

Chaffee Top 12 Critical Needs & Opportunities

These opportunities to improve the county trails system were identified through public and land manager input. Final prioritization was completed by consensus of the TSCP Working Group.



The list is the basis for an “early wins” action plan of solutions that do not require in-depth studies or lengthy approvals, for countywide projects that are not located in the plan’s two Study Areas (Greater Salida and BV-North Fourmile).

Topic	Critical Need/Opportunity
Management and Maintenance	Trail Maintenance Capacity. Among 625 respondents to a Spring 2024 public trails survey generating about 3,400 write-in comments, 45% of the comments were related to management and maintenance needs and suggested solutions. Staff and funding to address that is a critical need, as is expanding the coverage of volunteer trail maintenance groups.
Management and Maintenance	Visitors Help Fund Maintenance. Insufficient funding to maintain the current 560 miles of system trails is a top issue. Surveys show that visitors are willing to pay to maintain the quality of their outdoor experiences. The opportunity is to enable visitors to voluntarily contribute.
Management and Maintenance	Manage Demand. Surveys indicate that demand is exceeding capacity at some popular trailheads, resulting in resource damage and a decline in experience quality. The need is to find ways to manage demand, starting with Lost and Ptarmigan lakes.
Natural Resource Health	Improve user behaviors. Irresponsible user behaviors are resulting in human waste, dog waste, trash, erosion from user-created routes, and habitat impacts. The need is to improve behaviors quickly with methods such as added presence and 1:1 education.
Natural Resource Health	Sustain and add restrooms. #2 is a #1 issue across the landscape. The Chaffee Rec Plan porta-potty program (managed by GARNA, SMT & BVSC) successfully provides about 30 restrooms that divert 10,000 gals of waste each season. Funding expires in 2024; meanwhile, agencies have gaps in funding to maintain vault toilets. The need is a sustainable program to manage waste.

Natural Resource Health	Enforce seasonal closures. Surveys indicate that residents and visitors prioritize wildlife protection measures. Improving enforcement of and compliance with existing closures is a need. There is also opportunity to adjust dates to align with wildlife production seasons.
User Experience	Reduce conflicts between OHV and other users. Negative interactions among OHVs (especially side-by-side vehicles) and all other recreation types (hikers, bikers, other motorized users) is a top theme from multiple surveys. Issues to address involve speeding, damage to roads, noise, dust and behavior.
User Experience	Improve user behaviors toward each other in multi-use areas. Another common theme in recreation surveys is declining experience quality related to negative interactions between trail users, such as conflict between high-speed recreation types and walkers. The need is to address these issues beyond education, such as with 1-way and single-use trails.
User Experience	Provide more trails and improve accessibility. Public input shows a desire for improved trail accessibility, especially for people of all abilities through the addition of ADA and beginner-level opportunities.
Social Trails	Discourage social trail development. Social trails, which are created by users without land manager design or approval, damage natural resources and impact wildlife. The need is to discourage development and use of new social trails.
Social Trails	Address social trails in alpine environments. Social trails are most damaging in fragile alpine and subalpine environments. This need will look at Ptarmigan Lake, Cottonwood Pass, and Browns Lake/Mount White to assess why social trails are proliferating and what to do about them.
Social Trails	Address social trails in other sensitive environments. Droney Gulch, at the base of Mount Shavano, is located in the highest quality habitat on the Chaffee Planning for Wildlife map. Geology and soils host plant species unique to Chaffee County. Damage to these fragile resources from user-created routes is a critical issue to be addressed.