



## **SECTION 03**

**CLOSING THE PHYSICAL GAP**

# INTRODUCTION

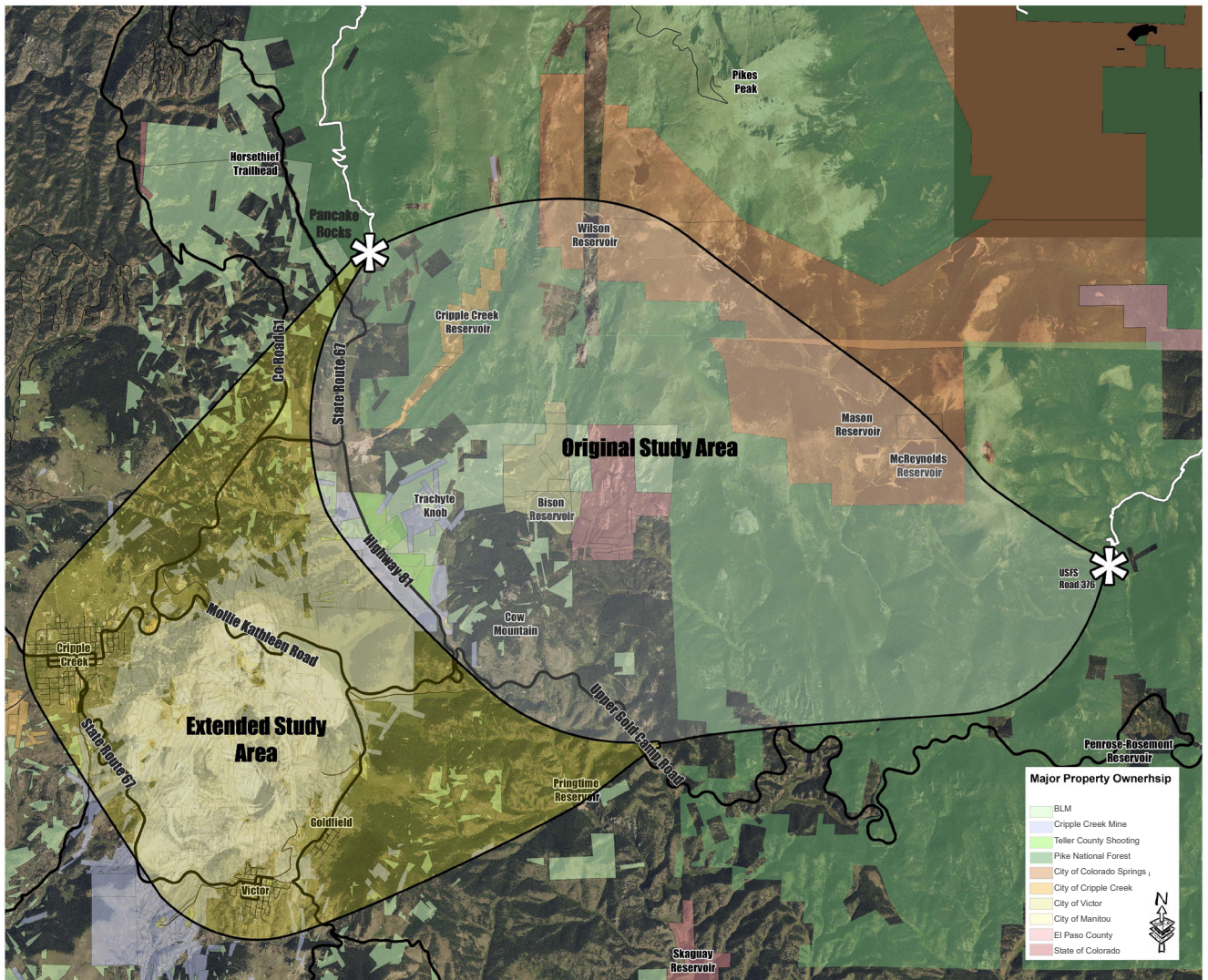
Located between Pancake Rocks and the gate to the South Slope, the southwest gap is composed of multiple jurisdictions, sensitive wildlife habitat, protected natural resources, critical watersheds, challenging terrain and numerous private properties. To navigate the trail corridor alignment obstacles of this gap in the Ring, a comprehensive effort was undertaken to understand the environmental, cultural and political landscapes present in the study area identified in Exhibit 3.1. The findings from analysis and study in tandem with the desires and concerns expressed by the community and stakeholders guided the design and evolution of the proposed trail corridor from broad sweeping strokes to the refined proposed trail corridor alignment presented in this Plan.

# STUDY AREA

The overall study area for potential trail corridors to close the southwest gap in the Ring, as illustrated in Exhibit 3.1, includes the south and southwest slopes of Pikes Peak, from the forested foothills near Cripple Creek and Victor to the alpine tundra near the Peak's summit. Elevations range from about 8,800 feet to about 12,000 feet. The terrain is rugged characterized by steep cirque valleys and dramatic rock outcrops up high transitioning to forested foothills and open meadows in the lower elevations. Above treeline at about 11,500 feet a broad expanse of alpine tundra, undulating through valleys and ridges extends to the 14,115-foot summit of the Peak. Streams in the study area drain to the southwest and southeast through a series of lakes and reservoirs that store municipal water supplies for Cripple Creek, Victor, and Colorado Springs. With more than 3,000 feet of elevation relief on the slopes of Pikes Peak, the study area contains a broad spectrum of vegetation communities and ecological life zones.



Exhibit 3.1



# KEY ISSUES & CONSIDERATIONS



## Wildlife Habitat & Sensitive Ecosystems

New impacts to undisturbed areas along the proposed trail corridor are carefully evaluated. A broad range of wildlife species common to the Rocky Mountains are present. Trail development in certain locations may have disproportionate impacts to sensitive species that occur in those areas.



## Watershed Protection

Streams in the study area drain to the southwest and southeast, through a series of lakes and reservoirs that store municipal water supplies for Cripple Creek, Victor, and Colorado Springs. The protection of watersheds is a priority for this master plan in accordance with the 1999 Multi-Use Plan and is a common theme from public and stakeholder feedback.



## Topography

The study area is characterized by steep cirque valleys and dramatic rock outcrops up high, transitioning to forested foothills and open meadows in the lower elevations. Undulating contours through valleys and ridges extend to the summit of Pikes Peak.



## Geopolitical Advocacy

The study area crosses many political and organizational jurisdictions and property ownership scenarios. Federal, state, local, Newmont Mine and private properties create a diverse challenge to establish relationships and advocate for the closure of the southwest gap.



## Trail User Experience

There are multiple points of view to trail design and etiquette. It is important that the many users reach a compromise on how to respect and work with the various trail user groups. Compromise, outreach and education will be key to successful user experiences along the proposed trail corridor.



## Economic Development

Victor and Cripple Creek want to establish new avenues for outdoor recreation tourism. It will be important to identify access points and other opportunities along the trail corridor that act as a magnet for adventure seekers and become an economic driver for the region.

# NATURAL RESOURCE ANALYSIS

The study area is a diverse mosaic of forest and shrub land communities. In disturbed meadow areas high quality under-story grasses are present often dominated by introduced grasses. Upper elevation forests contain patches of high quality under-story grasses. The noxious A list weed myrtle spurge occurs sparingly; there are no other significant infestations. Thoughtful trail planning and social trail restoration can improve the existing native vegetation. Ongoing forest and weed management is important. New impacts to undisturbed areas should be carefully evaluated. New trail development and recreational use may have impacts to site-specific environmental resources. Construction of the physical trail-tread may have localized impacts on soils and vegetation, while the introduction of recreational use to previously undisturbed habitats may have broader impacts to wildlife. More specifically, trail development in certain locations may have disproportionate impacts to sensitive species that occur in those areas.

Most of the upper elevations of the study area are included in Potential Conservation Areas (PCAs), as designated by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. These are areas that include an assemblage of rare or sensitive species and are important in conserving biological diversity. They are not a regulatory designation. The PCAs identified in the study area are described below.

- Pikes Peak PCA – (B1: Outstanding Biodiversity Significance). This designation is based on the occurrences of several rare or imperiled plant species, natural communities and bird species. Sensitive natural communities include timberline forests, alpine meadows, alpine fellfields, and subalpine riparian willow carr, while rare plant species include Pikes Peak spring parsley, James’ telesonix, Rocky Mountain columbine, arctic draba and alpine bluebells. Sensitive bird species in the area include brown-capped rosy-finch and white-tailed ptarmigan.
- Sheep Mountain at Bison Reservoir PCA – (B3: High Biodiversity Significance). This designation includes a small site on a tributary of Bison Creek and is based on an occurrence of riparian shrubland community dominated by Bebb’s willow and wolf willow.

- East Fork West Beaver Creek PCA – (B4: Moderate Biodiversity Significance). This designation is based on an alpine willow scrub community and associated habitat in a high-elevation subalpine valley.

## WILDLIFE HABITAT

The ecosystems of the study area provide habitat for a broad range of wildlife species that are common to the Rocky Mountains. Lower elevation forests and meadows are home to large mammals such as elk, mule deer, and bighorn sheep, various carnivores, including mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, red fox, skunk and weasel, and small mammals, including squirrels, voles and pika. A variety of bird species occupy the area ranging from small passerines to raptors and accipiters. Because habitat fragmentation is particularly difficult to repair, planning and management of the proposed trail corridor should be designed to maintain habitat connectivity, which is crucial to minimizing fragmentation. Golden eagles have been observed in the study area, which provides suitable nesting habitat among the cliffs and crags. A nest was formerly documented along Oil Creek, but that nest is no longer active. However, continued observations of golden eagle in the area indicate an alternate nest location is present in the vicinity. Other sensitive species believed to occur in the alpine habitats of the study area include brown-capped rosy finch, white-tail ptarmigan and pika.



Photo by Haley Alkin

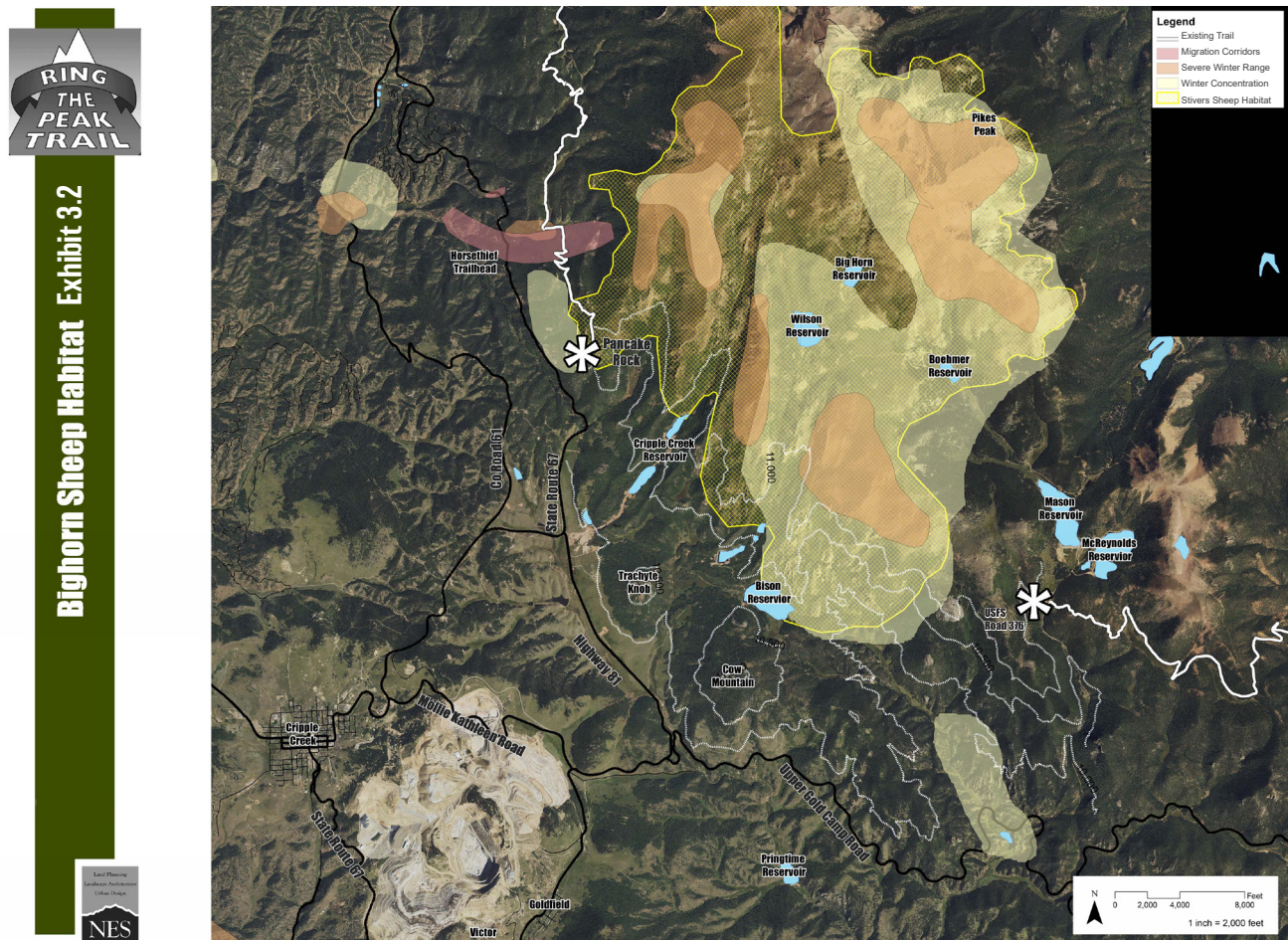
# BIGHORN SHEEP & ELK

Bighorn sheep is the primary wildlife conservation concern in the study area. Pikes Peak is home to a native population of bighorn sheep considered to be a Tier 1 priority herd within the state. The estimated population of the Pikes Peak/Dome Rock herd is currently about 155 sheep, which is significantly down from where it was about 15 years ago and from CPW's population objective for this herd of 240 sheep. This rapid reduction in the population was likely the result of pneumonia outbreaks and subsequently low lamb survival, which can be exacerbated by human recreation disturbances in the relatively limited overall habitat that is available for this herd. Based on CPW's published Species Area Mapping and additional data developed specifically for this project, as shown in Exhibit 3.2, the study area includes the following sensitive habitat areas for bighorn: Priority Bighorn Sheep Area, Winter Range, Winter Concentration Area, Production Area (lambing habitat) and Severe Winter Range. These areas all generally include the portions of the study area above about 10,500 feet in elevation and are used year-round by bighorn. Severe Winter Range is more concentrated around the cliffs and ramparts above Bison Reservoir. The Priority Bighorn Sheep Area mapping was based on actual bighorn

movement and use (telemetry locations from 2007-2013). The extent and overlap of these data layers underscore the importance of the high-elevation habitats within the study area to bighorn and the sensitivity of these areas to new human disturbances.

The elk population in the study area is relatively small, but is found year-round. In general, elk utilize higher elevation habitats on Pikes Peak in the spring, summer and early fall before transitioning to lower-elevation ranges in the winter. Winter Ranges include the lower hills and meadows that include Bison Reservoir, Cow Mountain, and Gillett Flats. Calving habitat for elk has been documented in drainages to the north of the study area. This calving area would be the primary management and conservation concern for elk.

Most of the corridor is located along existing disturbances that would minimize impacts. New trail development – where it occurs - may result in localized impacts to vegetation with increased potential for erosion. Considering the proximity to the Newmont Mine, Cripple Creek, Victor, county roads and other disturbances, new impacts to wildlife would be minimal.



# ADJACENT LAND USES

The study area includes lands managed by numerous public agencies and private individuals as illustrated in Exhibit 3.3. It is important that the proposed trail corridor complements and integrates with the adjacent diverse land uses through the study area. The Ring will foster a sense of connection and community amongst the many entities involved and affected by the closure of the southwest gap.

# USER EXPERIENCE

On a multi-use trail like the Ring, it is important that the many users reach a compromise to respect and work with each other. People are here to protect, promote or preserve some aspect of the project. Having thousands of people visiting might not be considered a benefit to everyone. Compromise is key.

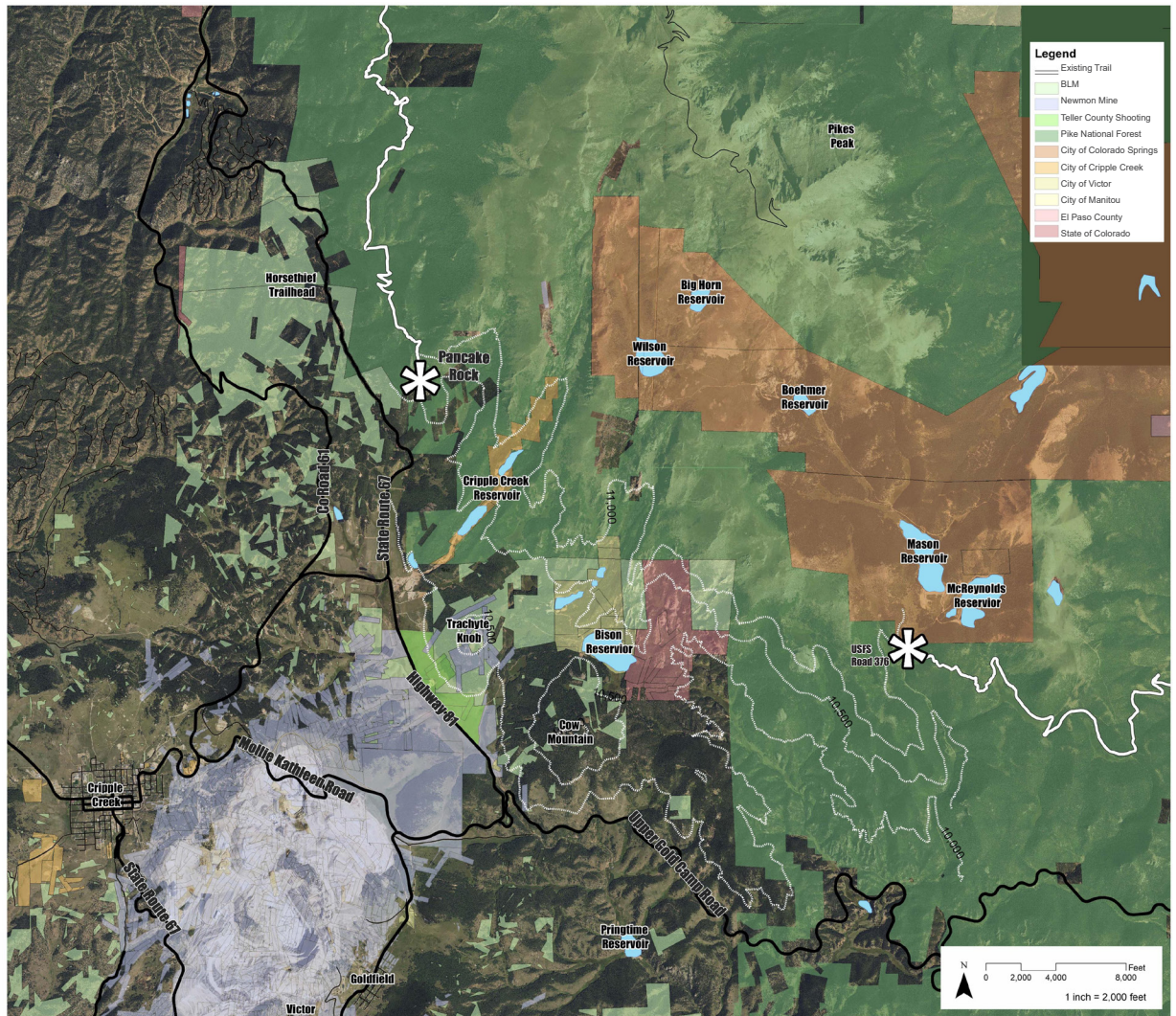
Within the existing Ring, 100% is open to travel by foot, 98% is open to mountain biking, 80% is open to horseback riding, 30% is open to motorized uses and 24% is open for various off-highway vehicle (OHV) use with approximately half of the mileage open to OHV use limited to motorcycles only.

These calculations do not include proposed trails to complete the Ring or the proposed Community Connector. Uses will be permitted in accordance with the desires and policies of the managing authority responsible for each property. Uses other than hiking will be permitted only where the activity can be safely accommodated and the trail is designed and constructed according to accepted standards for that activity.



Ownership Exhibit 3.3

El Paso & Teller County Assessors





# PROPOSED TRAIL CORRIDOR

## OVERVIEW

To identify the preferred alignment for the proposed trail corridor, the three potential corridors, seasonal high, middle and year-round, described in the previous section were examined with the goals and concerns of stakeholders and the public in addition to desktop and field analysis. The high seasonal and middle corridors, in earlier discussions and presentations, were eliminated from consideration due to concerns over watersheds, reservoirs, wildlife, private property, enforcement and seasonal accessibility for short durations at different times of the year. The year-round corridor was selected for the proposed trail corridor because of the following characteristics:

- Greatest chance for success and approval
- Purposeful connections
- Year-round access
- Potential for timely implementation
- Phasing options for trail construction

Planning the overall alignment of the trail corridor to close the southwest gap in the Ring required careful planning with consideration and attention to trail safety, sustainability, construction cost, structural integrity and maintenance.

The trail corridor planning process incorporated the concept of conscientious trail experience and sought to create a destination trail. The proposed trail corridor is designed in response to:

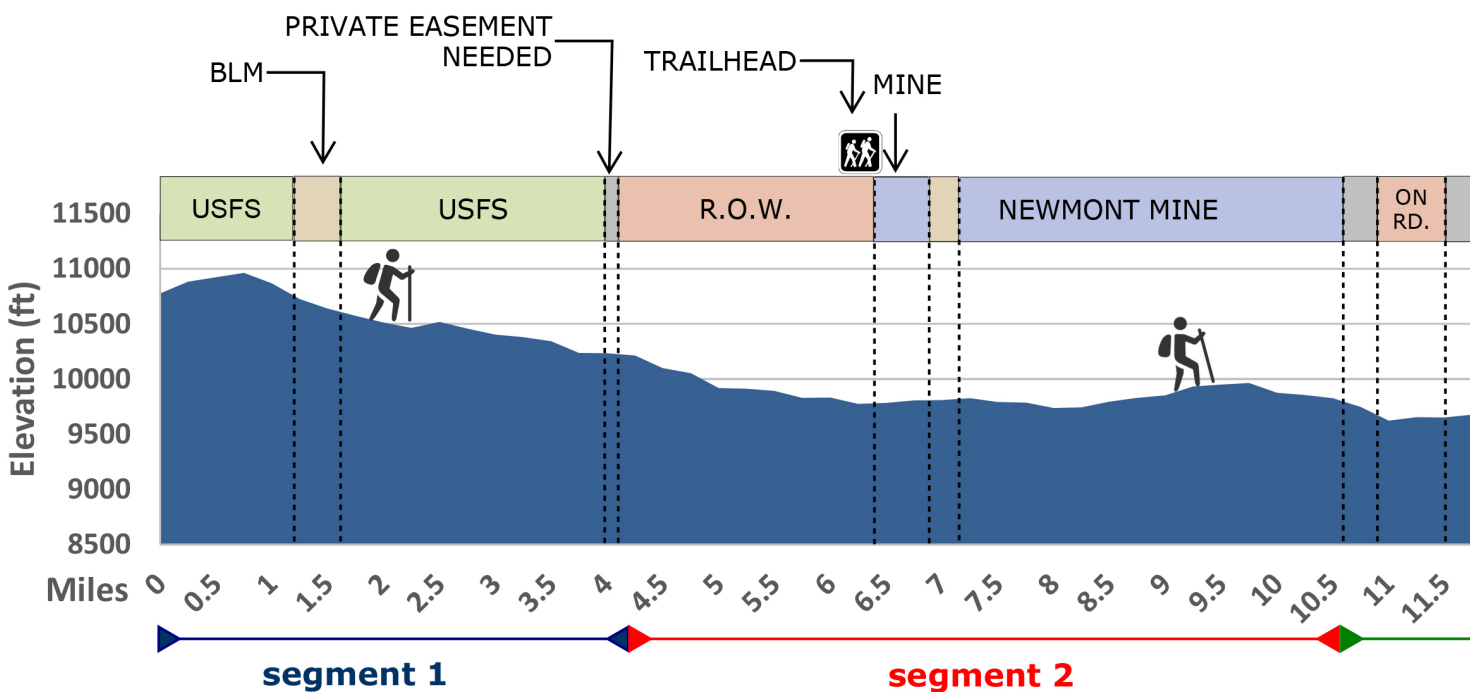
- Community dialogue
- Stakeholder and Project Team input
- Desktop and field analysis

The planning of the proposed trail corridor sought to incorporate the following:

- Be fun and rejuvenating
- Provide passageway not simply a transportation route
- Provide compatibility for various trail user types: hikers, cyclists, horses, runners, day users and full Ring travelers
- Integrate with the land, vegetation and wildlife
- Interact with the environment
- Stimulate inquisitiveness

The proposed trail corridor includes new trail development and construction and follows sections of Gold Camp Road and the former Midland Railroad grade. New impacts to natural resources and wildlife where the proposed trail corridor is along Gold Camp Road and through the Gillett Flats area would be minimal due to relatively high levels of existing human use and disturbance. Trail construction would result in localized impacts to vegetation and soils along the trail corridor. Where the proposed trail crosses streams and riparian habitat, there is potential for localized impacts to

**Exhibit 3.4**



wetlands. This proposed trail corridor does not impact the most sensitive habitats for bighorn sheep or elk.

The proposed trail corridor alignment presented in this Plan traverses through lands with a variety of owners from private to federal. This trail corridor was created with the understanding that partnership with private landowners and trail easements would be critical to the trail corridor’s success. Of the proposed trail corridor, approximately 4.5 miles will require trail easements with private property owners, 1 mile will require a trail easement from Teller County and 2.4 miles will require an access agreement with Newmont Mine.

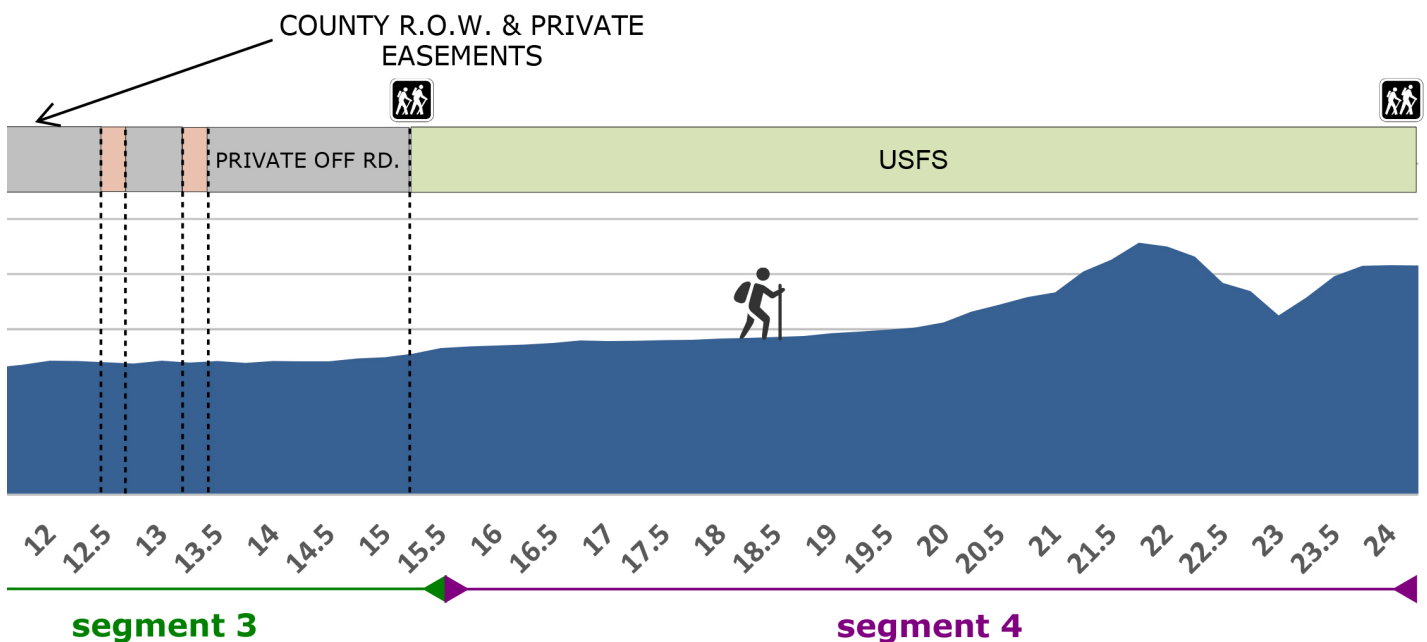
The proposed trail corridor is divided into segments to create a phased system approach to closing the southwest gap in the Ring that is more manageable for implementation, strengthening partnerships and attractive for grant funding. The trail corridor segments were delineated with the following rationales:

- Logical and usable trail segments with recognizable control points at beginning and end
- Distribution of feasible projects along the trail corridor segment that can be implemented from a financial, right-of-way and trail easement acquisition standpoint
- Location of strategic projects along the trail corridor that bring maximum benefit from limited resources
- Distribution of potential trail corridor opportunities to showcase the natural resources of the Pikes Peak region and promote the ultimate completion of the entire Ring

The proposed trail corridor is divided into four segments, between 4.4 to 11.4 miles in length. In addition, the Community Connector trail, 15.1 miles in length, is proposed to connect the City of Cripple Creek and the City of Victor to the Ring. After the map of the overall proposed trail corridor on the next page of this Plan, a map, general description, key findings and action items for each section of the proposed trail corridor follows.

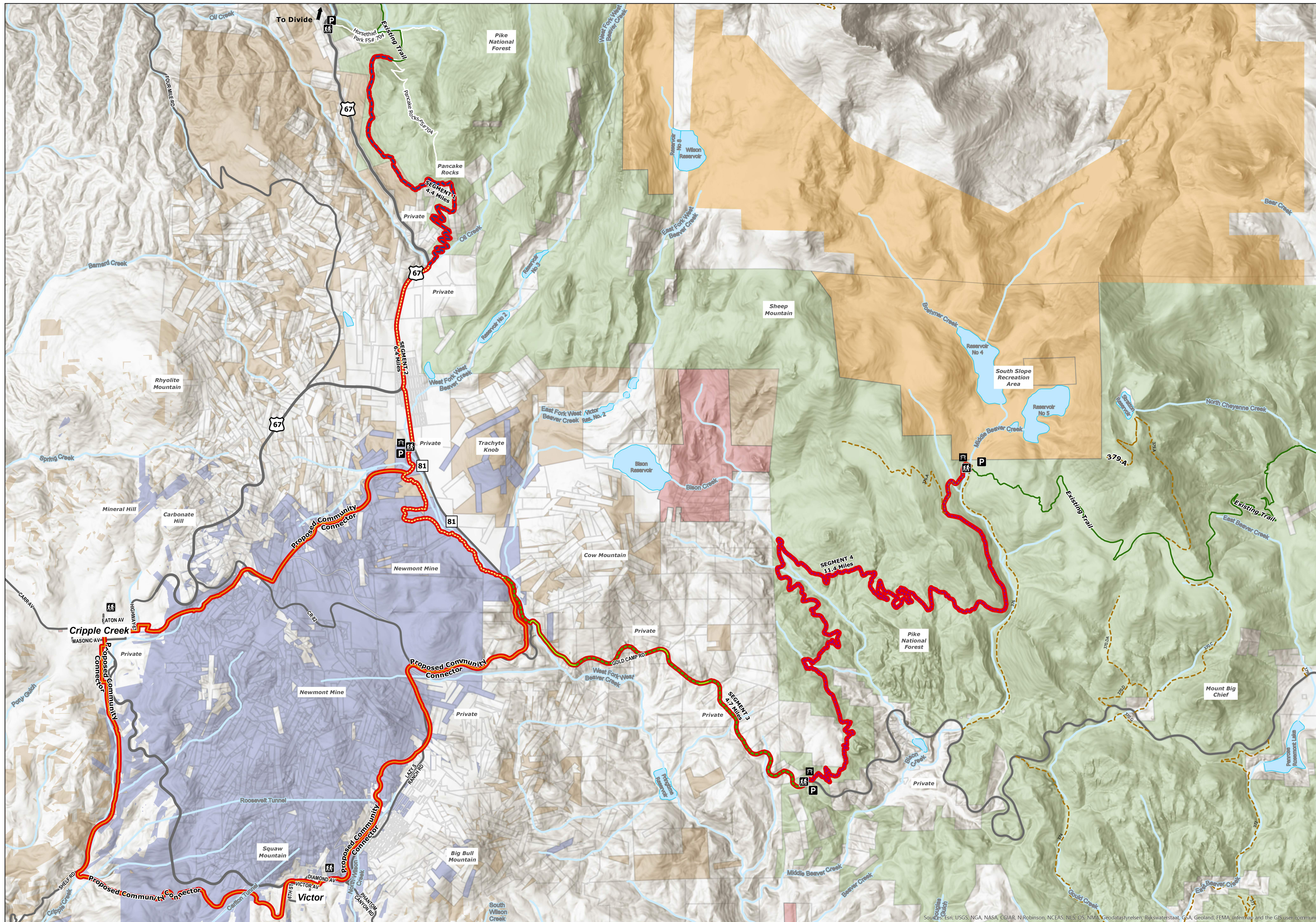
The proposed trail corridor presented on the following page is the next step in fulfilling the Colorado 16 initiative and the culmination of countless hours of dedication and effort on the part of the Project Team, stakeholders, community and Consultant Team. This proposed trail corridor accomplishes the following:

- Provides a tangible approach to implement trail construction and close the southwest gap in the Ring
- Acts as a reference for working with landowners on trail easement acquisition
- Creates the blueprint to guide trail construction
- Serves as an economic development tool for adjacent communities
- Increases fundraising and grant opportunities to support trail construction and future maintenance





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- Trailhead
- Kiosk
- Parking
- Community Connector
- Segment 1
- Segment 2
- Segment 3
- off road segment 3
- on road segment 3
- Segment 4
- Existing Ring Trail
- USFS Roads
- City of Colorado Springs
- State of Colorado
- Newmont Mine
- Pike National Forest
- BLM

Recommended trail corridor to close the southwest gap: **26.9 miles**

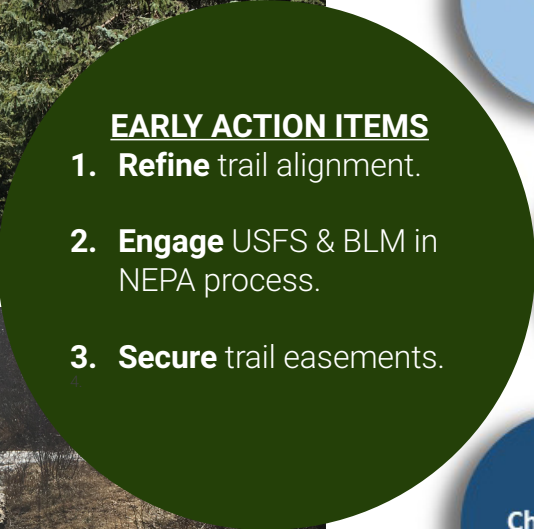
Recommended Community Connector: **15.1 miles**



## Proposed Trail Corridor Exhibit 3.5

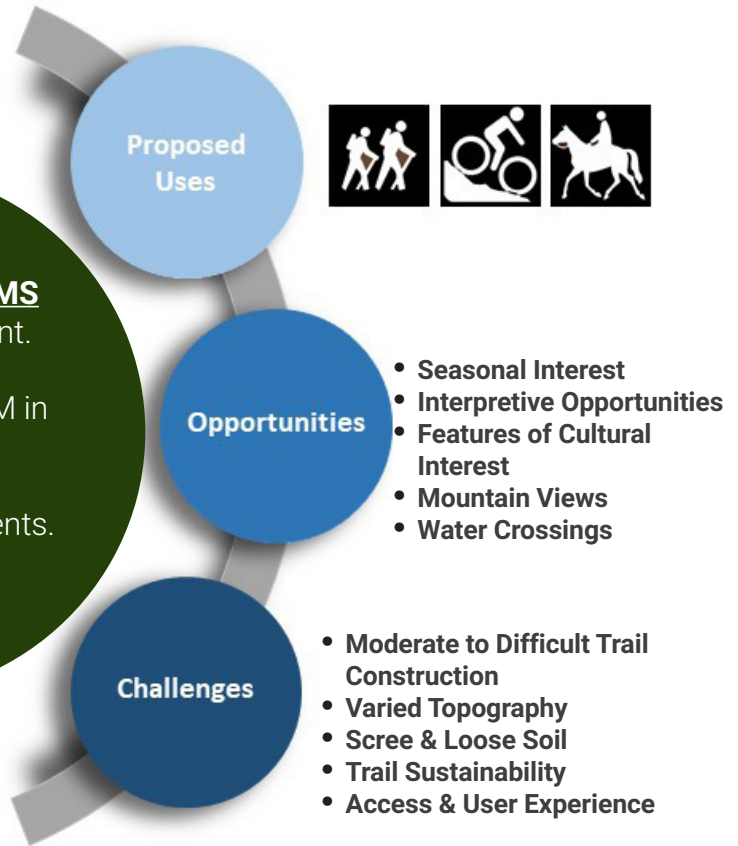


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**EARLY ACTION ITEMS**

1. **Refine** trail alignment.
2. **Engage** USFS & BLM in NEPA process.
3. **Secure** trail easements.



**Proposed Uses**



**Opportunities**

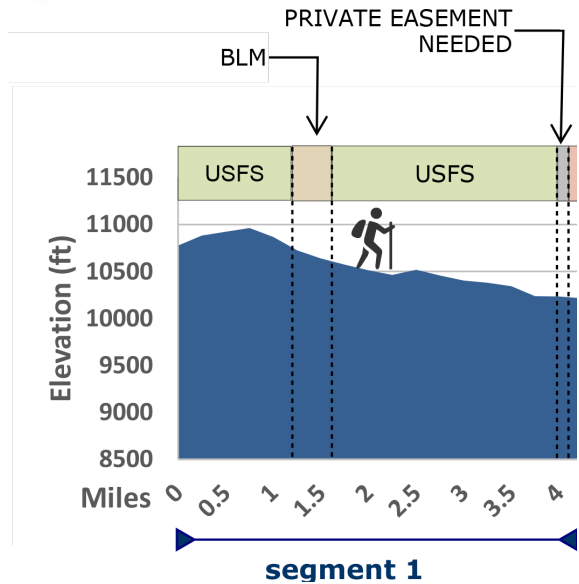
- Seasonal Interest
- Interpretive Opportunities
- Features of Cultural Interest
- Mountain Views
- Water Crossings

**Challenges**

- Moderate to Difficult Trail Construction
- Varied Topography
- Scree & Loose Soil
- Trail Sustainability
- Access & User Experience

# SEGMENT 1

Segment 1 is approximately 4.4 miles in length. This segment branches off the existing trail to Pancake Rocks at the base of the switchbacks and connects to the HWY 67 right-of-way at Oil Creek. This segment of the Ring trail will offer trail users stunning fall colors as they travel through mature aspen groves and views of Pikes Peak and the surrounding countryside. Features of cultural importance and interest include glory holes dug by prospecting miners and felled tree stumps still bearing the mark of pioneer axes. The majority of Segment 1 is proposed on USFS property with a brief passage through BLM property. Near the southern end of the proposed corridor the trail passes through private property for approximately 0.2 miles to safely descend onto the right-of-way of HWY 67, which will require a trail easement. Switchbacks are proposed to address steep slopes in several areas and allow for sustainable and safe passage. Segment 1 connects to Segment 2 at the intersection of Oil Creek and HWY 67.



# SEGMENT 1 OF THE RING

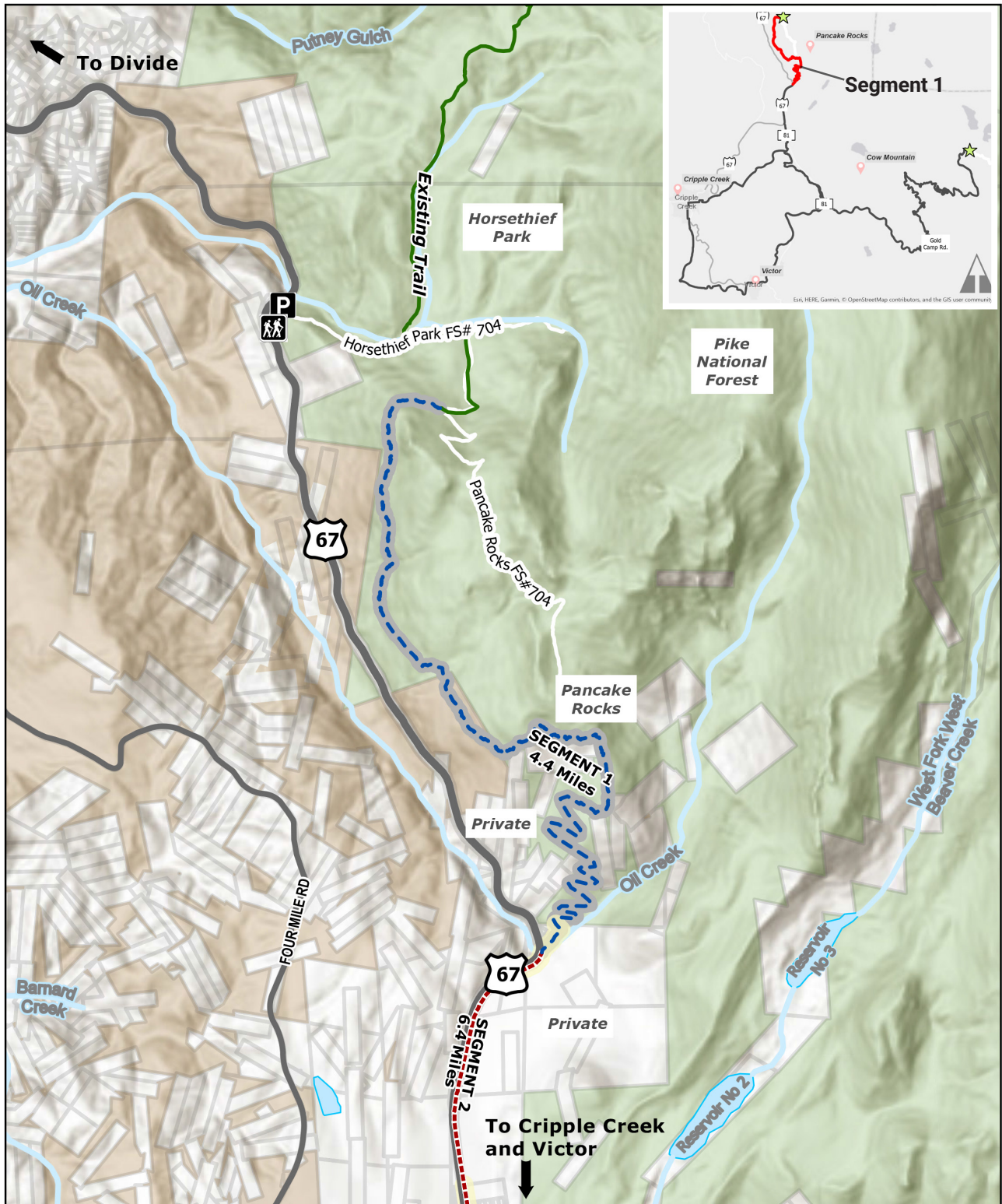
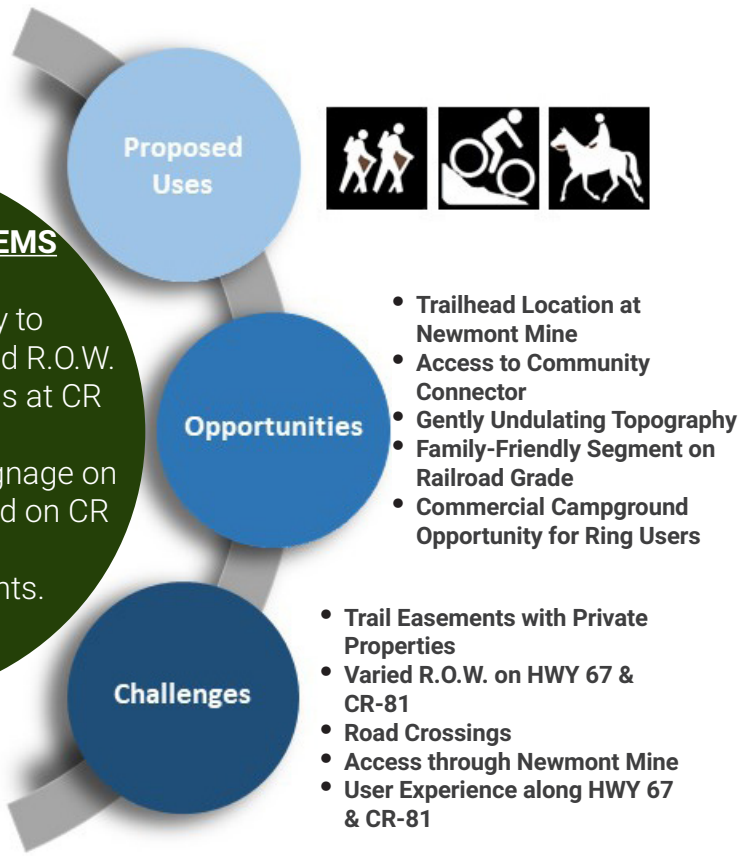


Exhibit 3.6

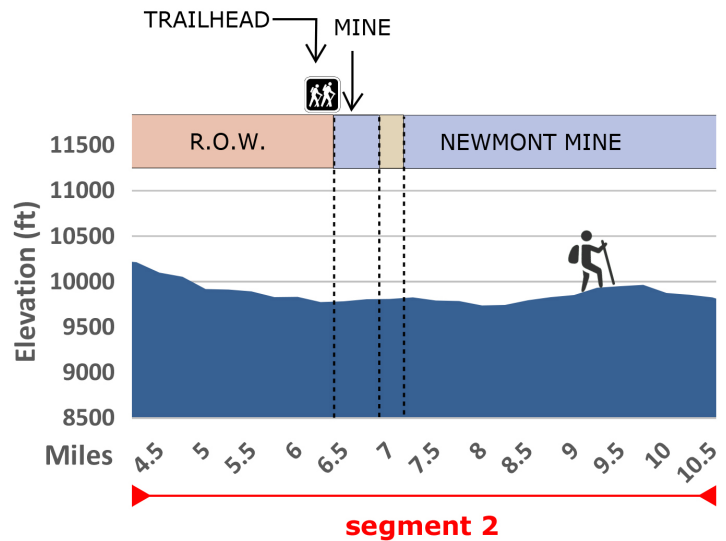


- EARLY ACTION ITEMS**
1. **Refine** trail corridor.
  2. **Engage** Teller County to secure access to road R.O.W.
  3. **Secure** trail crossings at CR 81.
  4. **Install** trail safety signage on HWY 67 and trailhead on CR 81.
  5. **Secure** trail easements.



## SEGMENT 2

Segment 2 is approximately 6.4 miles in length. Segment 2 starts and travels along the right-of-way on the east side of HWY 67 for approximately 1 mile. For the majority of the trail along HWY 67, there is sufficient space between the road and private property to construct a trail buffered from vehicles. Eventually, the right-of-way along HWY 67 narrows and the trail will require easements from private landowners for approximately 0.4 miles. At the intersection of HWY 67 and CR-81, the proposed trail leaves HWY 67 and follows the east side of CR-81. There is insufficient right-of-way along CR-81 for a trail. This section will require trail easements with adjacent private property owners for approximately 0.6 miles. Low traffic volumes and good visibility on CR-81 support use of the shoulder on an interim basis until easements can be secured. A road crossing is needed to access the Newmont Mine property from CR-81. This crossing is highly visible with clear lines of sight for trail users and a strategic location for a trailhead to serve the Community Connector and the Ring. On Newmont Mine property for approximately 2.1 miles the trail corridor utilizes the old Midland Railroad grade until it meets up with Segment 3 at CR-81.



# SEGMENT 2 OF THE RING

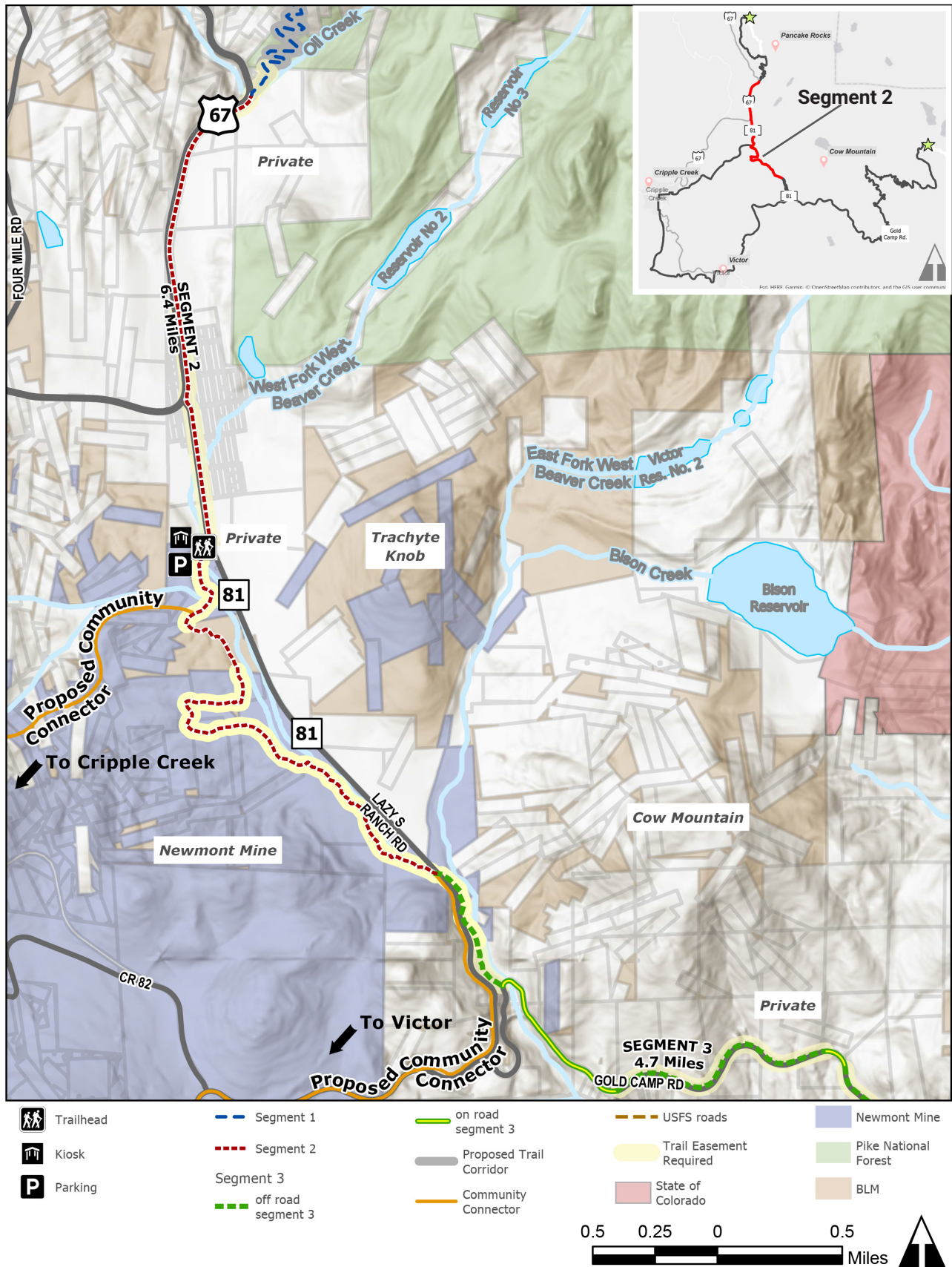


Exhibit 3.7



Photo by City of Colorado Springs

### EARLY ACTION ITEMS

1. **Secure** trail access agreement through Newmont Mine.
2. **Create** clear signage to guide trail users and encourage trail etiquette.
3. **Implement** marketing strategies for Victor and Cripple Creek as Community Portals.

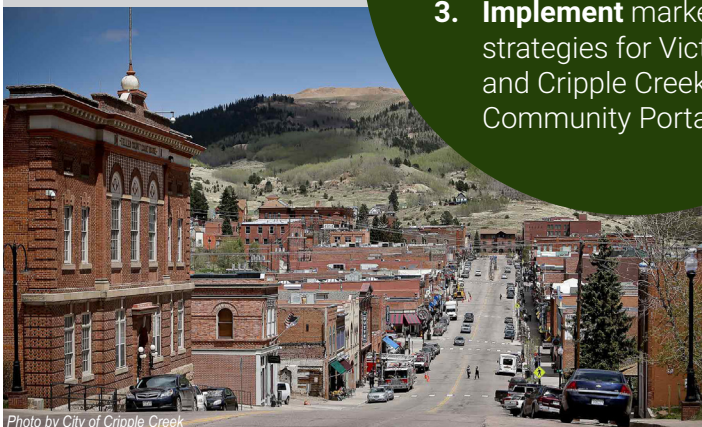


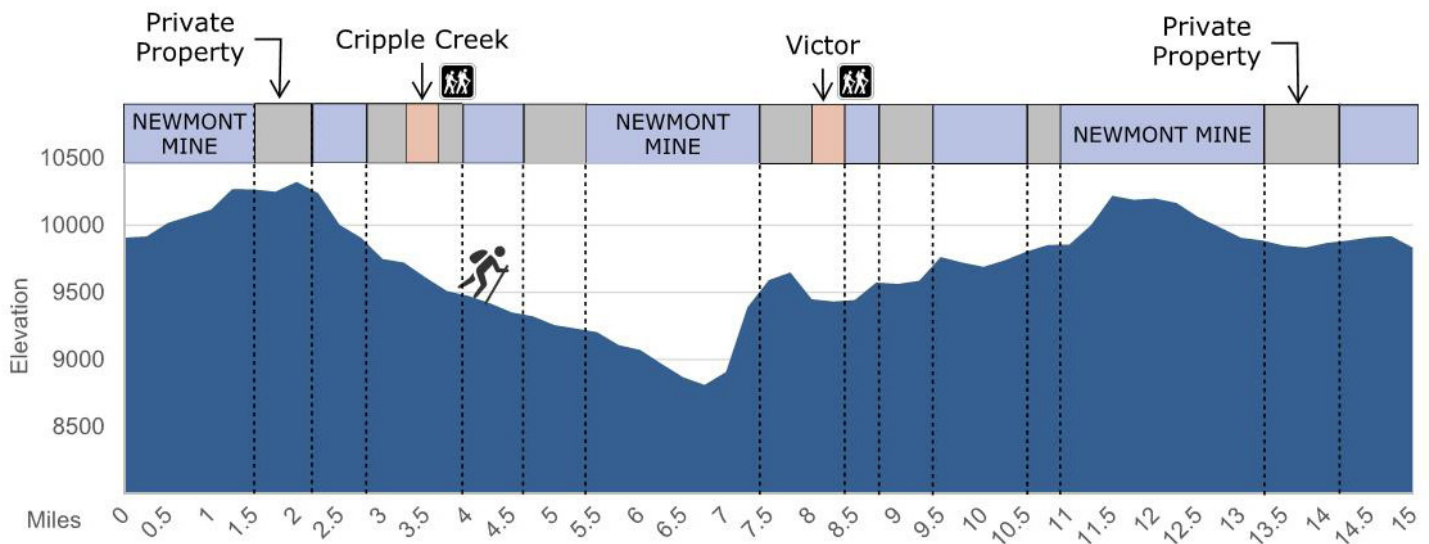
Photo by City of Cripple Creek



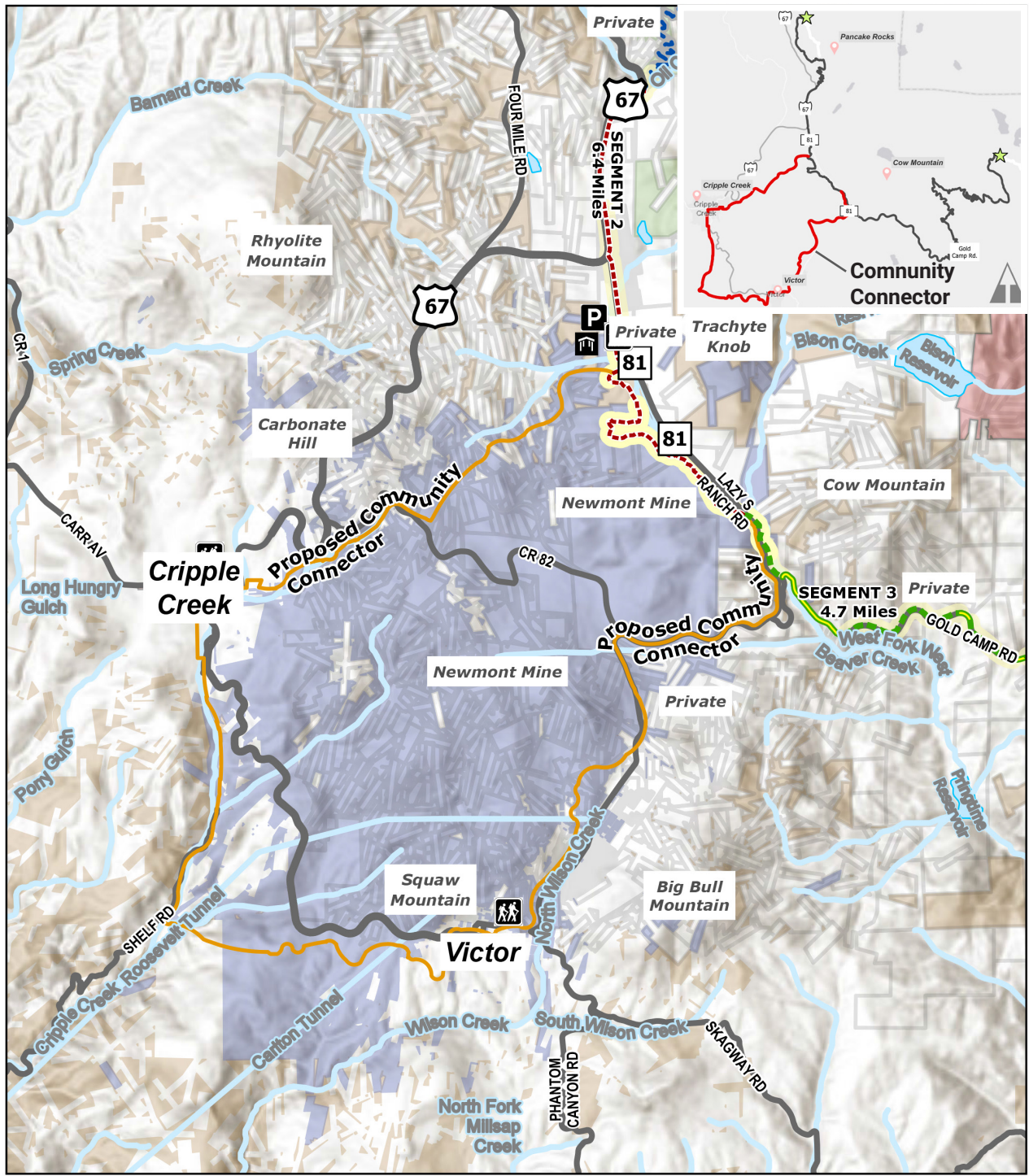
## COMMUNITY CONNECTOR

The Community Connector is a loop off of the Ring trail linking the communities of Cripple Creek and Victor. This segment will utilize existing roads, trails and railroad grades to build upon past and current local trail advocacy efforts. With the construction of the Community Connector trail Victor and Cripple Creek become portals for the Ring creating new economic development opportunities. The Community Connector introduces new and burgeoning avenues of recreation tourism for the towns of Cripple Creek and Victor. The rich cultural history and scenic natural resources of these towns make them exceptional destinations for travel along the

Ring. The communities of Victor and Cripple Creek function as portals to access the Ring creating additional economic opportunities in the form of outfitters, guides, shuttles, bed and breakfasts, restaurants and hotels. Integrating trailheads into the existing parks in Cripple Creek and Victor will increase access and showcase the town's scenic view corridors. The proposed alignment of the Community Connector was provided by Victor and Cripple Creek and is consistent with their community trail plans. The Community Connector will need to be aware and be adaptable to mining operations.



# THE COMMUNITY CONNECTOR



- |  |           |  |                     |  |                   |  |                         |  |                      |
|--|-----------|--|---------------------|--|-------------------|--|-------------------------|--|----------------------|
|  | Trailhead |  | Community Connector |  | on road segment 3 |  | Trail Easement Required |  | Pike National Forest |
|  | Kiosk     |  | Segment 2           |  | Segment 1         |  | State of Colorado       |  | BLM                  |
|  | Parking   |  | off road segment 3  |  |                   |  | Newmont Mine            |  | USFS roads           |

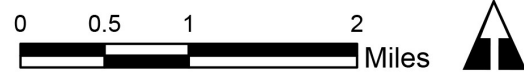


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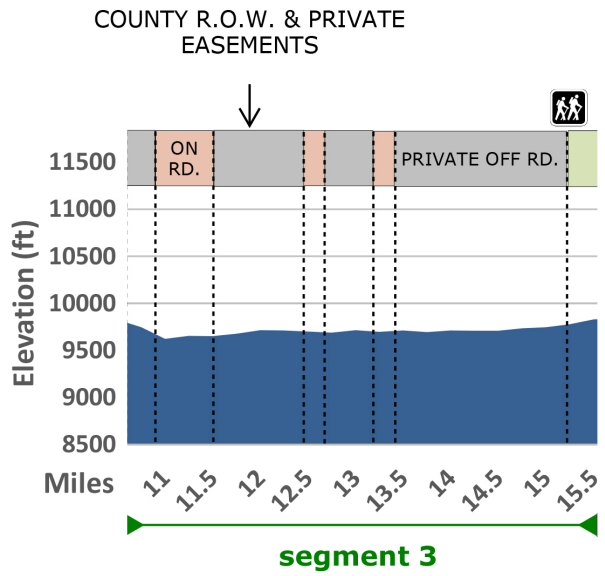
**EARLY ACTION ITEMS**

- 1. Engage** Teller County and USFS to secure trail access on Gold Camp Rd.
- 2. Engage** Teller County to plan and install trail safety standards along roads.
- 3. Create** a pedestrian crossing at CR-81.

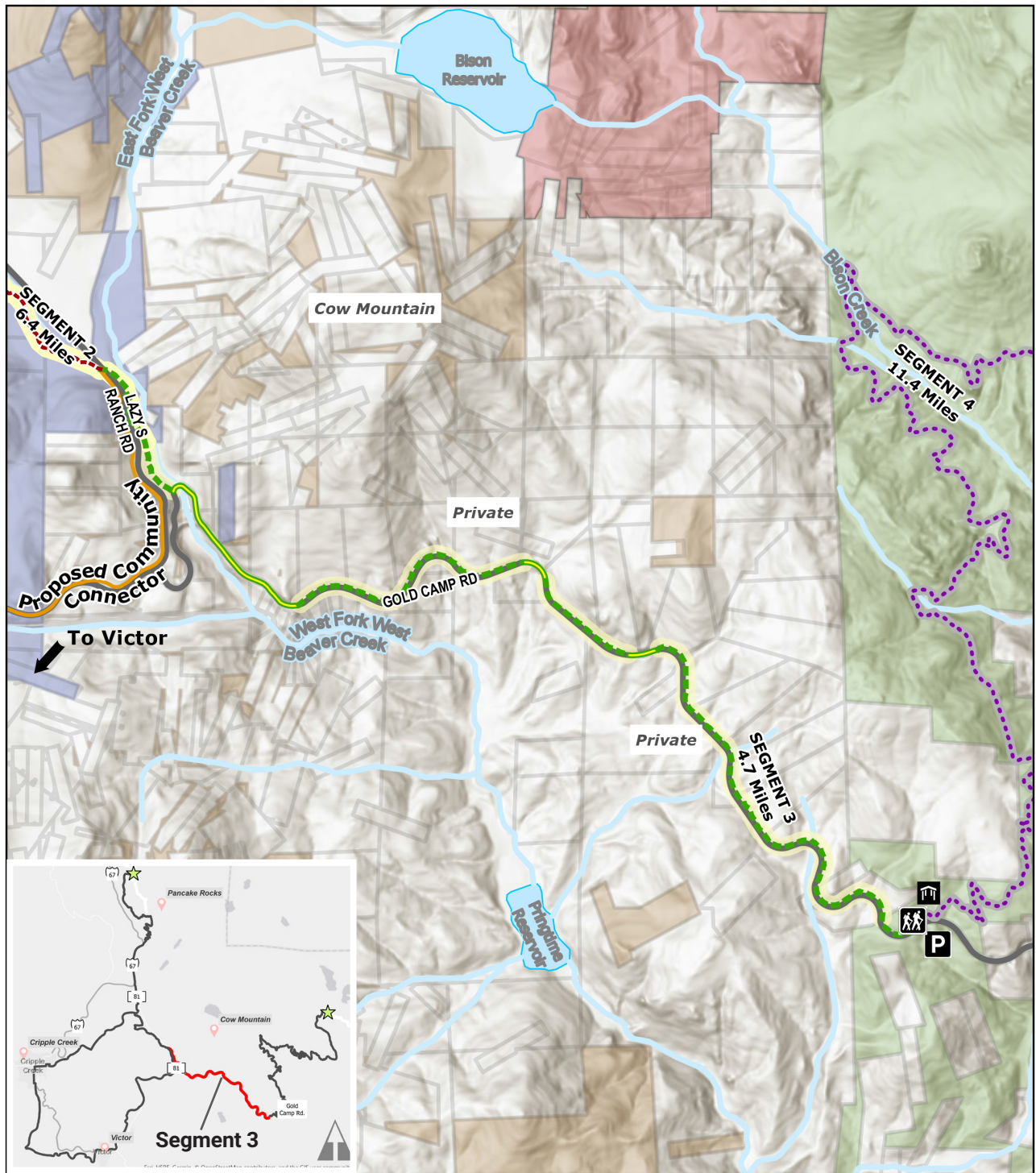


# SEGMENT 3

Segment 3 is approximately 4.7 miles and begins at the trail crossing on CR-81, drops down for 0.3 miles onto Newmont Mine property and connects with Gold Camp Road. This proposed alignment offers clear lines of sight for trail users crossing CR-81 and utilizes an existing pull-off drive on the north side of the crossing. At this point the trail skirts along the site of historic wells that serve the City of Victor. Once the trail corridor joins Gold Camp Road, intermittent vertical rock faces and sheer drop-offs on either side force the proposed trail onto the road in several stretches. Segment 3 finishes on USFS property at an existing pull-off, a strategic trailhead location with opportunities for views, outreach and access. On an interim basis, trail users may travel on the existing Gold Camp Road; however, due to limited visibility, narrow road width and compromised user experience, it is recommended that approximately 3.3 miles of trail easements be secured from property owners along the north side of Gold Camp Road.



# SEGMENT 3 OF THE RING



- |           |                    |                     |                         |                         |
|-----------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Trailhead | Segment 2          | on road segment 3   | Trail Easement Required | Pike National Forest    |
| Kiosk     | Segment 3 Type     | Segment 4           | State of Colorado       | BLM                     |
| Parking   | off road segment 3 | Community Connector | Newmont Mine            | Proposed Trail Corridor |

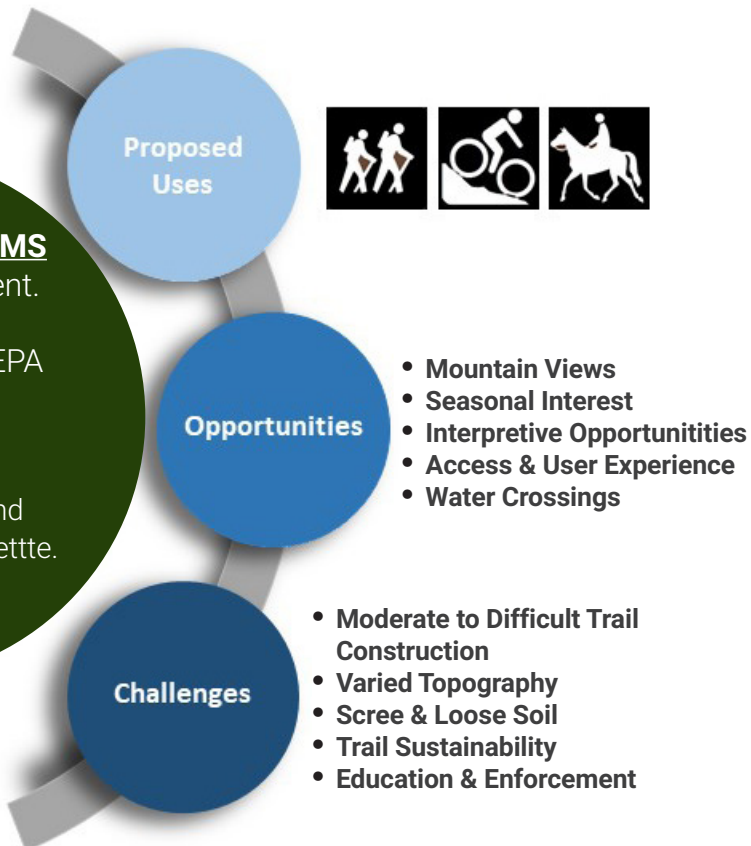


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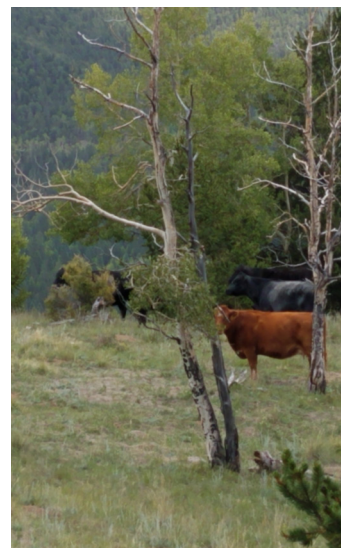
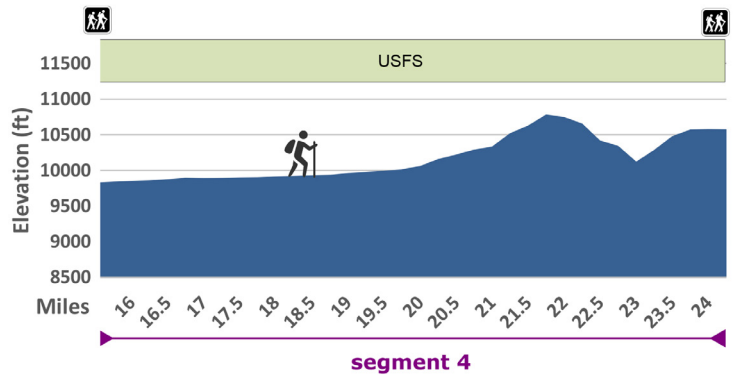
**EARLY ACTION ITEMS**

- 1. Refine** trail alignment.
- 2. Engage** USFS in NEPA process.
- 3. Create** clear signage to guide trail users and encourage trail etiquette.



## SEGMENT 4

Segment 4 is approximately 11.4 miles in length. It begins at the existing entrance to Pike National Forest and remains on USFS property the entire length connecting with trail that is part of the existing Ring at USFS Road 376. Segment 4 has a diverse mix of topography with several challenging ascents that reward trail users with unique views. Segment 4 transitions in several instances from dense canopy cover to wide open spaces. There are a few rock outcroppings that make for excellent picnic spaces to relax and take in the natural setting. Segment 4 is bookended by proposed trailheads and parking areas. The trailheads would include interpretive and educational kiosks to assist in wayfinding and enhance the user experience. Similar to Segment 1, this segment of the Ring will offer trail users stunning fall colors and views of Pikes Peak. Features of cultural importance and interest include glory holes dug by prospecting miners. Switchbacks are proposed to address steep slopes in several areas and allow for sustainable and safe passage.



# SEGMENT 4 OF THE RING

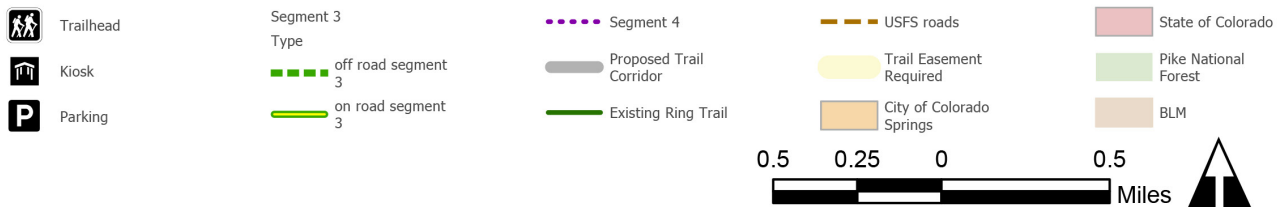
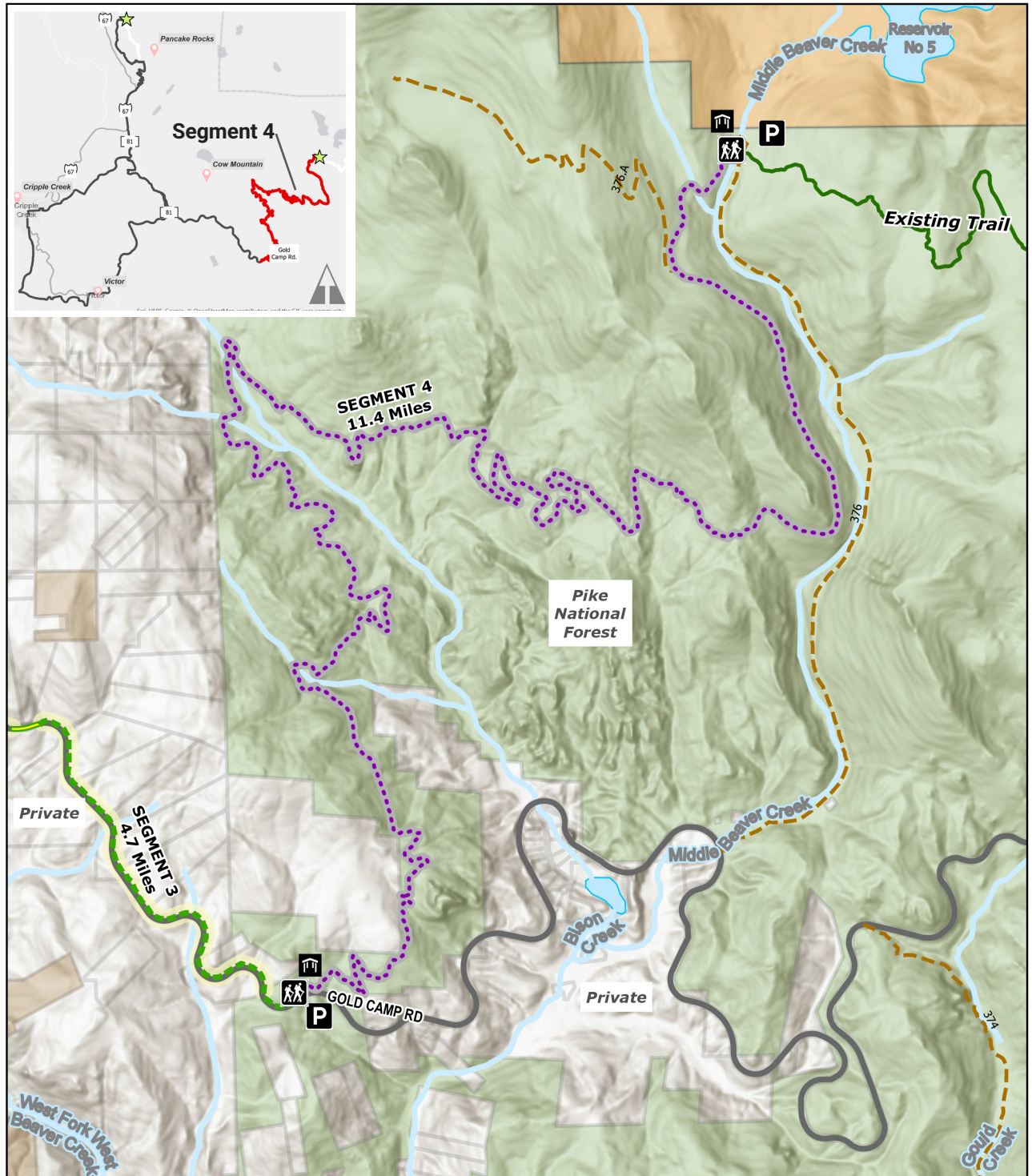


Exhibit 3.10

# Planning Steps Completed to Close the Southwest Gap



Obtain and analyze existing information on affected resources within or near the trail corridors, including expertise of agency staff and data and knowledge from prior nearby projects.



Perform desktop (GIS and research-based) evaluations to identify resource issues and the impacts of proposed trail alignment.



Conduct reconnaissance level field reviews to validate existing information, confirm resource conditions and boundaries, and explore opportunities for avoidance or mitigation.



Work with the Consultant Team and stakeholders to further refine trail alignments to minimize environmental impacts.



Describe the issues, process, data, findings and mitigation measures in the Plan.



Coordinate with CPW staff and bighorn sheep experts to understand and document the issues and the sensitivity of different areas to potential trail impacts.



Utilize available mapping and county records to evaluate private properties and right-of-way opportunities along the trail corridor.



Conduct on site investigations to determine the best proposed trail corridor to close the southwest gap in the Ring.