



06.15.22 Preliminary Project Proposal - Emerald Directional Trail #2

1) Description of the project and identified location

The trail use on Emerald Mountain has increased drastically in the last couple of years and will continue to increase as Steamboat's population and visitor numbers grow. Busy trails bring safety and maintenance concerns. The directionality of NPR trail has done a number of positive things for Emerald, including concentrating the descending riders, which helps make the trails safer by reducing conflicts. NPR, however, needs a higher level of maintenance and grooming than other trails to keep riders safe. In 2021, it underwent a massive renovation which brought it back to a safer riding level and will help reduce, but not eliminate, future maintenance needs. NPR will need heavier maintenance every couple of years, or it could deteriorate once again to a somewhat unsafe trail.

Taking all of this into consideration, RCR proposes the addition of a black diamond, directional trail, starting at the top of Emerald Mountain, ending at the bottom. Emerald does not have a lengthy black diamond trail; this will help this trail zone be more complete. The expert-level trails on Emerald are smaller 'connectors' here and there. This would be a primitive singletrack trail that could be hand or machine built. It will require little maintenance and will attract the more advanced riders from NPR and other egress routes, lowering the maintenance needs of NPR and helping to lower multi directional trail conflicts. From the 2019 PROSTR Master Plan, suggestions for development of the Emerald trail network include (page 74):

3. Designate additional **directional and single use trails** at Emerald Mountain/Howelsen Open Space, and Spring Creek Open Space.

The trail ideally will start at the top of Emerald, by the radio towers at the top of the Lane of Pain, possibly using an old two track that descends back to the quarry. Then it will proceed to the bikers right of Little Moab, on the exposed edge outside the Lupine trail. It will intersect Lupine and the start of Morning Gloria and continue bikers' right of Lupine. The trail will again cross Lupine near the top of Brian's Worry and enter the scrub oaks on the ski area before crossing the ski area road. It will continue into the ski area descending bikers right of the alpine slide ending above the chairlift base. Some creativity may be needed in the finish zone given the Alpine Slide location. Trail length is approximately 1.65 miles as the crow flies, closer to 2 miles once the trail follows a more realistic trajectory. There is a 1,450' descent. Note that there are options to phase this construction or alter the plans slightly - the Quarry zone could potentially offer a separate access point or starting zone.

Alternative site locations for this particular project are quite limited given the terrain options and the presence of other trail corridors on Emerald, combined with a desire to keep downhill-oriented high speed traffic away from too many crossovers or points of potential conflict.

In conclusion: This trail will enhance the diversity of the Emerald Mountain trail zone, by adding a lengthier black diamond trail; it will take pressure off the heavily used and high maintenance cost of NPR; it adds new loops, for casual riding and programs/events, and will help lower user conflicts in the entire zone by increasing directionality. It also offers another trail to descend if the Barrows chair eventually uploads bikes.

2) Roles and responsibilities of all parties

RCR has a well-documented history of collaboration with the City of Steamboat Parks + Rec on trail projects over the past several decades. This amassed experience means that we are comfortable with several different kinds of “setup” when it comes to the relationship between us for this potential project. We would expect the City to define the basic parameters around the process, i.e. what is allowable or disallowed, and give them the final say when it comes to hiring of consultants, etc. At the end of the day, we would follow all City contracting procedures. Overall, RCR would propose that we are part of the design and review team initially, and that we remain a key part of the process to define the scope of work and layout. We would recruit and supply volunteers for at least part of the construction process, and work closely with the City to ensure project completion and quality while also rallying community support and buy-in. More on financial considerations for collaboration below.

3) Estimated cost and proposed funding for:

We estimate that a 2-mile long black-diamond trail, combo of machine and hand build, through complex and changing terrain features - would cost anywhere from **\$150,00-\$200,000** in today’s market from concept through completion. To arrive at this number, we estimate \$15 per foot on the high end, stretched out over 2 miles, and then overestimate to add funding for the research/design phase on the front end. We would propose that the funding structure come about as a collaborative effort between RCR and City resources, especially when it comes to matching grant requirements and leveraging potentially larger grant pools that are accessible to municipalities/government entities (and not necessarily nonprofits directly). That said, we are open to taking on a large role when it comes to the funding mechanisms for this trail project.

a/b) Research & Design / Construction

It’s possible that the R+D phase of this project could be bundled in cost with the actual build, a “design build” price. Our estimate above would include this phase. We would suggest a variety of funding mechanisms and would love to take an active role in directing resources to funding this project. We would work with the City of Steamboat granting staff to develop plans for matching mechanisms or “grant vs. grant” scenarios.

Funding possibilities:

- OREC Grants - shorturl.at/syB57
- IMBA Trail Accelerator Grants - <https://www.imba.com/trails-for-all/trail-accelerator-grants>
- Corporate partnerships - Trek Bikes has expressed preliminary interest
- City of Steamboat + Routt County Riders budget funds
- Reallocation of 2A Trails funds for “Emerald Directional #2” - needs a conversation

c/d) Operation / Maintenance

The City of Steamboat Parks + Rec will oversee this potential trail as part of their charge on the Emerald trail system at large. RCR and the City of Steamboat can work together to complete periodic/seasonal evaluations to ensure continued safety and usability of the trail. RCR has a robust volunteer trail work day program that we have every intention of leveraging for the upkeep of this (and every other) trail on the network should it be needed. We also have a good deal of faith in the CoSS P+R trail crew and their current management and maintenance of the network. The growing balance of the Trail Maintenance Endowment Fund is an additional source of potential funding should the trail(s) need a targeted rebuild or otherwise. Overall, we would point out that the more “primitive” trail design we would target for this trail (as opposed to the “groomed” nature of NPR) needs less maintenance and upkeep than something with more built features.

4) Anticipated project schedule

Once we gain approval through City processes, RCR could spend time narrowing in on the grant processes we want to pursue alongside City grants staff. In theory, we could begin to submit grant applications soon after the project gains approval, potentially in late summer and early fall 2022. We would aim to contract the project over the winter of 2022-2023 and break ground in the early summer of 2023. RCR would schedule a handful of volunteer work days dedicated to this project construction to work alongside or in tandem with the contractors hired to increase community buy-in.

5) Benefits to the City and community

Over the past 30 years, our local community of trail users has been growing and diversifying. This has been especially tangible over the last decade. Our downhill, cycling-specific trails have exploded in popularity - Grouse, Spring, Roll, and NPR get TONS of use. Combined with the Steamboat Bike Park’s extended closures and complications with corporate expansion projects, our DH-specific trails are taking a beating.

The CoSS P+R has been hearing the need and desire to diversify the trail network specifically on Emerald Mountain. This trail use zone is quite focused on ‘green and blue’ cross-country style riding, which fits the terrain quite nicely. RCR sees an opportunity and the potential terrain and corridor to line out a more challenging trail experience on this network with a black diamond, DH-specific trail that would relieve a great deal of pressure on NPR and other trails by directing cyclists along a different corridor.

Overall, a new and challenging trail on Emerald would diversify the network even further and provide a greater range of recreational opportunities to our growing community of trail users, providing even more transformational outdoor experiences to the people who seek them out in our zone.

6) Anticipated impacts to the City and community

We hear this all the time - that one more trail on the network is one more “maintenance nightmare”. We push back against this in myriad ways (we have the human power and the funding mechanisms to support our growing trail network). However, we do acknowledge that the construction of a new trail does indeed come with the accepted responsibility of maintaining it for the future. We are excited to continue working with the CoSS P+R crews to ensure continued stewardship and minimize potential future budgetary impacts.

Approximate
corridor/layout:

