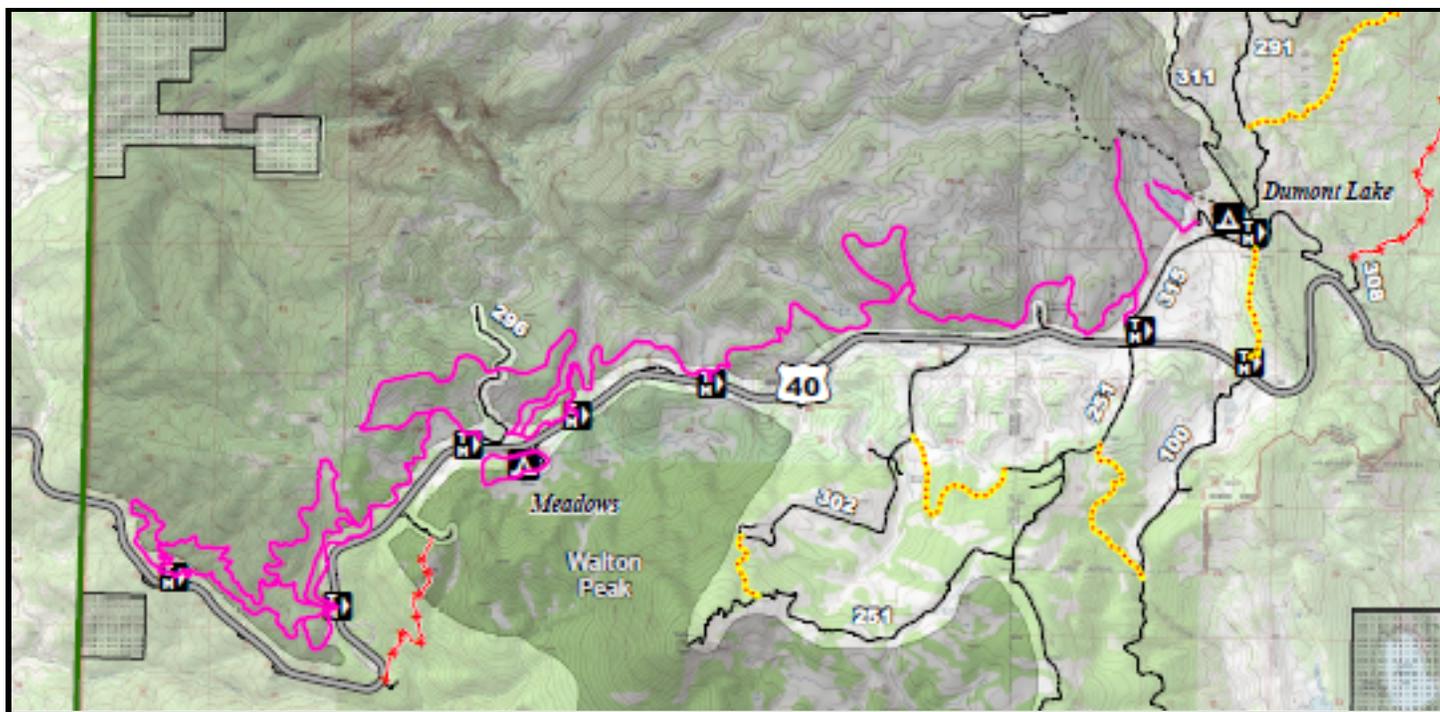




February 2022 ‘State of the Mad Rabbit’ Trails Project
Laraine Martin, Executive Director, and Routt County Riders’ Board of Directors

Our trail system is currently buried in snow, curing for next summer - but we remain at a critical point in the development and success of the big picture for the future of trails and riding in Steamboat. In particular, the Rabbit Ears NEPA analysis (overseen by our Forest Service partners) is scheduled for a draft Environmental Assessment release in the coming weeks. This has been a long time coming - the last time the USFS issued updates on this project was in the late summer of 2019. In our opinion, Rabbit Ears is the most important piece of the Trails Alliance Proposal approved in 2013 by a 70%-plus majority of our community. This piece will tie the rest of our trail network together and relieve pressure on high-traffic zones, such as Buffalo Pass. **We will soon enter into a public comment period on this next phase of multi-use trail development.** Completing the Rabbit Ears trail network is critical to ensuring that the original Trails Alliance Proposal meets its intended goals of creating multiple well-rounded, diverse trail networks, and exceptional experiences for all users.



When we talk about the ‘Rabbit Ears phase’ of the Mad Rabbit trails project, note that this is only one piece of the entire decade-plus duration of this project. The map above generally covers the swathe of public land for which we currently await an EA release from the USFS. **The Rabbit Ears zone was intended to be a focal point within the Mad**

Rabbit trail project due to its proximity to the Highway 40 corridor. This serves multiple purposes - the first is that confining a large part of this development within earshot of the highway concentrates human impacts closer to where they are already felt by wildlife. When compared with the vast acreage of the MedBow-Routt National Forest as a whole (totaling **2.2 million acres**), this is an incredibly small amount being earmarked for trail development. The second purpose its close highway proximity serves is to offer ease of access for both locals and visitors. Visitors from the Front Range and elsewhere will find trailhead amenities and trail access right along the heavily trafficked highway corridor, on their way to and from town. This will functionally separate much of the demand for trail access from places already seeing heavy usage like Emerald and Buffalo Pass - and will not add to neighborhood strain (such as experienced at Blackmer or Strawberry Park). The Rabbit Ears trailhead access will potentially also allow for shuttles (both private and commercial), easing transport and accessibility, and reducing car traffic from trail users.

RCR is interested in rallying community support for this project, and increasing the education and contextual understanding for how this next phase fits in with the Mad Rabbit trail project as a whole. We will need your voice, as members of the trail use community, to make comments that emphasize the need for this new network. This has not been a shotgun process, but has come together over the past 10+ years of advocacy and dirt work to diversify our trail offerings. When the Steamboat Springs Trails Alliance proposal was submitted, it was a joint effort by RCR, Bike Town USA, the Steamboat Springs Running Series, and Yampatika as co-authors; it was developed through a process of frequent public engagement. The work completed thus far has been a joint effort between all SSTA partners and our local land management agencies, including the City of Steamboat, the USFS, the BLM, and CO Parks and Wildlife. All agencies have been deeply involved with the progression of this project and with the vetting of these areas as acceptable for future trail development.

USEFUL LINKS:

- **USFS Mad Rabbit Project Homepage:** <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=50917&exp=overview>
- **Original Steamboat Springs Trails Alliance Proposal (page 61-79 for Rabbit Ears):**
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YNMDGWeEqE4_ELvVr_Q7xNK0bEoogeRw/view?usp=sharing
- **Mad Rabbit Project FAQ issued by the USFS in April 2021:**
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ifm51NVSijr9oAfBUhEN1Z-zO0xoMXi0/edit?usp=sharing&oid=101373>
- **2A Trails Project Status as of 3/2021:**
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1dXstk5irrzVh24_aaK_WzFirS_kB-h9L/edit?usp=sharing&oid=101373689342767365884&rtpof=true&sd=true
- **Rabbit Ears Pre-Scoping Description mid-2019:**
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PxcPOUzp3GsBf2Cw1G7tpP57PtPUABUC/view?usp=sharing>
- **1/5/2013 Original Ballot Language - 2A Trails:**
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Xy3g-67UqkQ8gGBS-d_c34c0331IdvHB/view?usp=sharing