



Zuni Mountains Trails Partnership Project

The Zuni Mountain Trail Partnership proposes to create and implement a ~~master~~ trails ~~development~~ network and conservation plan for the Zuni Mountains area of the Cibola National Forest – that is supported and endorsed by the United States Forest Service, National Park Service, Zuni Pueblo and surrounding communities. ~~Mt. Taylor Ranger District.~~ Our ~~larger~~ goal for this project is to create a large non-motorized, multi-use system throughout the entire Zuni Mountains area and beyond with connections to community trail systems in the Gallup, Grants, Milan, Breadsprings, Zuni, Fort Wingate, Bluewater, and Ramah areas, as well as, nationally prominent trail systems, trade routes, monuments, and parks, such as the historic Zuni-Acoma Trail, the Chain of Craters, the Hogbacks, McGaffey Lake, Ojo Redondo Campground, Quaking Aspen Trailhead and System, El Malpais National Monument, El Morro National Monument, Mount Taylor, Mount Sedgwick, and the Continental Divide Trail System.

This project has the potential of creating several hundreds of miles of multi-use, singletrack trail. The Zuni Mountain Trail Partnership has begun to expand the membership and identify stakeholders in the region. Public input and grassroots participation will be vital to the development of a master plan that is suitable to all citizens. The ZMTP is currently working on a public participation plan that will be inclusive.

A draft Community Vision for recreation has been developed by the Partnership representatives:

The Zuni Mountains are a premier recreational destination with an integrated network of single track trails connected with trailheads that provide access.. The Zuni Mountains offer riding experiences for the whole family, for all levels of riders, from novice to extreme. Outfitters offer an array of services for recreational visitors from guided tours and full service resort facilities to primitive campsites which offer real solitude. Visitors depend on quality services from the surrounding gateway communities that have responded with increased recreation related businesses -- guide services, bike sales, repair and service, lodging, camping, and RV supplies.

The Zuni Mountain Trail Partnership coordinates volunteers and youth corps members for trails and forest health projects. Dedicated local, state, federal and grant funding supports these activities. This is being accomplished through a partnership of communities — Cibola and McKinley counties, state, tribal and federal governments, and affiliated interests who want to improve the quality of life and sustain the Zuni Mountains..

Some initial Goals of this project include:

- Creation of a multi-stakeholder partnership for the sustainable and environmental sound development and conservation, and restoration of the Zuni Mountains region.
- Development of a Zuni Mountains Master Plan with trail connections and linkages to surrounding communities to provide access to area assets in both Cibola and McKinley counties.

- ~~Corridor improvements to 26 miles of a Federally designated multi-use, non-motorized, and natural stacked loop trail system in the McGaffey Area.~~
- ~~Planning, design, and engineering on an additional 40 miles of singletrack in the McGaffey Area.~~
- ~~Completion of trailhead construction and infrastructure improvements at the Hills Quaking Aspen Trailhead in the McGaffey area. Construction elements include: enhancement and corridor upgrades of designated trail system (26 miles); installation of one designated and designed trailhead including: parking lot, fencing, toilet unit, cattleguards, gate, landscaping, installation of US Forest Service approved signage, etc.~~
- ~~Planning, design, and engineering on an additional 70 miles of singletrack in the Twin Springs area and 30+ miles in the Ramah Lake area, including trailhead development.~~
- Identification, inventory, and prioritization of sensitive areas and potential restoration projects throughout the project area. The Zuni Mountains Trail Partnership (ZMTP) estimates that at least three (3) restoration projects will be chosen as models for completion.
- Addressing tourism and economic development opportunities
- Supporting youth corps and other “green job” initiatives

There are many important components that create a critical need for this project:

- *Health.* This project adds critical health and wellness venues that can be marketed and promoted to regional Native American and Hispanic populations that have seen epidemic levels of obesity, diabetes, and renal failure to promote increased activity and exercise.
- *Tourism & Economic Development.* This project represents the start of a flagship multi-use trail system for the State of New Mexico and the entire Four Corners. Local riders, trail enthusiasts, and visitors alike brag that the Zuni Mountains area is the hidden gem of singletrack trail, which will encourage and spawn job creation, business development and opportunities, sustainable tourism and economic development.
- *Intrinsic Qualities.* The Zuni Mountains have a rich and culturally significant past. Traditional uses, historical logging, railroading, and grazing remnants dot the landscape. Through interpretation, the trails network can help tell the story of the Zunis. This project will connect the user to the area in a unique and picturesque way that weaves together a story told by the trail. A user will not only be connected to scenic, geologic, and natural beauty, but understand the historic uses (logging and grazing) and the culturally sacredness of this area’s vegetation and animal life to local Native American populations.
- *Conservation.* Creating a balance between use and the ecological restoration and preservation of the area. Increased community interest in the Zunis may lead to watershed health projects and funding. Stream and meadow restoration, forest thinning and other projects could bring many more “forest friends” to the Zunis

Key Agencies/Acronyms:

USFS – United States Forest Service – landowner and manager of the Cibola National Forest-Mount Taylor District including the majority of lands that the master plan will address.

NPS - National Park Service – the Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program, in cooperation with the United States Forest Service is providing technical support to McKinley County and other partners to develop a trails concept plan. RTCA staff assist in facilitating community dialogue and the trails planning process. ~~main convener/facilitator of the master planning process.~~

Frequently Asked Questions:

What will this plan include?

The Zuni Mountains Trail Network Plan will include an inventory of all non-motorized routes in the Zuni Mountains, issues and concerns brought forth by the public and adjacent land managers, goals and strategies to address those concerns, an action plan for implementation and identification of funding opportunities.

What is the overall process?

As a community based planning effort, tremendous energy will be placed on civic engagement and outreach. Following the formation of the Zuni Mountains Trail Partnership and initial project orientation workshops, the information gathering phase goes into full swing. During this phase, the public will be involved through mapping exercises, field trips, focus groups and other techniques. Smaller working groups may be established to address issues and concerns related to specific topics such as forest health, trailhead standards, and more. Following sufficient information gathering, the Partnership Team, through additional public involvement will begin to identify the key trail systems and connector trails. Long-term management, maintenance, and volunteer stewardship of trails will be addressed. Generally the process might look like this:

- Feasibility Study – data collection and information gathering
Management, maintenance, trail access, linkages, connections, landowner concerns, cultural and historical considerations, youth engagement, interpretation and signage, sustainability
- Developing Goals, Strategies and actions for management and stewardship
- Exploring opportunities for economic development/tourism
- Action Plan for Implementation.

At each step in the process, the Zuni Mountains Trail Partnership will engage the public. This planning effort is primarily a consensus based approach.

Is this part of the overall Travel Management Plan that the USFS has been working on for several years to determine motorized traffic use?

No. The USFS is working to finalize a travel management plan to meet the Congressional mandate. This travel management plan will determine the allowable motorized traffic routes in the Cibola National Forest-Mt. Taylor Ranger District. The Zuni Mountains Master Plan is based on user interest to develop and designate a non-motorized, multi-use trail system. This Master Plan can complement and build on the Travel Management Plan including joint-use trailheads, shared access routes into the USFS, etc, but in no way supersedes the Travel Management Plan and Congressional mandate.

Will this plan be an official USFS document and thus developed?

This plan is not being developed as an official document of the USFS, and does not follow the USFS normal public input procedures. However, it will be facilitated by NPS staff through their process, which involves a lengthy public participation and consensus-building model that aims at a longer planning period and a more inclusive product. The NPS process will begin with the June Kick-off meetings but will continue to have regular stakeholder group meetings, focus groups, individual conversations, and many other large group presentations to make sure that all users and stakeholders find a common vision and develop a master plan. This plan and the trails that are identified do not automatically become designated by the USFS. The USFS will have the opportunity to review and accept as they determine fit trail designations. The USFS will not designate any trail without going through a full NEPA clearance review on trails.

~~Why are we doing trails?~~ Why are trails important?

USFS sees these trails as a land management tool and conversation method to sustain forest health. These trails will help control the majority of use and manmade disturbances in the region to designated areas. The trails will planned, designed, and developed to avoid cultural and historic sites, as well as riparian and endangered species habitat and other areas that are determined to need to be avoided.

Trails and conservation are also seen for other positive elements including preservation of open space, forest lands, and native species; increasing health and recreation opportunities; bringing tourism into neighboring communities; other secondary business and economic development opportunities; and overall fostering a better or continuing connection to the outdoors.

Is this planning process going to include tribal -participation?

The USFS, NPS, and its planning partners will invite and solicit tribal involvement and input throughout the planning and development process. As part of the government-to-government relationship, the USFS understands how to invite participation for all surrounding or impacted tribes and Pueblos. The USFS respects the cultural connection and traditional use of these areas for native plants and medicines and other uses of the Zuni Mountains forest lands. The USFS will work to include recommendations for tribal communities, and understand that all explanations of why places are sacred do not need to be shared.

Are these trails going to be more than just mountain biking trails?

~~No~~ Yes, the master plan has a broad mission of creating a multi-use trail system. Some portions of this trail system may be more suited for certain or just single use. (e.g. steep grades where only hiking may be appropriate or where soils and terrain are delicate and horseback riding would need to be prohibited)

Will there be designated campsites developing from this plan?

USFS has official rules regarding camping on its lands, including at designated campsites and 100 yds along all travel management routes. They also allow hike-in camping throughout the USFS lands. No camping is allowed on private lands without the landowners permission.

Will private lands or in-holdings within the Forest be targeted for trail development in this plan?

How do I find out about restrictions in USFS?

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/cibola/districts/mttaylor.shtml>

How will these trails affect traditional uses like hunting or wood gathering

I live in Zuni Canyon, am I going to have to deal with more vehicle traffic?

How much is this going to cost and who is going to pay for it?