Unauthorized Trail Project

What it is
How decisions are made
Why it matters

What is this project?

The NoCo Places Unauthorized Trails Project is a region-wide effort to address the environmental, safety, and management impacts of unauthorized ("social") trails on public lands in Northern Colorado. The project is funded to restore high-impact unauthorized trails and, where appropriate, evaluate whether some routes should be studied for potential adoption.

NoCo Places does not decide what happens on the ground. We serve as a neutral convener, supporting land managers with data, coordination, project management, and stakeholder input.

Who makes decisions?

Land managers decide. Public agencies have final authority for actions on their jurisdictions.

Partners inform. Recreation and conservation partners provide local knowledge and feedback.

Data guides priorities. Decisions are based on mapped trail and habitat data utilizing a standardized criteria.

Environmental compliance applies. All actions must meet safety, legal, and environmental requirements.

How the Process Works

1. **Data development** – A regional dashboard maps unauthorized trails and key biodiversity and wildlife habitat. Agency prioritization – Agencies identify priority areas using a region wide evaluation framework.

2. **Partner input** – Partners provide input and their feedback on draft priorities.

3. **Feasibility review** – Trails suggested for adoption are screened for safety, environmental, planning constraints, and long-term maintenance costs.

4. **Final decisions** – Agencies determine which trails are restored, studied further, or monitored.

5. **Public release** – A transparent action plan explains outcomes and rationale.

Why are unauthorized ("social") trails an issue?

Many social trails start with good intentions, but unmanaged routes can cause long-term problems:

Environmental damage – erosion, habitat fragmentation, and impacts to wildlife and water.
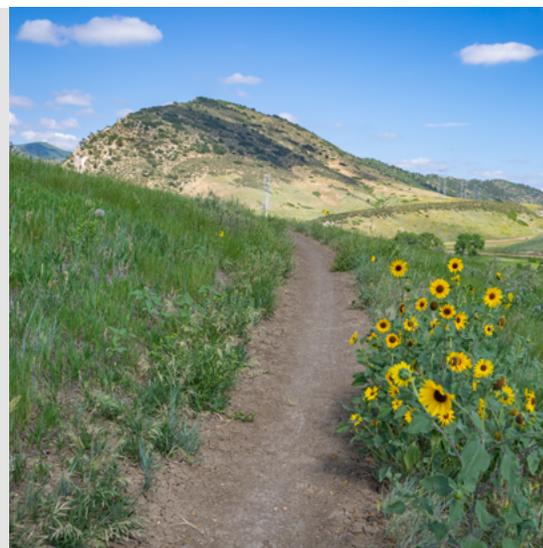
Safety risks – steep, unstable, poorly designed, or trails without navigational aids can increase injuries and rescues.

Legal and funding risk – agencies face liability and may jeopardize grant eligibility.

System impacts – unmanaged trails pull users away from sustainable, planned trail systems.

What this project is — and is not

✓ Focused on restoration, safety, and sustainability
✓ Grounded in data and partner input
✓ Transparent and documented

✗ Not a blanket trail closure effort
✗ Not a decision made by NoCo Places alone
✗ Not anti-recreation

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