

## Lead King Loop Stakeholder Group

Recommendations to the Town of Marble,  
Gunnison County, and the U.S. Forest Service



July 2022

Commented [MA2R1]: I am working to get a good citation for this.

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## Executive Summary

Gunnison County, the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District of the White River National Forest, and the Town of Marble convened a stakeholder group to provide recommendations to the management direction of the Lead King Loop and surrounding areas. The purpose of this report is to present the stakeholder group recommendations and document the process by which the group arrived at these recommendations.

The convening entities partnered with Western Colorado University’s Center for Public Lands to provide skilled neutral facilitation of the Lead King Loop stakeholder process. Between December 2021 and June 2022, the Center organized and facilitated four stakeholder workshops and three public listening sessions attended by 123 members of the public. The Center also conducted a community survey and established a [web home](#) for the project and public meetings.

After listening to public concerns and carefully balancing diverse interests, stakeholder group members issued the series of consensus-based recommendations described in this document. The group believes these actions, if implemented, have high potential to provide exceptional recreation opportunities while mitigating impacts to the community and the environment. Recommendations span a wide variety of strategies including parking management, reservation systems, education, enforcement, noise regulations, road conditions, trail construction, and OHV management.

Summary of Recommendations for Management of the Lead King Loop	
<b>Parking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Gunnison County and Aspen-Sopris Ranger District</i> establish parking spots, landscaping, signage, turn around options, and facilities (e.g., bathrooms, trashcans, kiosks) on land adjacent to County Road 3 at the base of Daniels Hill to accommodate parking for approximately 20 passenger vehicles.</li> <li>• <i>Town of Marble</i> reduce truck and trailer parking spaces within the Town limits from an estimated 20-30 poorly regulated spaces to 12 well-managed and reservable spaces.</li> <li>• Pending outcomes of the OHV ban and an assessment of the effectiveness of delineating clear roadside parking spaces to constrain impacts, <i>Gunnison County, Aspen-Sopris Ranger District, and the Town of Marble</i> study parking lot and parking reservation options on <i>County, Forest Service, and Town lands</i>.</li> </ul>
<b>Reservation Systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Town of Marble</i> develop a reservation system for 12 truck and trailer parking spaces across from the Millsite Park. The stakeholder group supports the collection of fees for truck and trailer parking in this area for the purpose of maintaining the reservation system and funding education and enforcement efforts. Reservations should be accompanied by educational information.</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under the "More Mindful Marble Tourism Management Project" funded by the Colorado Tourism Office, <i>Western Colorado University's Center for Public Lands</i> develop an interpretive signage and communication plan for the Upper Crystal River Valley.</li> <li>• <i>Western Colorado University's Center for Public Lands</i> engage the Stay the Trail organization in development of educational materials to promote a culture of responsible OHV use in the Upper Crystal River Valley.</li> <li>• <i>Gunnison County, Aspen-Sopris Ranger District, and the Town of Marble</i> incorporate education whenever possible into all other management approaches listed in this document, such as parking management, reservation system administration, and enforcement.</li> <li>• <i>Town of Marble</i> place an electronic sign at the Junction of 133 and County Road 3 to inform visitors about parking availability.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Enforcement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Gunnison County Sheriff Department</i> provide increased law enforcement presence in the Upper Crystal River Valley, especially on weekends and during peak season.</li> <li>• <i>Aspen-Sopris Ranger District</i> have a Forest Protection Officer patrol the Lead King Loop, especially on weekends and during peak season.</li> <li>• <i>Towns of Marble and Crystal</i> explore opportunities to raise funding for increased summer law enforcement presence through private donations offered as matching funds for U.S. Forest Service law enforcement. <i>Treasure Mountain Ranch</i> is considered a likely first entity to offer such a contribution.</li> <li>• <i>Town of Marble</i> develop a program to train Upper Crystal River Valley residents to act as ambassadors of the destination and educate both visitors and residents about conserving natural and cultural assets in and around Marble.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Noise Regulations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Aspen-Sopris Ranger District, Gunnison County, and the Town of Marble</i> purchase devices to measure decibels at a vehicle's tailpipe to increase enforcement of the 96-decibel limit and educate visitors about noise levels of their vehicles.</li> <li>• <i>Town of Marble and Gunnison County</i> explore the feasibility and impact of implementing a noise ordinance that sets stricter decibel levels for OHVs than those already established at the state level.</li> <li>• Through work under the Colorado Tourism Office grant, <i>Town of Marble and Western Colorado University's Center for Public Lands</i> identify opportunities to incorporate noise regulations into existing and future enforcement and education efforts. Even with limited enforcement, a noise ordinance, associated media attention, and signage informing visitors of stringent decibel limits could have a desirable effect on visitor behavior.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Road Conditions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Gunnison County</i> further explore the possibility (including legal ramifications) of installing a gatekeeper at the bottom of Daniels Hill. The gatekeeper should be designed to match the most difficult road conditions encountered on the six-mile stretch between the Towns of Marble and Crystal. The gatekeeper should be accompanied by a gated bypass option. Keys for the gate should be distributed to federal, state, and local agencies and private property owners, so that emergency vehicles, government personnel, and landowners can access the Lead King Loop area. The gatekeeper should also be coupled with educational efforts, including signage on both sides of the gatekeeper, informing drivers of the recommended vehicle clearance and roughness of the road ahead.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Trail Construction</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Aspen-Sopris Ranger District</i> explore the possibility of building a separate trail from the bottom to the top of Daniels Hill to enhance experiences of motorized and non-motorized users in the area.</li> <li>• Groups like the <i>Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association</i> who specialize in trail building actions should be involved in the feasibility analysis for such a trail.</li> </ul>
<p><b>OHV Management</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Gunnison County</i> should continue the current exemption on County Road 3 through the end of 2023. This extension would allow for</li> </ul>

	<p>implementation and evaluation of other recommendations identified in this document.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Town of Marble</i>, in partnership with <i>Western Colorado University's Center for Public Lands</i>, should pursue funding to systematically analyze the outcomes of the proposed actions. This analysis could include surveys of residents and visitors, collection of visitor use data, assessment of environmental change, and evaluation of the costs and benefits of the recommendations, and should be reported to the Town of Marble/Gunnison County/U.S. Forest Service by November 2023 to inform the decision on the County Road 3 exemption.</li><li>• <i>Aspen-Sopris Ranger District</i> continue to collect visitor use data on the Lead King Loop Road and share results with the stakeholder group by the end of 2022 and again in 2023.</li><li>• If quality of life issues and environmental concerns do not abate, this group will reconvene and revisit the implications of and processes for restricting OHVs on County Road 3, the Lead King Loop Road, and/or within the Town of Marble.</li></ul>
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## Introduction

The Town of Marble has about 120 year-round residents and is in the northwest corner of Gunnison County. The White River National Forest surrounds the town with connectivity to National Forest lands by dirt mountain roads. The public lands surrounding the Towns of Marble and Crystal, including the Crystal Mill, attract more than 17,000 visitors, who visit through the gateway community of Marble, visit mostly during the months of May to October. Marble is seeing an increase in outdoor recreation-based tourism. This increase in use is putting new pressure on the environmental and social-economic systems of the Upper Crystal River Valley, including communities of Marble and Crystal, Gunnison County lands, and U.S. Forest Service lands.

A main attraction of the area is the historic Crystal Mill and Town Site. Images of the picturesque mill perched above the Crystal River spread prolifically on social and traditional media, drawing visitors in four-wheel drive and off highway vehicles (OHVs), as well as hikers, bikers, and horseback riders. Some continue to travel the rugged, scenic 13-mile Lead King Loop Road beyond the Crystal Mill and Town Site. The public has expressed concerns about noise, road safety, parking, decreased user enjoyment, and environmental degradation that are corresponding with the increase in use. These multifaceted

pressures prompted local municipalities and governing bodies to initiate a formal planning process.

Three years ago, a working group formed to consider the effects of increased use of the Lead King Loop. The group met monthly to identify issues and priorities, opening conversation between diverse entities including the U.S. Forest Service, Gunnison County, Town of Marble, Town of Crystal, and other groups. In 2020, Western Colorado University graduate student, Corinne Truesdell, collected visitor use data and conducted interviews and focus groups among residents. Her report can be found [here](#). In 2021, the working group's recommendations to increase enforcement were put into practice, with positive outcomes.

Upon recommendation from the working group, the County and Town are working to assure that town signs and regulations meet County criteria for enforcement. In 2021, an additional County deputy focused enforcement efforts on Somerset, Black Mesa, Kebler Pass, McClure Pass, and Marble, and an additional US Forest Service Forest Protection Officer, funded in part by the Town and County, patrolled the Lead King Loop two days a week from May through September.

The working group also supported a parking and education plan by the Town of Marble. Using a mixture of volunteers and paid staff, the Town placed an attendant at the Millsite Park parking area on weekends in the 2021 summer season. The attendant helped guide and inform visitors and remind them of recreation etiquette. The Town of Marble worked with Wilderness Workshop to produce brochures and informational material to help educate visitors on expectations while visiting Marble and the backcountry surrounding it. Working group members also participated in a workshop hosted by the Colorado Tourism Office to strategize promotion of Marble as a place for diverse recreation and enjoyment of nature and the arts, and history.

To build upon these initial efforts, the working group endorsed beginning a facilitated process to integrate public and stakeholder sentiment into a consensus-based strategy for future management actions. In January of 2021, Gunnison County, the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District of the White River National Forest, and the Town of Marble convened a stakeholder group to address issues and define potential strategies for management of recreation-based tourism on the Lead King Loop and in the Upper Crystal River Valley.



## **Lead King Loop Stakeholder Group**

### ***Purpose and Objectives***

The Lead King Loop Stakeholder Group formed to balance the interests related to the Upper Crystal River Valley in providing advice and recommendations to the management direction of the Lead King Loop and surrounding areas. The group accomplished this through mutual education; transparency in process; fostering communication between constituents and governmental agencies; and identifying, evaluating, and recommending options that meet the needs of the many stakeholders involved.

The objectives of the collaborative process were to a) Create a shared vision for the management of the Lead King Loop area; b) Explore stakeholder perspectives regarding recreation use and options to manage recreation use in the interim and long-term; and c) Provide consensus-based recommendations for managers and government partners that have high potential to provide exceptional recreation opportunities while mitigating impacts to the community and environment.

For additional details, the charter of the stakeholder group can be accessed [here](#).



### **Membership**

The Stakeholder Group provided membership and voting rights to organizations and individuals representing key interests and perspectives involving, geographic, economic, and social balance, and knowledge of the lands and resources within the Upper Crystal River Valley. The interest groups and individuals representing them were:

#### The Town of Crystal community member

Manette Anderson

#### Crystal Mill representative

Christopher Cox, Treasure Mountain Ranch, Inc.

Stuart Gillespie (*Alternate*), Treasure Mountain Ranch, Inc.

#### The Town of Marble community member

Jason Rusby, Business Owner (UTV Rentals)

Gunnison County community member

Peter Mertz

Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff

John Groves, Colorado Parks and Wildlife Carbondale District Wildlife Manager

Motorized recreation representative

Greg Noss, High Country Four Wheelers

Non-motorized recreation representative

*Vacant*

Mechanized recreation representative

Mike Pritchard, Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association (RFMBA)

Community economic development representative

Amber McMahill

Environmental/conservation representative

John Armstrong, Crystal Valley Environmental Protection Association (CVEPA) President

Suzy Meredith-Orr (*Alternate*), CVEPA Vice-President

**Process and Public Engagement**

The convening entities (the Town of Marble, Gunnison County, and the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District of the White River National Forest) partnered with the Center for Public Lands at Western Colorado University to provide skilled neutral facilitation of the Lead King Loop stakeholder process. Between December 2021 and June 2022, the Center organized and facilitated four stakeholder workshops and three public listening sessions. The Center also established a [web home](#) for the project and public meetings.

An initial Public Listening Session was held on Wednesday, December 8th, 2021, at the Fire Station in Marble, Colorado. 34 people attended in person and 19 attended virtually through Zoom. People with a variety of backgrounds and interests shared their reasons for loving the Lead King Loop, and patterns of concern began to emerge.

At the meeting, a team of Western Colorado University graduate students proposed a [survey](#) based on Q-methodology – a strategy used in social sciences to assess strength of multiple values held by a group – to investigate the diverse concerns and priorities of community members for management of the Lead King Loop. With public feedback from the listening session, the students created a list of 24 priorities, which they used to build a survey that asked people to identify how their individual priorities fell across a continuum from low to high importance. Between January and March of 2022, the survey was widely shared with the public, and the group received a total of 198 responses. Survey results informed future stakeholder workshops and were shared with the community during subsequent listening sessions (see Appendix A for a summary of survey results).

Meanwhile, the Center for Public Lands, with assistance from the convening entities, reached out to organizations and individuals representing key interests to form the Lead King Loop Stakeholder Group. The group met virtually for the first time on January 27th, 2022. At this meeting, the group established ground rules for collaboration, identified focal issues, defined the purpose, objectives, and scope of the stakeholder process, and drafted a group charter. These conversations continued into the second stakeholder workshop held on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, at which point the group charter was finalized.

On March 25th, 2022, the stakeholder group engaged virtually with representatives from communities navigating challenges like those faced by residents of the Upper Crystal River Valley. The group heard from Ben Billingsley from the City of Moab on the development of Moab's Noise Ordinance and from Sandy Hines, Hinsdale County Administrator, on her experience of managing the OHV Pilot Program Special Use Permit for Hinsdale County.

The stakeholder group gathered again in-person for a workshop on April 7th and 8th, 2022, to identify and develop management actions to mitigate impacts to the Towns of Marble and Crystal, visitor experiences, and the ecosystem. The top three actions that rose to the surface during the meeting included parking management, implementation of a reservation/permit system, and education. Other topics that were important to the group included: the possibility of implementing a noise ordinance at the city or county level; capacity to enforce existing and future regulations; options for restricting OHV use within the Town of Marble, on the Lead King Loop, and/or on County Road 3; and improving or degrading conditions of the Lead King Loop dirt road to manage visitation. All management strategies were vetted using a rubric based on top priorities identified through analysis of community responses to the Q-methodology survey.

Subsequently, the Center for Public Lands facilitated an in-person public listening session on April 28th, 2022, at the Fire Station in Marble, Colorado. At the meeting, the Center shared the range of management actions that the stakeholder group had workshopped up to this point. Following a presentation, attendees had the opportunity to visit individual stations to learn about and provide feedback on specific actions (e.g., construction of a parking lot, design of educational signage, placing restrictions on OHVs). At each station, members of the stakeholder group and representatives from the convening entities were present to facilitate conversation and record public input. The session was attended by 43 members of the public.

A separate, virtual public listening session was held on May 3rd, 2022, via Zoom and attended by 32 individuals. Following a presentation, attendees had the opportunity to join and switch between virtual breakout rooms to discuss different management actions. Again, each breakout room had members of the stakeholder group and representatives from the convening entities to facilitate discussion and solicit feedback.

The stakeholder group met again virtually on May 9th and 10th, 2022, to debrief public comments received at the listening sessions and discuss next steps.

The next stakeholder workshop was held in-person on June 21st and 22nd, 2022, to formulate recommendations to the Town of Marble, Gunnison County, and the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District of the White River National Forest for management of outdoor recreation-based tourism in the Upper Crystal River Valley.

After listening to all concerns and carefully balancing diverse interests, stakeholder group members came to a series of recommendations described in the next pages. The stakeholder group strove for consensus-based decision-making using a degrees of support continuum (see below). Consensus was reached when all members voted at least 1, 2, or 3. Consensus with Major Reservations was reached when all members vote 1, 2, 3, or 4. Consensus was not reached when one or more members voted 5.

#### DEGREES OF SUPPORT CONTINUUM



## Recommendations

The Lead King Loop Stakeholder Group presents the following recommendations to the Town of Marble, Gunnison County, and the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District of the White River National Forest for management of outdoor recreation-based tourism in the Upper Crystal River Valley. The actions recommended seek to protect the quality of life of residents of the Upper Crystal River Valley (including the Towns of Marble and Crystal and residents living along County Road 3), enhance experiences for visitors from all user groups, and mitigate impacts to the ecosystem.

### **Parking Management**

At stakeholder meetings and public listening sessions, concerns over noise, dust, and parking frequently rose to the top of conversations. Members of the community expressed that the demand for parking in Marble exceeds the number of designated parking sites at many times during the summer. Trailers were identified as a particular burden for parking due to their larger size. While some would like to eliminate parking for trailers entirely, most recognized a need to provide parking for visitors to access public lands and the Lead King Loop.

Many Marble residents expressed a desire to limit trailer parking inside the Town limits and create alternative parking options outside of Town. Much of the truck trailer parking inside the Town of Marble has taken place along streets and in front of homes to the dismay of residents, who have shared that their quality of life has been impacted by excessive noise and dust. This summer, the Town of Marble has started to install physical barriers to prevent truck and trailer parking in these locations.

Truck and trailer parking also has occurred at the Millsite Park in the center of the Town of Marble. However, deed restrictions, which were placed on the Millsite property when it was transferred to the Town of Marble, limit parking at this site specifically to persons visiting and using the park. Truck and trailer parking at the Millsite with the purpose of unloading OHVs and recreating on the Lead King Loop violates these deed restrictions and will be prohibited in the future.

Limiting truck and trailer parking within the Town of Marble, however, generates the need to create alternative parking options outside of the Town. During the search for a suitable property to construct additional parking spaces, the stakeholder group identified land administered by the U.S. Forest Service at the base of Daniels Hill as a potential site for a future parking lot.

This parking site, however, was vehemently opposed by residents who live on County Road 3 between Beaver Lake and the top of Daniels Hill and who are among the most impacted by the traffic funneling into the Lead King Loop. The primary concern identified by residents is water pollution, as the parking lot would be centered in a field surrounded by freshwater ditches that provide water to the houses nearby and the subdivisions below.

Other concerns identified by residents include wildlife disturbance, noise pollution, disproportionate benefits from parking facilities going to OHV users, historical and archaeological site preservation, trespassing, overnight camping, lack of enforcement, and human waste and litter.

Due to these concerns expressed by residents, the stakeholder group backed away from the idea of a parking lot in favor of enhancing and clarifying roadside parking along County Road 3 at the bottom of Daniels Hill.

### Recommendations:

- *Gunnison County and Aspen-Sopris Ranger District* explore/develop/plan to establish parking spots, landscaping, signage, turn around options, and facilities (e.g., bathrooms, trashcans, kiosks) on land adjacent to County Road 3 at the base of Daniels Hill to accommodate parking for approximately 20 passenger vehicles and 2 horse trailers.
  - Implement signage clarifying where it is legal and illegal to park at the base of Daniels Hill
  - Gunnison County and the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District work closely with residents local to Daniels Hill during parking planning, especially in regard to environmental concerns.
- *Town of Marble* implement the following measures to reduce truck and trailer parking spaces within the Town limits from an estimated 20-30 poorly regulated spaces to 12 well-managed and reservable spaces by
  - Prohibiting truck and trailer parking at the Millsite Park, so that this parking area is exclusively available to persons visiting the Millsite Park.
  - Providing 12 parking spaces for trucks and trailers across from the Millsite Park and implementing a reservation system for these spaces.
  - Closing truck and trailer parking along street sides within the Town of Marble. This will be accomplished by installing barriers (e.g., large boulders) that will prevent large vehicles (i.e., trucks + trailers) from parking in spaces alongside Town roads, while still allowing passenger vehicles to park in those spaces.
- Pending outcomes of the OHV ban and an assessment of the effectiveness of delineating clear roadside parking spaces to constrain impacts, *Gunnison County, Aspen-Sopris Ranger District*, and the *Town of Marble* study parking lot and parking reservation options on County, Forest Service, and Town lands.

### **Reservation System**

At the onset of the process, several stakeholders and community members advocated for a permit system to regulate vehicle access to the Lead King Loop. However, after further discussion and consultation with the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District of the White River National Forest, it has become apparent that there are significant barriers to implementing a permitting system for motorized use of the road, primarily because current use levels do not warrant such a system. The road system and surface have capacity to handle more use than currently experienced.

The stakeholder group agreed that desired outcomes, such as reduced impact of noise and dust, can be accomplished via a reservation system to manage available parking spaces. Such a reservation system could be used to balance visitation across the week and season. Potential fees collected through a reservation system could also fund other

programs, such as visitor education or parking enforcement. The group is mindful that a reservation system, depending on its implementation design, can make access to recreation more difficult for some users and potential users, with implications for diversity and inclusivity.

#### Recommendations:

- *Town of Marble* develop a reservation system for 12 truck and trailer parking spaces across from the Millsite Park. The stakeholder group supports the collection of fees for truck and trailer parking in this area for the purpose of maintaining the reservation system and funding education and enforcement efforts. Reservations should be accompanied by educational information, teaching visitors about the importance of conserving natural and cultural assets in and around Marble.
- Pending outcomes of the OHV ban and an assessment of the effectiveness of delineating clear roadside parking spaces to constrain impacts, *Gunnison County, Aspen-Sopris Ranger District*, and the *Town of Marble* study parking lot and parking reservation options on County, Forest Service, and Town lands.

#### **Education**

There is broad support from stakeholders and the community for increasing visitor education efforts about topics such as road conditions, responsible recreation behavior, and the importance of conserving natural and cultural assets in and around Marble. At the same time, a sentiment frequently expressed is that education alone is insufficient and needs to be coupled with enforcement and other management strategies.

This summer, the Town of Marble installed a kiosk at the Millsite Park to provide information to visitors. The Marble Crystal River Chamber (MCRC) also received a grant from the Colorado Tourism Office to fund the “More Mindful Marble Tourism Management Project.” Under this grant, MCRC has partnered with Western Colorado University Center for Public Lands to produce several deliverables, including

1. Development of a cohesive plan for interpretive signage to be produced and installed throughout Marble, Crystal, the Highway 33 turnoff to Marble, and at integral points along the Lead King Loop. The signs around Marble and Crystal will be designed to tell cultural heritage-based stories to visitors and highlight the principles of enjoying the community as a responsible and mindful guest. Signs around the Lead King Loop will also include messages about noise ordinances and recreating responsibly, with off-highway vehicle operators as the primary audience.

2. Development of a strategic communication plan to educate visitors and promote responsible recreation behavior both prior to their arrival in Marble and during their on-site experience.
3. Two training sessions to educate both tourism actors and residents about the importance of conserving natural and cultural assets in and around Marble, all while creating a set of standards that allows stakeholders to act as ambassadors of the destination.
4. Facilitation of two meetings to engage the Lead King Loop Stakeholder Group and interested members of the public in the development and implementation of the sign and communication plans.

The Lead King Loop Stakeholder Group remains committed to supporting development of these grant deliverables, including providing feedback on educational messaging and signage and participating in future trainings and workshops.

#### Recommendations:

- *Western Colorado University's Center for Public Lands* engage the Stay the Trail organization in development of educational materials to enhance/create/support/promote a culture of responsible OHV use in the Upper Crystal River Valley.
- *Gunnison County, Aspen-Sopris Ranger District, and the Town of Marble* incorporate education whenever possible into all other management approaches listed in this document, such as parking management, reservation system administration, and enforcement.
- *Town of Marble* place an electronic sign at the Junction of 133 and County Road 3 to inform visitors about parking availability.

#### **Capacity to Enforce Existing and Future Regulations**

Enforcement remains a challenge for implementation of any management action considered by the group. Without enforcement, parking regulations, reservations systems, noise limits, etc. will likely fall short of achieving management objectives. Therefore, concerns over enforcement are prominent. There is a shared recognition that enforcement requires funding and staffing, both of which are in short supply. In the summer of 2021, community members noted positive results due to an increased presence of law enforcement personnel from the Gunnison County Sheriff's Department and Aspen-Sopris Ranger District in the Town of Marble and on the Lead King Loop.

#### Recommendations:

- *Gunnison County Sheriff Department* provide increased law enforcement presence in the Upper Crystal River Valley, especially on weekends and during peak season.
- *Aspen-Sopris Ranger District* have a Forest Protection Officer patrol the Lead King Loop, especially on weekends and during peak season.
- *Towns of Marble and Crystal* explore opportunities to raise funding for increased summer law enforcement presence through private donations offered as matching funds for U.S. Forest Service law enforcement. *Treasure Mountain Ranch* is considered a likely first entity to offer such a contribution.
- *Town of Marble* develop a program to train Upper Crystal River Valley residents to act as ambassadors of the destination and educate both visitors and residents about conserving natural and cultural assets in and around Marble. While these ambassadors would not have the capacity to enforce regulations, they could provide much-needed “law encouragement” and communicate closely with law enforcement agents.

### **Noise Ordinance**

Stakeholders and community members frequently listed noise and dust among their top concerns and impacts to quality of life. A state-wide 96-decibel limit already exists for OHVs in Colorado. Stakeholders discussed the option of implementing a local noise ordinance at the Town or County level following the model provided by the City of Moab, Utah (the noise limit for all vehicles in Moab City is 92 decibels during the day and 85 decibels during nighttime hours).

### Recommendations:

- *Aspen-Sopris Ranger District, Gunnison County, and the Town of Marble* purchase affordable devices to measure decibels at a vehicle’s tailpipe to increase enforcement of the 96-decibel limit and educate visitors about noise levels of their vehicles.
- *Town of Marble and Gunnison County* explore the feasibility and impact of implementing a noise ordinance that sets stricter decibel levels for OHVs than those already established at the state level.
- Through work under the Colorado Tourism Office grant, *Town of Marble and Western Colorado University’s Center for Public Lands* identify opportunities to incorporate noise regulations into existing and future enforcement and education efforts. Even with limited enforcement, a noise ordinance, associated media attention, and signage informing visitors of stringent decibel limits could have a desirable effect on visitor behavior.

### **Road Conditions**

Changes in the condition of the Lead King Loop Road itself could encourage or discourage outdoor-based recreation in the Upper Crystal River Valley. Traffic count data shows that most road traffic results from visitation to Crystal Mill and occurs on the six-mile stretch between the Towns of Marble and Crystal. This stretch of road could be improved to allow

passenger vehicle travel to the Crystal. Alternatively, the road could be downgraded to make it even more difficult to drive, thus reducing motorized use.

At community listening sessions, members of the public generally expressed a desire to keep the road in its current state, effectively requiring a high-clearance, four-wheel drive vehicle to access the road. One common concern, however, is that vehicles ill-equipped to drive the rugged Lead King Loop Road regularly access it, despite warning signs placed at the base of Daniels Hill. This results in vehicles becoming stuck and creating congestion and safety issues along the road. To prevent these situations, there has been broad public support for a “gatekeeper” (i.e., an obstacle placed at the start of the route that imitates the most difficult terrain a vehicle will face during travel) at the base of Daniels Hill that will discourage and effectively prevent low-clearance vehicles from accessing the loop.

#### Recommendations:

- *Gunnison County* further explore the possibility (including legal ramifications) of installing a gatekeeper at the bottom of Daniels Hill. The gatekeeper should be designed to match the most difficult road conditions encountered on the six-mile stretch between the Towns of Marble and Crystal. The gatekeeper should be accompanied by a gated bypass option. Keys for the gate should be distributed to federal, state, and local agencies and private property owners, so that emergency vehicles, government personnel, and landowners can access the Lead King Loop area. The gatekeeper should also be coupled with educational efforts, including signage on both sides of the gatekeeper, informing drivers of the recommended vehicle clearance and roughness of the road ahead.

#### **Trail Construction**

Currently, motorized and non-motorized users have to share the Lead King Loop Road. This situation causes safety concerns, degraded recreation experiences, and conflicts between user groups. To address these issues, one suggestion has been to develop a separate walking and biking trail alongside sections of the Lead King Loop. In particular, there has been support at public meetings for constructing a trail that leads from the Town of Marble to the top of Daniels Hill to improve outdoor recreation experiences of both motorized and non-motorized users.

Members of the public and the stakeholder group generally liked the idea of a separate trail that extends from the Town of Marble to the top of Daniels Hill or to the Crystal Mill. However, community members and stakeholders expressed concerns about the feasibility and practicality of such a trail. Due to topographic features, any trail along this route would

likely have high exposure in some areas and stay very close to the road in others. A matrix of mixed ownership along the route would also complicate trail design and construction.

#### Recommendations:

- *Aspen-Sopris Ranger District* explore the possibility of building a separate trail from the bottom to the top of Daniels Hill to enhance experiences of motorized and non-motorized users in the area.
- Groups like the *Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association* who specialize in trail building actions should be involved in the feasibility analysis for such a trail.

#### **Managing OHV Use**

Colorado state law prohibits OHVs on public roads or highways unless a specific section of road is exempted from that ban by the county or city of jurisdiction. In 2015 (and clarified in 2018), Gunnison County passed a resolution applying such an exemption to County Road 3 on a 1.5-mile stretch from the Town of Marble limits at Beaver Lake to the U.S. Forest Service boundary near the top of Daniels Hill. The Town of Marble also has an ordinance that allows OHVs within town limits. Together, the County exemption and the Town of Marble ordinance allow OHV users to ride their vehicles from the Town of Marble along County Road 3 to access Forest Service land and the popular 13-mile Lead King Loop Road. The County exemption will sunset in January of 2023, at which point the Board of County Commissioners will revisit the issue.

Though only covering a 1.5-mile stretch, the County exemption has been the topic of impassioned discussion about OHV use in the Upper Crystal River Valley. Indeed, the future of OHV tourism in the area and Marble's image as an OHV destination may very well hinge on this exemption. Currently, visitors park their trailers and unload their OHVs either in the Town of Marble or at the bottom of Daniels Hill (along County Road 3) to access the Lead King Loop Road. If prohibited from driving OHVs from these parking areas to the Forest Service boundary, access to the Lead King Loop Road for OHV users who come from outside the Town of Marble would be severely restricted (access from Schofield Pass north of Crested Butte would still be possible). While OHV use would still be allowed on Forest Service lands and on the Lead King Loop Road, there simply would be no safe places to park trailers and unload OHVs to Forest Service lands from the Marble side of the Lead King Loop.

Many residents in the Upper Crystal River Valley have identified OHV tourism as the principal use negatively impacting their quality of life and the environment. At the same

time, many locals own and use OHVs to access their private property, drive around the Town of Marble, and recreate on the Lead King Loop. While a local exemption for OHV use is favored by many, Gunnison County and the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District have questioned the feasibility of such an exemption on the grounds that it might be unconstitutional. At this time, no consensus, or even a majority opinion, has emerged on restricting OHVs for all users (residents and visitors) on County Road 3, the Lead King Loop Road, or within the Town of Marble.

#### Recommendations:

- *Gunnison County* should continue the current exemption on County Road 3 through the end of 2023. This extension would allow for implementation and evaluation of other recommendations identified in this document.
- *Town of Marble*, in partnership with *Western Colorado University's Center for Public Lands*, should pursue funding to systematically analyze the outcomes of the proposed actions. This analysis could include surveys of residents and visitors, collection of visitors use data, assessment of environmental change, and evaluation of the costs and benefits of the recommendations, and should be reported to the Town of Marble/Gunnison County/U.S. Forest Service by November 2023 to inform the decision on the County Road 3 exemption.
- *Aspen-Sopris Ranger District* continue to collect visitor use data on the Lead King Loop Road and share results with the stakeholder group by the end of 2022 and again in 2023.
- If quality of life issues and environmental concerns do not abate, this group will reconvene and revisit the implications of and processes for restricting OHVs on County Road 3, the Lead King Loop Road, and/or within the Town of Marble.

#### **Major Reservations**

*There is still time to revise and tweak the above recommendations. However, per the group's charter, if you, as a stakeholder representative, plan to vote a "four" (i.e., stand aside with major reservations - formal disagreement, but will not block the proposal/provision) on any of these recommendations, we would like to make this space available for you to articulate and document your formal disagreement with any of the group's recommendations.*

#### **Conclusion**

The group recognizes that people with a variety of backgrounds and interests love the Upper Crystal River Valley, have chosen to make their homes here, and/or continue to come back to this area year after year. The stakeholder group has worked diligently to listen to public concerns and carefully balance the diverse interests and competing values that pertain to management of the Lead King Loop and its surrounding areas. The

recommendations put forward in this document have been reviewed and ratified by the stakeholder group, who offer them as a consensus-based proposal to respond to community concerns. The group believes that these recommendations, if implemented, have high potential to provide exceptional recreation opportunities while mitigating impacts to the community and the environment. With collaborative, thoughtful, and forward-thinking management, the Upper Crystal River Valley will continue to provide a refuge for plants, animals, and humans – visitors and residents alike – for many more years to come.

## Signatures

\_\_\_\_\_  
Manette Anderson, Town of Crystal community member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Stuart Gillespie, Crystal Mill representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jason Rusby, Town of Marble community member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Peter Mertz, Gunnison County community member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
John Groves, Colorado [Parks and Wildlife](#) District Manager

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Greg Noss, Motorized recreation representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Non-motorized recreation representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mike Pritchard, mechanized recreation representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Amber McMahill, Community economic development representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
John Armstrong, Environmental/conservation representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix A: Results from the Q-Methodology Community Survey

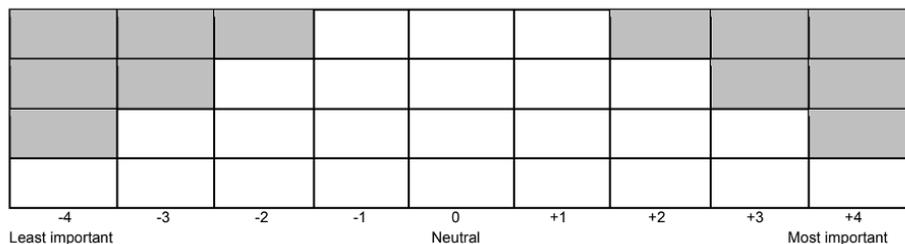
Western Colorado University's Center for Public Lands surveyed community members about their diverse concerns and priorities for management of the Lead King Loop. The [survey](#) utilized Q-methodology, which is a strategy used in social sciences to assess the strength of multiple values held by a group. The survey included 24 terms (see list below) that were informed by the first public listening session and stakeholder workshop. The terms represent 24 priorities related to OHV use on the Lead King Loop. Using the forms shown in Fig. 1, the terms were then ranked and sorted by participants in a digital survey that was active from January to March of 2022. Fig. 2 shows an example of what a completed survey response might look like.

The survey was distributed by stakeholders and through the Center for Public Lands and the Town of Marble websites. In total, 198 individuals participated in the survey. Western Colorado University's Dr. Garrett Smith completed the Q-sort factor analysis of all completed survey responses. Table 1 shows the top 10 priorities most frequently selected as "most important" by respondents. The five factors that represented the majority of responses were then evaluated and grouped by the Center for Public Lands team. The survey results identified five community priorities: community impact, environmental impact, management, planning and preparedness, and social coexistence. Survey results were shared at the April 28th public listening session, where participants were given rubrics to assess how different management strategies met community priorities.

### List of Q-Sort Priorities

- *Respect*: Behavior that shows regard for the environment, residents, and recreationists.
- *Tranquility*: The absence of elements that detract from the desired experience. The quality or state of being calm.
- *Parking*: Safe and legal locations for parking off the road, including adequate turn-around space.
- *Enforcement of rules*: Presence of Forest Protection Officers and Sheriff's Deputies to issue citations regarding speed, noise, parking, etc.
- *Soils*: Protection of soils from erosion, dust, and mudslides. Preventing unstable soils.
- *Wildlife habitat*: Protection of resources that wildlife relies upon for survival.
- *Space for all users*: Space to ensure equitable access for all user groups.
- *Education*: Sources of information for recreators (e.g., signage, social media, website information newsletter) Dissemination and outreach.
- *Cultural heritage*: Properties or qualities of an area that have cultural, historic, or spiritual value unique to any community's way of life.

- *Road and trail maintenance*: Maintaining the quality of the road (e.g., pullouts, the safety of road access, space on the road.)
- *Infrastructure*: Establishing an adequate infrastructure to accommodate users (waste receptacles, signage, toilets); ensuring disability access.
- *Water quality*: Protection of water resources.
- *Wildfire prevention*: Changes in climate may lead to more fire-prone forests. Some motor vehicles could present undue fire threats. Recreation increases wildfire risk.
- *Trailer parking*: Addressing trailer parking (currently below the fire station) in amount and location.
- *Volume of users*: Addressing the volume of users without limiting access to any group.
- *Emergency access*: Includes fire evacuation, emergency response vehicle access “life safety” for emergency vehicle access in town and in the backcountry.
- *Permits*: Consideration of permits or other reservation systems to limit volume.
- *Local’s priority*: Consideration of local access and use of surrounding lands.
- *Public access*: Continued access to national forests for many user groups.
- *Economic sustainability*: Consideration of scale and scope of local business’s activity and pace of growth.
- *Disproportionate impact*: Consideration of the associated noise and pollution of motorized vehicle users as it impacts the experience of other users.
- *Displacement*: Displacement of recreation, wildlife, Crystal residents (consideration of changing user patterns.)
- *Transparent governance*: Transparency is an important value to ensure success and respect for future management actions.
- *Value and quality of life*: Preserving residents’ quality of life and property values.



**Figure 1.** Q-methodology survey form. Respondents were asked to assign the 24 priorities listed above across a continuum from low to high importance.

			Emergency access	Cultural heritage	Permits			
		Infrastructure	Trailer parking	Soils	Parking	Water quality		
	Education	Enforcement of rules	Space for all users	Wildfire prevention	Displacement	Tranquility	Local's priority	
Economic sustainability	Transparent governance	Road and trail maintenance	Respect	Public access	Wildlife habitat	Volume of users	Disproportionate impact	Value & Quality of Life
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
Least important				Neutral				Most important

**Figure 2.** Example of what a completed Q-methodology survey could look like.

**Table 1.** Top 10 priorities selected as "most important" (category +4) in survey responses.

1	Respect	14.58%	14
2	Wildfire prevention	11.46%	11
3	Tranquility	9.38%	9
4	Value and Quality of Life	9.38%	9
5	Wildlife habitat	8.33%	8
6	Volume of users	7.29%	7
7	Local's Priority	5.21%	5
8	Disproportionate impact	5.21%	5
9	Parking	4.17%	4
10	Permits	4.17%	4

In Partnership with  
Western Colorado University, Center for Public Lands

