Critical Needs & Opportunities
Summary Data Report
July 2024

The following Summary Report captures opinions expressed during the Spring 2024 public input opportunity, hosted to help inform early development of the Chaffee County Trails System & Conservation Plan (TSCP).

As a first chance for the public to provide input to the TSCP, participants of an in-person meeting and an online survey were asked to identify **Critical Needs & Opportunities** in the existing trails system, and to consider **Potential Study Areas** (PSAs) for future detailed trails planning. Survey respondents also were asked to share their ideas about how to address gaps in countywide trails **Management & Maintenance** (M&M).

The purpose of the TSCP is to create a community-driven strategic plan for conserving natural resources while also providing a spectrum of sustainable trail-based outdoor recreation experiences in the County. The process coordinates with land managers and county leaders while considering the entire trails system including trailheads, access corridors, parking, restrooms, waste, erosion, wildlife habitat and the economy. The resulting plan will build on the 2021 Chaffee County Outdoor Recreation Management Plan. Completion is slated for the end of 2025, with the next public input opportunity planned to take place by the Spring of 2025.

While the vision is to develop a countywide strategic trails plan, current funding is only sufficient to conduct detailed planning in two to three areas; therefore, the intent of the Spring 2024 round of public input was to prioritize those areas and define the existing critical needs and opportunities within them.

A five-member coalition of local leaders in outdoor recreation spearheads the TSCP and makes decisions by consensus. County, state and federal officials support the project in an advisory capacity. A Working Group with 40 members informs the plan and ensures diverse perspectives. For more details about the process, visit the [planning webpage](#).

Public Input Methods
Opinions described in this report were gathered through two different opportunities: 1) an in-person, open public meeting held on May 22 and attended by 192 people at the County Fairgrounds, and 2) an online survey that was open in SurveyMonkey from May 28th through June 18th, 2024.

All participants were asked to share their feedback about any or all of seven (7) specific geographic areas (PSAs) they were familiar with; they could share up to three specific Critical Needs & Opportunities to protect and enhance user experiences and natural resources.

Meeting participants were asked to analyze the PSAs using an evaluation worksheet and a map. More than half of these participants focused solely on the Greater Salida area or did not complete the exercise. Based on feedback that the in-person exercise was too complex, the online survey was created after the public meeting to simplify and improve the input opportunity.

The survey asked about Critical Needs & Opportunities in the same 7 geographic areas, and additionally requested input about Management & Maintenance (M&M). The survey link was shared

widely through social media, email lists and websites of the leadership coalition organizations. A total of **625** people responded to the survey with at least one comment.

Overall, the report reflects the complexity of countywide trail system needs, clarifying the Critical Needs & Opportunities in each area (see the next section, below). The report also provides insight and solution ideas for gaps in M&M, as 1,564 of all comments — 45% of the total — were related to this topic and offered solution ideas (details in Table 2 on Page 4). Finally, the report prioritizes 4 of the 7 Potential Study Areas (See Page 7). Note that funding may only be available to address 2 to 3 of these areas in the current phase of work.

Critical Needs & Opportunities

Both meeting and survey participants were asked to give input about Critical Needs & Opportunities in the 7 geographic areas where they were most familiar; they could enter up to three specific critical needs or opportunities for each PSA. Public comments reflect differing needs and priorities from different user types and by area; and taken together are highly complex. More than 100 comments were received on each of the needs for (Table 1):

- Trail system management and maintenance
- Improved capacity, including new trails and beginner trials
- Solutions to user conflicts, especially between user groups such as higher-speed recreation forms (bike, ATVs) and hikers
- Need for appropriate trailhead infrastructure such as camping, parking, restrooms and signage
- Improved trail connectivity, and
- Solutions for overuse and resource damage.

Table 1

Public Meeting Top 10 Critical Needs/Opportunities	Public Survey Top 10 Critical Needs/Opportunities
User conflict (**22**)	Trail maintenance and management (**253**)
Improve trail connectivity (**19**)	Improve trail capacity/add beginner trails (**245**)
Improve trail capacity and quality of experience (**18**)	User conflict (**178**)
Trash and human/ dog waste (**18**)	Right size infrastructure including camping (**131**), trash and human/dog waste (**125**), signage (**110**) and parking (**99**)
Address natural resource damage (**15**)	Trail connectivity (**108**)
Reduce impacts of high recreation use (**14**)	Responsible use (need for education, behaviors) (**98**)
Address user-created social trails (**14**)	General sense of crowding, overuse and damage (**93**)
Trail maintenance and management (**14**)	
Add beginner-friendly single-track trails (**14**)	
Right-size trailhead infrastructure (**13**)	

Eighteen or more types of issues were identified in all of the Potential Study Areas (Table 2, below). This complexity emphasizes the need for collaborative and systematic planning.

There was a total of **3,398** survey comments broken down by **33** different categories, as shown in Table 2, below. This table includes both the M&M ideas (column 2) and all the Critical Needs & Opportunities identified by respondents within all 7 geographic areas (columns 3-9).

Table 2: Critical Issues & Opportunities by Potential Study Areas (and including Maintenance and Management ideas).

CATEGORIES	M&M Ideas for ALL PSAs	CC	NFM	CP	GAR	BC	GS	MC/RT
Trail Maintenance / Management	107	14	19	17	15	34	103	51
More Volunteer Maintenance	279	1	1	0	1	0	3	2
Add Trails / capacity	26	6	37	7	48	12	69	66
User Conflict	6	6	36	2	16	22	54	42
Funding	162	3	1	1	0	1	7	0
Limit/restrict access or use	52	13	20	7	16	16	29	22
Other Maintenance	124	0	7	1	2	0	6	1
Camping	6	19	30	12	14	35	17	4
Signage	27	10	15	8	9	10	34	24
Human waste/restrooms	10	18	21	20	7	22	25	12
More partnerships	117	2	1	1	0	2	7	5
Responsible Use (need for education, behaviors)	31	8	12	9	9	8	31	21
Fees	108	0	3	3	1	4	2	4
Improve Trail Connectivity	11	2	17	4	19	6	37	23
Parking	4	18	9	34	5	17	8	8
General Sense of Crowding / High Use / Overuse	7	15	12	3	9	19	16	19
Resource Damage/Enhancement	5	11	19	11	10	13	8	12
Trail Adoption	84	2	0	0	1	0	0	1
Beginner/ADA/All User Access	13	2	13	1	10	1	21	4
Conservation - no more trails	23	8	4	5	3	2	5	10
Enforcement	6	5	15	3	7	8	10	4
Accommodate new use (E Bikes)	8	2	7	4	2	3	18	9
Student Involvement	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Animal Waste	5	1	2	1	1	6	22	1
Road Maintenance	4	10	5	5	3	1	7	4
Other	0	0	9	2	6	7	5	14
Wildlife Impacts	3	7	6	4	2	4	4	2
Trash	5	0	4	1	1	3	15	2
Fire Mitigation	2	6	6	1	2	2	2	1
Social Trails	0	1	6	4	1	4	5	1

Table 3: Key for Table 2

Categories (column 1)	General categories that respondent comments fell into
M&M Ideas for all PSAs (column 2)	All the ideas and solutions respondents provided in each of the PSAs AND in the specific M&M question
Potential Study Areas (columns 3 through 9)	
CC	Clear Creek
NFM	Northern Fourmile
CP	Cottonwood Pass
GAR	Greater Aspen Ridge
BC	Browns Creek
GS	Greater Salida
MC/RT	Monarch Crest/Rainbow Trail

The next two tables show the number of Critical Needs & Opportunities that were selected in each geographic area (PSA), and the number of in-person meeting table groups that evaluated each PSA.

Table 4: Public meeting Critical Needs & Opportunities input - Part One.

PSA	Number of Table Groups Participating in this PSA Evaluation	CRITICAL NEEDS/OPPORTUNITIES							
		W - Natural Resource & Wildlife Protection and Restoration				M - Maintenance Management			
		1 - Ideas to address natural resource damage.	2 - Ideas to address recurring conflicts with wildlife.	3 - Ideas to reduce impacts of high recreation use.	4 - Ideas to address user-created social trails.	1 - Ideas to address long- term trail maintenance and management.	2 - Ideas to 'right size' trailhead infrastructure	3 - Ideas to address trash and human/ dog waste.	4 - Ideas to prioritize natural resource and wildlife protection.
Clear Creek Corridor	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Northern Fourmile	7	2	3	2	4	3	1	2	2
Cottonwood Pass Corridor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greater Aspen Ridge	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1
Browns Creek	6	4	0	2	3	4	4	4	1
Greater Salida	12	4	4	6	3	3	5	8	2
Monarch Crest/Rainbow Trail	6	4	2	3	3	3	0	1	1
TOTALS		15	10	14	14	14	13	18	7
Top 10 Critical Needs/Opportunities		5		6	7	8	10	3	

Table 5:Public meeting Critical Needs and Opportunities input - Part Two.

PSA	Number of Table Groups Participating in this PSA Evaluation	CRITICAL NEEDS/OPPORTUNITIES									
		T - Trail Experience, Accessibility and Connectivity					C - Context				
		1 - Ideas on how to establish and communicate expectations for the quality of each trail's experience.	2 - Ideas to address recurring user conflict on trails.	3 - Ideas to improve county-wide trail connectivity.	4 - Ideas to define goals and target areas for beginner-friendly single-track trails.	5 - Ideas to improve existing trail system capacity and quality of experience.	1 - Ideas to retain a Backcountry Experience and sense of solitude.	2 - Ideas to reduce River corridor conflicts and shoreline degradation	3 - Ideas to improve and provide all-weather multi-user accessible trails.	4 - Ideas to address conflicts with agricultural operators.	5 - Ideas to add new/coming use types.
Clear Creek Corridor	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Northern Fourmile	7	0	5	3	3	3	2	1	1	1	0
Cottonwood Pass Corridor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greater Aspen Ridge	3	3	1	3	1	3	2	1	1	2	2
Browns Creek	6	4	4	0	2	2	2	1	1	0	0
Greater Salida	12	4	8	8	8	8	0	2	1	0	3
Monarch Crest/Rainbow Trail	6	3	3	5	0	1	3	0	1	0	2
TOTALS		15	22	19	14	18	9	5	6	3	7
Top 10 Critical Needs/Opportunities		1	2	9	4						

Management & Maintenance

Survey respondents were asked to share their ideas about how to address Management & Maintenance (M&M) needs throughout the County. There were **598** respondents who provided more than **1,277** answers to this specific question. There were an additional **287** M&M responses from the other PSA survey questions, for a grand total of **1,564** ideas to address M&M needs, as shown in Table 7, below. Note that the public meeting participants were not asked to provide any specific input on this topic.

Table 6: Management & Maintenance solution ideas.

CATEGORIES	M&M Ideas for ALL PSAs
More Volunteer Maintenance	**279**
Funding	**162**
Other Maintenance	**124**
More partnerships	**117**
Fees	**108**
Trail Maintenance / Management	**107**
Trail Adoption	**84**

Limit/restrict access or use	**52**
Student Involvement	**42**
Responsible Use (need for education, behaviors)	**31**
Signage	**27**
Add Trails / capacity	**26**
Conservation - no more trails	**23**
Beginner/ADA/All User Access	**13**
Improve Trail Connectivity	**11**
Human waste/restrooms	**10**
Accommodate new use (E Bikes)	**8**
General Sense of Crowding / High Use / Overuse	**7**
Camping	**6**
User Conflict	**6**
Enforcement	**6**
Resource Damage/Enhancement	**5**
Animal Waste	**5**
Trash	**5**
Parking	**4**
Road Maintenance	**4**
Wildlife Impacts	**3**
Fire Mitigation	**2**
Total M&M Only	**1277**
TOTAL M&M within PSAs	**287**
Total M&M With PSAs included	**1564**

The **Top 5** sub-type categories for M&M ideas include the following:

1. **More Volunteer Maintenance (279)** including events, workgroups, volunteer days, incentives, promotions, outreach and volunteer reporting.
2. **Funding (162)** including writing more grants, fundraising events, more fundraising, donation boxes, QR codes, sponsorships, ballot initiative, trail naming opportunities, visitor donations, and more funding for nonprofits.
3. **Other Maintenance (124)** including training volunteers, prioritization of high use trails, hiring more staff, suggestion boxes, paid crew, better communications, ensuring that agencies can do the work, and transportation considerations.
4. **Fees (108)** including instituting additional taxes (property, lodging, sales), pay-to-play model, passes, permits, and parking fees.
5. **Trails Management (107)** including directional use, better management, maintain current trails, designation of user-specific trails, development of trail ratings, and keeping some of the trails rough.

Potential Study Areas (PSAs)

All participants were asked to select their top two priority PSAs, based on the evaluation and analysis worksheet (in-person meeting), or a survey question that asked, "Which area do you think has the most critical needs and should be prioritized for planning?"

Public input prioritized four of the seven PSAs, as outlined below with top Critical Needs & Opportunities in each area. (Note that funding may only be available to address 2 to 3 areas in the current phase of work.) PSA locations are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
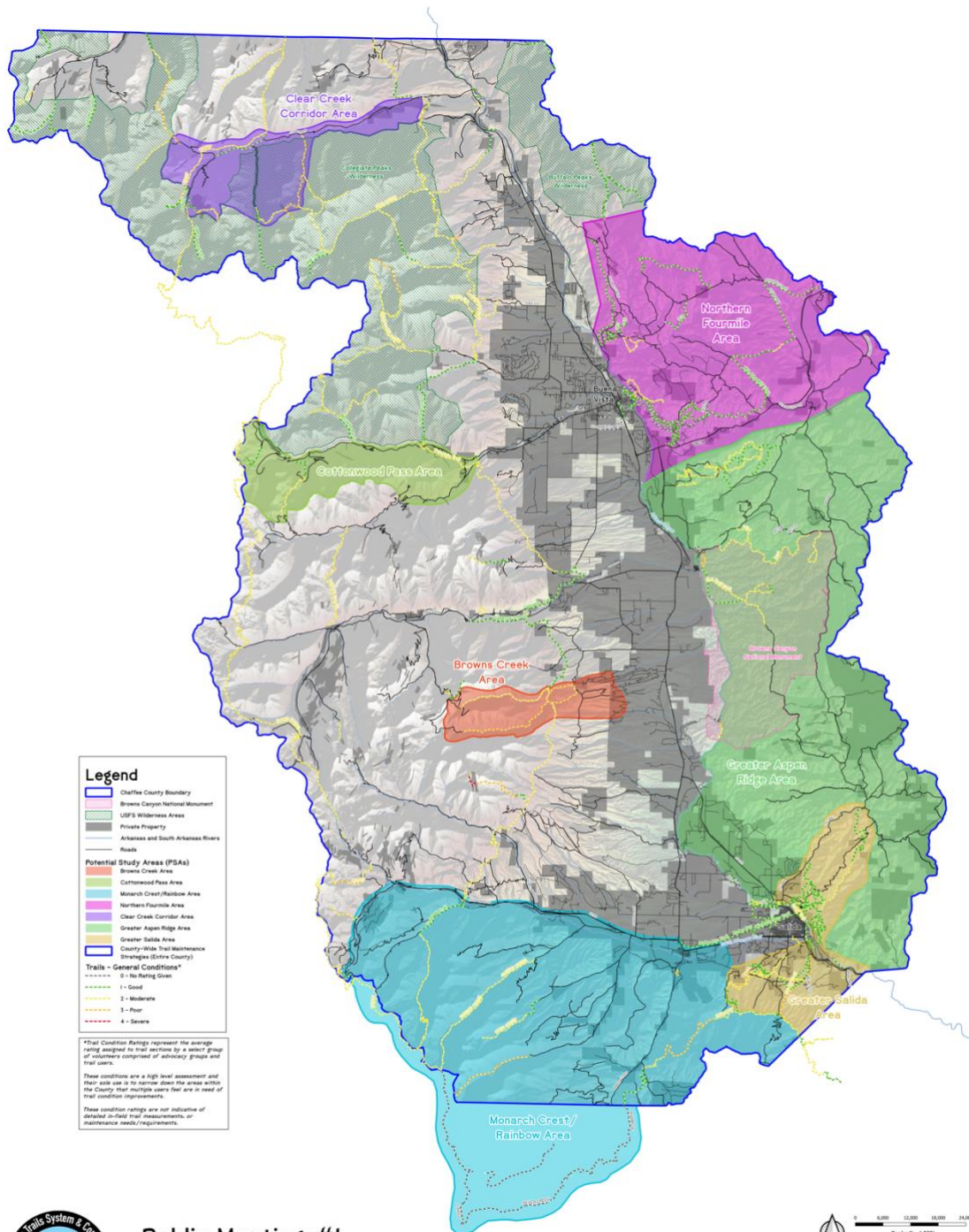
Public Meeting #1
Potential Study Areas (PSAs) Map
May 22, 2024

Greater Salida Area. This area received the highest number of comments. Top critical needs and opportunity categories include trail management/maintenance, added capacity/opportunities, solutions to address user conflicts, signage, connectivity, need for more responsible use/user behaviors and a desire to limit or restrict use.

Monarch Crest and Rainbow Trail. Top critical needs and opportunity categories include opportunity for added capacity, trail management and maintenance, user conflict solutions, signage, connectivity, need for more responsible use/user behaviors and a desire to limit or restrict use.

Northern Fourmile Area. Top critical needs and opportunity categories include trailhead infrastructure (managed camping, human waste management-restrooms), solutions to user conflicts, added capacity, desire to limit or restrict use, solutions to resource damage and trail maintenance and management.

Browns Creek Area. Top critical needs and opportunity categories include camping management, trail maintenance and management, human waste management (restrooms), solutions to user conflicts, solutions to a general sense of overuse/resource damage and parking.

Three-hundred thirty-eight (**338**) survey respondents answered the question asking them to prioritize PSAs. Survey outcomes were similar to the meeting, prioritizing the four areas listed above. Survey respondents were additionally asked why they selected these two areas as priorities. Reasons include:

- The area is one they personally use most often.
- The area is heavily used and has the most pressure (and is the most impacted).
- The area is most accessible.
- The area has safety concern due to overuse.
- The area needs trail connectivity and has the most potential opportunities.

A detailed list of specific survey comments for each potential study area is available: https://envisionchaffeecounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/TSCP_SurveyCommentsAll.pdf