

Silver Star Vision Plan

Recommendations to protect and preserve a special landscape through collaboration and shared stewardship.



Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Vision	4
Goals	5
Background	6
Yacolt Burn	7
Special Interest Area Designation and the 1993 Trails Plan	8
Recent Past	9
Reviving and Revising a Vision for the Silver Star Area	10
The Planning Process	12
Forming the Steering Committee and Sideboards	12
Collecting Data and Input	13
Forming the Planning Team	14
Objectives and Strategies	15
Zones Within the Planning Area	15
Overarching Objectives	17
Northwest Zone	19
Southwest Zone	23
East Zone	27
Appendix: Silver Star Vision Plan Sideboards	31
Purpose	31
Towards a Common Vision	31
Resource Protection	31
Legal Context	32
Implementation	33

Acknowledgments

Land Acknowledgment

We respectfully acknowledge these lands are the homelands of Indigenous Tribes of the Pacific Northwest. Tribes continue to rely on and share in the stewardship of these lands today. Please tread gently and treat these places with respect.

This planning document is the result of the commitment of a diverse group of people who shared their knowledge, experience and expertise to create a shared vision for the stewardship of the Silver Star area.

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Photo: Lisa Holmes

Vision

The Silver Star Area Trail System provides a diversity of non-motorized trail opportunities which are stewarded for sustainability by the land management agencies in partnership with those who use them. Trail recreation in the Silver Star area exists in harmony with the landscape's rich biological diversity and cultural resources.

The Silver Star Vision Plan is the result of a collaboration between government agencies, local nonprofits and the Cowlitz Indian Tribe. Although this team's recommendations are merely that rather than decisions, they are very important in showing the level of support for actions that will help meet the plan's goals and vision of recreation and conservation management of the Silver Star Area for future generations. Such support is critical in determining how priorities are established and gives land managers the confidence to invest in additional analysis knowing that the public will very likely support their effort.

Goals

Preservation and protection of the landscape's unique and outstanding biological, cultural and scenic values is paramount. Silver Star Mountain, its ridges and surrounding forests are rich in biodiversity, cultural history and offer some of the best scenic vistas in the region. Past and current members of Indigenous Tribes retain a special connection to this area because of specific cultural sites but also their relationships with culturally significant resources found there.

The landscape features an integrated and diverse non-motorized trail system. Trails connect people to the landscape and also facilitate vital monitoring and stewardship activities to protect and preserve the special qualities that draw people to visit. People come to enjoy a diverse range of activities — from a quiet walk to see wildflowers to adventurous treks. A trail system provides opportunities for as many types of activities as possible while minimizing congestion and conflict, which helps ensure that this special place can be enjoyed by all.

Recreation and management projects and activities are centered on sustainability and harmony. Thoughtful design and management lead people to be responsible, respectful visitors and inspire them to be stewards and advocates to protect and preserve the values they come to enjoy. Thus, visitors are agents for sustainability when recreation facilities engender the behaviors that enhance the landscape's value rather than detract from it. Harmony in this instance is a special type of balance where people, trails and the natural environment have a mutually beneficial relationship.

Stewardship is planned and accomplished through partnerships and collaboration. No single entity is capable of achieving all of the above goals. Rather, a diverse coalition of land management agencies, Tribes and other organizations collectively bring together the perspectives and resources needed to reach the vision. These stakeholder groups not only have unique insights, they also bring specific skills sets and capacity that others may lack. The entities that worked together to develop this plan commit to collaboration going forward to realize our common vision.

Background

Since time immemorial, people living in this region have had a connection to Silver Star Mountain and the adjacent highlands north of the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette rivers. These rivers served as vital travel and trade routes for the people of the Lower Columbia River and a regional trading hub was hosted by the Cowlitz Indian Tribe on land now occupied by Fort Vancouver. From these ancestral lands, indigenous people drew upon the abundant natural resources for trade and commerce. But the plants, animals and places found across these landscapes are much more than food, medicine, material and real estate — they are an inseparable component of the peoples' culture and identity. Thus the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and other Indigenous people of the Lower Columbia continue to be deeply invested in caring for this area.

The Pyramid Rock Trail is a popular route to the Silver Star summit; Ed's Trail features a natural rock arch; the Bluff Mountain Trail follows an open ridgeline with views of Mount Adams to the east. Photos: Ryan Ojerio, Andrea Manchester, Kat Traczyk



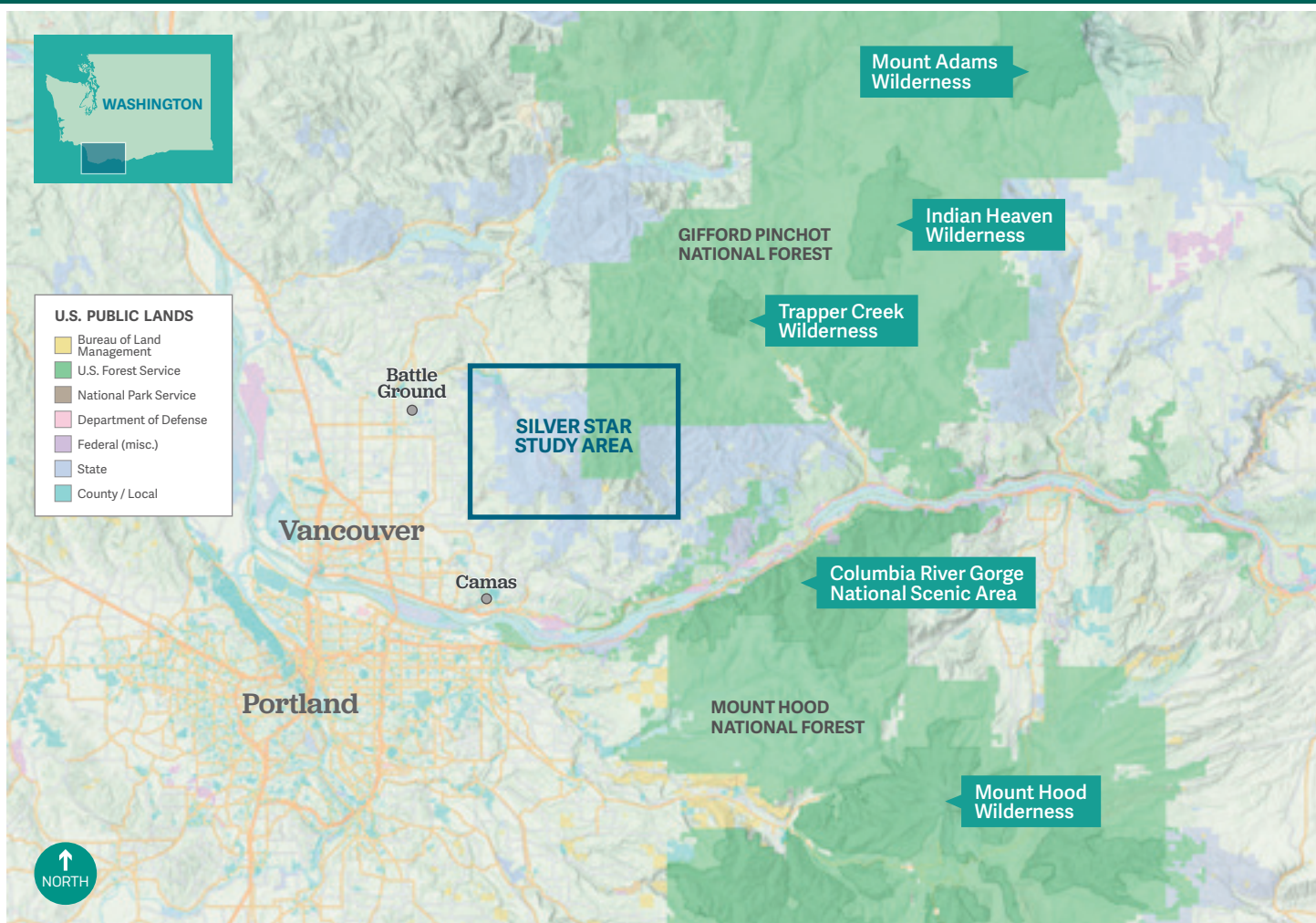


Figure 1. Regional map showing the Silver Star area and other comparable popular recreation areas.

Silver Star Mountain is located approximately 25 miles northeast of Vancouver in Skamania County. The mountain and surrounding lands are situated in the far southwestern corner of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and bordered by Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) lands to the west, south and east and private lands to the south.

The Silver Star area is dominated by a ridge connecting three major peaks. The namesake peak rises to a little over 4,000 feet followed by Little Baldy and Bluff Mountain. Steep slopes and ridges drop off the central ridge into the Copper Creek basin to the north and the Washougal River basin to the south. Ridges and peaks in the area tend to be steep with many rock outcrops, bluffs, talus slopes and waterfalls making the area outstanding in its geologic and scenic features as well as providing important habitat for mountain goat, golden eagle and other wildlife.

The Yacolt Burn

The area has a diversity of unique and rare plant life and exceptional views that are in large part due to the effects of the Yacolt Burn. In September of 1902, a series of fires

merged and burnt 230,000 acres. In the decades that followed, natural regeneration of the forest cover plus human efforts to plant trees were hampered by the harsh winter climate, rocky soils and additional wildfires.

Today, the open meadows and rocky talus slopes provide an alpine environment at a relatively low 4,000 feet of elevation. In the 1970s, a public effort to protect the area was led by a local climbing organization, the Ptarmigans. Their concept of a “Special Scenic Area” was endorsed by local chapters of the Audubon Society, American Alpine Club and the Silver Star Study group, a Vancouver based group formed in 1975 to protect and preserve Silver Star.

In the 1980s, a concerted effort organized by the Audubon Society, Portland Chapter, identified 150 plant species including some rare and sensitive populations. In order to protect this biodiversity, as well as the unique cultural and scenic values, the Forest Service closed the road to the former fire lookout site to motorized vehicles in 1989.



A feast for the eyes, exceptional wildflowers draw visitors for the aesthetic beauty, but many people also value this biodiversity for a host of other reasons. For Indigenous Tribes, the plants, animals, and even the landscape as a whole are interconnected and inseparable from their cultural identity. Photo: Lisa Holmes

Special Interest Area Designation and the 1993 Trails Plan

The Silver Star Mountain and nearby ridges and valleys were designated as a Special Interest Area in the Forest Management Plan in 1990. The goal of this designation was to maintain the outstanding scenic, botanical and cultural features of the area while still providing for an appropriate level of public access. The plan specifies that motorized vehicles should not be allowed in the area. In 1993, the Forest Service approved a trails plan that converted some roads to trails, authorized new trails and established the management goal of providing a semi-primitive non-motorized experience with trails for hiking as well as some open to equestrians and mountain biking.

Prior to this planning effort, Silver Star had four trails: Starway #175, Bluff Mountain #172, Star #174, and the closed section of Road 4109 over the summit of Silver Star, renamed Silver Star #180, for a total of 11.7 miles. The new plan proposed building new trails as well as improving the still-open section of Forest Road 4109 for passenger vehicles and adding a formal trailhead at the end of the road.



With its gentle grade, this former road that was converted to a trail can accommodate a wide range of hikers of varying physical abilities. Photo: Lisa Holmes

Following the 1993 plan, the Chinook Trail Association (CTA) led the effort to build new sections of trail including Ed's Trail #180A and a connector between Ed's Trail and the DNR trail system — linking up the Forest Service with DNR managed trails. Eventually CTA envisions these trail segments to become part of a 300-mile bi-state loop encircling the Columbia River Gorge.

In 2005, a 29-mile route of linked trails that are part of that vision earned National Recreation Trail status. Collectively known as the Chinook Trail, this route traverses from Moulton Falls on the western end of the study area to the Bluff Mountain trailhead on the eastern end.

Recent Past

A decade after the 1993 plan, the Silver Star Scenic Special Interest Area was being damaged by illegal motorized vehicle use on old roadways and across fragile wildflower meadows. Forest Service efforts to block access had been thwarted. Signs were destroyed, barricades were winched away, steel cables were cut. Washington Trails Association (WTA) partnered with the CTA, the Forest Service and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to develop a project to protect the area. Together they installed new signs, placed barrier rocks and hosted volunteer work parties to narrow old road corridors with native trees.

In 2007, DNR staff initiated a collaborative planning effort to develop additional trails in the Yacolt Burn State Forest. After 3 years of work with representatives from non-motorized and motorized recreation organizations, the Western Yacolt Burn Forest Recreation Plan (August 2010) was adopted and guided trail construction activities for

the following decade. As a result of that work, the southern portion of the forest features a motorized network whereas the northern portion that abuts the Silver Star area has an expanded non-motorized trail network. In addition to that separation to reduce user conflicts, the newly built trails were designed to create loops and in some instances offer activity specific routes such as the one-way downhill mountain bike trail named Thrillium.

Reviving and Revising a Vision for the Silver Star Area

Following the Eagle Creek Fire in 2017 and the subsequent closure of many popular day hiking destinations in the Columbia River Gorge, the Silver Star area and many others on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest experienced a spike in visitation offering a peek at the future as participation in outdoor recreation grows across the region. Not surprisingly, increases in visitors were most prominent near the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area including at sites managed by DNR on the Yacolt Burn State Forest.

While DNR staff were noticing their parking areas filling more quickly, calls from hikers for maintenance on the Forest Road 4109 also increased. Years of funding shortfalls for the entire Gifford Pinchot road system meant that the last 2 miles of the 4109 road leading to the popular Silver Star trailhead became deeply rutted. It became infamous as one of the worst roads leading to one of the best destinations for hiking in the region.

At the same time that rough driving conditions deterred many, others with 4x4 vehicles in search of a challenge exacerbated the erosion problems by driving on the 4109 for recreation — even short cutting across unroaded areas. Some went so far as to drive beyond the trailhead out onto the fragile meadows and, in the process, undo decades of work to restore these unique ecosystems.



Road access is a significant barrier, especially for people with physical limitations. Photo: Cheryl Hill

In 2018, WTA began to convene interested trail user groups as well as staff with both DNR and the Gifford Pinchot National Forest to talk about a comprehensive effort to solve the difficult challenges of unmanaged motorized incursions, deteriorating infrastructure and increasing visitor numbers. Recognizing that this effort would span two land management agencies and touch on the interests of many diverse stakeholders, this group applied for a grant from the National Parks Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program that would provide the services of an experienced planner to work with this group to develop the plan.

HOW IS THE STUDY AREA DEFINED?

The Silver Star Special Interest Scenic Area was formally designated in 1990 and has clearly delineated boundaries. A number of U.S. Forest Service plans and policies apply to how it is to be managed. Next door to it, the Yacolt Burn State Forest is managed according to a variety of state plans and policies. This planning effort is concerned with all the unique and special values found across these boundaries along the ridgelines and forested slopes of the Silver Star Mountain and adjacent peaks.

People who come to recreate in the study area often travel across these boundaries, thus the planning team recognized that a holistic and comprehensive approach was needed for this project. Consequently, they focused their attention on those areas that have the most important scenic, biological and cultural values and the interconnected trails, trailheads and roads that people use to visit these special areas. This study area encompasses the southwestern corner of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and the entire Silver Star Scenic Area plus the portion of the Yacolt Burn State Forest that abuts it. The planning team decided to further focus their recommendations to three zones that together comprise the planning area.

WHAT IS AN “UNOFFICIAL” TRAIL OR ROUTE?

Modern trail systems are made up of trails that are purposefully planned, built and managed. These trails are often referred to as system trails or official trails. Unofficial trails, also called non-system trails, are those that exist on the landscape but are not part of the formal system. Sometimes these trails develop as the unintended consequence of people walking or riding to an interesting destination. The resulting compaction of the soil kills vegetation and a path is born — such trails are typically called social trails. Rogue trails on the other hand are purposefully built, often in a clandestine fashion, without being sanctioned by the land manager. Yet another category of unofficial trail is when people follow a decommissioned road bed frequently enough that it becomes established as a social trail. The term “unofficial route” encompasses all these different types of pathways that people use that are outside of the intended (or official) trail system.

WHAT IS A SUSTAINABLE TRAIL SYSTEM?

The U.S. Forest Service provides this definition: “A sustainable trail system is a holistic network of diverse physical and social resources consisting of actual on-the-ground routes and associated community health and economic benefits. It is a resilient system consisting of a wide array of well planned, well-designed, well-constructed, and well managed trails that are supported by a mosaic of public and private interests. The system inspires stewardship and invites people of all ages and abilities — and from all backgrounds — to enjoy trails and use them to connect to their public lands while protecting and conserving natural and cultural resources.”

United States Forest Service Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System, November 2017

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

The word sustainability has gained a lot of attention lately but it can mean different things to different people. For the purposes of this plan, it is useful to think about sustainability as the ability to resist change. If this plan is successful all of the things that make Silver Star unique and special will be there for future generations to enjoy. For that to happen, the sacred cultural sites and resources such as First Nation foods need to be protected; the plant and animal communities that are part of an interdependent system need to thrive and the high quality recreation experiences need to be stewarded so they continue to be high quality experiences.

Sustainable trails not only skirt sensitive habitats and cultural resources, but they also offer a recreation experience that people are inspired to care for. When people love the trails they use, they want to take care of them for future generations.

But even well-loved trails can be difficult to care for if they are designed poorly. For example trails along the fall-line of the slope invite erosion that can be nearly impossible to stop.

The Planning Process

The Silver Star Vision Project seeks to build consensus among a diverse set of stakeholders including trail users, environmental groups and land management agencies, specifically the **Gifford Pinchot National Forest** and **Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Pacific Cascade Region**, which manages the adjacent Yacolt Burn State Forest. The planning team believes that a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities that this landscape offers will produce a robust and comprehensive plan for future recreation management. They also believe that this process can build a coalition of partners to steward this special landscape into the future.

Forming the Steering Committee and Sideboards

This project is a collaborative effort guided by a steering committee composed of Forest Service and DNR staff as well as representatives from several nonprofit trail user groups. These groups are: **Back Country Horsemen of Washington, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, Chinook Trail Association, Washington Trails Association** and the **Washington Trail Riders Association**. Additional planning assistance with facilitation, research, and writing is provided by the **National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program** through a grant of technical assistance.

The steering committee convened for a series of meetings before engaging with the public to develop and define the scope of the project. They recognized that a number of planning

Silver Star's prominence and lack of tree cover provides sweeping vistas that are rare at this relatively low elevation. Photo: Miranda Beck



efforts, policies and rules preceding this project would need to be respected. Additionally, they thought it important to set some boundaries on the scope of the project from the beginning so that they started with a common understanding of the legal context as well as the plan's intention. Called "sideboards" this set of guidelines can be found in the appendix. These sideboards serve to define the scope of this planning effort and acknowledge that a variety of other plans, management activities, policies and regulations that precede this vision plan take precedence.

Collecting Data and Input

As the steering committee was refining the sideboards, WTA engaged volunteers to gather data on current trail conditions. Separately, staff from the Gifford Pinchot National Forest conducted a trails assessment with input from their recreation specialists that included information about the trail's sustainability. To assess the trails on the adjacent DNR managed lands, the steering committee worked with DNR trails staff to conduct the same assessment.

The steering committee also sought information about the trails and the broader landscape from people who represent a range of interests, such as conservationists, motorized users and hunters, to name a few. The steering committee reached out to interested organizations and convened a meeting to present the project's intent, describe the planning process and invite their input. Feedback from this stakeholder meeting was useful in helping to understand the issues that people care about and the opportunities they saw for improvement.

In an effort to gather more public input, the steering committee developed an online survey and distributed it through a press release and throughout the committee's respective email lists. **During the summer of 2021, 1,232 people completed the survey.** Their input along with the stakeholder representatives' was instrumental in shaping the recommendations of this plan.

Although it was not a scientific survey, it does provide an overview of how people recreate in the area and what their experience is like. Key highlights indicate that people enjoy different types of activities on different trails in the planning area. Equestrian use tends to be clustered near Rock Creek Horse Camp and mountain biking is more common around the Yacolt Burn and Larch Mountain trailheads. Hiking is more common at the Grouse Vista and Silver Star trailheads. People also visit the area to view wildlife and observe native plants in the wild, a testament to the area's rich biodiversity.

Regardless of their favorite activity, respondents share common concerns about litter, vandalism and unmanaged recreational shooting. Notably hikers' main concern is poor road conditions and cite the degraded condition of Forest Road 4109 to the Silver Star trailhead in particular. However, hikers are evenly split when asked if they would support decommissioning all or part of the road and converting it to a trail.



Geology and geography are on full display from the Silver Star summit on a clear day. Photo: Ryan Ojerio

Forming the Planning Team

In December 2021, the steering committee expanded to include representatives that bring important perspectives to this project. Outreach was made to various user types, including Tribes, equestrian, hiking, target shooting, biking, motorized, hunters, and environmental/conservation interest groups. Groups that showed an interest in participating on this new planning team included representatives from **The Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Cougar Area Trail Seekers, Friends of 4109 Road** and the **Washington Native Plant Society**.

For the next 5 months, the planning team met regularly to discuss the different issues facing the landscape and opportunities that could enhance and protect the important values found there. At the end of those series of meetings, the planning team had developed a series of recommendations described in the form of objectives, strategies and potential actions or options.

The planning team believes that these suggestions for further consideration align with the overall vision and goals for the area and thus offer a roadmap for next steps. In some instances, stewardship activities like maintenance or restoration work could begin as soon as the time and resources are available. However, other actions such as rerouting a trail, siting a new parking area or adding a new trail connection will require a more detailed analysis. Such analysis involve technical experts, require public input and a thorough land manager review in accordance with applicable policies such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

Although the planning team's recommendations are merely that, rather than decisions, they are very important in showing the level of support for actions that will help meet the plan's goals and vision. Such support is critical in determining how priorities are established and gives land managers the confidence to invest in additional analyses knowing that the public will very likely support their effort.

Objectives and Strategies

The plan is built around a set of recommendations that are described in terms of objectives, strategies and potential actions or potential options. An objective is an outcome that helps to achieve one or more goals. A strategy is a method to achieve the objective and potential actions or options are ideas for how a strategy could be implemented.

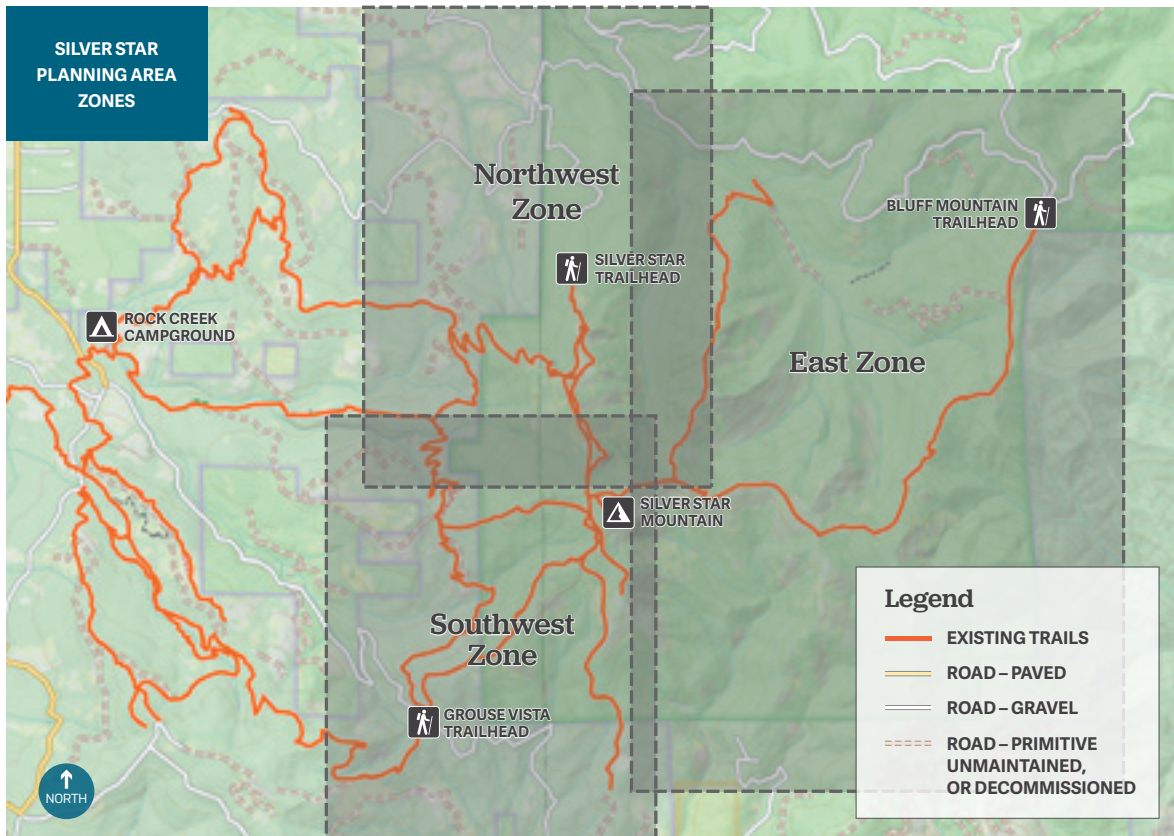


Figure 2. Within the Study Area the planning team delineated planning zones, each with a unique character and set of issues.

Zones Within the Planning Area

There are three zones, each with its own character as well as unique issues. These zones aren't formal and thus don't have any defined boundaries but they are useful conceptually to organize one's thoughts about how they should be stewarded.

The **Northwest Zone** is best known for the spectacular wildflower displays that grace the open meadows and the striking views of Cascade volcanoes. At about 3,100 feet the Silver Star trailhead is the highest parking in the planning area, offering the easiest access to this high

country. However the lack of road maintenance is a barrier to those without 4x4 high clearance vehicles. Another issue is that motorized incursions beyond the trailhead and from adjacent DNR system roads to the west have led to significant damage to the meadows.

The **Southwest Zone** features the dramatic prominences of Sturgeon Rock and Pyramid Rock plus three trail routes to the summit of Silver Star Mountain. However, each of these trails was once an old road bed that has become badly eroded making for an unpleasant recreation experience. The popular Grouse Vista trailhead is lower in elevation than the Silver Star trailhead, making for a longer trip to the high country but road access is much better owing to the regular maintenance it receives.

The **Eastern Zone** is the most remote and least connected by trails and roads. As such, it lends itself to a more primitive solitary recreation experience. The Starway ridgeline and the ridge between Bluff Mountain and Silver Star Mountain feature rugged, rocky trails that are challenging for hikers, equestrians and mountain bikers alike.

To the west of these zones, campgrounds and trails in the Yacolt Burn State Forest feed into the planning area. This more developed recreation infrastructure provides connections to the Forest Service trail network and are the most common entry points because of their proximity to town and the relatively well maintained gravel roads. Management of these trails and recreation sites was directed by the Western Yacolt Burn Recreation Plan (2010), and it is useful to know how recreation activity there influences use patterns in the zones of the planning area described above.

The following section lists recommendations that apply across all of the zones followed by those that are more tailored to the specific issues and opportunities for that zone. Although this plan focuses on one particular region of the state and the types of recreation appropriate for it, the planning team recognizes people's desire for a wide variety of recreation opportunities. Some of those activities such as motorized trail recreation and target shooting may not be allowed or appropriate in this study area. Similarly this area lacks formal rock climbing areas and developed camping facilities. The planning team encourages agencies and stakeholders to consider how a lack of these designated opportunities outside of the study area could contribute to some of the issues identified in this plan.

It should be noted that a large portion of the Northwest and Southwest Zones are comprised in large part of DNR managed trust lands that are managed sustainably for revenue for the trust beneficiaries as mandated by the Washington State Constitution, multiple laws and two separate State Supreme Court cases. As trust land manager, the DNR manages state-owned forest, range, aquatic, agricultural, conservation and commercial lands for the people of Washington. These trust lands generate non-tax revenue through income-producing activities such as timber harvest, commercial properties, and agricultural and communications site leases. The revenue provides support for trust beneficiaries such as public schools, state institutions and county services. Activities need to be consistent with the set practices for managing and developing recreational trails on DNR-managed lands that are compatible with land management responsibilities.

Overarching Objectives

Provide appropriate trailhead access

STRATEGY

- Proactively plan for and manage parking congestion in collaboration with partners.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS

- Explore potential to operate a shuttle service during peak visitation.
- Explore potential for parking permitting as the last option to manage congestion, including using it only during peak times rather than creating a blanket permit requirement.
- Explore potential for adding NW Forest Pass sites and required facilities.

Protect and preserve sensitive natural and cultural resources from visitor impacts

STRATEGIES

- Collaborate with agencies, organizations and Tribes to monitor impacts from recreation.
- Develop a centralized reporting system for impact monitoring.
- Establish a volunteer program to periodically survey sensitive areas.
- Relocate trails in order to protect resource values at risk.
- Implement a volunteer trailhead ambassador program to educate visitors about recreating responsibly.
- Mitigate camping impacts.

Reduce negative impacts from target shooting

STRATEGIES

- Engage with target shooting user groups to provide environmental and safe target shooting.
- Increase enforcement capacity by entering into a joint law enforcement agreement between DNR and the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.
- Maintain appropriate signage and messaging.

Prevent motorized incursions

STRATEGIES

- Engage with motorized user groups to provide education about responsible recreation.
- Increase enforcement capability by entering into a joint law enforcement agreement between DNR and the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.
- Maintain appropriate signage and messaging.
- Maintain barriers to motorized vehicles from accessing the non-motorized trail system.

Modernize the trail system to provide sustainable, high quality trail experiences

STRATEGIES

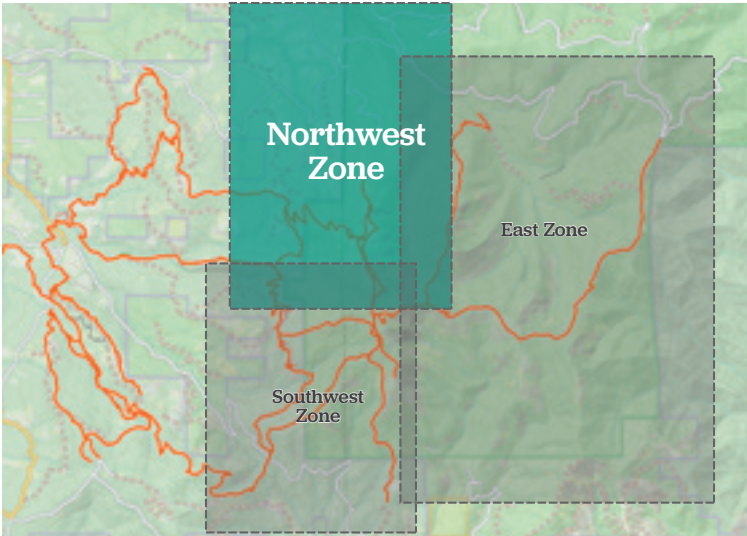
- Work with resources specialists with the Tribes and land management agencies to identify appropriate areas to re-route or redevelop trails that are not sustainable.
- Form a trail advisory group to support implementation of trail system modifications, monitor user conflict and work collaboratively to address issues.
- Reduce congestion by seeking opportunities to develop loop routes with a preferred direction of travel.
- Reduce user conflict by designing and maintaining trails that encourage an intuitive separation of activities within a trail system that is open to hikers, bikers and equestrians.
- Manage trail segments within the Silver Star area that are part of the Chinook Trail in a manner consistent with its vision as a regional bi-state loop for multi-use and non-motorized use.
- Volunteers and partner organizations will support the decommissioning of unauthorized/social trails.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS

- In the Northwest Zone, design and manage trails that primarily appeal to hikers including those with physical limitations, to offer opportunities to view the scenic vistas and observe nature.
- In the Southwest Zone, design and manage trails for a diversity of more physically challenging trail experiences for hikers, bikers and equestrians.
- In the East Zone, design and manage trails for a more rugged backcountry experience primarily for more experienced hikers, but also open to equestrians and bikers.
- Volunteers and partner organizations coordinate with land managing agencies to share information about unauthorized/social trail development and work to decommission them.
- Volunteers and partner organizations promote recreate responsibly messaging to educate trail users about the issues with unauthorized/social trails.

Northwest Zone

With the highest elevation trailhead in the area this zone is the most accessible to those with physical limitations. But Forest Road 4109 that serves the Silver Star Trailhead is difficult to drive even with a 4x4 high clearance vehicle. Those that can reach the parking lot are within 3 miles of the summit, but the superlative views and opportunities to observe wildflowers and wildlife begin right away and continue along either side of the ridge.



The Silver Star Trail #180 follows a gentle grade along the west side of the ridge and Ed's Trail #180A takes a more rugged approach along the east side of the ridge (photo: bottom). Unfortunately unlawful motorized incursions continue to damage fragile meadows in this zone (photo: top right). Photos: Steve Jones, Lisa Holmes

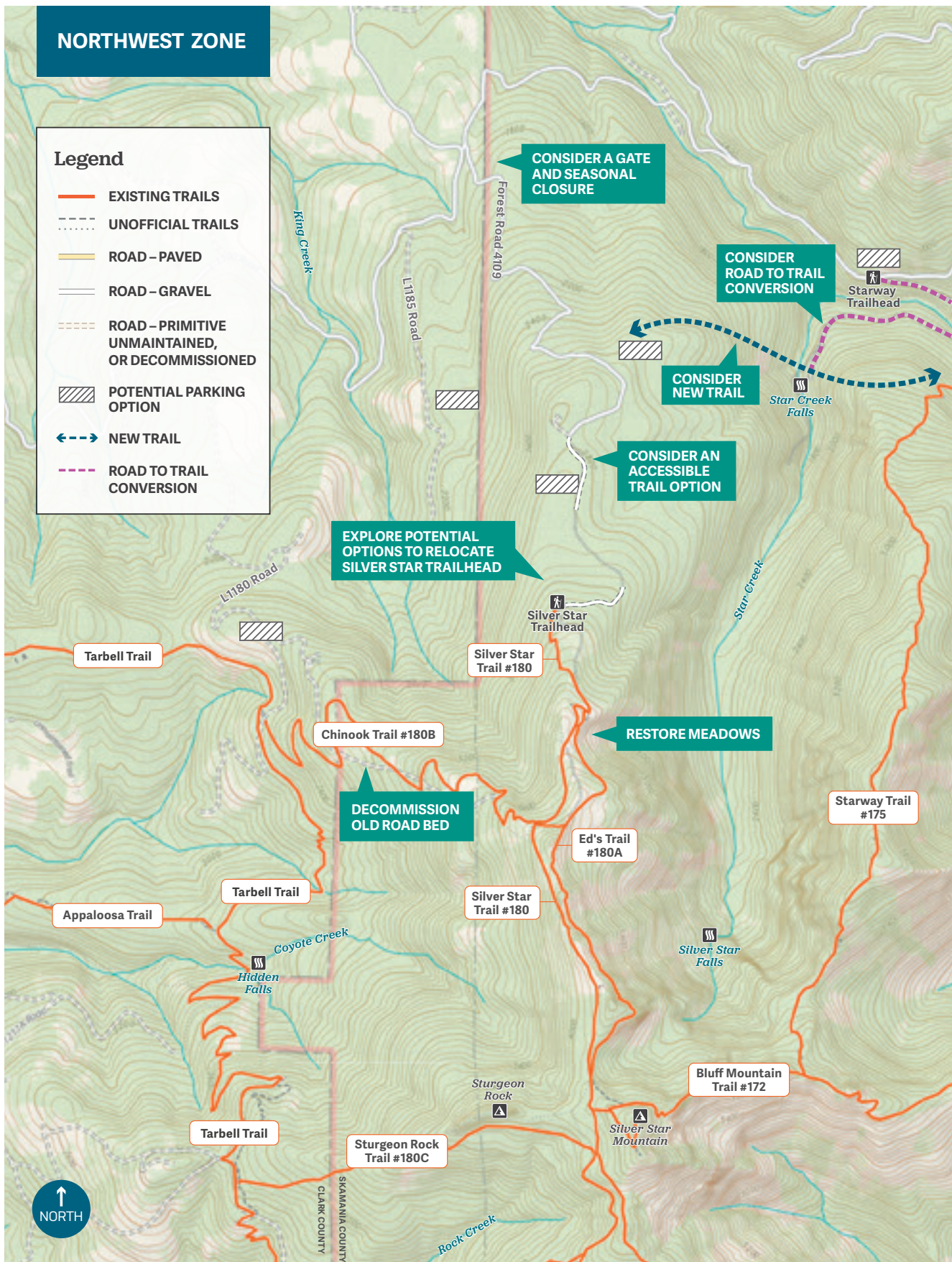


Figure 3. DRAFT map of the Northwest zone

Northwest Zone

Provide appropriate trailhead access

STRATEGIES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS
Maintain and protect existing infrastructure	<p>Perform maintenance on USFS Road 4109 to facilitate stewardship and restoration activities on the north ridge.</p> <p>Install a gate on USFS Road 4109 and close it seasonally to protect the road from damage during the wet season.</p>
Explore alternatives for parking in this area	<p>Maintain existing USFS Road 4109 for passenger vehicles and restructure existing parking area to maximize the number of parking spots.</p> <p>Consider closing a portion of the 4109 road and building a new parking lot lower on the slope to reduce ongoing maintenance burden.</p> <p>Explore potential for a trailhead off of DNR road L1185.</p>

Prevent motorized incursions

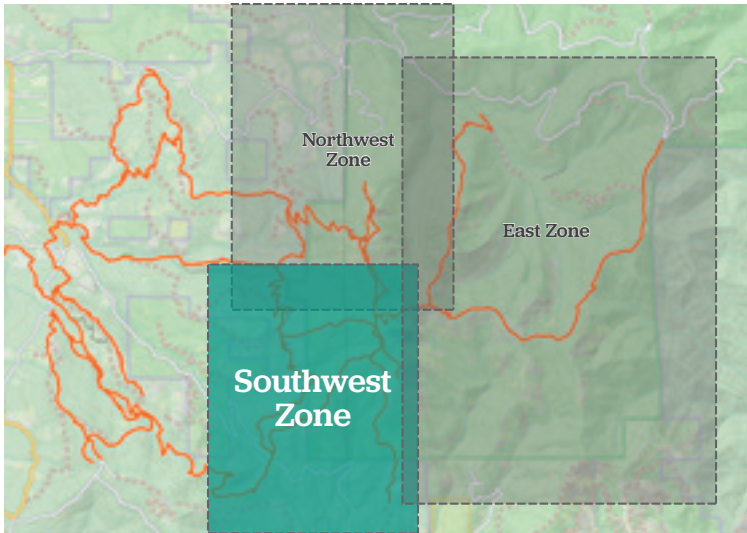
STRATEGIES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS
Block common breach points	<p>Enhance existing barriers at the Silver Star Trailhead.</p> <p>Enhance existing barriers near the Chinook Trail 180B and Kloochman Butte.</p>
Decommission legacy road beds that no longer serve a useful function	<p>Decommission and restore the non-system route that ascends the northwest ridge.</p> <p>Decommission and restore the user-created double tracks on the north ridge.</p>

Northwest Zone, continued

Modernize the trail system to provide sustainable, high quality non-motorized trail experiences	
STRATEGIES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS
Offer a diversity of trail experiences	<p>Consider accessibility when planning parking options to access the north ridge.</p> <p>Explore potential design options to provide for an accessible recreation experience when doing the planning and redesign work at the Silver Star Trailhead.</p>
Reduce user conflict through intentional trail design	<p>Prioritize the views, observing nature, walking and other forms of slow, quiet recreation in the Northwest Zone.</p> <p>Seek opportunities to reduce congestion with loop trails that have a preferred direction of travel.</p>

Southwest Zone

This zone has the most popular access point for visitors as it is both the closest to the Portland/Vancouver Metro area and accessible by passenger vehicles. The Grouse Vista trailhead is often full on weekends during the wildflower season. But the trail distances to the summit are longer, steeper and more rugged regardless of which of the three trail options one chooses within this zone.



Former roads converted to non-motorized trails in this zone have eroded to the point where exposed rocks are a significant barrier to equestrian use and unpleasant for hiking, trail running and cycling. Photos: Dorethee Abbott, Lisa Holmes

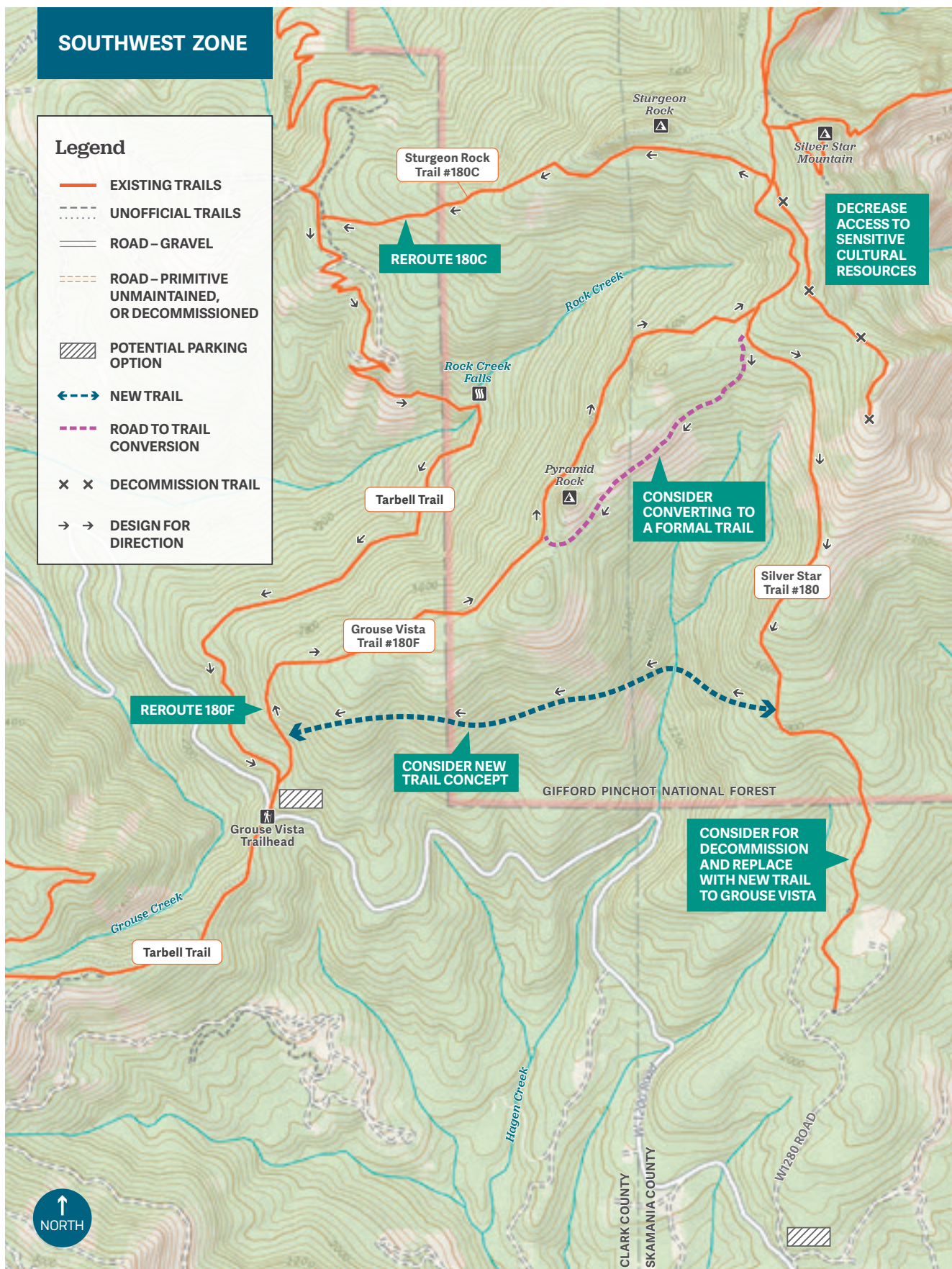


Figure 4. DRAFT map of the Southwest Zone

Southwest Zone

Provide appropriate trailhead access	
STRATEGIES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS
Explore alternatives for adding parking capacity in the south zone	<p>Explore potential to enlarge the footprint of the Grouse Vista trailhead.</p> <p>Explore potential for a trailhead for the south end of Silver Star Trail 180 at DNR Road W1280.</p> <p>Explore potential to eliminate the current end of Silver Star Trail at DNR Road W1280 and replace it with a connector to the Pyramid Rock Trail 180F with a concurrent increase in the Grouse Vista Trailhead parking footprint.</p>
Protect and preserve cultural and natural resources	
STRATEGIES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS
Decrease access to sensitive cultural resources	<p>Remove trail 180E "Indian Pits" from the official system.</p> <p>Obscure access and remove signage to trail 180E "Indian Pits".</p> <p>Decommission trail 180E "Indian Pits."</p>
Monitor and manage climbing development	<p>Protect culturally significant sites in coordination with Tribes.</p> <p>Study, monitor and assess possible impacts to sites from scrambling and rock climbing.</p> <p>Establish relationships with representatives of the climbing community to foster responsible route development as well as to discourage inappropriate route development.</p>
Mitigate camping impacts	<p>Work with partners to inventory, assess and monitor camping sites.</p> <p>Delineate places to camp where it will minimize resource damage.</p> <p>Decommission sites where camping is not sustainable.</p> <p>Study potential for future designated sites if camping use warrants it.</p> <p>Work with partners to disseminate info about responsible camping sites.</p>

Southwest Zone, continued

Prevent motorized incursions

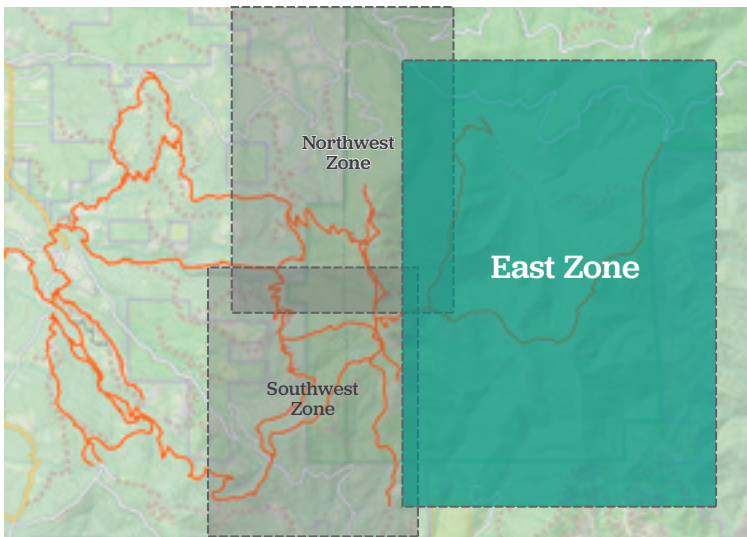
STRATEGIES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS
Block common breach points	<p>Install physical barriers at the southern terminus of Silver Star Trail 180.</p> <p>Enhance physical barriers at the Grouse Vista Trailhead.</p> <p>Incorporate physical barriers and narrow trail corridors to act as barriers when planning future trailhead and trail redevelopment.</p>

Modernize the trail system to provide sustainable, high quality non-motorized trail experiences

STRATEGIES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS
Work with Tribal resources specialists and land management agencies to identify appropriate areas to re-route or redevelop trails that are not sustainable	<p>Consider reroutes of the Pyramid Rock Trail 180F where the current alignment is causing erosion.</p> <p>Consider a reroute of the Sturgeon Rock Trail 180C where the current alignment is causing erosion.</p>
Analyze the trails in the Southwest Zone to identify ways to reduce the potential for user conflict between equestrians, mountain bikers and hikers with intentional trail design	<p>Look for opportunities to create loops with a preferred direction of travel to reduce congestion.</p> <p>Consider designating Pyramid Rock Trail 180F as the preferred uphill trail for horses, bikers and hikers.</p> <p>Consider designing Sturgeon Rock Trail 180C as the preferred downhill trail for horses and hikers as well as an uphill route for bikers.</p> <p>Consider designating the southern end of the Silver Star Trail 180 as the preferred downhill bike route.</p> <p>Consider utilizing the old road bed east of Pyramid rock to create a formal trail loop option to distribute trail users.</p> <p>Consider creating a loop by connecting the Pyramid Rock Trail 180F to the southern portion of Silver Star Trail 180.</p>

East Zone

This zone has the distinction of being the most remote. As such, visitors are more likely to find solitude, but it is the more difficult zone to monitor and conduct trail maintenance. A long ridge running west to east from Silver Star to Bluff Mountain features the Bluff Mountain Trail #172 — a portion of which follows a Forest Road that was converted to a non-motorized trail. Unfortunately, like the Northwest Zone, unlawful motorized incursions are an issue on this trail and some sections suffer from erosion like the trails that used to be roads found in the Southwest Zone.



The Bluff Mountain Trail #172 features some flat sections that could become accessible trail options if some of the steeper segments were rerouted. Photos: Ryan Ojerio

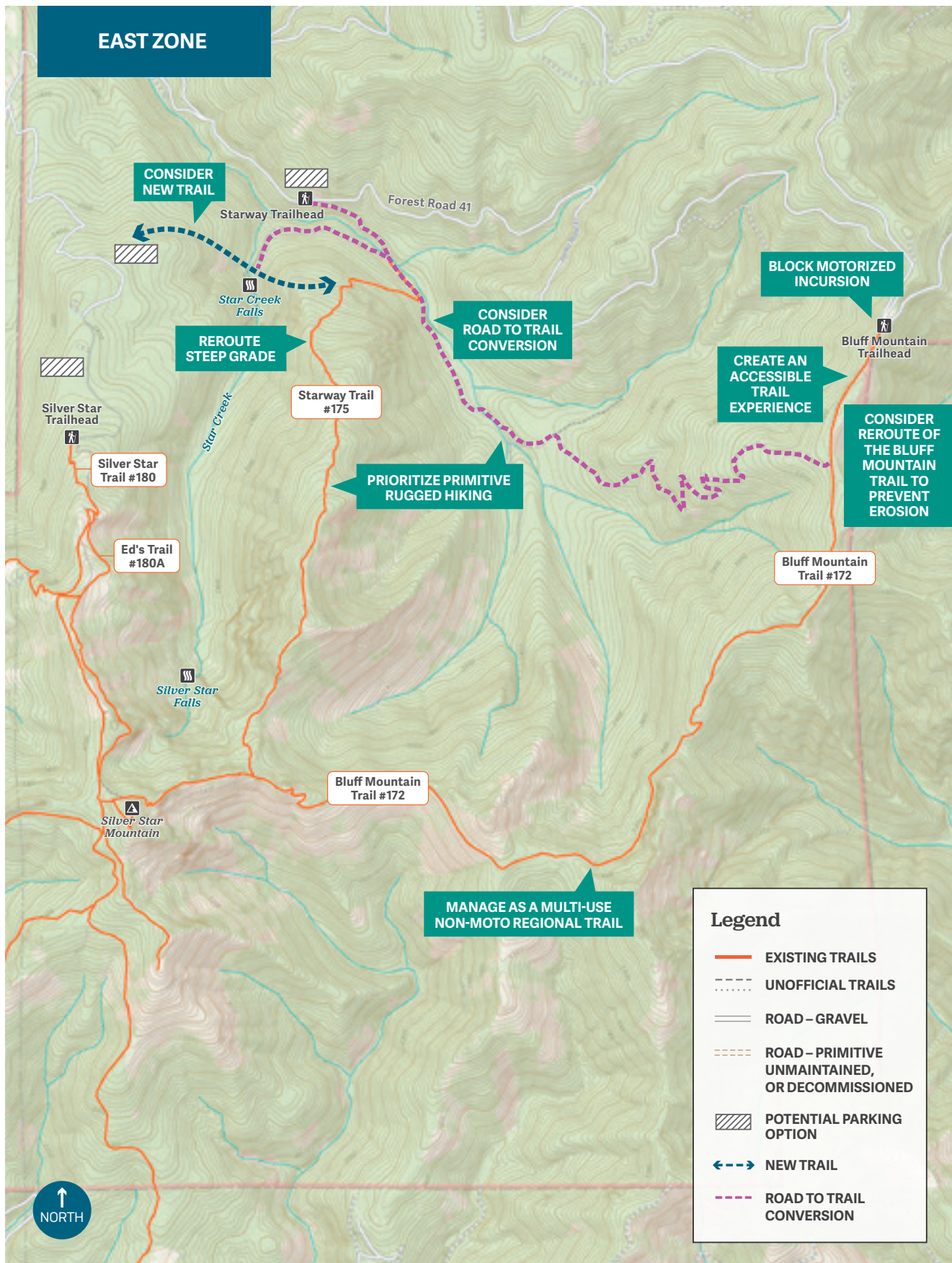


Figure 5. DRAFT map of the East Zone.

East Zone

Provide appropriate trailhead access	
STRATEGIES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS
Enhance and improve the Starway trailhead	Consider relocating the parking lot to the 41 road to increase the size of the lot and move it away from a riparian area and convert Forest Service spur road 4107 to a trail. Consider increasing the existing parking lot size.
Enhance and improve the Bluff Mountain trailhead	Provide accessible facilities in conjunction with trail improvements to add an accessible trail experience.

Prevent motorized incursions	
STRATEGIES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS
Block common breach points	Add and enhance barriers at the Bluff Mountain trailhead Convert the portion of the Bluff Mountain Trail that uses an old road bed to a narrow trail so it is more difficult to breach.

East Zone, continued

Modernize the trail system to provide sustainable, high quality non-motorized trail experiences	
STRATEGIES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS/OPTIONS
Re-route or redevelop trails that are not sustainable	<p>Consider a reroute of the Starway Trail where it is prone to erosion and extremely steep.</p> <p>Reroute Bluff Mountain Trail where it is an old road bed that is prone to erosion.</p>
Offer a diversity of trail experiences	<p>Formalize a trail to Star Creek Falls using the existing old road bed.</p> <p>Create an accessible trail experience from the Bluff Mountain trailhead in conjunction with redeveloping the trail to discourage motorized incursions.</p>
Reduce user conflict on the landscape by designing most trails in the East Zone primarily for hiking while allowing mountain biking and horseback riding	<p>Manage the upper Starway Trail 175 as a primitive, rugged hiking experience.</p> <p>Create a primitive, rugged hiking experience by developing a formal trail loop within the Copper Creek drainage.</p> <p>Improve the Bluff Mountain Trail as a regional multi-use, non-motorized trail consistent with the vision of the Chinook Trail system.</p> <p>Improve the tread surface of the Bluff Mountain Trail 172 where it is unsafe for equestrian use.</p>
Look for ways to reduce congestion by forming trail loop options with a preferred direction of travel	<p>Create a loop opportunity with Bluff Mountain Trail 172 using old road bed/user-path in the Copper Creek drainage.</p> <p>Form a short loop option from Starway trailhead 175 to Star Creek Falls and back.</p> <p>Consider a trail connection between the Star Creek Falls trail concept in the redevelopment planning for Forest Road 4109 and the Silver Star trailhead.</p>

Appendix

Silver Star Vision Plan Sideboards

These sideboards serve to define the scope of this planning effort and acknowledge that a variety of other plans, policies and regulations that precede this vision plan take precedence.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this plan is to guide the modernization of the trail system to protect natural and cultural values in and immediately adjacent to the Silver Star Scenic Special Interest Area. In doing so, we will look at existing infrastructure, user-created routes, unmanaged recreation activities and will consider a full range of actions that could include restoration, removal, re-alignment, reroute, decommission as well as possible new infrastructure.

TOWARDS A COMMON VISION

Both land management agencies (USFS/GP & DNR) must be in support of any recommendations or visionary plan.

Some recommendations may require additional analysis and public involvement prior to final decision and implementation by the land management agency.

There should be effort to work collaboratively with the various stakeholders, that include, but are not limited to: local communities, interested recreation groups, organized DNR advisory and focus groups, stakeholders, Tribes, and as appropriate, adjacent landowners, about the development and management of designated recreational trails.

The land managers responsible for making future decisions about proposed projects and management actions must balance the needs and concerns of all citizens. The recommendations and ideas that will be outcomes of this visioning process will provide valuable information to deciding officials on where there is mutual agreement among a range of stakeholder interests, and will serve as the foundation of any related decision-making process.

RESOURCE PROTECTION

Cultural resource protection will be given a high priority in this plan and future implementation processes. Furthermore, there is a need to protect and enhance the resources, habitat, and continue Tribe(s) access to places upon which they have traditionally hunted, fished and gathered and where there are cultural resources.

LEGAL CONTEXT

Any recommendations or actions resulting from this plan must be consistent with the Gifford Pinchot Forest Management Plan, applicable DNR recreation plans and other overarching policies, planning documents and previously agreed upon projects. Recommendations in this plan will be consistent with laws, policies and regulations that guide agency management activities.

Projects and management actions recommended in this plan will be consistent with and in service to DNR's obligations to the state as stewards of trust lands.

Any recreational trail management and development must be compatible with the basic activities necessary to fulfill land management responsibilities and financial obligations of trust management.

Partner organizations need to work with DNR land managers to look for opportunities to minimize potential impacts on designated or planned recreational trails resulting from forest management activities. Forest management activities may include, but are not limited to, timber harvest or thinning, road construction/maintenance, road abandonment, chemical applications and stand management.

DNR will apply Recreational Trail Development and Evaluation Criteria when assessing an area for new recreational trails or when evaluating existing designated trails or non-designated trails. This may include, but not be limited to:

- Consistency with any statewide strategic or management plan
- Cost and benefit to the trust
- The trail's potential impact on the environment, natural resources, and water quality, including the risk of invasive species spread
- Carrying capacity of the land based on land type, recreational uses, quantity and intensity of recreational use and anticipated future pressures.
- Cost effectiveness (balance of development and long-term maintenance needs and costs)
- The reasonable availability of financial, staff, and volunteer resources for planning, development, and sustainable, long-term management and stewardship
- Legal access
- Consistency with the Habitat Conservation Plan objectives, components, and strategies including consideration for threatened and/or endangered species habitat
- Sensitivity to cultural, archaeological and/or historical resources

Any development or increase in access will need to assess impacts, both financial and logistical, to infrastructure (e.g., forest roads, trailheads and campgrounds).

Any recreational trail management and development activity needs to be consistent with RCWs, WACs, other relevant local, state, and federal laws, regulations and ordinances, DNR policies, procedures, plans, trail standards, best practices, guidelines or any that DNR may develop. A few key documents include, but are not limited to: Multiple Use Act, Recreation Program Vision, Goals for Managing Statewide Recreation, Recreation Trails Policy or recreational management plan(s).

- Multiple Use Concept - The Multiple Use Concept (RCW 79.10) directs and allows DNR to provide recreational trail opportunities on trust lands when compatible with the basic activities necessary to fulfill the financial obligations of trust management. Managing and developing recreational

trails on DNR-managed trust lands must be consistent with the mission, goals, plans, policies, rules, and regulations of the department as well as surrounding communities, counties and the state.

- Recreation Program Vision — Provide diverse and high quality recreational opportunities on DNR landscapes that foster community engagement, promote a strong sense of environmental stewardship and enrich the quality of life in Washington.
- Goals for Managing Statewide Recreation
 - Promote the safety of the public, DNR employees and volunteers
 - Support enjoyable recreation that is compatible with land management responsibilities
 - Work in collaboration with volunteers and interested stakeholders to provide engaging recreational opportunities
 - Manage healthy natural landscapes and working forests that can sustain recreation for current and future generations
- Recreational Trails Policy Goals
 - Offer recreational trail opportunities that cause the least impact to the land in accordance with the Primary Management Objective for the area, and provide protection for water quality, and natural, environmental and cultural resources.
- Expand designated recreational trail experiences that DNR and its volunteers can support across the state.
- Maintain the lowest trail construction and maintenance costs reasonable, based on site-specific information, Primary Management Objectives and Trail Management Objectives.

Project ideas, management actions recommended, or maps presented in this plan are simply preferred potential alternatives and options supported by the plan partners. Any planning or permit processes required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) still need to be completed prior to any new actions.

IMPLEMENTATION

This Vision Plan provides guidance to the type and location of management actions appropriate to achieve the vision, but does not commit land management agencies nor partners to any specific project or project timeline.

Priority for resources will be given to existing infrastructure maintenance and management issues before new infrastructure is built.

Prior to initiating any plans for new design and construction projects, an ongoing operations and maintenance plan will be in place. Prior to implementation of actions, land management agencies may require construction and/or maintenance commitments from trail-related organizations.

The agencies and organizations involved in this plan commit to the ideal of shared leadership and shared responsibility for the design/construction and ongoing maintenance of recreation facilities described in this plan.