Proposed Action Description) and Section 2.4 (Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail) of the Final EA have been updated to reaffirm the rationale for maintaining E-Bike access and to further clarify how safety and conflict mitigation measures could be implemented as needed. Section 3.10 (Other Law, Regulation, and Policy Consistency) of the Final EA has been updated to state that the proposed trail would be added to the CAF Motor Vehicle Use Map with symbology for E-Bikes to clarify allowed uses.



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“The main concern we have is the multiple uses being proposed. It’s important to separate e-bikes and mountain bikes from hikers, and horse riders. Otherwise, there will be conflicts between forest users and a major safety issue.” (Commenter ID #22)

The project team carefully considered this suggestion. However, the commenter’s proposed alternative would not meet the project’s purpose and need to provide an inclusive, multi-use trail that could accommodate the widest feasible range of users (including adaptive riders). The project team remains committed to user safety and would incorporate design measures to reduce potential conflicts, such as maximizing sight distances on curves and ensuring appropriate trail width and grade. The CAF and project partners may also provide trail-etiquette guidance and clear yielding rules to support safe and predictable use. (Refer to previous comment responses for additional detail.)

“Only Class 1 e-bikes should be allowed - no Class 2 e-bikes.” (Commenter ID #16)

The project team carefully evaluated this suggestion. The alternative of prohibiting Class 2 E-Bikes (which include a throttle and are motor-assisted up to 20 mph) was considered but eliminated from further consideration because it would not meet the project’s purpose and need to provide an inclusive, multi-use trail accommodating the widest feasible range of users in the region.

The decision to permit both Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes is based on the following considerations:

- **Minimal Operational Difference:** For a multi-use trail such as the proposed trail, the operational difference between Class 1 (pedal-assist) and Class 2 (throttle-assist) E-Bikes is negligible. Both have the same maximum motor-assisted speed of 20 mph, the key factor influencing trail safety and user interaction. These risks are more effectively addressed through posted advisory signage, design visibility, and yielding protocols rather than by restricting technology class.
- **Equitable Access:** Allowing Class 2 E-Bikes would expand access for users who rely on throttle-assist due to physical limitations or difficulty initiating pedaling on steep grades. Restricting Class 2 E-Bikes would disproportionately limit participation by older riders and those with mobility challenges, contrary to the project’s inclusive recreation objectives.
- **Multi-Use Consistency:** Permitting both classes aligns with the project’s multi-use objectives, as well as current Forest Service direction (36 CFR §§ 212, 261, and 295) and ECTA’s regional ECTP.

Refer to the previous comment responses regarding safety and user conflict mitigation for additional detail on the proposed measures to manage speed and behavior, rather than restricting E-Bike classes.

Section 2.4 (Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail) of the Final EA has been updated to clarify this evaluation and the rationale for allowing both Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes on the trail.

Several commenters expressed opposition to the use of motorized vehicles (e.g., ATVs, OHVs, UTVs, dirt bikes), including E-Bikes, on the proposed trail, citing concerns that their presence would negatively impact the user experience and potentially ruin the health benefits and natural character of the area. A specific concern was raised about E-Bikes enabling the unfit and elderly to travel distances they are physically unable to manage. (Commenter ID # 5, 8, 12)

The modification of prohibiting Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes (the only motorized use permitted on the proposed trail) was evaluated but eliminated from further consideration for the following reasons:

- **Motorized Restriction:** The proposed trail would not permit general motorized use (e.g., ATVs, OHVs, UTVs, dirt bikes, etc.). The only motor-assisted use allowed would be Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes, both of which have the same maximum assisted speed (20 mph), and would be similar to conventional bicycles, operating with minimal noise or disturbance. This approach would maintain the trail’s character while providing an inclusive form of low-impact recreation.
- **User Experience and Resource Protection:** As described in Section 3.3 (Recreation and Scenery) and Appendix A (Project Design Criteria) of the Draft EA, the project includes design and management measures to preserve the natural setting and quality of user experience. These include advisory signage and clear yielding protocols, emphasizing trail etiquette and respect for other visitors and the environment.



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The project design also incorporates user safety considerations related to distance and endurance. Clearly designated trailheads, rest areas, and turnaround points would help ensure that all users, including those using E-Bikes, can make informed decisions about travel distance and avoid extending beyond their physical capabilities or available battery range.

- **Health and Wellness Benefits:** E-Bikes require active participation and provide meaningful physical exercise, especially for older adults and users with limited stamina or mobility. Consequently, allowing E-Bikes supports the project's purpose and need (refer to Section 1.3 of the Draft EA) to improve community health and provide equitable recreation opportunities across a wide demographic.
- **Equitable Access:** A core goal of the proposed trail is to create an inclusive recreation corridor that connects communities and enables residents and visitors of all abilities to experience the outdoors safely. E-Bikes are recognized nationally as an effective tool for expanding outdoor access for older adults, individuals with chronic health conditions, and others who may not otherwise be able to engage in extended or high-elevation trail use.

The Final EA has been updated to include additional clarifying language, emphasizing that permitting Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes is consistent with Forest Service direction (36 CFR §§ 212, 261, and 295) and modern federal and state recreation policy, which promotes equitable, multi-use access. The Draft EA already included language addressing preservation of the trail's natural character and user experience; this is strengthened in the Final EA to respond to these concerns more explicitly.

The following four comments are grouped based on a similar theme:

“Motorized recreation is a longstanding, legally recognized use on National Forest System trails and is an important component of the multiple-use mandate. Properly managed motorized trails can coexist with non-motorized and e-bike use through sustainable design, clear signage, and education.”
(Commenter ID # 21)

“Motorized recreation provides substantial economic benefits to surrounding communities, particularly in rural areas like Questa and Red River. Visitors using motorcycles and other motorized vehicles contribute to lodging, dining, fuel, and retail sales, supporting local jobs and small businesses. National studies consistently show that motorized recreation generates billions in economic activity annually, and that well-designed motorized trails can minimize environmental impacts while providing meaningful access to remote public lands.” (Commenter ID # 21)

“Allowing motorized use alongside Class 1 and 2 e-bikes and traditional mountain bikes supports a truly multi-use trail system, ensuring that public lands are accessible to the broadest range of users. Trail managers can mitigate potential conflicts and resource impacts through proactive measures such as speed management, trail separation where appropriate, and user education. Restricting motorized use would unnecessarily limit access, reduce recreational opportunities, and diminish the economic and social benefits these trails provide.” (Commenter ID # 21)

“It would be inconsistent to develop a trail only for non-motorized users and not equal amount of mileage for motorized users as well.” (Commenter ID # 21)

The project team agrees that properly managed trails can support diverse recreation uses. However, the alternative of including general motorized use on the proposed trail has been eliminated from further consideration due to the project's specific purpose and need:

- **Safety Priority:** As described in Section 1.3 (Purpose and Need) of the Draft EA, the trail is designed to provide a safe, separated corridor for pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians who currently face hazardous conditions along New Mexico State Road 38. Allowing heavier, higher-speed motorized vehicles would fundamentally compromise this safety objective and alter the intended experience.
- **Targeted Project Scope:** The project is focused on addressing a long-identified connectivity gap in the regional trail network. While the Forest Service's multiple-use mandate is broad, this project specifically fulfills the need for a separated, low-impact route linking Questa and Red River.



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- Existing Motorized Opportunities: The Taos County area already includes extensive designated motorized trail systems on Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, along with the fully developed New Mexico State Road 38 corridor, for motorized travel. This project complements, rather than duplicates, those existing opportunities.
- Economic Context: The Draft EA acknowledges that motorized recreation contributes significantly to the regional economy (refer to Section 3.5 – Socioeconomics). However, non-motorized and E-Bike recreation also generates meaningful economic benefits through tourism, lodging, and retail activity, while promoting public health and sustainable outdoor access.

While general motorized use is not included under the Proposed Action, the trail would accommodate Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes to promote inclusive, modern, multi-use recreation consistent with Forest Service E-Bike policy (36 CFR §§ 212, 261, and 295) and ECTA's regional ECTP. To ensure safe coexistence among all permitted users, the Final EA describes proactive management measures that could be utilized, such as user education and management (refer to the previous comment responses above), as well as adaptive management should conditions change over time.

Section 2.4 (Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail) of the Final EA includes added language clarifying this evaluation and the rationale for excluding general motorized use from detailed analysis.

Recreation

Trail User Types

Several commenters advocated for allowing E-Bikes on the proposed trail, arguing that banning them while allowing other types of bikes is irrational and unfair to those who are not physically fit enough to enjoy the trail by foot or a traditional bicycle. These commenters emphasized the importance of equitable and inclusive recreation opportunities in the area for older populations and those with physical limitations. Commenters highlighted the health benefits of E-Bikes, noting that they provide moderate-intensity physical activity and allow users to maintain cardiovascular exercise and access challenging terrain without undue physical strain. To address concerns, several commenters suggested enforcing a speed limit on the trail, which would manage potential issues without restricting access for a broader range of the public. (Commenter ID # 14, 17, 19, 21)

The commenters agree with the purpose and need of the proposal. Please refer to Section 1.3 (Purpose and Need) of the Final EA for more information on the purpose and need of the proposal. No additional edits were made to the Final EA in response to this comment.

Several commenters noted that by allowing E-Bikes, the proposed trail would attract more visitors, enhance tourism, and generate economic benefits for nearby communities. Since many forest trails restrict E-Bike use, allowing them on the proposed trail would give visitors, who often use E-Bikes as their primary method of local transportation/exploring (especially those traveling in RVs), a much-needed outdoor destination beyond town limits. Conversely, restricting E-Bike use would isolate a significant user group and limit the potential revenue that could support local businesses and continued trail stewardship. (Commenter ID # 19, 21)

The commenters agree with the purpose and need of the proposal. Please refer to Section 1.3 (Purpose and Need) of the Final EA for more information on the purpose and need of the proposal. No additional edits were made to the Final EA in response to this comment.

The following two comments are grouped together based on a similar theme:

“Federal and state land management agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service, have increasingly approved e-bike use on mountain bike trails to expand access and accommodate a broader range of users. Allowing Class 1 and 2 e-bikes on this trail will ensure consistency with these practices, simplify public understanding of where e-bikes are permitted, and support equitable access for riders of all abilities.” (Commenter ID # 21)



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“The allowance of Class 1 and 2 E-bikes is consistent with federal policy directives that promote public access and recreation. The EXPLORE Act encourages enhanced recreational opportunities on public lands, and Secretarial Orders and Executive directives emphasize the importance of expanding recreational access, including for motorized and mechanically assisted activities. Managing the Questa to Red River Trail to accommodate e-bikes aligns with these priorities while maintaining sustainability and resource protection.” (Commenter ID # 21)

The project team agrees that allowing both Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes on the proposed trail is consistent with the evolving practices of federal land management agencies such as the Forest Service and the BLM. Federal direction, including the [Forest Service's 2022 E-Bike Rule \(36 CFR Part 212\)](#) and the BLM's 2020 E-Bike Regulation ([43 CFR Part 8340](#)), authorizes local officials to designate trails for E-Bike use following site-specific environmental review. These frameworks, together with broader policy initiatives such as the [EXPLORE Act \(2023\)](#) and Departmental [Secretarial Orders 3366](#) and [3376](#), encourage agencies to expand recreational access and promote equitable outdoor opportunities for all users.

The decision to include both Class 1 (pedal-assist) and Class 2 (throttle-assist) E-Bikes on the proposed trail reflects the project's localized purpose and need to provide a safe, accessible corridor between Questa and Red River. The trail's moderate grades and elevation gain make throttle-assist functionality particularly beneficial for older adults, families, and users with limited mobility who might otherwise be unable to complete the route. This approach balances accessibility, resource protection, and safety, consistent with the intent of federal policy to broaden participation in outdoor recreation through responsibly managed, sustainable trail systems.

Additionally, other than roads open to motor vehicles, the CAF does not currently offer any trails that are designated for the use of E-Bikes. Consequently, without specifically designated trails for E-Bike use, past observations have revealed that E-Bike users will use trails even if E-Bike use is not allowed by designation on those trails. With E-Bike sales at all-time highs,¹⁶ offering a designated trail for E-Bike use could provide relief for other trails in the area where the use is not allowed, thus helping to prevent potential user conflict on steeper, more technical trails where E-Bikes are not allowed.

The Final EA includes added language in Section 1.3 (Purpose and Need) and Section 3.10 (Other Law, Regulation, and Policy), clarifying this rationale and documenting consistency with current federal and state recreation policies.

“E-bikes provide a low-impact alternative to traditional mountain biking when trails are sustainably designed, constructed, and maintained. This trail system meets sustainable trail design standards that should mitigate any impacts associated with E-bike use.” (Commenter ID #21)

The commenters agree with the purpose and need of the proposal. Please refer to Section 1.3 (Purpose and Need) of the Final EA for more information on the purpose and need of the proposal. No additional edits were made to the Final EA in response to this comment.

Trail Access

“At least one access point should be provided - perhaps at the Columbine campground.” (Commenter ID # 16)

The Draft EA provides a comprehensive description of the proposed access points, parking areas, and staging locations for the proposed trail. This detail is found primarily in Section 2.2 (Proposed Action Description). This

¹⁶ According to various sources (BoltBikers.com, TheRoundup.org, and eBikes.org), sales of E-Bikes have surged 240% from 2019 to 2021.



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section illustrates and discusses the selection criteria for each proposed access point, including considerations for user safety, ease of access, and minimization of resource impacts.

The Draft EA addresses the feasibility of an access point at or near Columbine Campground and includes the current proposed access strategy for that segment of the trail. The proposed access points included in the Draft EA strike a balance between providing user convenience and minimizing impacts to developed recreation sites, such as campgrounds. No additional edits were added to the Final EA in response to this comment.

“There are several campgrounds in Red River Canyon. The trail may enter the campgrounds or pass in close proximity to the campgrounds. The impact of hikers, motorcycles, ATVs, UTVs, horses, or other trail users should be noted and explained in the document with anticipated mitigation measures. Many campground users have used these campgrounds for numerous years. Were these users contacted or informed about the proposed trail through items such as fliers, and posters at the campgrounds. Please show the poster/fliers as an attachment to the environmental document.” (Commenter ID # 20)

The potential for user conflict, noise, and other disturbances to campground visitors from all user types (hikers, motorized, equestrian, etc.) is thoroughly analyzed in Section 3.3 (Recreation and Scenery) of the Draft EA. This analysis details the proximity of the proposed trail to existing campgrounds and outlines the proposed mitigation measures designed to minimize impacts, such as establishing appropriate buffer zones, installing physical barriers (e.g., fencing or vegetation), and using screening elements to reduce visual and noise disturbance between the proposed trail and the camping areas.

The public involvement process for this project was comprehensive and adhered to all NEPA requirements. Section 1.5 (Public Involvement) of the Draft EA documents the outreach process, which included: published notices in local newspapers, mailings to affected property owners and stakeholders, and the distribution of project information to the public.

The Forest Service utilized various methods to inform the public about the project, including postings at the CAF offices and online. The campground concessionaire who manages the campgrounds in the corridor has been involved in the planning process. No additional edits were added to the Final EA in response to this comment.

Education and Signage

Commenters strongly emphasized that education of trail users is crucial for the safety and enjoyment of the proposed trail. They specifically requested that the Forest Service utilize methods such as signs, social media, and outreach/education programs to inform the public about trail etiquette (including user yield etiquette and dogs-on-leash etiquette), safety guidelines, trail conditions, and wildlife concerns. They encouraged using education as the primary tool to address issues, such as those related to E-Bike use, rather than implementing restrictions. To ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all, commenters emphasized that enforcing trail rules is critical. (Commenter ID #16, 21, 22).

The project team agrees that education, outreach, and clear communication are critical to the long-term success of the proposed trail. PDC (refer to **Appendix A** of the Final EA), outline opportunities for user education through design standards and signage that inform users about trail etiquette, safety practices, and the responsible use of adaptive mobility equipment.

In addition, Section 2.2 (Proposed Action Description) and Section 3.3 (Recreation and Scenery) of the Draft EA describe the CAF's plans to share trail-related information through multiple methods, such as on-site signage, community partnerships, and potential social media or online platforms, to communicate trail conditions and seasonal safety messages.

The approach of emphasizing education over restriction is consistent with current Forest Service management policy, which focuses on integrating E-Bike use safely through operational guidance and outreach rather than prohibition. This includes PDC such as clear signage at trailheads, public-facing education campaigns led by



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partners such as ECTA, and ongoing promotion of proper yielding behavior and speed awareness for all wheeled users.

Enforcement of trail rules would be addressed through long-term MOUs between the CAF, the Village of Questa, and the Town of Red River, as well as potentially ECTA. While specific staffing and budget decisions are administrative in nature, the Draft EA affirms that the Forest Service and local partners would actively manage the trail to ensure user safety and compliance with established regulations.

Recreation Trends

"I feel that rock climbing should be included as one of the increasing recreational trends in the region." (Commenter ID #13)

Section 3.3 (Recreation and Scenery) of the Final EA has been updated to document the increasing popularity of rock climbing as a recreational trend within the region.

This clarification will help ensure the analysis of cumulative impacts and the overall demand for outdoor recreation is as accurate and current as possible, providing a more robust basis for the project's purpose and need.

Hydrology and Soils

"[E-Bikes] are also a cause for rutting and washing out of trails that already exist." (Commenter ID # 15)

As noted on page 38 of the Draft EA, a 2015 study conducted by the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) found that soil displacement and tread disturbance from Class 1 E-Bikes and traditional mountain bikes are not significantly different, and both are much less than those associated with equestrian use or gasoline-powered motor vehicles. This highlights that equestrian use and motorized two-wheeled recreation (excluding E-Bikes) generally pose greater risks to trail integrity than E-Bikes. Although there is limited research on the degradation of natural surfaces by different classes of E-Bikes, this finding likely holds true for both Class 1 and Class II E-Bikes, as both are limited to the same maximum speed and have similar overall weights compared to traditional mountain bikes (IMBA 2015).

Related research, such as a study by Olive and Marion (2008), has found that "trail position, trail slope alignment angle, grade, water drainage, and type of use are all significantly influential variables in the best trail soil loss model." This indicates that trail design is the primary factor to consider in the protection of soils and hydrology (Olive and Marion 2008).

In the long term, increased trail use, particularly by equestrians, is expected to contribute to compaction and erosion if not managed. Other non-motorized uses (hiking, traditional biking, etc.) and E-Bike use may also contribute to compaction and erosion over time, but effects from these modes of transportation are expected to be less severe (IMBA 2015). Preventive measures, such as user signage, clearly defined tread boundaries, and post-construction monitoring, may help reduce impacts from increased use and facilitate adaptive management when issues arise (refer to Appendix A of the Draft EA for proposed measures to be implemented as part of the Proposed Action). No additional edits were added to the Final EA in response to this comment.

The following two comments are grouped based on a similar theme:

"The areas that have annual mudslides should be addressed to minimize damage." (Commenter ID # 16)

"The soils in this canyon along with Cabresto Canyon are somewhat unstable. They are correctly noted as hydrothermic soils. Water infiltrating these soil may and often have contributed to landslides or other soil movement. The scar north of the Red River highway is an example. These soils also allow percolation of toxic minerals into the Red River above the now closed mine. The Environmental document needs to show how the trail, if constructed, will contribute to these minerals entering the Red River." (Commenter ID # 20)



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The project team acknowledges the commenters' concerns regarding slope instability, recurring mudslides, and the presence of hydrothermic soils within portions of the Red River Canyon and Cabresto Canyon areas. These topics were addressed in Section 3.8 (Soils) of the Draft EA, which identifies that a portion of the project area contains unstable and erosion-prone soils. The analysis concluded that, with adherence to PDC and associated Best Management Practices (BMPs) (refer to Appendix A of the Draft EA), the project would not measurably change soil conditions.

Further, trail alignment and construction design have been developed specifically to avoid known unstable areas and to incorporate erosion-control and slope-stabilization measures where avoidance is not feasible. These include site-specific drainage controls, vegetative stabilization, and rapid revegetation of disturbed soils following construction.

Based on the mitigation measures and avoidance practices identified, no additional analysis or design modification is required in the Final EA. However, for clarity, the Final EA has been updated to state that hydrothermic and slide-prone soils were specifically considered during alignment design, and that PDC and BMPs would prevent increased infiltration or sediment transport into the Red River.

Regarding concerns related to toxic minerals from the now-closed Chevron mine, in 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency designated the mine as a Superfund site due to soil and groundwater contamination from mining activities. Chevron has undergone extensive remediation to address contamination over the last decade, and long-term remediation and monitoring continue under the Superfund program.

“One other concern would be to water quality in the Red River. There needs to be measures taken to insure the river is protected from dog waste and trash, especially since there be increased access for miles along the river from there is currently.” (Commenter ID # 22)

The project team acknowledges the commenter's concerns regarding increased access to the Red River following the project's implementation and the resulting desire to protect water quality from trash and waste. The project's design includes several specific and detailed measures to address this concern:

- **Erosion control:** Specific PDC and BMPs (refer to Appendix A of the Draft EA) would be adhered to during construction and operation of the proposed trail to reduce erosion and minimize sediment delivery to the Red River, thereby protecting the water quality of the river.
- **Waste management:** Waste receptacles and/or “pack it in, pack it out” signage may be installed at trailheads and parking access points along the river corridor to encourage proper waste disposal. Other adaptive management strategies may be implemented in partnership with the Village of Questa and Town of Red River, as needed, should these methods prove ineffective.

No additional edits were added to the Final EA in response to this comment.

General Vegetation

“The proposed trail traverses an area where Limber pine and Southwestern white pine exist. These two trees are interbreeding. What are the anticipated impacts to the area where the interbreeding is occurring? The impacts need to be discussed and displayed in the document.” (Commenter ID # 20)

Hybridization between these species is a naturally occurring process and is neither a regulated resource nor a management indicator under NEPA or Forest Service policy. Based on available data and existing protection measures, the potential for effects on these species or their interbreeding processes is negligible and outside the scope of detailed analysis. Therefore, no additional edits were added to the Final EA in response to this comment.

Wilderness

“The proposed trail location avoids the wilderness area. Please document where the Carson Nation Forest has proposed to the U.S. Congress a possible slight change in the wilderness boundary to reduce the need to cross the Red River via a bridge.” (Commenter ID # 20)



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As noted on page 26 of the Draft EA, the proposed trail location avoids the Columbine Wilderness Area. This project has been specifically designed to ensure there are no direct impacts to the Wilderness Area. Additionally, the CAF has not proposed a change in the Wilderness Area boundary to the U.S. Congress in connection with this project. Any such proposal would require separate, extensive environmental analysis, public engagement, and subsequent action by Congress. The current project is based on the existing, legally established Wilderness Area boundary, and all necessary infrastructure associated with the proposed trail is planned outside the designated Wilderness Area. No additional edits were added to the Final EA in response to this comment.

Public Health and Safety

“The proposed trail crosses the Red River to Questa state highway. What safety measures are part of the proposal? There is a cost to the safety measures. What is proposed to insure the U.S. Government is not liable for possible injuries or death by crossing the highway? Construction of bridges adequate for a multiple use highway crossing may make the project costs increase. The Carson National Forest in the past has been named in lawsuits due to injuries at highway crossings with trails.” (Commenter ID # 20)

The proposed trail alignment does not cross New Mexico State Road 38 and would remain on the south side of the roadway for its entire length. However, recreationists may still cross the highway at certain locations to access existing infrastructure (e.g., campgrounds). In addition, some segments of the proposed trail would use an enhanced shoulder of New Mexico State Road 38, which would bring trail users into close proximity to the roadway.

Public safety is a top priority for the Forest Service for the proposed trail. The Final EA has been updated to clarify that specific design and operational measures would be implemented to ensure the safest feasible crossing across New Mexico State Road 38 for trail users. The CAF is actively involved in discussions with the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) to consider the development of these safety measures by the CAF, as NMDOT has jurisdiction over the state highway. Proposed safety measures could include:

- **High-Visibility Signage and Pavement Markings:** Installing prominent warning signs on the highway approaches, as well as distinct pavement markings (e.g., crosswalks, rumble strips if appropriate) on the highway, to alert motorists to the crossings and pedestrian activity.
- **Traffic Control Devices:** Installing advanced warning devices (e.g., pedestrian-activated flashing lights or signals) to alert motorists to the crossings and pedestrian activity.
- **Safe Sight Distances:** Ensuring that the proposed trail design provides adequate sight distance for both trail users and motorists.
- **Design Standards:** Ensuring that any crossing infrastructure would adhere to current American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and Federal Highway Administration (FHA) design standards for shared-use paths and highway crossings.

Construction and Phasing

Several commenters requested that the proposed bridge near Mile Marker 2 be given high priority and built during Phase 1 of operations, as this bridge would allow safer and more sustainable access to Bear Canyon. (Commenter ID # 11, 13)

The determination of the phasing of operations for the proposed trail and associated infrastructure is a project implementation decision. This decision is based on factors such as funding availability, engineering readiness, and overall construction logistics. This decision is therefore considered outside the scope of this NEPA analysis, which focuses on the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Action. No additional edits were added to the Final EA in response to this comment.

“What construction techniques will be employed to minimize the speed of the motorized vehicles? The list and effectiveness should be indicated to the public.” (Commenter ID # 20)



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As described in Section 2.2 (Proposed Action Description) of the Draft EA, the only motor-assisted use permitted on the proposed trail would be Class 1 and Class 2 E-Bikes (both have the same maximum motor-assisted speed of 20 mph). Operation of all other motorized vehicles (e.g., ATVs, OHVs, UTVs, dirt bikes, etc.) would be prohibited.

While specific construction methods would be determined during the final design and implementation phase rather than through the NEPA process, the proposed trail's physical design would inherently limit speed through: 1) a curvilinear alignment following natural topography rather than long, straight grades; 2) narrow tread width (approximately 8 feet), reducing the opportunity for high-speed travel; and 3) a compacted native surface, which would provide natural rolling resistance compared to paved trails. During final engineering design, these design features and other construction elements, such as placement of rolling grade dips, grade reversals, and natural visual cues, would be refined to further promote safe riding speeds and user awareness. Enforcement and ongoing management would occur through future partnership or operations agreements (e.g., MOUs) between the Forest Service and local partners. Because these techniques are inherently part of trail design and would be detailed during implementation, no additional analysis or design commitments are required in the Final EA. No additional edits were added to the Final EA in response to this comment.

Funding and Maintenance

“Sufficient funding should be allocated for on-going maintenance.” (Commenter ID #16)

The CAF acknowledges the need for sufficient ongoing maintenance funding as an important consideration. Section 2.2 (Proposed Action Description) of the Draft EA identifies that the CAF, in coordination with the Village of Questa and the Town of Red River, would be responsible for the maintenance and management of the proposed trail. As part of the Proposed Action, the CAF may enter into an MOU, long-term maintenance agreement, or SUA with these entities to ensure proper maintenance and management of the trail, trailheads, parking access points, and associated infrastructure along the route.

However, further identifying and allocating specific funding sources for the maintenance of the proposed trail is considered outside the scope of this NEPA analysis. This environmental review is focused on the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Action. No additional edits were added to the Final EA in response to this comment.

“There is no estimated cost for the trail construction. Several bridges cross the Red River. There needs to be an estimated cost for each bridge, related items such as the abutments, design criteria, cost for the engineering for the bridges. A table would be a minimum requirement.” (Commenter ID #20)

While essential for project budgeting and future planning, the estimated cost and specific financial breakdown of the proposed trail construction are outside the scope of this NEPA analysis. This environmental review focuses on the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Action, rather than the detailed financial or engineering specifications of the Proposed Action. ECTA and the Forest Service are actively coordinating with design and construction partners to ensure that the proposed trail and associated infrastructure would meet all necessary safety and feasibility standards. No additional edits were added to the Final EA in response to this comment.



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Appendix D – Finding of No Significant Impact

The analysis presented in the Questa to Red River Trail Project Final Environmental Assessment (EA) demonstrates that the Proposed Action would not, individually or cumulatively, significantly affect the quality of the natural or human environment as evaluated under the significance factors in [40 CFR § 1501.3](#). Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared. Regulations at [40 CFR § 1501.3](#) outline how significance is determined, including consideration of the potentially affected environment and the degree of the anticipated effects.

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents the reasons why the Proposed Action would not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. This FONSI considers all information included in the Final EA as well as documentation in the project record. Pertinent specialists have reviewed the proposal, and based on their input, I have made the following determinations with regard to the potentially affected environment and degree of effects considered for a FONSI.

Potentially Affected Environment

[40 CFR § 1501.3](#) directs agencies to consider the potentially affected environment in determining whether a project will have a significant effect on the quality of the natural or human environment. Specifically, agencies should consider, as appropriate to the specific action, the affected area (national, regional, or local) and its resources. In the case of site-specific actions, significance depends more on the effects in the locale, rather than the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant.

The direct and indirect effects analysis contained in the Final EA focuses on the proposed project area and extends further for indirect or cumulative effects analysis, depending on the resource. Refer to the resource analysis in [3. Environmental Impacts](#) of the Final EA for additional information.

Degree of Effects

The following effects (or impacts) discussions focus on changes to the natural or human environment from the Proposed Action that are reasonably foreseeable and have a reasonably close causal relationship to the project. This includes those effects that occur at the same time and place as the Proposed Action and may include effects that are later in time or farther in distance from the Proposed Action. The degree of the effects includes both short- and long-term effects, beneficial and adverse effects, effects on public health and safety, and effects that would violate Federal, State, Tribal, or local law protecting the environment.

Short- and Long-Term Effects

As stated in the Final EA, the duration of short- and long-term effects is specific to the resource and issue being analyzed. Unless otherwise specified, the analyses in the Final EA assume that short-term effects occur from implementation until five years after implementation. This considers that forbs, grasses, and seedlings are likely to re-establish within one year of disturbance, while meaningful ground cover typically develops over a 2- to 5-year period. In comparison, long-term effects are expected to span from 5 to 30 years. This timeframe captures patterns of revegetation and soil stabilization under consistent recreational use from the proposed project. Short- and long-term effects, as well as beneficial and adverse effects, are briefly described by resource in [Table D-1](#).



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Table D-1. Summary of Short- and Long-term Effects by Resource

Resource	Short-Term Effects (Beneficial and Adverse)	Long-Term Effects (Beneficial and Adverse)
Recreation and Scenery	Beneficial: - Incremental improvements in recreation connectivity and access as initial trail segments and parking facilities are constructed. - Near-term reductions in pedestrian use of New Mexico State Road 38, resulting in improved traveler safety. Adverse: - Temporary construction-related impacts, including noise, dust, equipment traffic, and localized access disruptions near communities, trailheads, and private lands. - Short-term minor congestion and reduced availability at existing parking areas prior to completion of new facilities. - Temporary scenic disturbance and reduced privacy for adjacent landowners during construction activities.	Beneficial: - Establishment of a continuous, off-highway multi-use corridor between Questa and Red River, improving regional connectivity and public safety. - Enhanced year-round recreation opportunities and greater dispersion of use across Carson National Forest (CAF) lands, alleviating pressure on existing sites. - Long-term improvements in parking capacity, organized access, and overall visitor experience. - Increased inclusive and adaptive recreation access, and support for active transportation and community well-being. - Potential long-term quality-of-life benefits for nearby communities. Adverse: - Increased visitation may result in periodic strain on recreation and parking facilities (both on National Forest System (NFS) and adjacent public and private lands) during peak periods. - Residual potential for user conflicts, off-trail use, trespass, and localized resource degradation, even with required Project Design Criteria (PDC) in place. - Long-term privacy concerns for adjacent private properties where the trail corridor is in close proximity. - Localized scenic contrast in open terrain.
Designated Areas	Beneficial: - Improved access to the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness via enhanced connectivity to the Columbine Trailhead. - Increased visibility and awareness of nearby Designated Areas as construction progresses and formal access routes become more apparent. Adverse:	Beneficial: - No direct effects to Columbine-Hondo Wilderness; the proposed trail remains outside the boundary and does not introduce development into the wilderness. - Maintains wilderness characteristics (untrammled, natural, undeveloped, opportunities for solitude) with only minor, indirect change. - Enhanced access to Wilderness and National Recreation Trail



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Resource	Short-Term Effects (Beneficial and Adverse)	Long-Term Effects (Beneficial and Adverse)
	- Temporary construction-related disturbances (noise, traffic, equipment staging) along the Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway corridor. - Localized, short-term scenic disturbance due to vegetation clearing, exposed soils, and construction equipment. - Temporary increases in traffic near entrances to the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness (e.g., Columbine Trailhead and Columbine Canyon Campground).	opportunities through improved approach routes and trailhead connectivity. - No impact on the eligibility or Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) of the eligible Columbine Creek National Wild and Scenic River (NWSR) segment due to avoidance and protective design features (e.g., bridge crossing). - Improved recreation connectivity along the Enchanted Circle National Scenic Byway, enhancing access to nearby public lands and trailheads.
Socioeconomics	Beneficial: - Limited, temporary economic activity associated with local construction spending and contractor presence. Adverse: - Temporary disruptions to recreation-based uses (fishing, camping, hunting, off-highway vehicle use, etc.) along the Red River corridor during construction, including associated reductions in access and potential displacement of users. - Potential short-term operational impacts to outfitter-guide permittees due to reduced access or altered use patterns, requiring schedule or location adjustments. - Localized reductions in visitor activity at temporarily closed recreation sites, including corresponding short-term declines in related economic activity.	Beneficial: - Improved connectivity between Questa and Red River, enhancing access to public lands and community cohesion. - Expanded multi-use recreation opportunities that support sustained local economic activity, including increased patronage of small businesses. - Supports long-term economic resilience in traditionally underserved and economically transitioning communities (e.g., Questa following the Chevron mine closure). - No disproportionate long-term socioeconomic impacts on traditional communities. Adverse: - Increased visitation may create modest long-term demands on municipal services and infrastructure.
Cultural Resources	Beneficial: None. Adverse: None.	Beneficial: The proposed trail's construction and use would not pose a threat to impact the qualities of two sites recommended to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). As such, a finding of "historic properties affected—not adverse" is recommended. Adverse: None.
Wildlife	Beneficial: None.	Beneficial:



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Resource	Short-Term Effects (Beneficial and Adverse)	Long-Term Effects (Beneficial and Adverse)
	Adverse: - Temporary disturbance and displacement of wildlife (including migratory birds) during construction due to noise, vegetation clearing, and increased human activity. - Localized, short-term habitat disturbance near work areas.	- No effect on federally listed species, as no habitat or occurrences are present. - Trail siting and design features minimize long-term habitat disturbance. - Ongoing reclamation at the Chevron Questa Mine contributes to broader habitat improvements in the region. Adverse: - Increase in human presence may result in localized, sustained wildlife avoidance, though similar disturbance already occurs from New Mexico State Road 38 and developed sites. - Minimal incremental disturbance to wildlife (including migratory birds) during trail use, with effects expected to remain limited due to abundant surrounding habitat. - Combined activity from the proposed trail, mine reclamation, and potential Fawn Lakes Campground reconstruction may reinforce existing patterns of wildlife displacement along the corridor.
Soils	Beneficial: - None. Adverse: - Localized soil compaction, rutting, and surface erosion from ground-disturbing construction activities, particularly on steep slopes, saturated soils, and areas with hydrothermic scars. - Increased risk of sediment movement where construction intersects drainage features. - Soil disturbance in loose, gravelly, or unstable substrates requiring stabilization.	Beneficial: - Trail alignment and field-fitting minimize disturbance to the most erosion-prone soils, reducing long-term maintenance needs. Adverse: - Ongoing trail use may continue to compact soils and increase runoff in susceptible areas. - Segments on steep slopes, hydrothermic scars, or loose soils may experience recurring erosion and require periodic maintenance.
Hydrology	Beneficial: - None. Adverse: - Ground disturbance during construction could temporarily	Beneficial: - Construction of a defined trail corridor would reduce informal off-trail travel in sensitive wetland areas. - Trail design, including bridges and post-construction stabilization, would



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Resource	Short-Term Effects (Beneficial and Adverse)	Long-Term Effects (Beneficial and Adverse)
	increase erosion and sediment transport near the Red River, Columbine Creek, and Pioneer Creek. (However, these effects would be minimized through a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP).	maintain existing drainage patterns and watershed function. Adverse: Minor permanent wetland impacts may occur at isolated crossings if full avoidance is not achievable.

Effects on Public Health and Safety

The Proposed Action is not anticipated to result in adverse impacts to public health or safety. By creating a safe, off-highway multi-use trail, the project would reduce existing hazards along New Mexico State Road 38 and improve travel between Questa and Red River. Required PDC, including erosion control, bridge crossings, and durable trail surfacing, would minimize risks related to steep slopes, unstable soils, and water features. Short-term construction effects (e.g., noise, dust, and equipment traffic) would be temporary and managed through standard safety measures, and access to existing recreation sites would be maintained. In the long term, the designated corridor and improved parking would enhance emergency access and reduce unsafe roadside activity. The project would not disproportionately affect low-income, traditional, or culturally significant communities. Overall, the Proposed Action would improve safety conditions and would not introduce significant new risks.

Effects That Would Violate Federal, State, Tribal, or Local Law Protecting the Environment

The Proposed Action would not violate any Federal, State, Tribal, or local law or requirement. The CAF has conducted the required Tribal consultation for the project, and no portion of the proposed trail would cross or disturb Tribal lands. No concerns were identified that would preclude the project, and any considerations raised through consultation have been incorporated into the project design and environmental review. The Proposed Action complies with all applicable laws and regulations, including the National Historic Preservation Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Clean Water Act. (Refer to the Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations section for more detail.)

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

The decision to implement the proposed project is consistent with the 2022 Carson National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (2022 Forest Plan), as required under the [National Forest Management Act of 1976](#). The project also complies with all other applicable laws, regulations, and Forest Service policies. Site-specific PDC and applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines would be applied to ensure the project supports Forest Plan goals and desired conditions.

Other Applicable Laws

Decisions by jurisdictions to issue or to not issue approvals related to this proposal may be aided by the analysis presented in this Final EA (per [40 CFR § 1502.25\[b\]](#)). While the Forest Service assumes no responsibility for enforcing laws, regulations, or ordinances under the jurisdiction of other governmental agencies, Forest Service regulations require conformance with applicable laws and conditions imposed by other jurisdictions. Based on information disclosed in the Final EA (refer to corresponding [3. Environmental Impacts](#)) and materials contained in the project file, no federal, state, or local laws, regulations, or requirements for protection of the environment would be violated with implementation of the Proposed Action. The applicable laws include:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife [Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation](#);



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- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [Clean Water Act 404 Permit](#);
- SHPO [National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 Consultation](#);
- [National Environmental Policy Act of 1969](#);
- [National Forest Management Act of 1976](#);
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [Clean Air Act](#);
- [Executive Order 13186 \(Migratory Bird Treaty Act\)](#);
- [Executive Order 14072 \(Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies\)](#);
- [Executive Order 11990 \(Protection of Wetlands\)](#); and
- [Executive Order 11988 \(Floodplain Management\)](#).

Administrative Review and Objection Rights

The Questa to Red River Trail Project is subject to the objection processes pursuant to [36 CFR § 218.8](#) (project-level components objection), subparts A and B.

Objections, including attachments, must be filed with the appropriate reviewing officer within 45 calendar days following publication of this notice in the *Taos News*, the newspaper of record. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Objectors should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. It is the objector's responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer pursuant to [36 CFR § 218.9](#). The regulations prohibit extending the time to file an objection.

Objections will only be accepted from those who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or the Draft EA comment periods in accordance with [36 CFR § 218.5\(a\)](#). Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless the issue is based on new information arising after the designated comment opportunities.

Objections, including attachments, must be sent by one of the following methods:

- **Electronically:** Electronic comments are preferred and can be submitted on the project website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r03/carson/projects/67508> (under the heading "Get Connected," select Comment / Object on Project).
- **By Email:** in Adobe (.pdf), MS-Word (.doc or .docx), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), or hypertext markup language (.html) to: objections-southwestern-carson@usda.gov (please include " Questa to Red River Trail Project" in the subject line of your email).
- **By Mail:** Amy Simms, Questa District Ranger, Carson National Forest, c/o Jessica Barela, Attn: Questa to Red River Trail Environmental Assessment Project, 208 Cruz Alta Road, Taos, New Mexico, 87571.
- **In-person:** Office hours, for those who wish to hand deliver their comments to the Questa Ranger District Office at 184 State Hwy 38 in Questa, New Mexico, 87556, are Wednesdays 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., 12:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

The objection must contain the minimum content requirements specified in [36 CFR § 218.8\(d\)](#):

1. The objector's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
2. A signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for email may be filed with the objection);
3. When multiple names are listed on an objection, identification of the lead objector (verification of the identity of the lead objector shall be provided upon request);
4. The name of the proposed project, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the name(s) of the National Forest(s) and/or Ranger District(s) on which the proposed project will be implemented;



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5. A description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider; and
6. A statement that demonstrates connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity and the content of the objection

Incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided in [36 CFR § 218.8\(b\)](#). All eligible objections are available for public inspection.

Implementation

If no objection is filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may begin on, but not before, the 5th business day following the close of the objection filing period ([36 CFR § 218.12\(c\)\(2\)](#)). If an objection is received, implementation may occur immediately following the close of the objection resolution period ([36 CFR § 218.12\(a\)](#)).

Contact

For further information concerning the Questa to Red River Trail Project, contact Amy Simms, District Ranger of the Questa Ranger District, at amy.simms@usda.gov or 575-758-6200.

Amy Simms
Questa District Ranger
Carson National Forest

Date