Environmental Assessment for the Designation of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail

United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management

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The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for the balanced management of the public lands and resources and their various values so that they are considered in a combination that will best serve the needs of the American people. Management is based upon the principles of multiple use and sustained yield, a combination of uses that take into account the long-term needs of future generations for renewable and nonrenewable resources. These resources include recreation, range, timber, minerals, watershed, fish and wildlife, wilderness and natural, scenic, scientific and cultural values.
INTRODUCTION

Background Information

On October 2, 1968, Congress passed the National Trails System Act. This Act called for the establishment of a system of national scenic trails "which will be extended trails so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass." As a result of 1978 amendment to this Act, Congress designated the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) as part of the National Scenic Trail system. The CDNST is a trail route traversing the length of the Rocky Mountains through the states of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico for approximately 3,100 miles in close proximity to the Continental Divide.

Significant Dates for the CDNST -

• 1968 - passage of the National Trails System Act that authorized the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR), Dept. of Interior, to study the feasibility of a CDNST.
• 1976 - BOR finished the study report which recognized the east rim of the Great Divide Basin, in Wyoming, as the recommended general route for the trail.
• 1977 - BOR finishes a Final Environmental Impact Statement on the study report.
• 1978 - passage of National Parks and Recreation Act amending the National Trails System Act and establishing the CDNST. This Act also established an advisory council for the CDNST.
• 1980 - United States Forest Service, along with the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service, begin the public involvement process in preparation for writing a comprehensive management plan.
• 1985 - Comprehensive Management Plan completed.

The legislative mandate and intent of Congress, as outlined in the 1985 Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan), called for the trail to:

- be an extended trail, primarily for hiker and equestrian use, to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, or cultural qualities of the areas through which it passes.
- provide for the continued use of motorized vehicles on portions of the CDNST where such use was allowed by administrative regulations at the time of on-the-ground designation.
- provide for other uses which will not substantially interfere with the nature and purpose of the trail.
use only those lands to the extent necessary for the intended trail purposes and in such a way as to minimize the adverse effects upon adjacent lands and uses. The trail shall be designed to harmonize with and compliment any established multiple-use plans.

The United States Forest Service, as the designated lead agency, in coordination with the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, state and local agencies, and with extensive public involvement, completed the CDNST Comp Plan in 1976. The goal of the plan was to provide a uniform trail management program which reflects the purposes of the National Scenic Trail System. Also, the plan would provide for the use and protection of the natural and cultural resources found along the designated route on lands of all jurisdictions.

The Comp Plan states that the trail will 1) be an extended trail from Canada to Mexico, in proximity to the Continental Divide, that will provide outdoor recreation enjoyment; 2) be designed to harmonize with and compliment established multiple-use plans, and to minimize the adverse effects upon adjacent land and uses; 3) cross segments of private land only where necessary; 4) provide for the continued use of motor vehicles on segments where such use was permitted prior to on-the-ground designation; and 5) use existing trails, primitive roads and cross country travel, and improved roads, where necessary, to avoid private property.

The legislation also provided for the appointment of an advisory council to work with the agencies during the preparation of the Comp Plan. The viewpoint of the advisory council was the trail would:

- provide a scenic trail recreation opportunity that would consist of the trunk primary trail, designated connecting side trails and related public use facilities such as trail heads and campsites.
- be located, developed, and maintained to provide an opportunity to experience and reflect upon the wide variety of scenic, cultural, historic, and physiographic setting characteristic of the Continental Divide and adjacent lands.
- be located, developed, and maintained to a standard commensurate with its national significance, while reflecting local land management objectives.
- cross segments of private land only where necessary.
- be the responsibility of the public entities having principal jurisdiction over respective trail segments.
- be located in such a manner that it will harmonize with and be compatible with the environment, the adjacent land uses, and will be an asset to the existing character of the Continental Divide and the overall experience of the trail user.
- have a "zone of concern" established which will extend up to 50 miles either side of the geographical divide which would be within acceptable limits of intent in establishing the trail.

Public response during the development of the Comp Plan in the early 1980s included the following:

- utilize existing trails and rights-of-ways as much as possible.
- do not overdevelop the trail -- keep it simple -- do not change the current opportunities to experience the wide variety of travel conditions.
- the trail should not dictate the other uses of adjacent lands. Do not adversely affect the current mix of multiple uses that occur adjacent to or within the trail corridor (both on public and private lands). Let people learn about all the activities and uses that occur along the route.
- keep the trail essentially non-motorized, though approximately 45 percent of the route passes through areas that were currently open to motorized use in the early 1980s. (Note: comments received in 1997 from hiker and equestrian trail users indicate acceptance of using primitive two-track roads that are also open to motorized use, since motorized use is so light).
- being able to cope with the natural hazards of wildlands, including the availability of water, is the responsibility of the user. However, land management agencies should make reliable information available to the users so that they can be made aware of what conditions to expect.
- let the natural conditions of access and remoteness determine the levels of use on segments of the trail.

The BLM-administered public lands in Wyoming were specifically identified in the Comp Plan. These lands lie between the Bridger-Teton and Shoshone National Forests, to the north, and the Medicine Bow National Forest, to the south. Of particular interest to the BLM-administered public lands in Wyoming:

- the trail location will follow a route in proximity to the east rim of the Great Divide Basin, as spelled out in the 1976 Bureau of Outdoor Recreation Study Report (BOR).
- the route can use existing trails, primitive roads, and cross countv travel to avoid private land.
- the use of primitive road rights-of-ways was permitted on approximately 218 miles of the proposed CDNST alignment within Wyoming, as identified in the 1976 BOR Study Report.
- motorized use of existing primitive roads which are selected as components of the CDNST system will continue where such use is provided for in the Resource Management Plan for the area.
- the presence or proposed location of the CDNST route will not be an acceptable reason for prohibiting motorized or other specified uses in an area where such use was established prior to the formal location of the trail.

The Comp Plan also specifically identifies the BLM-administered
A need for the Proposed Action

Interest in a trail along the Continental Divide started years before congressional designation of the CDNST in 1978. Earlier, a BOR report on the nationwide trails study recommended the establishment of a national system of trails for those who wish to walk, ride horseback, and bicycle. The 1966 report, offered for consideration a national scenic trail along or near the Continental Divide through the Rocky Mountains. The primary purpose of this trail would be to provide a continuous route designed for the hiker and horseman, but compatible with other land uses.

Following congressional designation in 1978, interest in the CDNST increased with the formation of two organizations that advocate the designation and management of an on-the-ground route along the entire 3,100 miles of the trail. The Continental Divide Trail Society, formed in 1978, produced a Wyoming guide to the CDNST in 1980 and revised it with a supplement in 1993. Though the official trail wasn’t located on the ground yet, the trail guide assisted numerous hikers along the Continental Divide, including through the mixture of public and private lands in the Great Divide Basin of Wyoming. A second group, the Continental Divide Trail Alliance (CDTA), was formed in 1995.

Their mission is to promote, construct, and assist in the management of a primitive trail along the Continental Divide. Working closely with agencies and corporate sponsors, the CDTA’s efforts have elevated the CDNST to a higher level of interest with the public land managers, outdoor equipment retail/manufacturing companies, and the recreating public.

In the 1990s, the number of CDNST inquiries to the BLM offices in Wyoming has increased yearly. These inquiries have risen from a handful in 1990, to several dozen in 1997. Information supplied to the public consists of recommended routes that avoid private land, provide reliable water sources, campsite and mail-drop locations, as well as BLM surface management status maps providing coverage of possible trail routes.

Identification and development of a single route is complicated by the mixed land-ownership pattern encountered between the Bridger-Teton and Shoshone National Forests, to the north, and the Medicine Bow/Routt National Forest, to the south. While some of the BLM-administered public lands are “blocked up”, others are in a “checkerboard” pattern or are intermingled with private parcels which can create difficulties in legally accessing the public lands.

Current users of this segment of the CDNST rarely follow the same route as others. Some follow the state and county roads between the national forests, while others follow existing BLM gravel roads or primitive two-track roads, while others may strike out cross-country. Many consider the desert a highlight of their CDNST experience. Those that venture across private lands are reminded to obtain permission to use the private lands before beginning a trip. However, locating these landowners to obtain permission is not an easy task for people from out of the area.

Current designation of an on-the-ground trail varies from location to location within the five trail states. Approximately 2,000 miles of the trail has been designated, with over 1,000 miles remaining. In Wyoming, the on-the-ground trail was designated on the Medicine Bow National Forest (south of the BLM-administered public land) in 1993. The Bridger-Teton and Shoshone National Forests (north of the BLM-administered public lands) and the BLM Rock Springs office have prepared an environmental assessment, in coordination with the BLM Lander office, for formal designation of a CDNST route. Final approval of the CDNST through this National Forest/BLM-administered public land section of Wyoming was completed in March, 1998. To provide a continuous trail through the remaining BLM-administered public lands in Wyoming, while also reducing potential adverse effects on private lands, a designated on-the-ground route is needed.
Route Location Criteria

Seven location criteria were considered in identifying an on-the-ground route for the CDNST through the BLM-administered public lands in Wyoming.

1. Provide the recreating public a legally accessed route between the Medicine Bow National Forest and Wyoming State Highway 28, near South Pass City, Wyoming, that provides for a quality outdoor recreation experience.

2. Minimize the adverse effects of the trail and its use upon adjacent lands and their use.

3. Design the trail to harmonize with and compliment established Resource Management Plans.

4. Locate the trail within a maximum distance of 50 miles either side of the Continental Divide.

5. To avoid private property as much as possible, locate the trail on existing public rights-of-way including primitive two-track roads, cross country travel routes, or as necessary, improved (non-paved) roads.

6. Provide for the continued use of motorized vehicles on existing vehicle routes, including primitive two-track roads, where such use is provided for in the Resource Management Plan for the area.

7. The trail location should provide for user safety, water sources, scenic quality, and useability without over development of the trail.

Conformance with Land Use Plans

The 1987 Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Lander Resource Area states that the BLM will implement the broad direction set forth in the Comp Plan for designation and management of the CDNST.

The 1990 Great Divide Resource Area RMP states the BLM will manage the trail to provide opportunities for trail users to view the diverse topographic, geologic, vegetative, and scenic phenomena and wildlife that characterize the Continental Divide and to observe examples of human use of the natural resources.

The Green River Resource Area RMP identifies the CDNST to be managed as a special recreation management area to focus management on areas of high recreation values.

The proposed actions and alternatives contained in this environmental assessment are in conformance with the three RMPs.

Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The alternatives, as listed in this document, are also in conformance with the following:

* Public Law 90-543, October 2, 1968, National Trails System Act. Authorized the BOR to complete a feasibility study of a CDNST.

* Public Law 95-625, November 10, 1978, National Parks and Recreation Act, amending the National Trails Act, to designate the CDNST.

* Public Law 96-199 (section 101 (b) (4)), amended section 551 (23) of P.L. 95-625, May 3, 1980. Allowed the expenditure of funds for acquisition of lands or interests in land for the CDNST within the exterior boundaries of existing Federal areas.


PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

The proposed action and alternatives of providing a public accessible route for the CDNST between the Medicine Bow National Forest and Wyoming State Highway 28, near South Pass City, Wyoming, are identified in various segments of the route. All, except one of the alternatives were evaluated during the CDTA's sponsored summer of 1997 "Uniting Along the Divide" volunteer project. The one exception is the proposed action, Divide Peak in Segment 1, Medicine Bow NF to Rawlins, WY, since it was not identified until March, 1998. Maps depicting the proposed action and alternatives are contained in Appendix A. The route is described in a south to north alignment.

Elements common to the proposed action and alternatives include:

1) Designation of the CDNST will be limited to BLM-administered public land and those state or private lands covered in cooperative agreements entered into after appropriate consultation and negotiation that provide for designation of the trail. The route shall be within 50
miles either side of the geographical continental divide (identified as the "zone of concern" in the Comp Plan).

2) Existing two-track roads that are identified for use as the CDNST are identified in the appropriate RMPs, Off Road Vehicle (ORV) designations as available to the use of motorized vehicles, with one exception. The Ferris Mountains Wilderness Study Area (see Segment 4, Highway 287 to Crooks Gap Road, Alternative 2, page 13) is closed to all types of motorized vehicle use year-round. Where the trail utilizes cross-country travel, motorized vehicle use is not permitted. The use of mountain bicycles is limited to existing roads and trails in all situations.

3) Development of a cooperative agreement with the State of Wyoming for the designation and management of state lands as part of the CDNST system will be pursued. See Appendix B for a list of affected state lands.

4) To provide continuity of travel, public access routes (non-designated trail segments) will be identified to provide a link with the designated CDNST segments. These public access routes may include existing rights-of-way for county roads and state highways. Cooperative agreements with the appropriate county and/or state officials will be pursued. The use of county roads and state highway rights-of-way by hiking and equestrian trail users would be subject to state and local laws and regulations that govern such use.

5) Efforts to locate and designate the trail away from public access routes (county roads, state highways) onto BLM-administered public land or state lands will be pursued on a case-by-case basis. This could be accomplished by land exchanges, cooperative agreements between private landowners and the BLM, state, and/or local governments, or by other private entities.

6) While Congress authorized the creation of the CDNST, it did not authorize the expenditure of funds specifically for land acquisition for the trail in areas managed by the BLM. Any consolidation of public lands, while a benefit to the trail, would be for other benefits such as overall manageability of public lands.

7) Signing of the trail will be limited to the level necessary for users to navigate the trail. Signs will be placed at intersections with roads and along cross-country travel segments. To assist in preventing limited incidental trespass of private lands additional signs will be placed along segments with adjacent private land to aid in navigation of the trail. To assist the trail user in identifying and avoiding private lands along the route additional signs would be placed along public access rights-of-way (BLM easements) to identify when one is leaving and entering public land. As needed, in cooperation with the affected county and the Wyoming Transportation Department sign the county roads and state highway rights-of-way to alert vehicle traffic of the possible use of the rights-of-way by trail users.

8) The use of private lands for the trail is avoided for all alternatives, with two exceptions (see Segment 4, Highway 287 to Crooks Gap Road, Alternative 3, Ferris Mountains, page 13, and Segment 7, Sweetwater River to South Pass City, Alternative 3, Willow Creek, Oregon Trail, page 16.)

9) The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service/Wildlife Services (formerly the Animal Damage Control Division) will be notified of the CDNST location on BLM-administered public lands. Mitigation or restriction of animal damage control activities will be suggested to protect the safety of the recreating public.

10) A Title V, right-of-way will be issued to BLM in accordance with 43 CFR 2807- Reservation to Federal Agencies, for the CDNST located on BLM-administered public lands.

11) Potential improvements to existing water sources will be identified in some of the proposed actions and alternatives. Site specific environmental assessments will be prepared with public involvement prior to any improvements occurring. Creating additional water sources specifically for the trail, such as drilling wells, is not planned. The creation of artificial water sources would detract from the harsh desert environment and change the current opportunities to experience the wide variety of travel conditions along the entire 3,100 miles of trail.

12) The development of trailheads will have site specific environmental assessments prepared with public involvement prior to any improvements occurring.

13) Educating the public in outdoor ethics will help reduce the level of impacts to vegetation, soils, wildlife, and the creation of impacts associated with the building of new fire rings in conjunction with use of the trail. Trailhead kiosks, a trail factsheet/brochure, and other information programs can be provided to trail users with signs such as Leave No Trace (LNT) program (see Appendix C for a list of the six principles of LNT.) The LNT principles advocate minimum-impact travel and camping techniques that when followed will aid in reducing impacts caused by trail use.
Locating campsites no closer to water sources than 200' and avoiding spoiling livestock will reduce the instances of temporary displacement of livestock, wildlife, and wild horses from those shared water sources. Trailhead kiosks and a trail factsheet/brochure would emphasize the need to avoid use of private lands without first obtaining permission to use the private lands.

13) The proposed action and alternatives provide an array of route possibilities that were determined from a combination of suggestions from BLM staff, hikers and equestrians, private landowners, and other interested publics. After a route is designated and signed as the CDNST, the public will still have the option to explore other routes (after obtaining any needed permission from private landowners for use of private lands) as they traverse between the two national forests. The public's sense of adventure and exploration would not be hampered regardless of which route is designated from the list of proposed actions and alternatives.

NOTE: Mileage figures listed below for the various segments are estimates for the length of the segment and are for comparison purposes only. Actual distances may vary.

Segment 1 - Medicine Bow National Forest to Rawlins, Wyoming

This segment includes a mixture of public and private lands north of the forest boundary leading into a "checkerboard" mixture of public and private lands. Existing right-of-ways include Carbon County roads, BLM roads with easements through private and state lands, and a state highway. Existing primitive two-track roads also occur in some alternatives.

Proposed Action - Divide Peak (34 miles) - This route would require the Medicine Bow NF to realign the CDNST north from near Divide Peak to a route west/northwest of Divide Peak. The trail would leave the national forest and enter BLM-administered public land to utilize a primitive two-track road that then enters a state section before re-entering public land and accessing County Road 401. A trailhead on BLM-administered public land at the county road, south of Deep Gulch, would be developed. The trailhead could serve as access to the CDNST on national forest land. The route would continue north along the county road for 1 1/2 miles at which point it would utilize a primitive two-track road (east of Smiley Meadow). A combination of cross country travel, to avoid private land, and primitive two-track roads would lead this route to the primitive two-track road along the continental divide (see Alternative 2, Bridger Pass, below). The mileage figure assumed for this route is an estimated portion of the South Highway (Alternative 1) to access Rawlins. However, neither the South Highway (Alternative 1) nor the Bridger Pass Road (Alternative 2) could be used with this route.

No improvements to existing water sources located at Deep Gulch, Truckdrivers Creek, and North Fork of Mill Creek are planned.

Alternative 1 - South Highway (31 miles) - Designation of the CDNST would be deferred along portions of County Roads 405, 500 and 401 and Highway 71 between the Medicine Bow National Forest and north to Rawlins. A cooperative agreement with the Carbon County Commissioners would be pursued to allow signing of the county roads (401, 405 and 500) as a travelway for through hiker/equestrian trail users for accessing the CDNST. Public rights-of-way would be used to provide passage through the mileage of public lands and private lands within this segment. Future proposals to designate the trail along this segment (off of the gravel road, county, state and state paved highways) would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Designation of the trail could follow actions that include land exchanges to consolidate public lands or cooperative agreements between private landowners and the BLM, state, or local governments, and/or private entities for trail rights-of-way.

Leaving the Medicine Bow National Forest this route follows Carbon County Road 405 northeast to Carbon County Road 500. The route continues west approximately seven miles to a primitive two-track road on the continental divide. Heading northwesterly on this primitive two-track road until BLM Road 3422 (The Hydrology Road) is intersected and continuing west on BLM 3422 until Carbon County Road 401 is intersected. The route proceeds north using the county road and State Highway 71 into Rawlins.

The two BLM developed recreation sites at Teton Reservoir and Rim Lake would be identified to trail users to help reduce the occurrence of limited incidental trespass on private land and state land (camping) as trail users seek campsites and water sources. Other water sources along County Road 401, at Sage Creek and in intermittent drainages that cross the road north toward Teton Reservoir, would be identified to trail users also.

No improvements to existing water sources are planned.

Alternative 2 - Bridger Pass Road (44 miles) - At County Road 401, near BLM 3422, this alternative leaves Alternative 1 (South Highway) and utilizes a BLM primitive two-track road to the continental divide and the improved BLM roads that access the Bridger Pass Road (BLM Road 3301). The Bridger Pass Road intersects with County Road 401 approximately 15 miles south of Rawlins. This alternative joins County Road 401 (State Highway 71
into Rawlins (as a travelway not as designated trail).

No improvements to existing water sources are planned.

Alternative 3 - County Road 500 (32 miles) - Same as Alternative 1 except stay on County Road 500, instead of using the primitive two-track road and BLM Road 3422, to intersect County Road 401.

Segment 2 - Rawlins Uplift Trail System

This is the trail system that the City of Rawlins, Carbon County, Rawlins High School, and the BLM Rawlins office are developing under a cooperative agreement. This trail system will have several trailheads throughout the city and serve as a recreation trail for the community. Opportunities for environmental education and interpretation of geology, plant communities, and wildlife are planned for the trail system.

Proposed Action - CDNST Designation - Recommend the inclusion of the Rawlins Uplift Trail System as a segment of the CDNST.

Alternative 1 - National Recreation Trail Designation - Upon completion of the Rawlins Uplift Trail System, designate it as a component of the National Recreation Trails System. The trail system will also be identified as a side trail of the CDNST.

Segment 3 - Rawlins, via Highway 287, to Public Land/Right-of-Way

This public access segment consists of the "checkerboard" lands north of Rawlins to Segment 4, Highway 287 to Crooks Gap Road. It is anticipated that limited use of this segment would be from through hikers/equestrians and not from day use or extended use trail users.

Proposed Action (23 miles) - Deferred Designation - Designation of the CDNST would be deferred along this segment of U.S. Highway 287 between Rawlins and north to outside of the "checkerboard" lands. Future proposals to designate the trail along this segment (off of the highway) would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Designation of the trail could follow actions that include land exchanges to consolidate public lands or cooperative agreements between private landowners and the BLM, state, or local governments, and/or private entities for trail rights-of-way. As currently exists, the highway right-of-way would continue to provide the only legal public access north of Rawlins for trail users.

Primitive campsite locations are found at the Nine Mile Hill pine grove, stands. An improvement to the existing exclosure fence at Fish Pond Spring, north of the pines, is planned to prevent livestock access to the meadow system. A stile will be incorporated into the exclosure fence to allow access to the water source by hikers and riders. Water for horses and llamas would be available from the nearby reservoir. Signing of public land boundaries around Fish Pond Spring and Reservoir to help reduce the limited incidental trespass onto the private lands is planned. A cooperative agreement would be pursued with the private land owner to allow access through an existing wire gate on private land along the highway right-of-way fence.

Segment 4 - Highway 287 to Crooks Gap Road

This segment consists of the northern portion of the "checkerboard" (Alternatives 1 and 2) and blocked up parcels of state and BLM-administered public lands north of the "checkerboard" (Proposed Action and the northern portion of Alternative 2.)

Proposed Action (38 miles) - Bull Springs - At a proposed trailhead parking and informational kiosk area on the westside of U.S. Highway 287, approximately 23 miles north of Rawlins, existing primitive two-track roads and cross country travel would be used westerly to the southern end of Bull Spring Rim. The route would continue northerly, on existing primitive two-track roads, to near A&M Reservoir. From there it would continue north and then westerly to intersect the Crooks Gap Road approximately 12 miles south of Jeffrey City, Wyoming.

Approval of improvements to existing water sources at Bull Springs and the spring is Section 17, T25N, R90W, both on state land, would be pursued with the State of Wyoming. The water needs of wildlife, livestock, and trail users would be provided for.

Alternative 1 (52 miles) - Mineral Exploration Road - At the base of Willow Hill, west of Highway 287, the route would follow the paved Minerals Exploration Road through the "checkerboard" to BLM-administered public land for approximately 12 miles. At this point the route would use a combination of cross country travel and existing primitive tw o-track roads to the southern end of Bull Springs Rim and tie into the Proposed Action.

Alternative 2 (74 miles) - Ferris Mountains - Approximately one mile north of the base of Willow Hill, east of Highway 287, the route would utilize Carbon County Road 497 (an improved gravel road) easterly for approximately six miles before continuing north along the same county road, now a primitive two-track road.
North of Rendell Springs, the route enters BLM-administered and state public land to follow existing primitive two-track roads, and one short segment of cross country travel, to the base of the Ferris Mountains. The route continues north into the Ferris Mountains Wilderness Study Area (WSA) to Youngs Pass following a heavily used game trail and ties into the reclaimed Babbs Mine Road. The route follows the northern base of the Ferris Mountains to the Whiskey Gap area via cross country travel and primitive two-track roads. Near Whiskey Gap the route continues northwest on a primitive two-track road to Highway 287. Approximately one mile south on Highway 287, a cross country travel route leads west/southwest to Whiskey Peak. The route then follows existing primitive two-track roads along Whiskey Ridge, Stratton Rim, and Crooks Creek to intersect the Proposed Action along the Crooks Gap Road 12 miles south of Jeffrey City, Wyoming.

In cooperation with the Wyoming Transportation Department sign the highway rights-of-way to alert vehicle traffic of the possible use of the rights-of-way by trail users, particularly at the narrow bridge on Highway 287 at Muddy Creek.

The trail would be routed through timbered areas and away from the bighorn sheep guzzler at Youngs Pass to reduce the stress on the sheep from the visual contact and/or sounds of trail users.

The landowner would be contacted to determine interest in negotiating an easement on the McIntosh lands near Muddy Gap to assure continued access for the trail.

The boundaries of the BLM-administered public land adjacent to the state section on Whiskey Peak would be identified to assist in preventing overnight camping at or near the small reservoir located on state land.

No improvements to existing water sources are planned.

Segment 5 - Crooks Gap Road to the Bison Basin Road

This segment utilizes primitive two-track roads through Crooks Mountain.

Proposed Action - South Mountain (15 miles) - From the Crooks Gap Road the trail would follow existing primitive two-track roads along the southern slopes of Crooks Mountain. This route passes by Brenton Springs, Maple Creek and East and West Arapaho Creeks, the headwaters of Haypress Creek, and along the rim above East Alkali Creek. Continuing on to the western end of this segment the trail follows existing primitive two-track roads to the Bison Basin Road.

Improvements to the existing water source at Brenton Springs would be analyzed in a site specific environmental assessment. Improvements would provide for the needs of wildlife, livestock, and trail users.

Alternative 1 - North Mountain (17 miles) - Above West Arapaho Creek this route leaves the proposed action to follow the northern base of Crooks Mountain. The route crosses Haypress Creek, the Soap Holes area, passes nearby Happy Spring, and ties back into the proposed action near the Bison Basin Road.

Warning signs would be posted to alert trail users approaching the Soap Holes to stay on the primitive two-track roads to avoid breaking through the dry surface and possibly sustaining injury to themselves or stock animals.

Public land around Happy Spring and at the reservoir on the adjacent state land would be signed to help reduce limited incidental trespass on adjacent private lands and camping on state lands.

Segment 6 - Bison Basin Road to the Sweetwater River at the Phelps-Dodge Bridge

This segment utilizes primitive two-track roads, including the Seminole Cutoff of the National Historic Trails (Oregon, Mormon Pioneer, and California) south of the Sweetwater River.

Alternative 1 utilizes cross country travel within the Sweetwater River Canyon WSA.

Proposed Action - Seminole Cutoff (30 miles) - At the Bison Basin Road the trail follows existing primitive two-track roads across Alkali Creek, up Coyote Gulch, ties into the Seminole Cutoff, uses three miles of the Three Forks - Atlantic City Road (BLM 231F), and crosses the Sweetwater River at the Phelps-Dodge Bridge.

Improvements to existing water sources at Weasel Spring and Upper Mormon Spring (the latter one on state land) would be analyzed in site specific environmental assessments with public involvement. Necessary consultations would be conducted as approval is requested for this water source on State land. Improvements would provide for the needs of wildlife, livestock, and trail users.

Alternative 1 - Sweetwater River Canyon WSA (36 miles) - At the upper end of Coyote Gulch this route leaves the proposed action and heads northwesterly on primitive two-track roads to Cow Camp Spring. Here it follows the Willow Creek drainage via cross country travel north into the Sweetwater River Canyon WSA. The
hiking route follows the river upstream to Wilson Bar (state land) where the route continues cross country, avoiding private property, and crosses Rock Creek at Lame Jack Gulch. The route ties into existing primitive two-track roads leading to the Three Forks - Atlantic City Road (BLM 2317), three miles north of the Phelps-Dodge Bridge. To avoid the river canyon the equestrian route follows the north rim of the canyon to Wilson Bar where it joins the hiking cross country route.

Public land boundaries west of Wilson Bar would be signed to help reduce limited incidental trespass onto the private lands.

Segment 7 - Sweetwater River, at the Phelps-Dodge Bridge, to South Pass City, Wyoming

This segment contains portions of the National Historic Trails (Oregon Trail, Mormon Pioneer, California, and Pony Express) north of the Sweetwater River. Depending upon the route selected this segment utilizes primitive two-track roads, or a combination of primitive two-track roads/improved graveled roads and a hiking trail leading into South Pass City.

Proposed Action - Volkmarth Trail (16 miles) - At the Sweetwater River the route uses the Three Forks - Atlantic City Road, now a Fremont County road, north for one mile. Continuing on primitive two-track roads, including a portion of the Oregon Trail, for approximately three miles, the route ties back into the county road. This route then alternates between use of the county road and primitive two-track roads for approximately five miles before leaving the county road on a primitive two-track road. Following a series of primitive two-track roads the route ties into the South Pass City Volkmarth Trail above the historic Shields Mine and continues into the Wyoming State Historic Site at South Pass City.

Alternative 1 - Willow Creek, State Section (14 miles) - Just north of the Phelps-Dodge Bridge crossing, this route travels westerly cross country through a state section to cross Willow Creek (non-improved crossing). It continues onto BLM-administered public land and ties into primitive two-track roads. Proceeding north on primitive two-track roads (crossing the Oregon Trail) the route continues to the area of the cemetery/landing strip above South Pass City.

Public land boundaries near Willow Creek would be signed to help reduce limited incidental trespass onto the private lands.

Alternative 2 - Willow Creek, Oregon Trail (14 miles) - Near the point in the Proposed Action where the route ties back into the county road this route diverts onto the Oregon Trail and crosses Willow Creek at the stock driveway (Mike Ruby private land). Continuing onto BLM-administered public land the route joins the primitive two-track road (Alternative 1) leading to the area of the cemetery/landing strip above South Pass City.

The private landowner would be contacted to determine interest in negotiating a cooperative agreement to provide access to trail users for use of the private land.

Public land boundaries west of Willow Creek would be signed to help reduce limited incidental trespass onto the private lands.

Segment 8 - South Pass City to Highway 28

The Shoshone National Forest/BLM Green River Resource Area (GRRA) CDNST segment that leads to Highway 28 from the southwest end of the Wind River Mountains has been identified as the Pine Creek Trail that comes out at Highway 28 near Dead Ox Creek. The other routes that were under consideration by the Forest Service and BLM GRRA came into Highway 28 at the Rock Shop. The three alternatives to be analyzed in this document would provide for a contiguous trail that ties into the selected FS/BLM Pine Creek Trail segment north of the highway.

Proposed Action - Dead Ox Creek (3 miles) - A trailhead informational kiosk area in the vicinity of the cemetery/landing strip, above the South Pass City State Historic Site, would be developed. This trailhead would provide a launching off point for trail users heading north toward the Wind Rivers or south to the Great Divide Basin. It would also provide a parking area for trail users away from the historic site to avoid impacts on the limited parking at the site. From the trailhead the route would head northwest on a primitive two-track road for 3/4 of a mile reaching Highway 28. A 1/4 mile segment of the Highway 28 rights-of-way would be used to tie into the FS/BLM trail segment (Pine Creek Trail) leading north of the highway.

Public land boundaries near the Franklin Mine would be signed to help reduce limited incidental trespass onto the private lands.

Signing of the highway rights-of-way to alert vehicle traffic of the possible use of the rights-of-way by trail users would be completed in cooperation with the Wyoming Transportation Department.

Alternative 1 - Westside Willow Creek to the Rock Shop (4 miles) - At the trailhead this route would follow a primitive two-track road on the westside of Willow Creek. Near the railroad grade segment the route would follow the route through the Willow Creek valley to the stock drive area above Willow Creek at Rock Shop.
crossing of Willow Creek the trail would continue cross country following above the creek on the westside and tie into another primitive two-track road that leads over to Highway 28 approximately 1/2 mile southwest of the Rock Shop. The highway right-of-way would be used to reach the Pine Creek Trail, approximately 1 1/4 miles southwest.

Sign of the highway rights-of-way to alert vehicle traffic of the possible use of the rights-of-way by trail users would be completed in cooperation with the Wyoming Transportation Department.

Alternative 2 - Eastside Willow Creek to the Rock Shop (3 miles) - At the trailhead this route would follow the county road through South Pass City. At the "Y", at the top of the hill, the routes continue on the county road to the left, approximately 1/4 mile past the railroad grade the route would use a primitive two-track road that reconnects with the county road at Highway 28. The highway right-of-way would be used to reach the Pine Creek Trail, approximately 3 1/4 miles to the southwest.

Sign of the highway rights-of-way to alert vehicle traffic of the possible use of the rights-of-way by trail users would be completed in cooperation with the Wyoming Transportation Department.

No Action Alternative - The No Action Alternative would not designate an on-the-ground route for the CDNST through the BLM-administered public lands in south central Wyoming. The current practice of providing the public with several public accessible routes between the Medicine Bow National Forest and the Shoshone National Forest would continue. No signing of a route or development of trailheads or water sources would occur along the routes.

Alternatives Considered But Not Selected For Further Analysis - The following alternatives where suggested by the public during public scoping of the project. A description of the alternative and the rationale for not selecting it for further analysis is provided:

Common Corner Crossing in the Checkerboard - This alternative provides for the crossing of common corners to access public land in the "checkerboard" north and south of Rawlins, Wyoming. The opinion provided in a memorandum from the Department of Interior, Office of the Solicitor, dated 11/5/97, considers corner crossing as trespass on the adjacent private lands. Due to this guidance, this alternative was dropped from further analysis. Further, this alternative called for the building of stiles at the common corners for hikers to cross. This would not accommodate equestrian use of the trail, which is also a primary mode of travel along the CDNST.

Construction of New Trail Off of Primitive Two-track Roads - This alternative would avoid the use of primitive two-track roads by constructing new roadway for the trail. The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation 1977 study report recommended, and it was reaffirmed in the 1985 Comp Plan, that the use of existing primitive two-track roads through the area between the two national forests is consistent with the criteria for location of the trail. Also, this alternative is not considered a viable alternative due to a lack of expected funding for 1) construction, 2) maintenance or 3) enforcement, and may also conflict with the motorized recreation use as classified as semi-primitive experiences in the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum and acknowledged in the 1985 Comp Plan as satisfying the intent of Congress for the CDNST.

Bull Spring Rim - This alternative would locate the trail on the physical rim of Bull Spring Rim via cross country travel. While this may be feasible for hikers, it does not provide an adequate trail for equestrian use which is also a primary purpose of the CDNST. Comments from horsemen and a local rancher during the summer of 1997 "uniting Along the Divide" volunteer project recommended routes to the rocky conditions on the rim and the potential damage to the horse's hooves.

Lamont to Whiskey Peak - This alternative would locate the trail on a combination of primitive two-track roads and cross country travel south of the Ferris Mountains along the continental divide at Highway 287, 1 1/2 miles north of Lamont, Wyoming. From there it would travel cross country to Little Camp Creek and Murphree Creek and access Whiskey Peak. The concern with this alternative is from a safety aspect due to hydrogen sulfide (H2S) gas that naturally occurs in the oil fields near Bairoil, Wyoming. Hydrogen sulfide is extremely hazardous and can cause death in concentrated levels. Concentrated levels of H2S would not be expected except in the event of an accidental release. The risk is light, but possible, and other alternatives exist. At lower concentration levels the smell of H2S (often described as rotten eggs) is present throughout the downwind area and may be a distraction for some people. In addition to H2S, extremely high concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO2) also occur near Bairoil and could cause similar health risks with accidental release.
AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Critical Elements of the Human Environment -

The following critical elements of the human environment would not be negatively affected by the proposed actions or alternatives:

- Air Quality: Farmland, Prime/Unique
- Floodplains: Native American Religious Concerns
- T & E Species: Wastes, Hazardous/Solid
- Water Quality: Wetlands/Riparian Zones
- Wild and Scenic Rivers: Wilderness

Vegetation -
The vegetation along the trail corridor (proposed actions and alternatives) varies from stands of coniferous trees (lodgepole, limber pine, aspen, juniper, Douglas fir, Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir), shrubby plants, grasses and forbs. The trail corridor also contains grassy meadows and riparian areas.

Wildlife -
The trail corridor supports a variety of wildlife species such as deer, antelope, elk, neo-tropical birds, and raptors. Bighorn sheep populations exist in the Ferris Mountains WSA.

Livestock/Wildhorses -
Livestock grazing occurs throughout the trail corridor. Wildhorse populations occur in several locations along the trail corridor. These wildhorse areas include the Great Divide Basin, west of US Highway 287, and along the slopes of Whiskey Peak, Stratton Rim, Crooks Mountain, and the Antelope Hills.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) -
The segments for designation of the CDNST are primary primitive two-track roads with short sections of improved roads (graveled). These segments are described as Semi-primitive Motorized in the ROS setting classification. This ROS setting has a predominantly natural appearance with the trail user having a moderate probability of experiencing solitude. There is a high degree of self-reliance on outdoor skills with a high level of challenge and risk involved. Additionally, the user feels a closeness to nature and a sense of tranquility.

Non-designated segments utilizing paved highways are described as Roaded Natural (RN) or Roaded Modified (RM) in ROS. The setting for RN (State Highway 71, Minerals Exploration Road) provides for a moderate level of self-reliance on outdoor skills with little challenge or risk involved. The setting for RM (Highways 287 and 28) has a lower level of self-reliance on outdoor skills and less challenge and risk than ROS RN.

Cultural Resources/ACBCs -
The NHTs (Oregon, Mormon, California, and Pony Express) are the main cultural resources within segments of the proposed actions and alternatives. Pre-historic hunting and habitation sites may exist in various locations along the proposed CDNST corridor.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Environmental impacts that are common to all proposed actions and alternatives are listed below. Environmental impacts for specific proposed actions and alternatives are shown under a separate heading.

Impacts Common to All Proposed Actions and Alternatives
Designation of an on-the-ground route for the CDNST will undoubtedly increase public awareness and interest in the trail. However, the number of users is not expected to substantially increase over the present estimated 10-20 annual through hikers/equestrians (users that are on the trail for extended periods of time anywhere from several weeks to several months). Any increase will likely come from a combination of day use and extended overnight trips, with some increase From through hikers/equestrians. Even a two or three fold increase spread over the length of the use season (May-October) is not expected to lead to a significant increase in impacts from hikers or equestrians.

The use of existing primitive two-track roads by hikers and equestrians will have little impact on the surface of the roads or the surrounding vegetation, soils or wildlife. Use of cross country travel trail segments may result in the establishment of a "worn treadway". However, the anticipated level of use would add little new disturbance of vegetation or soils.

Campsite establishment by trail users may result in temporary compaction of soils, disturbance to vegetation, as well as, the creation of additional fire rings and their residual scars. State lands involved may see an increase in limited incidental overnight camping and/or camp fires which are currently prohibited.
Disturbance to livestock or wild horses may occur by trail users as they travel through areas frequented by both. Temporary displacement of wildlife, livestock, or wild horses from water sources may also occur as trail users fill their water bottles or water their horses or llamas, but this impact is limited to approximately 1/2 hour per visit and is not expected to be significant to other water users. The use of water sources as campsites would intensify impacts to the wildlife, livestock, or wild horses by limiting or preventing access to water.

Limited signing of the trail may encourage an increase in use of vehicles on certain existing primitive two-track roads. This may accelerate the compaction of soils, disturbance to vegetation, and an increase in soil erosion during periods of runoff. Increased vehicle use may result in a well defined primitive two-track road where presently a faint one appears. This increase in vehicle use may reduce the sense of solitude enjoyed by non-motorized trail users, thus affecting the quality of their recreational experience. However, periodic use by vehicles will act to maintain the visible trail route, which through long periods of non-use by vehicles could become less visible or less easy to travel by trail users.

Impacts Specific to Proposed Actions and Alternatives

Segment 1 - Medicine Bow National Forest to Rawlins, Wyoming

Proposed Action - Divide Peak - This route would require the Medicine Bow NF to realign the CDNST north from Divide Peak to a route west/northwest of Divide Peak. Preliminary contact with the Medicine Bow NF indicates a willingness to consider a realignment of the trail on the forest. This route would provide a higher quality recreational experience by avoiding 10+ miles of improved county road right-of-way as contained in Alternative 1, 2, and 3.

Limited incidental trespass on private lands and state lands (camping) may occur as trail users seek campsites and water sources.

Alternative 1 - South Highway - Deferring designation of a CDNST route through this segment of "checkerboard" will provide the opportunity to consolidate public lands or develop cooperative agreements with private landowners. This will likely lead to the location of the trail off of improved roads, which will better meet the trail location criteria and provide trail users a quality recreational experience. The South Highway (County Road 401 and State Highway 71) is the most direct public accessible route to Rawlins. The volume and speed of vehicles would certainly be higher than that of the Bridger Pass Road (Alternative 2). This would result in a greater negative affect on the recreational experience of trail users trying to legally negotiate the "checkerboard" mixture of public and private lands.

Limited incidental trespass of private land may occur as trail users seek campsites and water sources.

Alternative 2 - Bridger Pass Road - This alternative may add 1-2 days travel to complete the trip from the national forest boundary to Rawlins versus the Proposed Action. Due to the "checkerboard" land in this segment a high concern of trespass has been expressed by several private landowners. Limited incidental trespass (water sources and campsites) is very likely along this alternative where there is little marking of public/private land boundaries. While there is a road easement through the private lands there is no easement for the use of water sources and potential campsites on the private land.

Water sources along the BLM roads leading to the Bridger Pass Road are at several springs and Muddy Creek, as well as, intermittently in other drainages that cross the roads that will be traveled.

Alternative 3 - County Road 500 - Impacts for this alternative are similar to the proposed action. Additionally, staying on the improved county road would not provide relief from the volume and speed of vehicles that the two-track roads in the proposed action would provide.

Segment 2 - Rawlins Uplift Trail System

Proposed Action - CDNST Designation Designating this trail system as a component of the CDNST will recognize the significant scenic qualities of the Rawlins Uplift. The City of Rawlins would benefit from the notoriety of having a Congressional designated trail on the outskirts of town. Benefits could include increased tourism and associated economic gains as well as community pride.

Alternative 1 - National Recreation Trail - Designation of this trail system as a component of the National Recreation Trails System would provide national recognition of recreational values of this network of trails. Also, identifying this trail system as a side trail of the CDNST will add to the national significance of the trail system. Benefits could include increased tourism and associated economic gains as well as community pride.
Segment 3 - Rawlins, via Highway 287, to Public Land/Right-of-Way

Proposed Action - Deferring designation of a CDNST route through this segment of "checkerboard", while taking advantage of opportunities to consolidate public lands or develop cooperative agreements with private landowners, could lead to a route that would meet the intent of Congress for trail location. These efforts would likely lead to the location of the trail off of improved roads, which will better meet the trail location criteria and provide trail users a quality recreational experience.

Use of the highway right-of-way by through hikers and equestrians, while not an attractive corridor, does provide the only current legal accessible route north from Rawlins. The width of the right-of-way provides the opportunity for hiker and equestrian use to be off the highway shoulder. This would be a short term situation until the completion of consolidation of public lands or development of cooperative agreements with private landowners that would allow the location of the trail onto primitive two-track roads.

The Nine Mile Hill pine stands provide the last available shade source until the slopes of Crooks Mountain (approximately 3-5 days travel). The existing campsites in the pines have been highly impacted (soil compaction, vegetation damage) by previous users (hunters, local youth parties). No additional impacts are expected from trail users that overnight in the pines.

Fish Pond Spring and Reservoir is the only legally accessible water source between Rawlins and Bull Springs (see Segment 4). Bull Springs and Mineral Exploration Road alternatives or Separation Creek (see Segment 4, Ferris Mountains alternative). The water at Fish Pond Spring and Reservoir is located west of the highway about 1/3 mile and is accessed via cross country travel (to avoid private land) and an existing primitive two-track road. This remote setting may encourage trail users to locate campsites in proximity to the springs and reservoir. Some impacts from campsites development, such as soil compaction and vegetation damage, could be expected. Limited incidental trespass onto the surrounding private land may result from use of the area as a water source or as a campsites.

Segment 4 - Highway 287 to Crooks Gap Road

Proposed Action - Bull Springs - The informational kiosk at Highway 287 would provide information to trail users heading toward South Pass City, approximately 100 miles away.

This route provides water sources at distances (minimum of six miles, maximum of 14 miles) that could be reasonably obtained by most users in one or two days travel.

Alternative 1 - Mineral Exploration Road - This route would add an additional five miles of pavement travel over the proposed action, though on a road with less vehicle traffic.

Some of the private "checkerboard" lands in Separation Flats have been sold in 40 acre parcels. The new owners or prospective buyers have expressed concerns with the potential for increased trail use through or near their private property. Their concern is from trail users looking for water, campsites, or other limited incidental trespass situations, as well as, landowner liability concerns.

Alternative 2 - Ferris Mountains - In the southern portion of this route some of the private "checkerboard" lands in Separation Flats have been sold in 40 acre parcels. The new owners or prospective buyers have expressed concern with the potential for increased trail use through or near their private property. Their concern is from trail users looking for water, campsites, or other limited incidental trespass situations, as well as, landowner liability concerns.

The primitive two-track county road to be used to access BLM-administered public land travels through a 40 acre parcel of private land containing Rendell Spring. To legally access the water at Rendell Springs a cooperative agreement between the landowner (Stone Ranch) and the BLM would need to be developed. Prior to the acquisition of legal public access, use of this water source would be in trespass without prior permission from the landowner. Without this water source the distance between reliable water may often exceed one day travel for hikers (Separation Creek to a state section reservoir/spring complex at County Road 100, a distance of approximately 16 miles).

At the southern base of the Ferris Mountains private land and facilities would need to be avoided through the use of cross country travel. The private lands involved are owned by the Raymond family and contain the historic Dorr Place, a homestead cabin and meadow system. Limited incidental trespass onto the Dorr Place could result from trail users failing to follow the cross country route off of the primitive two-track roads that lead to the private lands. The Raymond family has expressed concerns with both vandalism and liability issues, as well as, disruption of their grazing operations if the trail were located along this route.

The cross country route through Youngs Pass would bring trail
users within 1/4 - 1/2 mile of a bighorn sheep guzzler (T27N, R86W, Section 36, SWNE). Concerns with locating the trail through Young's Pass have been raised from the BLM and Wyoming Game and Fish Department wildlife biologists and from the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (FNAMS). The Ferris Mountains bighorn sheep population is in decline and any additional stress placed on the sheep by trail users would be considered a detrimental impact by the biologists and FNAMS. The meadow system and spring source at Whiskey Gap (1/4 mile off route) is on private land. Limited incidental trespass by trail users could be expected as they look for water sources and campsites. This water source and meadow complex is also frequented by bighorn sheep, even during the late spring and summer months. Use of the water source by trail users may force the sheep to avoid the water source which could cause additional stress on the sheep.

The BLM’s Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review (MP 8550-1), provides guidance on the management of the BLM WSA. Chapter 3, H, 1, states no new, permanent recreational ways, trails, structures, or installations will be permitted, except those that are the minimum necessary for public health and safety in the use and enjoyment of the public lands’ wilderness value, and that are necessary to protect wilderness resource values. No mechanical transport, which includes all motorized vehicles plus trail or mountain bikes, will be allowed on such trails. Location of a trail within the WSA could be done to meet the above criteria.

An informal recreational easement between the BLM and Virginia McIntosh provides use of 1/4 mile of private land from Highway 287 near Muddy Gap along an existing primitive two-track road to the BLM-administered public land to the east. No perpetual easement exists for public use of the primitive two-track road. Such use could be withdrawn by the landowner leaving a 1/4 mile gap in public access.

The location of the Three Forks-Muddy Gap Service on Highway 287 would provide an opportunity for trail users to resupply and/or retrieve their mail-drop packages. The owners have expressed an interest in having their business used by trail users for these purposes.

The highway right-of-way would be used to negotiate about one mile of private land before leaving the highway westerly and accessing BLM-administered public land at Coal Creek. The use of the highway right-of-way, even for a short segment, would disturb the remoteness and solitude, as provided by the proposed action. The highway bridge across Muddy Creek (private land) could provide a safety hazard for equestrians and hikers as they share the narrow shoulder of the bridge with highway traffic.

The route continues up Coal Creek to access Whiskey Peak via cross country travel on its steep southeastern slopes. Locating a route on these steep decomposed granite slopes would require some use of switchbacks. The trail would be prone to erosion due to the loose granitic soils.

A small reservoir in the state section near the top of Whiskey Peak could serve as a water source. However, it would also serve as an enticement for limited incidental trespass by trail users camping at or near the reservoir (camping and open fires are not permitted on state lands).

Water sources along this route are located at various distances. These distances range from less than one mile to over 15 miles.

Segment 5 - Crooks Gap Road to the Bison Basin Road

Proposed Action - South Crooks Mountain - This route provides the trail user with scenic views to the south of the Great Divide Basin. Pockets of timber pine would provide shade relief from the mostly shadeless route through the BLM-administered public lands.

Private lands are avoided by the primitive two-track roads that are used through this route.

Adequate water sources in the form of springs, flowing creeks, and reservoirs are available throughout the route. Distances between water range from less than one mile to approximately 10 miles.

Alternative 1 - North Crooks Mountain - This route would divert from the Proposed Action above West Arapahoe Creek and head north over the crest of the mountain and follow its northside base often within sound of Highway 287, some 6-10 miles to the north. The sound of large truck traffic would detract from the feeling of solitude and remoteness that is found in the Proposed Action.

The Soap Holes is an area of alkali bog that could pose a safety hazard to trail users that travel off the primitive two-track road that would be designated as trail. While the surface may appear to be dry, beneath the thin crust, lies a bog. Hikers or horses that break through the crust could find themselves in a situation that could result in serious injury.

The water source at Happy Spring is on BLM-administered public land, but some surface water is on the adjacent 80 acres of private land. Further down the drainage a reservoir is located on a state section. This small reservoir, while off trail, could serve as a water source. However, it would also serve as
an enticement for limited incidental trespass by trail users camping at or near the reservoir (camping and open fires are not permitted on state lands). Also, trespass across the adjacent private land would likely occur as trail users access or leave the state section.

Segment 6 - Bison Basin Road to the Sweetwater River at the Phelps-Dodge Bridge

Proposed Action - Seminoe Cutoff

This route uses a portion of the Seminoe Cutoff. This is a primitive two-track road used for approximately six miles. The use of the NHT by hikers and equestrians should have little additional impact on the surface of the roads or the surrounding vegetation, or soils that currently occurs from limited vehicle use. Comments received from recent hikers and equestrians as they have passed through on the NHT is the greatest sense of historic significance they feel. It was possible for them to relate to the emigrants that hiked, rode wagons and horses through the landscape that is essentially the same today that it was over 150 years ago.

The route leaves the primitive two-track road and utilizes the improved Three Forks - Atlantic City Road (BLM 2317) for 3 1/2 miles (this is also the Seminoe Cutoff). This BLM road provides legal public access through a mixture of public and private lands. Use of the improved road may detract from the feeling of historical significance that the primitive two-track road described above provided. Limited incidental trespass on these private lands is possible, particularly in the Harris Slough area, as trail users may venture off the road in search of water or campites.

The route leaves the improved road (BLM 2317) and private land at the cattleguard and utilizes cross country travel along the fence to several BLM-administered public land at the Sweetwater River. A limited number of primitive campsite locations are available, at the meadow system adjacent to the river, to aid in reducing trespass of adjacent private lands.

The Phelps-Dodge bridge provides the only non-water crossing of the Sweetwater River between Highway 28, near South Pass, and Highway 287 at Sweetwater Station. This is significant during the late-spring/early-summer runoff. The following historic data from the United States Geological Service (USGS) provides a perspective of the volume of water that may provide a serious safety hazard to trail users that attempt to cross the river without aid of the Phelps-Dodge Bridge. Historic USGS streamflow data for the Sweetwater River near South Pass City from 1959-1981

(no recent data is available) varies from year to year. Flows recorded during the months of May through July ranged from a low of 211 CFS to a high of 734 CFS. Data beyond July was not available. Based on USGS historical streamflow data for Willow Creek, a side drainage 1 1/4 miles upstream from the bridge (not included in Sweetwater CPS data), an additional 20-80 CFS would be added to the streamflow of the Sweetwater River. Other side drainages below the Sweetwater River gaging station (Fish Creek, Pine Creek, Slaughterhouse Gulch, Dickie Springs Gulch - Oregon Slough) would add more streamflow to the its CFS volume. While the exact streamflow is not known for the Sweetwater River, field observations from a local rancher over the past 20+ years reveals a serious safety hazard exists from May to the end of July most years. In 1997, a record snow year, the Wind River Mountains, field observations from hikers and equestrians revealed unsafe water crossing conditions existed well into August.

Alternative 1 - Sweetwater River Canyon WSA

This route would avoid any improved roads until reaching BLM 2317 north of the Phelps-Dodge Bridge. The remoteness and outstanding opportunities for solitude would be provided by crossing through the WSA river canyon.

Horse or other stock use in the river canyon, while possible, is avoided by experienced horse outfitters due to the potential of injury to their stock and clients from the extremely rocky conditions in the narrow canyon. Use of the north rim is preferred by the outfitters. This requires the crossing of the river at Willow Creek. To use the entire WSA river canyon several water crossing are necessary for both hikers and equestrians where the canyon walls come down to the waterline.

As in the Proposed Action, a serious public safety issue is involved in crossing or use of the river canyon. Streamflow data is not available for the river at this crossing site (confluence of Willow Creek, a different Willow Creek than in the Proposed Action), the narrow canyon and additional side drainages (Granite Creek, Strawberry Creek, Mormon Creek) would add to the in-stream flow of the Sweetwater River, thus quite possibly adding significant CPS flows and increasing the danger level of crossing the river.

West of Wilson Bar the trail leaves the river and utilizes cross country travel to avoid private lands containing historic mining operations. The possibility of trail users diverting from the marked cross country trail may result in limited incidental trespass on the private lands in the form of curious sightseers and the use of campites.

The water crossing of Rock Creek at Lame Jack Gulch may be
hazardous in the early season runoff period.

Use of the Oregon NHT to access the Three Forks-Atlantic City Road (Fremont County), north of the Sweetwater River, may provide a sense of historical significance to the trail user.

The BLM's Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review, Handbook 8550-1, provides guidance on the management of the BLM WSAs. Chapter 3, H, 1, states no new, permanent recreational ways, trails, structures, or installations will be permitted, except those that are the minimum necessary for public health and safety in the use and enjoyment of the public lands' wilderness value, and that are necessary to protect wilderness resource values. No mechanical transport, which includes all motorized vehicles plus trail or mountain bikes, will be allowed on such trails. Location of a trail within the WSA could be done to meet the above criteria.

Segment 7 - Sweetwater River, at the Phelps-Dodge Bridge, to South Pass City, Wyoming

Proposed Action - Volksmarch Trail

The periodic use of the improved Three Forks - Atlantic City Road (Fremont County 512) to access the primitive two-track road that leads to the Volksmarch Trail would detract from the feeling of solitude the two alternatives would provide. Vehicle traffic on the improved county road can often be moderately heavy with speeds to 45+ miles per hour. Hikers/equestrians can avoid use of the road surface by walking/riding outside the ditch area. This could provide a safer passage than being on the road's surface or shoulder.

The Volksmarch Trail leads directly into the Wyoming State Historic Site at South Pass City. By incorporating the Volksmarch Trail into the CDNST a great sense of mining history is provided. CDNST users will pass by the historic Shieles Mine and literally travel back in time as they enter the historic town site.

Through hikers have used the seasonal post office at the South Pass City historic site as a mail-drop opportunity. By mailing supplies ahead they are able to re-supply, send unneeded equipment ahead or back home, and send letters/cards to family and friends.

Use of primitive campsites both above and below South Pass City would probably occur as trail users take the opportunity to rest, relax, and tour the historic townsite before traveling on.

Alternative 1 - Willow Creek, State Section

This route would avoid traveling the improved county road and the distractions associated with vehicle traffic and the reduced visual quality. The major concern with this route is the unimproved crossing of Willow Creek. During the spring runoff of April into late July the CPS flow may often pose a safety hazard for trail users depending upon the flow. Even after the major runoff period has ended the wet bogggy meadow system would hamper crossing of the creek. Damage to the meadow system may result from trail user crossings.

Cross country travel to access Willow Creek provides the trail user views of buildings located on private lands less than 1/2 mile distant. The potential for limited incidental trespass concerns the landowner from a vandalism and liability aspect.

Once across the creek (on the westside) a narrow 1/4 mile strip of BLM-administered public land would be used to avoid private land to the north and south. The potential for limited incidental trespass concerns the landowner from a vandalism and liability aspect. Following primitive two-track roads this route crosses the Oregon Trail. Crossing over the Oregon Trail provides an opportunity for the trail user to visualize the country as it existed when the emigrants passed through over 150 years earlier.

Alternative 2 - Willow Creek, Oregon Trail

As in Alternative 2, the major concern with this route is the unimproved crossing of Willow Creek. During the spring runoff of April into late July the CPS flow may often pose a safety hazard for trail users, depending upon the flow. The crossing site is private land owned by Mike Ruby, Lander, WY. An easement (serial number 48566) was issued in 1973 to the U.S. government for a 50' wide fenced lane for a water gap for use by grazing livestock. This easement is known as the Carpenter Water Gap Fence. Any use of this crossing by trail users would need to be covered by a cooperative agreement between the present landowner and the BLM.

Crossing Willow Creek on the Oregon Trail provides an opportunity for the trail user to visualize the country as it existed when the emigrants passed through over 150 years earlier.

Segment 8 - South Pass City to Highway 28

Proposed Action - Dead Ox Creek

The development of a trailhead parking and information area in the vicinity of the cemetery/landing strip, 1/2 mile above South
Pass City, would provide a starting point for trail users heading toward the Highway 287 trailhead, approximately 100 miles away. It would also serve the same function for trail users heading north into the Wind River Mountains. The designated parking area would aid in keeping trail user vehicles from occupying the limited parking spots at the state historic sites. Additionally, the designated trailhead would help alleviate the establishment of a trailhead at Highway 28.

Existing primitive two-track roads are in close proximity to the southwest corner of the Franklin Mine, patented private land. Limited incidental trespass onto the private land may result from trail users leaving the route and exploring the historic mining property.

The crossing of Dead Ox Creek during high flow events may pose a safety concern. The use of this route to enter the Wind River Mountains during heavy runoff periods is not expected to occur very often since the higher elevations are often snow bound and inaccessible.

This route to Highway 28 does not align perfectly with the FS/BLM GGRA selected route north of the highway (Pine Creek Trail that leads into the Shoshone National Forest) as the two-track roads to be used enter the highway approximately 1/4 mile apart. This may lead to safety concerns for trail users crossing and using the highway by exposing themselves to vehicles traveling highway speeds.

A Federal Register Notice was issued February 23, 1998 (Volume 63, Number 35, page 9012-9013) for the withdrawal of 1,020 acres of public land from surface entry and mining for a period of 50 years to protect Arabis pusilla (small rockcress) plant habitat. These affected lands in the GGRA, Rock Springs District include the following:

Sixth Principal Meridian

T. 29 N., R. 101 W.,
Sec. 26, S 1/2 NW 1/4 and S 1/2;
Sec. 27, E 1/2 SW 1/4 NE1/4, SE 1/4 NE 1/4, E 1/2 W 1/2
SE 1/4, and E 1/2 SR 1/4;
Sec. 35, N 1/2, N 1/2 N 1/2 SW 1/4, and N 1/2 SR 1/4.

The above described lands are not utilized by this proposed action.

Alternative 1 - Westside Willow Creek to the Rock Shop

This route, using a combination of primitive two-track roads and cross country travel, would tie into Highway 28 approximately 1/2 mile southwest of the Rock Shop. The highway right-of-way would be used to continue southwest to the FS/BLM Pine Creek Trail. This may lead to safety concerns for trail users crossing and using the highway by exposing themselves to vehicles traveling highway speeds.

Alternative 2 - Eastside Willow Creek to the Rock Shop

This route uses improved county roads, primitive two-track roads and the state highway right-of-way, approximately one mile northeast of the Rock Shop. The use of improved county roads would detract from the recreational experience provided by either primitive two-track roads or cross country travel. The use of the highway right-of-way for 3 1/4 miles to reach the FS/BLM Pine Creek Trail may lead to safety concerns for trail users crossing and using the highway by exposing themselves to vehicles traveling highway speeds.

No Action Alternative -

With no designated on-the-ground route hikers/equestrians rarely follow the same route as others between the two national forests. Some follow the highways or follow existing gravel roads or primitive two-track roads on public lands to avoid private lands. Others may strike out cross-country and use private lands without first securing permission to use the private lands. The comments expressed by landowners of public use of the private lands (without permission) is from a liability and vandalism concern. Limited incidental trespass (water sources and campsites) is very likely to continue where there is little marking of public/private land boundaries or if a signed route that the trail user can navigate. The signing of a designated route would help reduce limited incidental trespass and help alleviate the concerns of most landowners.

Mitigation Measures -

Potential mitigation measures were incorporated into the proposed action and alternatives, as listed beginning on page 7. No additional specific mitigation measures are identified for the proposed action and alternatives.

Residual Impacts Common to Proposed Actions and Alternatives

Residual impacts may occur from trail users not following the Leave No Trace principles of low-impact travel and camping techniques.

The existing Off-Road Vehicle designations (as contained in the
appropriate Resource Management Plans) provide for the use of the existing primitive two-track roads that are to be designated as CDNST. Any joint use by vehicles and trail users would reduce the level of solitude experienced by non-motorized trail users, thus affecting their recreational experience.

Trail users may continue to temporarily displace wildlife, livestock, and wild horses from water sources despite efforts to follow LNT principles of low-impact travel and camping techniques.

Despite efforts to sign the route and public land boundaries limited incidental trespass on private lands and facilities may occur by trail users not following LNT principles of low-impact travel and camping techniques.

Cumulative Impacts Common to the Proposed Action and Alternatives

As the CDNST continues to receive public attention, the use of the trail segments is likely to increase. The development of trail guides books by private companies, magazine articles, and newspaper accounts of trail use and other media attention will add to the interest of the recreating public to visit the trail. This increased awareness may result in higher levels of use and increase the incidence of the residual impacts identified above.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Persons and Agencies Consulted

BLM Lander Resource Area
- Ray Hanson, Project Lead/EA Preparer, Outdoor Recreation Planner
- Sue Oberlie, Wildlife Biologist
- Tom Rinkes, Wildlife Biologist
- Greg Bautz, Soil Scientist
- Roy Packer, Rangeland Management Specialist
- Gary Long, Outdoor Recreation Planner
- Rhonda Flynn, Realty Specialist
- Mike Stewart, Assistant Area Manager
- Craig Bromley, Archeologist
- Jack Kelly, Area Manager
- Stuart Cerovski, Petroleum Engineer
- Mike Tietmeyer, Rangeland Management Specialist

BLM Great Divide Resource Area
- Karla Swanson, Area Manager
- Krystal Clair, Outdoor Recreation Planner
- John Spehar, Environmental Protection Specialist
- Marilyn Roth, Realty Specialist

BLM Green River Resource Area
- Bernard Weynand, Assistant Area Manager
- Andy Tenney, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Wyoming State Office
- Al Pierson, State Director
Mark Goldbach, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Gene Schaaf, Natural Resource Specialist
Joe Patti, Natural Resource Specialist
Washington Office
Deb Rawhouser, National Trails Coordinator

Grazing Permits
Green Mountain Common Allotment
Thomas L. Abernathy
D.T. Abernathy
Dick Smith
Sid Baldwin
Stan Cole
Bob Jamerman
Jack Darnell
Charlie McIntosh
Bob Whitlock
Bernard Sun
Atlantic City Common Allotment
D. G. Finlayson
Jeff Hancock
Rob Hellyer
Ben Avery
Mike Ruby
Jack Armstrong
Richard Ellis
John Philp

Great Divide Resource Area Permits
Gary Raymond
Elmer Peterson
Donna Smith
Kathryn Sanger

State of Wyoming
Game and Fish Department
State Lands Office
Federal Land Policy Office, Clearinghouse
State Historic Preservation Office
Department of Commerce, Trails Program
Geological Survey

Continental Divide Trail Alliance
Bruce Ward
Paula Ward
"Uniting Along the Divide" volunteers (30)

Continental Divide Trail Society
Jim Wolf
Keith Howard

County Governments
County Commissioners - Carbon, Sweetwater, Fremont
Fremont County Public Lands Committee

City of Rawlins
Parks and Recreation Department, Dan Mika
APPENDIX A
MAPS FOR THE
CDNST PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

LEGEND

TRAIL

TRAIL - CROSS COUNTRY TRAVEL

PUBLIC ACCESS ROUTE (non-designated trail)

SEGMENT 1, PROPOSED ACTION

SEGMENT 1, ALTERNATIVE 1

City Manager, Marty Colburn

Other Groups/Individuals

Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, Wyoming Chapter
University of Wyoming, Recreation Department
Carbon County Coalition for Stable Economic Growth
Carbon County Chamber of Commerce
Sierra Club, Wyoming Chapter
National Outdoor Leadership School
CDNST Through Hikers and Equestrians - numerous

Signature

Preparer Date
## APPENDIX B

CDNST SEGMENTS/ALTERNATIVES - AFFECTED WYOMING STATE LANDS

### Segment 1 - Medicine Bow National Forest to Rawlins

<table>
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<tr>
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(1) same parcel
(2) same parcel
APPENDIX C

PRINCIPLES OF LEAVE NO TRACE

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare

Know the area and what to expect. Travel in small groups. Select the appropriate equipment. Repackage food to reduce litter at the source.

2. Camp and Travel on Durable Surfaces

In popular areas, concentrate use. In remote areas, spread use. Avoid places where impact is just beginning.

3. Pack It In, Pack It Out

Reduce litter at the source. Dispose of trash and garbage properly.

4. Properly Dispose of What You Can't Pack Out


5. Leave What You Find

Minimize camping site alterations. Avoid damaging live trees and plants. Leave natural objects and cultural artifacts. Avoid disturbing wildlife. Reduce your impact on other visitors.

6. Minimize Use and Impacts from Fire

Portable light-weight stoves are the best choice for minimum-impact camping. If building a campfire keep the following ideas in mind: Be aware of fire restrictions, regulations and weather conditions. Use dead wood and burn it completely. In high use areas, use existing fire rings. In remote areas, consider the use of portable fire pans or build a mound fire.