

public facilities and community-oriented uses.

As a relatively mature community, Vail operates a wide variety of public facilities and there was a general level of satisfaction with facilities provided by the Town and how they are managed. By way of example, during the preparation of the '94 Plan there was considerable community support for the development of additional neighborhood parks and the '94 Plan identified a number of park improvements. Likely due to the development of Donovan Park, Sunbird Park, Booth Creek Park, Ellefson Park and major improvements to other Town parks since 1994, there were no comments or requests to expand the Town's park facilities during this update process.

The circumstances under which the Town should pursue the acquisition of land for public facilities or community-oriented uses prompted many diverse opinions. There were a preponderance of opinions that land acquisitions should first and foremost be to acquire **land for open space** to protect environmentally sensitive lands and that any parcel acquired for community uses should only occur if that parcel does not have environmental values that should be protected.

There were also divergent opinions on what constitutes a public facility or a community-oriented use. Many felt that **workforce** housing is neither a public facility nor a community-oriented use. By the same token, many others felt that **workforce** housing is a valid community-oriented use, that projects like the Chamonix development are beneficial and that it is

appropriate for this Plan to identify lands that may be suitable for housing development. **Of those in support of Town-initiated housing projects, there was a preference that they** be on land that is zoned for development, is located within an established neighborhood and is proximate to public transit.

A Policy Statement from the Vail Housing 2017 Plan establishes the Town's position that workforce housing is critical to maintaining Vail's sense of community.

"We acknowledge that the acquisition of deed restrictions on homes for Vail residents is critical to maintaining community. Therefore, we ensure an adequate supply and availability of homes for residents and recognize housing as infrastructure in the Town of Vail; a community support system not unlike roads, bridges, water and sewer systems, fire, police, and other services of the municipal government."

Policy Statement on Residential Housing as Infrastructure - Vail Housing 2027

While a wide spectrum of comments were heard, written comments provided by the community were near evenly split as to whether the Open Lands Plan should address housing with 38% of comments in support and 41% opposed.

OVERVIEW OF TOWN-OWNED LANDS

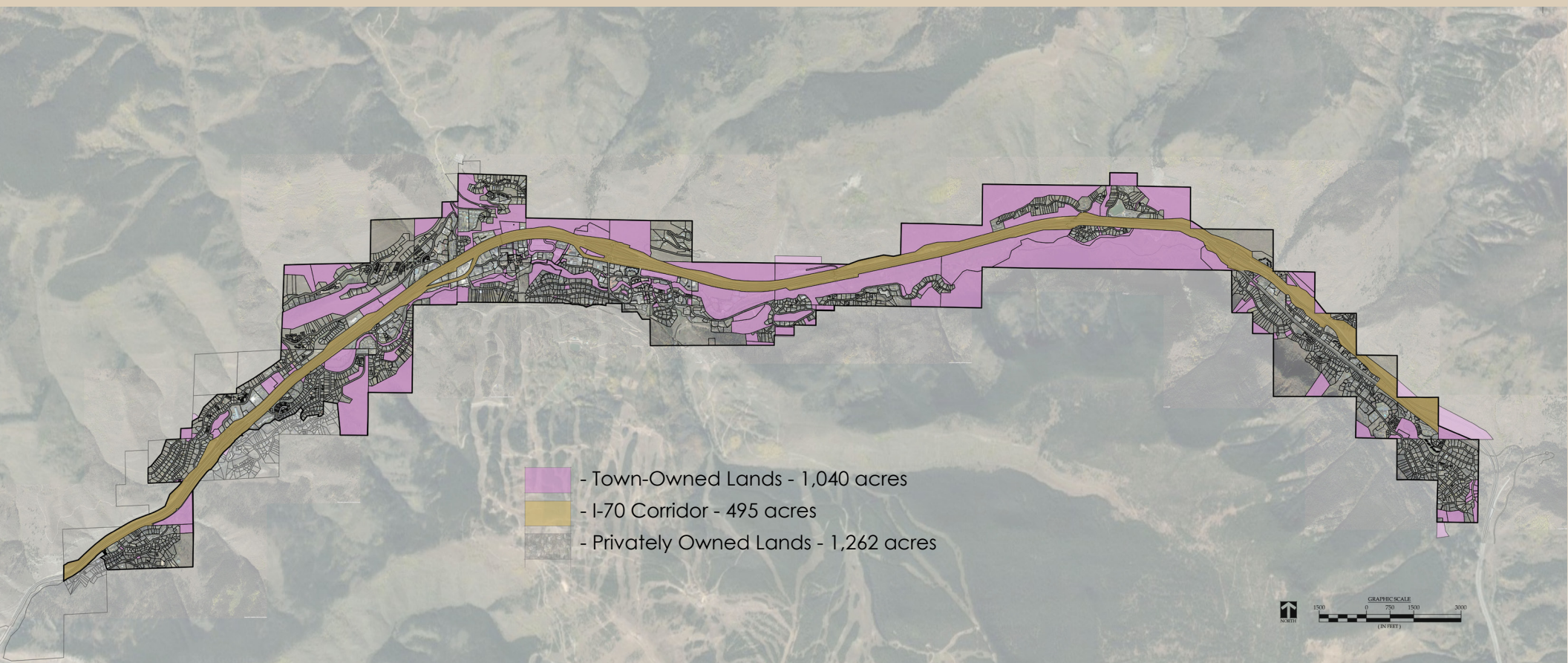
There are approximately 2,904 acres of land located within the Town's boundary and the Town of Vail owns 161 parcels that total 1,040 acres, or 35.8% of all land within the Town. Rights-of-way for Interstate 70 and the Frontage Roads comprise approximately 495 acres and approximately 1,262 acres of land are privately-owned or owned by other governmental entities. **With the exception of the Highland**

Meadows subdivision, all lands immediately surrounding the Town's boundary are owned by the United States Forest Service. A plan depicting Town-owned lands is found on the following page.

The Town of Vail has three open space-oriented zone districts – the Agricultural and Open Space District, the Outdoor Recreation District and the Natural Area Preservation District. While the purpose of the Agricultural and Open Space District and Outdoor Recreation District is to preserve open space lands, these districts allow for a limited range of land uses. The Natural Area Preservation District is intended to protect sensitive lands from development and land uses in this district are very limited. 758 acres, or 72.8% of all Town-owned lands are zoned one of these three open space districts. The 57 Town-owned parcels that are Designated Open Space total 533 acres.



Ford Park athletic fields.



TOWN OF VAIL OWNED LANDS AND I-70 R.O.W. LANDS

LAND NEEDS FOR PUBLIC USES AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

While there were suggestions from the community for expanding the supply of public parking, the development of more **workforce** housing, the development of conference performing art and recreation centers and a disc golf course, there was no single use that generated a significant number of requests from the community.

Town department directors were consulted for their input on the need for new or additional facilities. The Fire Department is interested in a one-acre site for a training facility. The Human Resources Department supported **workforce** housing to assist in recruitment and retention of employees. The Public Works Department would like to expand the existing snow dump, establish a solar farm and increase public parking, and the Economic Development Department supports the development of conference facilities, a theater and other event areas.

The feasibility of conference, performing art and recreation centers has been discussed and studied over the past few decades. Original plans for Ford Park included an aquatics/recreation center and on more than one occasion a convention center has been proposed, most recently at the east end of the Lionshead Parking Structure. For various reasons none of these facilities have been constructed. The development of additional public parking has been a priority of the Town for many years. A lack of available land and

the cost to construct parking are the two primary challenges to developing additional parking.

EVALUATION OF TOWN-OWNED LANDS

All 161 Town-owned parcels were evaluated to determine if any of these parcels can accommodate the Town's future needs for public or community-oriented facilities. A fundamental assumption in this evaluation was that existing uses will be maintained and no existing uses would be displaced in order to accommodate other uses.

The initial step in this evaluation considered the existing use and site characteristics of all Town-owned lands. Lands that are currently used for other purposes and lands with site characteristics that would preclude their development were eliminated from consideration. Lands were categorized one of four ways - developed lands such as the Vail Municipal Building, park and recreational lands such as Ford Park and the Vail Golf Club, environmentally constrained lands, and Designated Open Space parcels and conservation easement lands.

After eliminating parcels from the four categories listed above, only eight Town-owned parcels remained. These eight parcels were evaluated based on size, terrain and site characteristics, site context and relationship with surrounding lands, access and covenants restrictions. These eight parcels include:

Parcel #1 - Commonly referred to as the Middle Bench of Donovan Park, this 2.1 acre parcel is zoned Agricultural and Open Space and is located on Matterhorn Circle in the Matterhorn neighborhood. Based on site characteristics such as terrain and

access, this parcel is considered buildable. However, this parcel was purchased with RETT funds and as such land uses are **currently** limited to parks, recreation, open space and similar purposes. The Town Council has by resolution designated this parcel as a "park".

Parcel #2 – This 3.1 acre parcel located in the Glen Lyon neighborhood is zoned Special Development District. While the parcel is buildable based on site characteristics, use of the parcel is restricted by protective covenants.

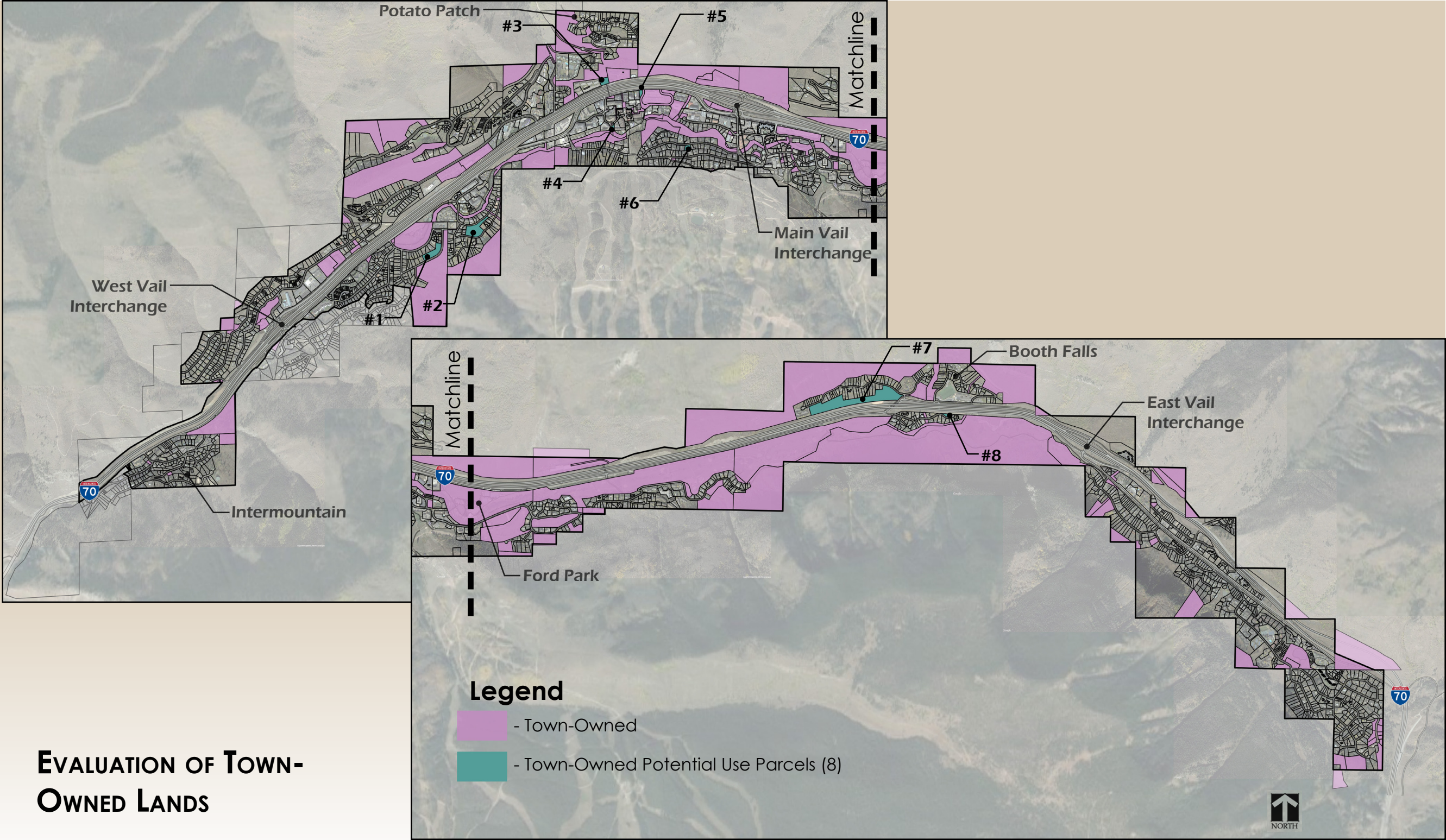
Parcel #3 – This 1 acre parcel is located at the north portal of the I-70 pedestrian bridge. Use of the parcel is restricted by protective covenants.

Parcel #4 – This .3 acre parcel is zoned Lionshead Mixed Use 1 and currently provides a pedestrian connection between Lionshead Place and the Gore Creek bike path. Use of the parcel is also restricted by protective covenants.

Parcel #5 – This .3 acre parcel located along East Lionshead Circle is zoned General Use. The size of this parcel limits its development potential.

Parcel #6 – This .5 acre parcel located on Beaver Dam Road is zoned Natural Area Preservation. The presence of wetlands would render this site to be unbuildable.

Parcel #7 – This 13 acre parcel is located along Bald Mountain Road. It is zoned Outdoor Recreation and the use of the parcel is restricted by protective covenants.



EVALUATION OF TOWN-OWNED LANDS

Parcel #8 – This .3 acre parcel is located between the I-70 corridor and Booth Creek Road. The size of this parcel limits its development potential.

Due to parcel size, access constraints, and restrictions due to covenants or land being purchased with RETT funds, none of these eight parcels are currently viable for the development of public uses or community-oriented facilities.

While the Town does not currently own vacant land capable of accommodating new uses, some Town-owned parcels that are currently developed may be capable of accommodating new or expanded uses. An example of this is the shared parking structure with Eagle County Schools, planned for Red Sandstone Elementary. Other examples could include the Public Works Facility, the Vail Municipal Building and the east end of the Lionshead Parking Structure. The Town owns additional lands adjacent to the Public Works facility that could accommodate expansion of the existing snow dump. *The east end of the Lionshead Parking Structure has been studied multiple times for the potential development of a conference facility.*



Development at the East end of Lionshead Parking Structure has been studied in the past.

In 2005 voters rejected a second tax increase to fund a Conference Center. The redevelopment of the Municipal Building has been studied for concepts that included additional community uses. Each of these possibilities would require additional study to fully understand the feasibility of accommodating other uses.

EVALUATION OF PRIVATELY-OWNED LANDS

The '94 Plan recommended a number of vacant, privately owned parcels to be acquired for the future development of public facilities and community-oriented uses. Examples of these are land acquired from Vail Resorts for expansion of the Public Works facility and land in West Vail that now includes the Chamonix housing project. Currently there are approximately 106 privately owned, undeveloped parcels in the Town of Vail. Each of these parcels was evaluated to understand if any could potentially accommodate public facilities and community-oriented uses.

Evaluation of these lands considered parcel size, existing zoning, site characteristics, the context of the site, covenant restrictions and its relationship to surrounding uses. The majority of these 106 parcels were deemed to not be viable for Town use for these reasons:

- Over half of the 106 parcels evaluated were Isolated, low density zoned parcels in established neighborhoods. These were considered to most appropriately be developed in accordance with existing zoning,
- Environmentally sensitive parcels were not considered viable development sites (these parcels are addressed in Chapter 2 – Environmentally

Sensitive Lands),

- Parcel size, site context and covenant restrictions limited the viability of many sites.

Remaining parcels were then considered relative to their ability to potentially accommodate the broad list of public facilities and community-oriented uses suggested by the community and Town staff. Due to parcel locations, site context and the land area requirements, none of the remaining parcels are feasible for the development of parking, conference, performing arts or recreation. There are *four* sites that could potentially accommodate *workforce* housing, *one of which could accomodate expansion to a town park.*



West Vail Parcels along Chamonix Lane

If assembled, these three contiguous parcels could accommodate a small housing development. These parcels are zoned Two-Family Primary/Secondary Residential and located next to multi-family and commercial development. While the parcels total 1.59

acres, development potential will be limited as over half the land area exceeds 40% slope. Refer to Action Item #4 in Chapter 5.



Old Roost Lodge

This 1.9 acre site previously accommodated the Roost Lodge. The site is now vacant and development approvals have been granted for a hotel/workforce housing development. If the approved development does not proceed, the site could be viable for the development of an workforce housing project or other community use. Refer to Action Item #7 in Chapter 5.



CDOT/Bighorn Parcel

This 1.8 acre site is owned by CDOT. The primary purpose of this acquisition is to protect the Bighorn Creek corridor. Limited residential development may also be feasible.

Development on both sides of Bighorn Creek

may be feasible but in all cases ample setbacks from the creek should be maintained and impacts to mature spruce trees west of the creek should be minimized. Refer to Action Item #23 in Chapter 5.



Talisa Tennis Courts

Tennis courts for the Talisa Hotel are located on this 3 acre site. The site is located immediately adjacent to Donovan Park. If in the future the hotel is interested disposal of this land, the Town could consider acquisition for a low to medium density workforce housing. The design of a housing project must be sensitive to the Gore Valley Trail and the Gore Creek corridor. Refer to Action Item #9 in Chapter 5.

MANAGEMENT OF VAIL'S OPEN LANDS

The '94 Plan included two approaches for the management of open lands. The first was to establish a cooperative management system with both the USFS and Vail Resorts. The second was to develop a management system to provide appropriate stewardship and maintenance for the Town's open lands. These concepts remain valid today. Community input during this update process echoed these concepts. Suggestions involved managing lands to promote biodiversity, attending to routine maintenance such as weed control and managing erosion or other issues and maintaining trails to

ensure they remain sustainable.

Below are management actions for open lands to be addressed by the Town. A number of these steps involve follow-up actions or the preparation of plans that will be completed after the adoption of this Plan. Some of these tasks are further discussed in Chapter 6 – Implementation.

Periodic Maintenance of Open Lands

All open lands will need periodic inspection and routine maintenance. Maintenance actions may include, but not be limited to, vegetation management and weed control, cleaning of litter or debris, resolving any erosion or drainage issues and repair or replace any improvements such as signs or seating. Town staff should establish seasonal inspections of all open lands to identify any maintenance needs. Appropriate staff and budget should be established to implement this management program.

Wildfire and Safety Considerations

The Vail Fire & Emergency Services is involved in ongoing efforts to manage vegetation to minimize the potential threat of wildfire in and around Vail. Wildfires do not recognize Town or property boundaries and the Department's mitigation efforts are not limited to Town-owned lands. That said, any decisions regarding management of the Town's open lands should be coordinated with the Department's wildfire mitigation efforts.

Any new recreation trails, whether located on Town land or on USFS lands, should also involve coordination with Vail Fire and Emergency Services. Considerations to be

addressed include emergency provider access to trails and mitigation of hazards that may be presented by standing-dead lodgepole located proximate to any new trails.

Managing Lands for Biodiversity

At its most basic level, biodiversity refers to the variety of plant and animal species found in a particular habitat. All plant and animal life is interconnected and ultimately dependent on one another. A habitat with healthy, diverse and vibrant biodiversity is essential to how an ecosystem functions with respect to cycling of nutrients and water, soil formation and retention, resistance to invasive species and the pollination of plants. Healthy biodiversity will benefit plant and animal life. The protection and preservation of the natural environment and wildlife resources of Vail's open space lands is a high priority of the community. The Town's open space lands could benefit from management programs designed to improve biodiversity.

“Biodiversity as a whole forms a shield protecting each of the species that together compose it, ourselves included.”
— E.O. Wilson

During the preparation of the '94 Plan the Town engaged the Colorado Nature Heritage Program to complete a Natural Heritage Inventory of the Town of Vail. The goal of this study was to identify “the localities of rare, threatened, or endangered species and the locations of significant natural

communities.” This effort evaluated thirteen parcels in and around Vail and the findings of this inventory provided a basis for some the recommended Action Items in the '94 Plan.

While the '94 Plan provided valuable information on the natural resources found on open lands in and around Vail, a current evaluation or inventory of existing conditions and the relative health of these resources should be completed as a first step to preparing a management plan for Town open spaces. Understanding the natural landscape and vegetation, habitat sub-types, hydrologic systems, wildlife resources and other characteristics found on these lands is critical to establishing a “baseline” of existing conditions. This effort should be completed by an ecological-oriented consulting firm and the scope of this effort may include land beyond Town Boundaries and include lands not owned by the Town. Chapter 4 – Trails addresses how a comprehensive evaluation of potential wildlife and environmental impacts from new recreation trails as a requisite to any new trail development. The inventory described above should be coordinated with the evaluation of new trail development.

Establishing a baseline of existing conditions will be useful for two reasons. Understanding existing conditions may identify the need to implement programs to enhance these natural resources. The baseline will also provide a valuable point of reference for the ongoing monitoring of these lands. The identification of potential habitat enhancements and a defined, systematic program for the monitoring of town open spaces should be elements of this effort.

The Vail community values the protection and preservation of environmental resources on the Town's open space lands. The community also values the recreational uses that occur on these lands. How open space lands are managed and the level of human activity they experience will directly affect biodiversity. Decisions on how these lands are managed and used should be made to balance these two community priorities. Recommendations for the management and use of open space lands should also be an element of this effort.

CHAPTER 4 -TRAILS



Improving the trail and bike path system in and around Vail was listed as one of the top three priorities of the '94 Plan for open space and recreation needs and four of the five top "priorities for action" involved improvements to the Town's recreational trails and paths. These four improvements from the '94 Plan included:

- Extend the Vail Trail to East Vail and add several trailheads to access the trail,
- Add a new trail on the north side and western half of Town to connect existing trailheads and neighborhoods,
- Add three trailheads in the core area to access Vail Mountain trails and inform visitors of trail opportunities and provide better access to Gore Creek,
- Add bike lanes to the north and south frontage roads (the entire length of Town) and add paved shoulders to Vail Valley Drive.

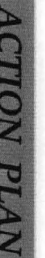
Of these five priority improvements, the North Trail has been constructed and bike lanes along the North and South Frontage Roads have been completed. The '94 Plan included a total of twenty-four other trail system improvements. Many of these improvements have been addressed, most notable among them are wayfinding and trailhead signage and new or improved trailheads at the Buffehr Creek, Davos, Middle Creek and Booth Falls trails.

The '94 Plan included a Trails Plan that identified specific improvements to Vail's trail system and a Concept Plan. The Concept Plan was diagrammatic in nature and included the idea of a soft surface trail system that looped the perimeter of Town to provide connections between all of Vail's neighborhoods. This concept was compared to trail systems in the Alps where interconnected trails allow hikers to access surrounding villages. The Trails Plan and Concept Plan from the '94 Plan are found on the following pages.

Trails were a significant element of the '94 Plan. In some cases, however, the '94 Plan lacked detail on future trail development with respect to the purpose for new trails, design standards or user groups to be served by the trails. One of the objectives of this update is to provide more clarity with respect to Vail's vision for recreation trails.

This chapter includes a summary of community input and a broad vision statement for Vail's trail system. Existing trails, including unofficial or social trails were inventoried, trail use on key trails was measured and an overall assessment of Vail's existing trail system has been completed. A conceptual trails plan provides ideas for new trails that could be developed in the future and a process for evaluating and making decision on new trail development is also provided.





2018 Open Lands Plan Update

COMMUNITY INPUT ON TRAILS

Recreational trails were a focal point of discussion at community meetings held during this update process. Input was obtained during scoping sessions, community meetings, small group trail meetings and a Town-wide trails workshop.

Scoping Sessions and Community Meetings

Wide spread support and appreciation for Vail's trail system and for surrounding regional trails was expressed by the community. When asked "do you see trails providing a benefit to the community" during the Scoping Sessions, the overwhelming majority of respondents answered "yes". Trails are viewed as an important resource for living a healthy and active lifestyle, for providing alternative modes of transportation and for contributing to Vail's tourism-based economy. The need for trail maintenance, improved signage, expanded parking at trailheads and trail management to address user conflicts were also cited. A summary of community input on trails is found in the appendix.

The community was divided on the need for expansion of the existing trail system. While many thought Vail's system of trails was sufficient and the expansion of trails was not necessary, many others saw potential benefits from the development of new trails. In written community feedback obtained during the Scoping Sessions, when asked "what steps could be taken to improve the Town's existing trail system" a majority of those who responded were in support of more trails. When asked about the Concept Plan idea of a trail system linking Vail neighborhoods from the '94 Plan, a

clear majority of those who responded thought this was a good idea. Notwithstanding the input above, there was a clear consensus that if any new trails are developed, that they be designed and constructed in a sensitive and sustainable manner and that any new trails not result in adverse impacts on the natural environment or wildlife resources. Impacts on wildlife that may result from the use of trails was clearly a community concern and in response a Wildlife Forum was held during the preparation of this Plan. The forum included four wildlife biologists and discussion focused on the state of wildlife resources in the Gore Creek Valley and how human activity affects wildlife. Information from the wildlife forum and the importance of wildlife considerations being an integral part of any discussion on future recreation trail development is further addressed in this chapter.

Community input on trails was diverse and whether expressed by trail proponents or those not interested in new trail development, opinions about trails were conveyed with great passion. Community input from these meetings highlighted the complexity and challenges associated with defining community goals for trails. In response, the SE Group, a consulting firm with expertise in trail design and planning was engaged to facilitate additional community involvement, to evaluate Vail's existing trail system, to identify social trails, to define a broad vision for Vail's trails and develop a conceptual trails plan.

Comments below were made during the community input process and are representative of the wide range of perspectives on trails:

"Vail can't be all things to all people"

"Vail should be a mountain biking mecca"

"Build a loop trail around the valley for world-class connectivity"

"Make the Vail Trail hiking-only"

"We have an amazing place - let's work with our existing trails with better signage and maintenance"

"Natural trails as Vail's signature"

"Vail may not be a trails destination but we need a trails update to meet existing demand"

"Vail should be a place where kids can ride a bike safely"

SMALL GROUP MEETINGS ON TRAILS

Five small group meetings were held to discuss the Town's recreational trail system. The purpose of these meetings was to bring divergent opinions together in small group settings to explore in greater detail issues and opportunities with trails. The goal of these meetings was to find common ground for how the Town's trail system can be improved. Approximately 25 people participated in these

meetings. Below are five themes with respect to trails were drawn from these discussions along with notable comments from these meetings:

Safety

- Work to minimize user conflict through signage and education
- Safety concerns for all users in certain areas of Town especially in the roundabout
- Complete paved trails segments where possible to provide more off-roadway opportunities (for example, Vail Mountain School to the East Vail Interchange)
- Prepare for the increasing prevalence of electric assisted bikes or e-bike riders
- Improve wayfinding

Sustainability

- Limited trail expansion and coordinate with neighboring communities instead of duplicating all trail types. “We can’t be all things, to all people”
- Wildlife concerns – ensure protection of important habitats and wildlife populations
- Make improvements to existing trails to make them more sustainable to reduce maintenance costs and preserve the environment
- Repair, improve, adopt and better utilize existing trails and connections before building new trails
- Consider maintenance options such as volunteer groups, youth corps and trail maintenance crews
- Vail’s trails should continue to provide a nature experience for locals and guests

Accessibility

- It is difficult to follow the Gore Valley Trail especially through East Vail (need better signage or icon to follow)

- A soft surface trail parallel to Gore Valley Trail could function as a commuting route for locals and a beginner trail for guests. (some oppose parallel trails)
- Overcrowding on existing soft surface trails (especially Booth Falls trail) is an existing concern – can these users be dispersed to other trails?
- Improve public access to trail information and push it to hotels and businesses – maps, online information, etc. which could help disperse hikers and bikers
- The adoption of social trails could alleviate congestion on existing trails
- Bus service and connector paths to trailheads could make trails accessible without a vehicle

Diversity

- Reduce user conflict by providing a variety of trail types
- Protect the existing Vail Trail as a small footprint, meandering, hiking trail and provide other similar trail types where possible
- Provide beginner to intermediate mountain biking trails
- Provide easier walking trails for children, elderly, and inexperienced hikers
- Vail’s topography is challenging for trail diversity
- Currently other jurisdictions provide a wider range of trail opportunities (particularly for mountain biking)
- Consider other trail activities when developing trails such as fat bikes, e-bikes, snowshoes, etc
- A pump track and beginner loop in Town could provide mountain biking experience for children

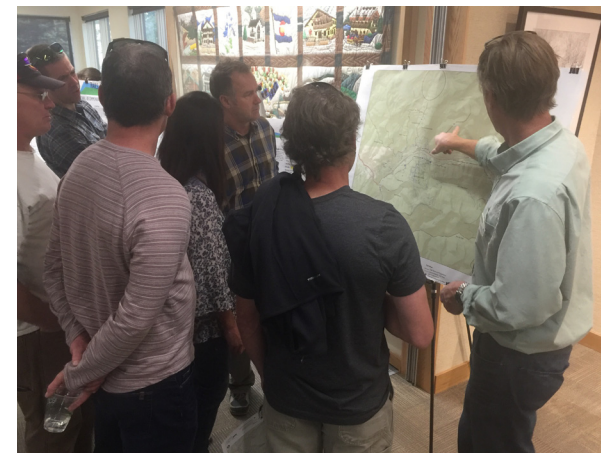
Connectivity

- Improve connectivity of both hard and soft surface trails
- Additional connector trails to Forest Service trails may help mitigate trailhead parking problems
- Additional short connector trails between

- neighborhoods (making it easier for kids to ride to school or a friend’s house)
- Convenient neighborhood access points for hiking, biking, and local trips
- Improve connectivity to Vail Resorts’ trails
- Build a trail connecting Vail to nearby Towns (i.e. Minturn and Avon)

TRAILS COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

A trails specific workshop was held to continue the community’s conversation about trails. The workshop was an open house format and was attended by approximately 40 people. Information presented included an overview of the planning and approval process for trails, the five trail themes that came out of the small group meetings, an inventory of user-created social trails, trail usage on both social and sanctioned trails, and design considerations for trails. A Conceptual Trails Plan identifying possible ideas for new trail segments was also presented and additional trail ideas were identified by community members during the workshop.



Interaction during the trails specific community workshop.

A VISION FOR VAIL'S TRAILS

Based on input from the community throughout this update process, the vision for Vail's system of trails and pathways is:

A system of paved and soft-surface trails that is safe for all users. Through best practices in design, signage and education, trail users with diverse needs and ability levels can safely recreate on trails in the Vail area. Educational and informational programs with an emphasis on safety, awareness and respect for others are provided to trail users.

Trails are maintained to meet the highest standards for sustainability. Managing existing trails to maintain high standards takes priority over expanding the trail network.

All trails are designed and constructed to respect and protect sensitive wildlife habitat and terrain while providing opportunities for both residents and visitors to connect with and experience nature.

A variety of soft and hard-surface trails of varying difficulty levels are available to provide accessibility to all user groups.

Connectivity is key. Trails provide safe, non-vehicular connections between neighborhoods and important destinations in Town. Proper signage will make trails easy to find and follow.

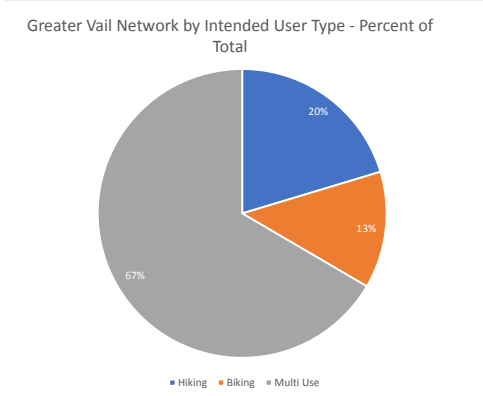
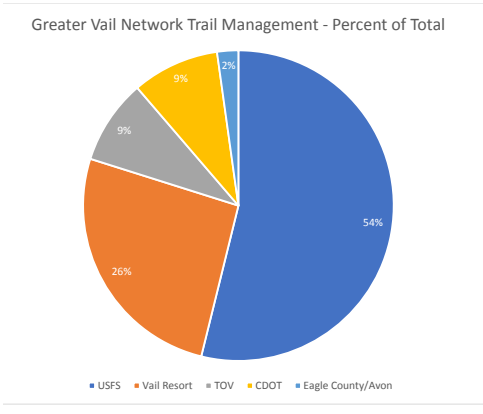
Trails in the Vail area are planned in concert with trails in the surrounding area. Continued collaboration with neighboring towns, Eagle County, and the USFS is essential for a successful trail network.

EVALUATION OF EXISTING TRAILS

The location and alignment of trails are typically defined by terrain, site constraints and opportunities, and objectives for creating trail linkages or connecting trails to specific destinations. Trail systems are not necessarily bound by property ownership or political boundaries. As such, the evaluation of existing trails involve trails that are located or start within Vail’s boundary and trails in the surrounding area. Factors considered in the evaluation of existing trails included the number and length of existing trails, agencies responsible for trail management, type of trail (paved or soft surface), trail user groups (multi-use, hiking only, biking only) and trail ability level.

A total of 90 hard and soft surface trails totaling nearly 200 miles were inventoried. While the vast majority of these trails are located outside of the Town’s boundary, they are considered part of Vail’s trail system given their connectivity and proximity to Vail. For example, only short segments of East Vail trails (such as Booth Falls and Bighorn), are located within the Town’s boundary, yet the entire length of these trails are included in this inventory. The Two Elk trail is well outside the Town’s boundaries, but given its connectivity to trails on Vail Mountain it is included in this inventory. Charts and tables below provide general information on existing trails in the greater Vail area.

Throughout the greater Vail area there is a relatively even distribution of easy, moderate and difficult ability level trails. There is a high percentage of easy ability multi-use trails, however this percentage is skewed by the large amount of paved trails, all of which are considered easy ability level. The percentage of hiking only and biking only trails is relatively low. This is largely a function of most USFS



Greater Vail Network by Intended User Type, and Ability Level		
Hiking		20%
Easy – 8%	Moderate – 35%	Difficult – 56%
Biking		13%
Easy – 8%	Moderate – 72%	Difficult – 20%
Multi-Use		67%
Easy – 42%	Moderate – 32%	Difficult – 26%

Note: Numbers may not total due to rounding

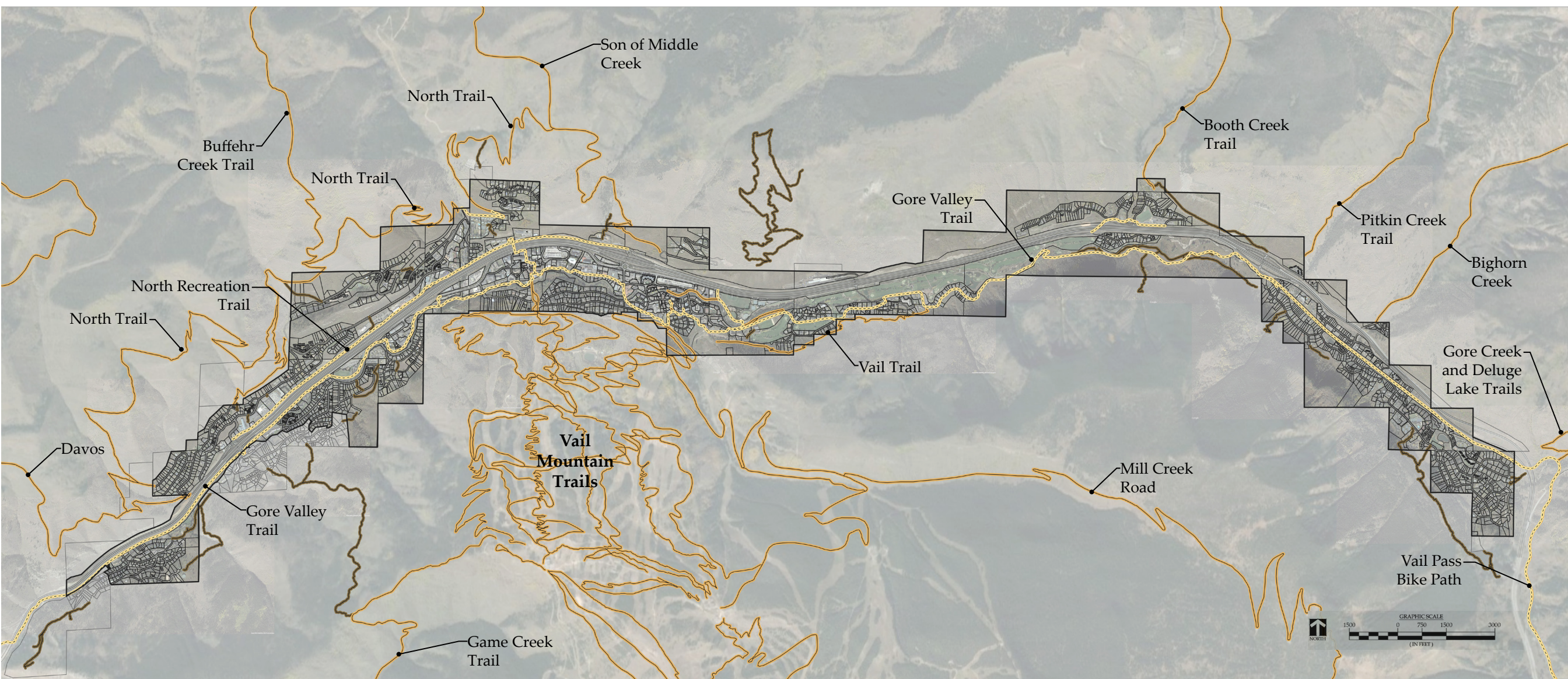
trails being multi-use. Hiking only trails are primarily located in wilderness areas and biking only trails are primarily located on Vail Mountain.

The Town of Vail manages 19 miles of trails.

Approximately 17 miles of these are hard surface trails and just 2 miles are soft surface trails. Examples of soft surface trails include the Village Streamwalk and the Vail Nature Center Trail. All trails managed by the Town are easy ability level trails. There are many other trail opportunities within and proximate to Vail that are managed by others. Vail Mountain includes a system of interpretive, hiking, biking and freeride biking trails, many of which are directly accessible from Town. Eight USFS trailheads providing access to multi-use and hiking trails are located in Vail. Most Vail Mountain and USFS trails are in the moderate and difficult ability level.

The trail inventory process employed trail-use counters and identified more than 14 miles of unsanctioned social trails. As expected, trail-use counts revealed the highest level of use on the paved paths, with up to 3,000 users per week on sections of the Gore Valley Trail. As for soft-surface trails, it is interesting to note that, while lower, the use-level on non-sanctioned social trails is significant when compared to sanctioned trails. For example, the trail counters estimate approximately 300-400 users per week on sections of the sanctioned North Trail, while some social trails see between 100-200 weekly users. Social trails are typically found in areas where sanctioned trails do not exist, often providing neighborhood access to a soft-surface trail. This indicates the desire for people to access trails from their homes, regardless of proximity to official trails.

The map on the following page depicts existing hard and soft surface trails and social trails in and around the Town of Vail.



EXISTING TRAILS

WILDLIFE AND THE GORE VALLEY

Input from the community was quite clear that any new trail development be located, designed, constructed and managed in a sensitive and sustainable manner and that any new trails not have **adverse** impacts on the natural environment or wildlife resources. The community clearly values recreation trails and clearly values our natural environment and wildlife. This raises the question – what is the current state of wildlife in and around Vail?

The Gore Creek Valley has changed dramatically since Vail was established in the early 1960's and these changes, be it from the growth of the Town and the population the Gore Valley now supports, the size and level of activity on Vail Mountain, Interstate 70, or the increased year-around recreational activity in and around Vail, there have been significant impacts on wildlife habitat. A 2017 letter from Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) documented significant declines in the population of many species, particularly deer, elk and bighorn sheep, and that the long-term sustainability of these species is in question. Many factors could be attributable to these declining populations, among them weather, disease, population management, loss of habitat, development and human disturbance. While the current level of development in and around Vail is a major factor, there is no question that human activity from recreation trails directly impact wildlife and its habitat. The 2017 CPW letter is found in the appendix of this Plan.

The Wildlife Forum **held in January of 2018** involved a panel discussion of wildlife in and around the Gore Valley. Presentations were made by two independent wildlife biologists

and wildlife biologists from the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the CPW. Presentations addressed the current state of wildlife in the Gore Creek Valley, potential reasons for the decline of some species, the importance of quality habitat to the health of wildlife, how human activity can impact wildlife and the potential for implementing measures for **minimizing, mitigating, or eliminating** impacts on wildlife. A video of the Wildlife Forum is available for viewing at <http://www.vailgov.com/wildlifeforum>. **A summary of the Wildlife Forum is found in the appendix of this Plan.**

WILDLIFE AND RECREATION TRAILS

Recreation trails can impact wildlife and wildlife habitat many ways. The mere presence of human activity from a hiker or biker will affect wildlife by causing stress, affecting foraging time and generally disrupting how typical behavioral patterns and how habitat is typically utilized. These impacts affect an animal's overall level of health and fitness, its reproductive success and winter survival rates. These impacts are particularly adverse in critical wildlife habitat such as calving areas, migration corridors and winter range areas. One thing is clear – any discussion of recreation trails cannot take place without a parallel discussion of wildlife.

The CPW has prepared wildlife maps that can be used to gauge potential impacts from trails and human activity on wildlife. These maps are based on data and findings from various wildlife studies, they are not based on site-specific analysis. That said, these maps do provide a general indication of factors to consider when studying how recreation trails could affect wildlife.

Area of Influence Maps

The CPW has mapped “areas of influence” for various species. Areas of influence are

defined by horizontal distances measured from a trail, within which wildlife could be affected. Distances are based on data from wildlife studies and as such do not take into consideration terrain, vegetation or other site-specific considerations that could influence how a trail may affect wildlife. The distances used to define the area of influence vary by species.

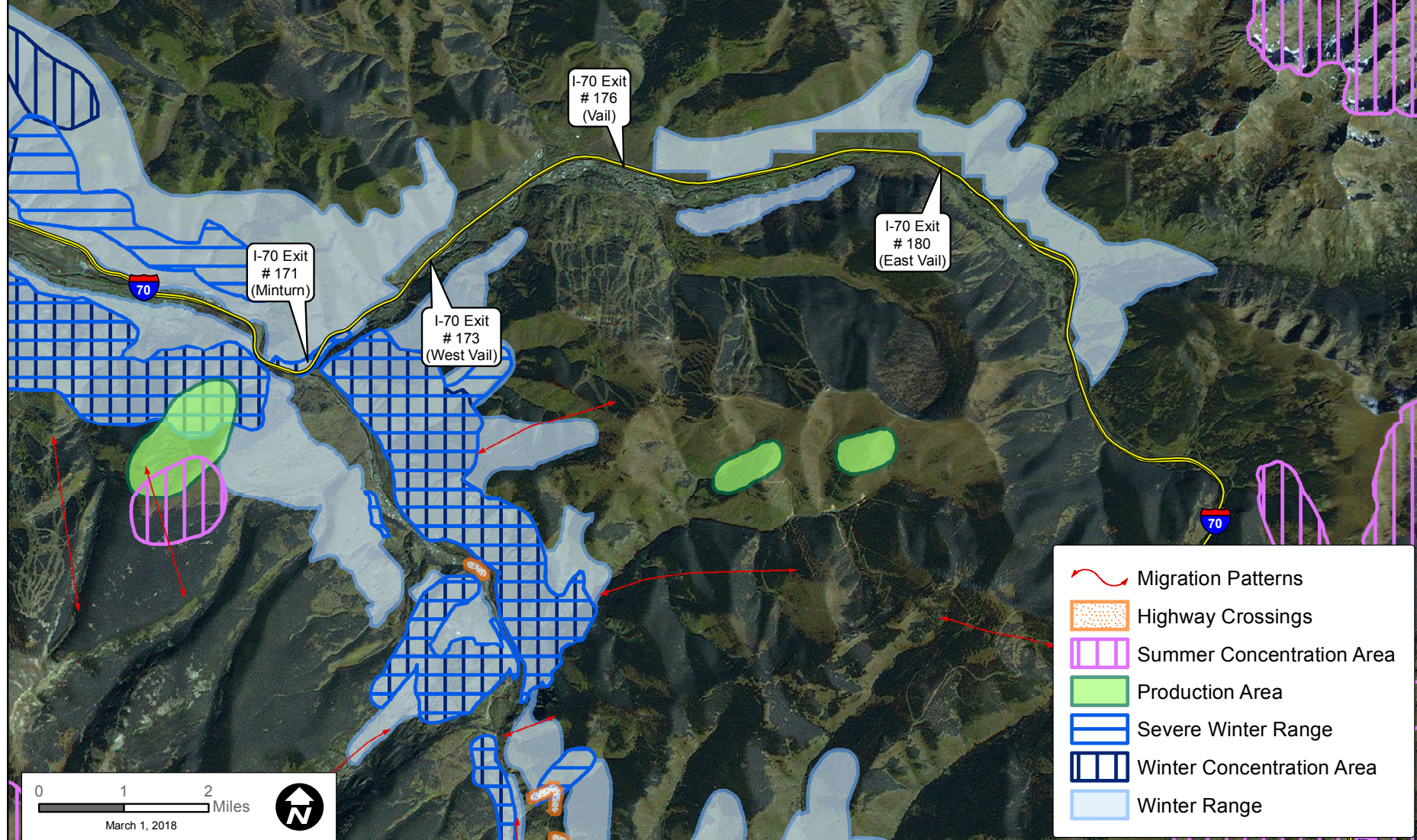
CPW generated Area of Influence maps for elk, mule deer, bighorn sheep and peregrine falcon based on conceptual trail ideas from early in this planning process. While general in nature, this mapping provides a starting point for understanding potential impacts from trails. Copies of these maps are found in the appendix. Note that the maps generated by CPW are based on trail ideas that are different from what is now presented in this Plan. Nonetheless, they do provide some context for understanding the information provided by these maps.

Wildlife Resource Maps

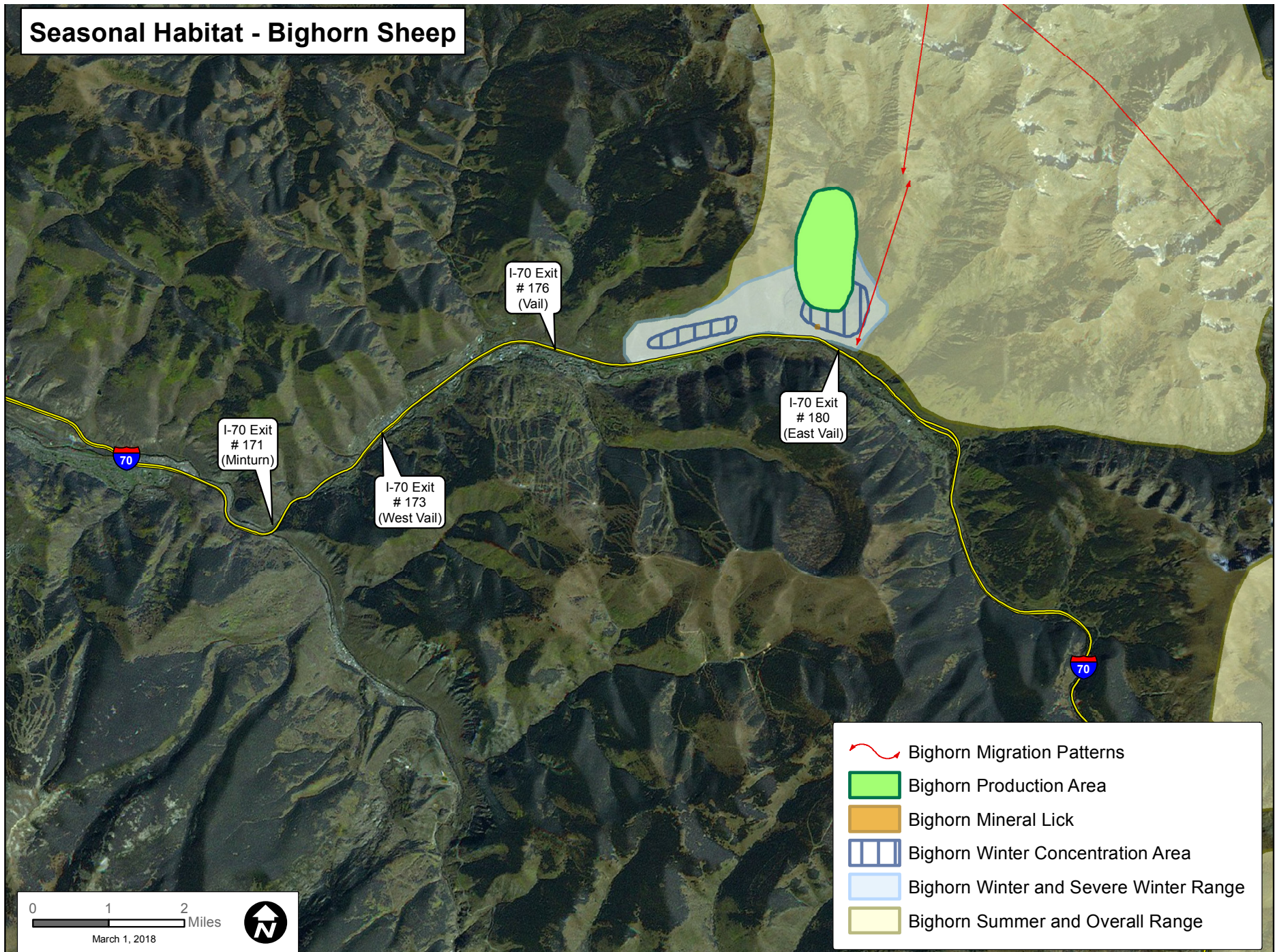
CPW has mapped wildlife resources for many different species. These maps indicate the general location of winter range, severe winter range, calving areas, migration corridors and other types of wildlife habitat. The maps on the

Seasonal Habitat - Elk

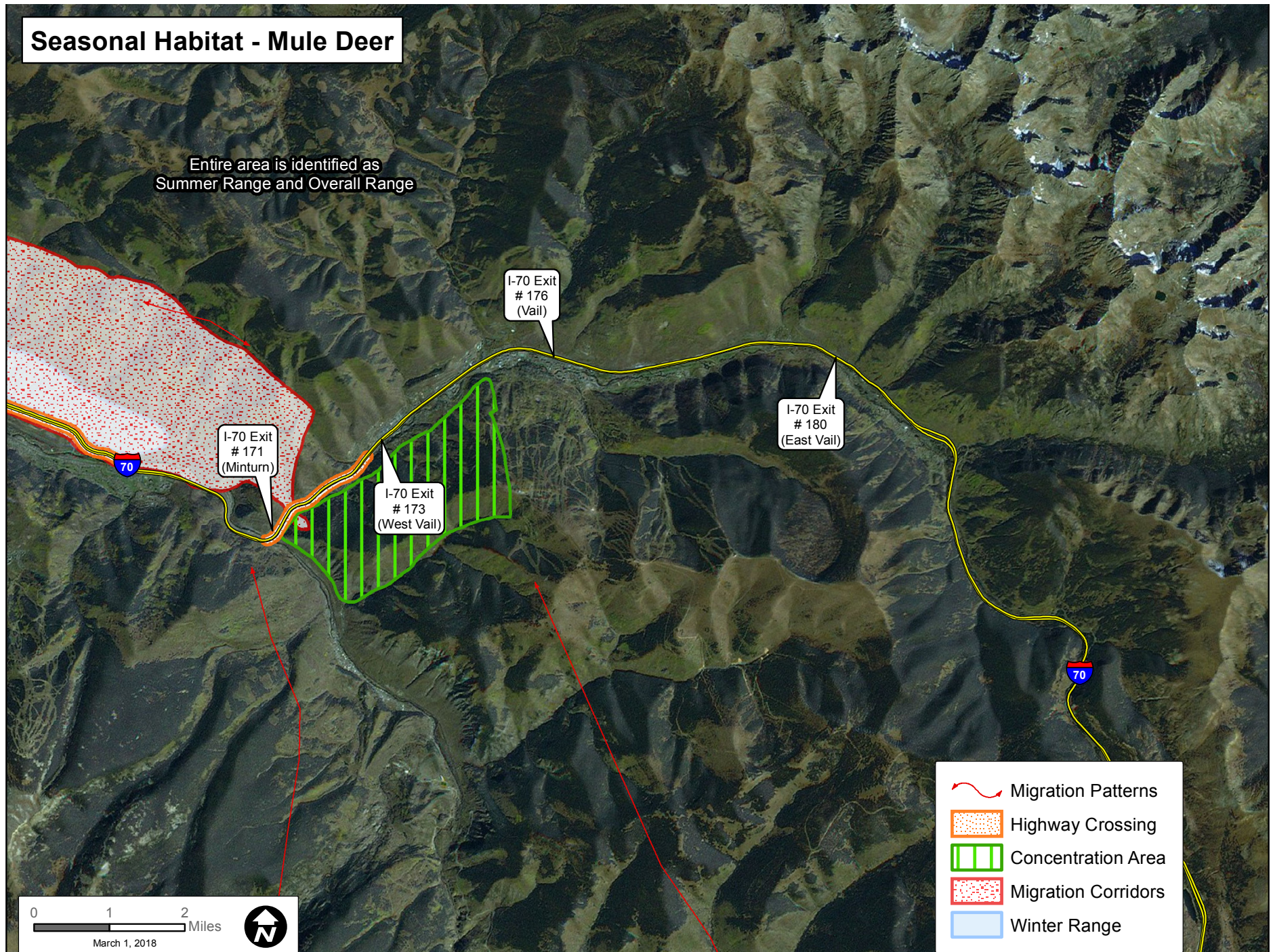
Entire area is identified as
Summer Range and Overall Range



Seasonal Habitat - Bighorn Sheep



Seasonal Habitat - Mule Deer

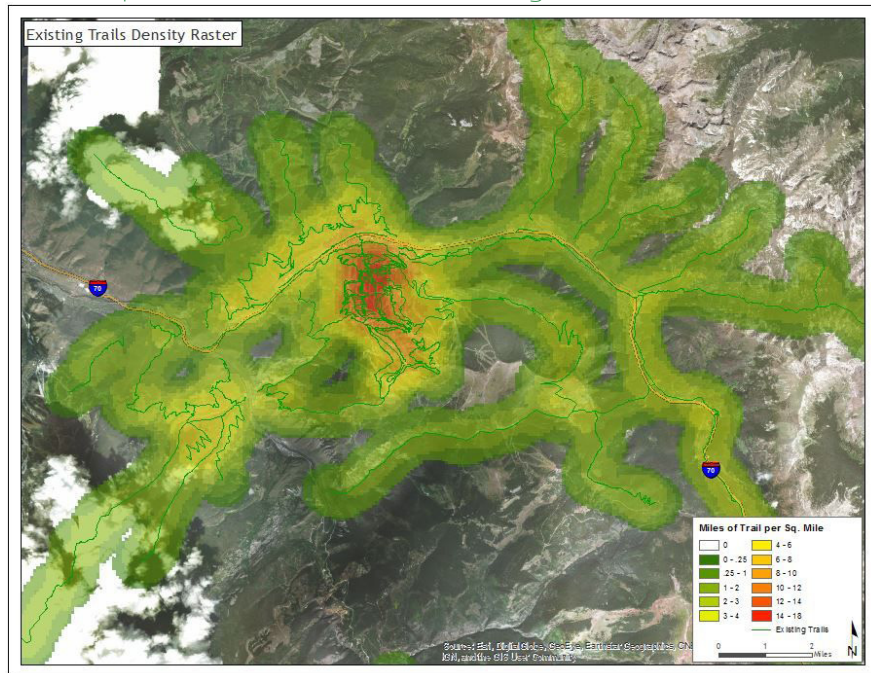


following page depict the type of data provided by CPW mapping.

Trail Density Maps

Trail density maps depict miles of trails per square mile. This data provides a general indication of the intensity of trail activity within a region. Below is a density map prepared by CPW of existing trails within the Gore Valley and surrounding area. Green indicates areas with fewer existing trails per square mile, while red areas indicate more trails per square mile. A basic premise when planning recreation trails that are sensitive to wildlife is to locate new trails within areas already influenced by human activity. The Trail Density Map provides information helpful to this effort. It should be noted that the density maps depict trail density only, they do not depict the impact of roads, homes or other development or the amount of use on any existing trail.

These maps and feedback from CPW during the



in defining suggestions for new trail ideas.

MITIGATING MEASURES PRIOR TO THE STUDY OF POTENTIAL NEW TRAILS

The CPW has documented significant declines in certain wildlife populations in the Gore Valley and the surrounding region and there is near universal agreement that activity from recreation trails can adversely impact wildlife populations and its habitats. In response to the existing condition of wildlife resources in the Gore Valley and value the Vail community places on wildlife, it is recommended that prior to the development of new recreation trails that the following steps be taken in an attempt to improve wildlife resources:

Trail-Free Zones

Areas that are free of trails generally have very little human activity and these areas serve as wildlife sanctuaries where animals benefit from solitude

and the lack of disruption from humans. Defining trail-free zones could be a great benefit to wildlife resources. Trail-free zones are depicted on the Conceptual Trails Plan. These zones are located on USFS land and coordination with the USFS would be necessary to implement these zones. Areas depicted are conceptual in nature and will need further study and refinement during subsequent evaluation of trails and wildlife.

Public Education

Educating the public on how

trail use can affect wildlife can be very effective in fostering behavior that is sensitive to wildlife. Respecting trail closures, having dogs on leash and not walking off trails are examples of behavior that will help minimize the impacts of trail use. If people understand the importance of being respectful and sensitive to wildlife resources, they will be more likely to behave in a respectful and sensitive manner. Educational programs targeted to both locals and guests should be implemented.

Seasonal Trail Closures

CPW has indicated that by and large, most people comply with seasonal wildlife trail closures. That said, using video cameras the USFS has documented extensive violations of a trail closure with the Town. However, the impacts to wildlife can be significant when closures are violated. Steps to improve compliance with seasonal closures could include active monitoring of trailheads, taking enforcement action against violators and constructing gates at trails with seasonal closures. These measures will require coordination with CPW and USFS.

Habitat Enhancement

Wildlife habitat has been impacted by development, fragmentation and overall declining health. Options for improving habitat by enhancing vegetation include: controlled burns, fertilization and manual manipulation of vegetation. Coordination with CPW and USFS should be initiated to define how the Town could assist in programs to enhance habitat in and around Vail.

CONCEPTUAL TRAILS PLAN

The Conceptual Trails Plan identifies twelve