

Statewide Stewardship Initiative
Demonstration Site Concept Paper
Gunnison County
One Valley Prosperity Project
Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation

Demonstration Site Concept Title

Gunnison County Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation

Demonstration Site Concept Description

In Gunnison County we are preparing for the future while honoring our community values and our rural history. The Gunnison County Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation (STOR) Committee is prepared for and enthusiastic about hosting a demonstration project to model the best practices and goals of the Statewide Stewardship Initiative. We have created the political and structural foundation to address and support sustainable tourism and recreation. With funding support for rural initiatives from GOCO and the Statewide Stewardship Initiative we will take action to address on the ground issues with excellent planning, political collaboration, volunteer stewardship, and community engagement. The [STOR Committee](#) is a model of collaborative capacity building, stewardship, implementation, and sustainability.

The population of the State of Colorado is growing every year and with that growth we have seen a significant increase in the numbers of visitors to our public lands and recreation areas. There have been [numerous articles](#) about the increasingly [negative impacts](#) of heavy use of our public lands and natural resources. The [entire State](#) has been feeling the impacts but rural and mountainous areas are bearing the brunt. The STOR Committee recognizes these impacts and is working to mitigate those conditions to create a sustainable recreation experience that can accommodate the demand while also providing a high quality experience. We are implementing a strategic plan for recreation and tourism that aligns with our rural community values.

The STOR Committee was created in 2017 by the Gunnison County Board of Commissioners as an outcome of the One Valley Prosperity Project. [The One Valley Prosperity Project \(OVPP\)](#) is a collaborative initiative focused on achieving a more prosperous and successful future for the residents of the Gunnison Valley. The first initiative of the OVPP was to develop the [One Valley Prosperity Strategy](#), a regional plan to guide cooperative efforts and economic development policy and investments in Gunnison County. The One Valley Prosperity Strategy included a strategic plan for four key areas, including sustainable tourism and outdoor recreation. Tourism and recreation are a significant

sector of the Gunnison County economy—one that we want to enhance while at the same time preserving the natural resources that sustain tourism and recreation. The STOR Committee is a unique and innovative collaborative that is tasked with implementing the Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation strategic plan (as included within the One Valley Prosperity Strategy).

The STOR Committee is leveraging our collective resources, identifying County-wide priorities and taking action to achieve our goals. Our approach, to include all the players and stakeholders, to strategically plan for protection and enhancement of our natural resources and recreation assets, is progressive and practical. We intend to leverage our assets together to achieve our goals. We understand the funding challenges that federal agencies face, while also seeing how that lack of investment has negative consequences for our community. It is critical that we, as a rural community with limited resources, work together.

The STOR Committee has four main goals each supported by objectives, strategies and actions to ensure results:

- Ensure the Valley's tourism sector of the economy is resilient, vibrant, and supports our community values.
- Foster a resident and visitor culture that demonstrates respect for our community, culture and environmental stewardship.
- Support collaboration between federal land agencies, local government, nonprofit and user groups to improve management of recreation and natural resources.
- Be proactive in management of private and public natural and recreation assets to minimize degradation and enhance quality.

The STOR Committee proposes to establish a structural and programmatic approach to long-term, sustainable volunteer stewardship. To accomplish bold goals we have established the political and structural framework for collaboration and propose to institute a volunteer coordinator and development of a program for volunteer stewardship which will support and enhance our current efforts and enable achievement of our goals.

While Gunnison County organizations have a good history of soliciting volunteers to support stewardship projects we believe that we can further build this capacity and improve it. Coordination and training of volunteers can place a significant burden on land management agencies and nonprofit groups and we believe a volunteer coordinator, along with an established program, will relieve some of that burden. There has been an expressed desire for more organized support of STOR Committee projects and volunteers, but the committee members do not have current funding to support such a position. The coordinator and program will help us build on the community engagement that exists and develop a sustainable, long-term program that the partner groups may be able to support financially in the future.

The STOR Committee proposes that a volunteer coordinator work directly with the Committee in support of the strategic goals and planning that have been identified. Volunteer efforts will be directed to high-priority projects that are compelling for our community members and visitors—there are two direct benefits to this approach—compelling, impactful projects generate more volunteers and these projects also support our community values and foster a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Volunteer and Partnership Coordinator roles may include:

- Support of the STOR Committee including strategic planning efforts, collaboration, capacity building.
- Coordination with STOR Committee members and other partners to develop a coordinated volunteer base with a variety of options for volunteers to engage in stewardship efforts. A diverse volunteer base is critical. The coordinator shall collaborate with existing non-profit groups that utilize volunteers, as well as reach out to new groups, valley youth, seniors, the Latino community, faith-based organizations and others.
- Support of data collection for metrics reporting and communication.
- Communication with press and media about volunteer efforts and accomplishments to garner support and engagement from community.
- Outreach and network with other demonstration sites to learn from their work and communicate about successes and challenges at Gunnison County site.
- Participation in COSC certified volunteer leadership trainings.

We are excited to learn from other communities and also model the collaborative efforts that we've established so that others may replicate it in their communities. A volunteer and stewardship coordinator may be housed and supported by a STOR Committee partner organization (e.g. Gunnison County or USFS). Gunnison County has the space and services necessary to support a coordinator and our partner organizations have also stated that they are able to house the coordinator position.

Our community places a high value on community service and stewardship and we would like to continue to model that behavior for others and work to include youth, seniors, diverse income groups, the Latino community, visitors, and full-time and part-time homeowners in those stewardship opportunities. Work days and volunteer opportunities will include a range of options to accommodate a diversity of volunteers including:

- A "menu" of options to fit the needs and interests of volunteers
- Work weekends that are family friendly
- Full and partial work days
- Possible "paid" work days for some volunteers (youth or low-income individuals that may otherwise be unable to participate)
- Volunteer days at trailheads to discuss Mountain Manners (local outdoor etiquette program), updates on trails, parking, access

The STOR Committee members have developed an outline for volunteer stewardship in Gunnison County. We believe the following three areas are critical for creating a sustainable recreation experience in our community. Volunteer stewardship efforts may include the following:

- **Outreach, communication and education efforts** in critical drainages, recreation areas and trailheads that receive high use. These volunteer efforts would be aimed at placing volunteers at busy trailheads or recreation areas to direct users to appropriate parking, answer questions and provide information about outdoor etiquette. Information about volunteer stewardship

opportunities would also be provided to connect more people to volunteer opportunities. Projected funding needs to be determined.

- **Restoration and maintenance** of critical areas including wilderness areas, riparian areas, campgrounds, non-motorized trails that receive little maintenance currently, non-sustainable routes, research sites affiliated with Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory and other priority sites. Volunteer efforts would be a critical component of this effort—restoration and maintenance often drop to the bottom of the priority list until a site is in crisis. We have a number of areas that require maintenance and restoration and would be a great opportunity to gather on-going volunteers to support these efforts. Increasing our collective volunteer stewardship efforts would enable proactive resource management rather than continuing to address resource conditions and needs after an issue has surfaced. Projected funding needs to be determined.
- **Trail and recreation infrastructure:** examples of priority projects include:
 - **Oh-Be-Joyful:** The Oh-Be-Joyful recreation area and nearby trails system are one of the most highly utilized areas in Gunnison County. Every year, thousands of campers, mountain bikers, hikers, stand up paddle boarders and others enjoy this area. The BLM, in cooperation with numerous partners, proposes to construct a foot/trail bridge across the Slate River to connect the Oh Be Joyful Campground and the Oh Be Joyful (OBJ) trail. There are also other, shorter loops planned for varying distances on the BLM managed land on the west side of the Slate River that would give users of all levels trail options. The bridge would create separation between day users (hikers, bikers) and overnight users (campers), creating a higher quality experience for both user groups.

Volunteer efforts in this area would be critical for infrastructure installation, restoration of disturbed areas, and trail development. This is a significant project that would require multiple weeks of volunteer labor but would also benefit from volunteer outreach and education efforts throughout the summer season. It is one of the most highly utilized recreation areas in the Gunnison Valley and thus has experienced increasingly negative impacts from overuse or misuse. Volunteer stewardship would support the goal of communicating a message and ethic of stewardship to our visitors. Projected resources needed include: \$100,000 for outreach, education materials, bridge construction, installation, and trail work.
 - **Snodgrass to Gothic Trail:** The Snodgrass to Gothic Trail is in the most iconic location in Gunnison County. The Gothic Valley is home to [Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory](#), Judd Falls, East Fork trailhead and [Trail 401](#), one of the most famous, highly visited mountain bike trails in the United States. Judd Falls is an easily accessible hike from Gothic Road and the trailhead in particular sees thousands of visitors each week. . From the edge of Mt. Crested Butte, Gothic Road becomes dirt and is a windy road for three miles before you come to the old mining town of Gothic. A new trail would be developed that would parallel the existing road from Snodgrass trailhead to the townsite of Gothic. This is a priority for the trails community and would be a project that would gather large community support and involvement. Volunteer participation for this project is critical—the USFS supports the project but does not have funding for implementation. This project will take many weeks to accomplish but would be a huge

source of pride and motivator for many of our volunteers and would likely encourage future participation in other projects. Projected resources needed include: \$100,000 materials, supplies, volunteer recruitment and overhead.

- **East Fork Trailhead (West Maroon Pass) Redevelopment:** The East Fork Trailhead is a project that it is critically needed. This trailhead is the terminus of the popular West Maroon Pass trail which traverses over West Maroon Pass and the Maroon Bells Wilderness Area and ends at Maroon Bells Lakes and trailhead in the Aspen area. Visitors come from around the world to experience this hike. On the Aspen side access to the trailhead is easy—there is a free shuttle bus that visitors can use. The West Maroon trailhead is up the Gothic Valley, nearly 15 miles from the Town of Crested Butte on a rough, 4 wheel-drive road. The trailhead has no infrastructure—minimal parking, no bathrooms, limited signage. The number of visitors utilizing the trailhead has increased dramatically in the past five years as have the human related impacts at the trail head, particularly related to sanitary facilities and parking.

The USFS is proposing to establish a 40-car parking lot, double toilet and reroute the trail to align with the improved trailhead facility. The local community has, for the past several years, emphatically stated that the conditions at the trailhead have significantly deteriorated and are a detriment to the user experience and an embarrassment to our community. The Forest Service has long acknowledged the problem but has lacked funding to address it.

We believe that this project would garner participation from a more diverse array of volunteer participants including seniors and destination stewardship volunteers because of its international acclaim. While this project could be accomplished in a short time frame, the location would also greatly benefit from regular volunteers directing hikers and visitors and discussing backcountry etiquette. We would place volunteers here on the busiest summer weekends to conduct outreach. Projected resources needed include: \$80,000 materials, supplies, volunteer recruitment and overhead.

- **Signal Peak Trail System:** The Signal Peak Trail System is an area adjacent to the City of Gunnison and Western State Colorado University. This area is highly utilized by the residents and students in Gunnison because of its proximity to town and easy access. Since the late 1980's, livestock and game trails have become social routes and seen increased use every year. Even though there has been no organization to these disconnected routes, for three decades mountain bikers, runners and hikers have cobbled together a variety of loops and out and back experiences, utilizing various combinations of the two system routes, the social trails and area system roads.

The BLM, in partnership with Gunnison Trails and other stakeholders, has developed a plan for the Signal Peak area for the development of approximately 21 miles of new trails, a designated trailhead, signage, improvement of existing trails, and the decommission and restoration of routes currently in critical wildlife areas. Education will be of critical importance to the development of this new system, as new seasonal trail restrictions related to the Gunnison Sage-grouse and wintering wildlife are going into effect.

This plan is focused on creating an accessible, high-quality recreational trail system designed for easy access for low-impact trail users in the Gunnison area, including: mountain bikers, hikers and runners. Projected resources needed include: \$80,000 materials, supplies, volunteer recruitment and overhead.

- **Gunnison River Access at Shady Island:** In 2017, Gunnison County purchased a 10-acre parcel known as Shady Island, approximately 1.5 miles north of the City of Gunnison. The County purchased this parcel with the express intention of creating a river park, river side fishing access, and river side boat access, along with improvements to riparian, wildlife and instream fish habitat.

River activities, whether it be for fishing, whitewater, SUP, or wildlife watching are an important part of these outdoor recreation opportunities. Currently public river access on the Gunnison River north of the City of Gunnison is very limited due to the amount of private land that borders the river. We are a community of outdoor-enthusiasts and this river amenity would greatly improve the access and availability for fishing, boating and river enjoyment for residents and visitors.

Volunteer efforts for this project would be targeted to a diverse array of users including youth, the Latino-community, and a wide array of income demographics. We believe that fishing is an activity that is welcoming to a wide variety of people and more accessible to many than some other activities that require expensive equipment for participation. The proximity of the land to the City and its location adjacent to the City of Gunnison recreation path mean that the park will be accessible for many users whether they arrive by foot, bike, car or boat. This project may be appropriate for paid volunteer efforts to encourage participation and engagement. An opportunity for Latino youth and other youth to participate and receive a \$50-100 stipend for a day's work and free fishing license from the local Parks and Wildlife office would be a unique and fun way to encourage participation.

Projected resources needed include: \$80,000 for materials, supplies, volunteer recruitment and overhead (river access put-in, habitat restoration, trail construction).

[Advance Long-term Volunteer Engagement Strategies](#)

The Gunnison County STOR Committee will advance the long-term engagement strategies identified by the Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition. The STOR Committee is committed to utilizing the tools developed by the Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition including the best practices guide, database, and metrics. We support the development and implementation of these tools and will apply them to our projects.

The STOR Committee is invested in utilizing a dedicated volunteer and partnership coordinator. This position would allow even greater synergy amongst the committee members and enable development of a long-term volunteer stewardship program to support STOR Committee goals.

The STOR Committee supports the implementation of metrics to measure success. Metrics help us communicate with the public and with our local decision makers, particularly related to funding requests. As we make progress toward accomplishment of our goals and demonstrate achievement

through quantifiable measures we are able to engage more support at the local level. This demonstration site and associated metrics will allow local land managers and elected officials to evaluate the effectiveness of our collaboration, utilization of volunteers, and mitigation of on the ground impacts.

Awarding of the demonstration site project to Gunnison County would further mobilize and motivate an already energized STOR Committee. We believe that a sustainable stewardship model will allow us to best address long-term, large-scale needs collaboratively. Many of our land managers and non-profit groups have utilized volunteer stewardship on a project by project basis—by building a sustainable program that is financially supported for the first two years we will be able to address the needs on a long-term scale and be more strategic and opportunistic.

STOR Committee members are well aware that federal funding is unlikely to increase (or even maintain status quo) in the foreseeable future—we know we need to develop a structure, program and collaborative effort that addresses our needs locally and the utilization of volunteers is critical to support those efforts. The STOR Committee is a unique effort that we have not seen implemented elsewhere and we strongly believe that it can be used as a model for communities throughout the State of Colorado. We are excited to share our approach, successes and challenges with others, while at the same time using the opportunity to learn from other communities who are also experiencing similar challenges and have developed creative solutions to complex problems.

Metrics

The Gunnison County Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee proposes to utilize the metrics that are being developed by the Statewide Stewardship Initiative. We look forward to release of those metrics and are committed to using them in a Gunnison County demonstration site.

Those metrics are not publically available at this time and so additional metrics that Gunnison County proposed to utilize include:

- Number of volunteer work days
- Number of new volunteers
- Number of repeat volunteers
- Demographics of volunteers (full time resident, part time resident, visitor, age category)
- Length of trail constructed by volunteers
- Number of visitors impacted by expansion of use
- Numbers of visitors on new trails segments (install counter)
- Pounds of trash removed by volunteers
- Number of outreach contacts completed (how many visitors were contacted at trailheads, etc.)
- Number of recreation sites rehabilitated or cleaned by volunteers

Resources

The Gunnison County Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee is pursuing a number of strategic trail, recreation and habitat restoration projects in Gunnison County. Necessary project resources include:

- \$100,000 for volunteer stewardship coordinator (2 years)

- Leverage resources locally with office, vehicle, internet
- Skill set to manage volunteers and build partnerships
- Fundraise, community-based support
- How can we leverage resources to continue this position
- \$7,500 for volunteer stipends and appreciation (water bottles, t-shirts, etc.)
- \$440,000 for materials, supplies for project completion

The STOR Committee intends to leverage its own resources to match and enhance any funds awarded by GOCO. Committee members, including government and nonprofits, have expressed their desire to support projects identified in this concept paper with local matching funds and in-kind work. It is anticipated that funds awarded through a demonstration site would at a minimum would be matched and more likely would be doubled by local partners. As we are able to gain momentum and demonstrate results we expect that local funding contributions will increase.

[Attachments and Links](#)

If the Gunnison County STOR Committee were awarded the opportunity to conduct a Statewide Stewardship Initiative demonstration project we would finalize partnerships, planning and commitments with our partner agencies, particularly the U.S. Forest Service and BLM prior to award. The STOR Committee is confident that we, in partnership with many other entities, will produce a high quality volunteer stewardship program of which we can all be proud.

The volunteer coordinator and above proposed volunteer stewardship projects are included within the One Valley Prosperity Strategy and the STOR Committee strategic planning efforts. Although they are high priority for our community we do not have available funding to implement a volunteer coordinator position nor all of the projects at this time. Award of the GOCO demonstration project funding would enable our rural community to take quick action and leverage other funding sources to accomplish significant goals and implement a long-term program for volunteer stewardship.

We are finding in Gunnison County that rural is the new urban. Many people have moved to the State of Colorado in the past ten years expecting to live a rural and mountain lifestyle, with the exploding population along the front range those expectations may have been dampened. But our residents and visitors have found that mountain and rural communities, like Gunnison County, have the amenities and lifestyle that they imagined of Colorado. We are hopeful and optimistic that the State and agencies such as GOCO will recognize the importance of investing in rural economies and how those investments can and do support the entire State economy.

Please see the additional links, videos and information below for additional background on Gunnison County and the proposed demonstration projects.

- [An overview of the One Valley Prosperity Project](#)
- [Example of stewardship in Gunnison County with the Crested Butte Conservation Corps](#)
- [Tourism and Recreation in the One Valley Prosperity Project](#)
- [The One Valley Prosperity Strategy](#) (tourism and recreation portion begins on page 54)
- [Description of local stewardship efforts to construct a new trail near Crested Butte](#)
- [The Lower Loop trail system video series](#)
- [“Community Rallies to Protect the Backcountry from Destructive Use”](#) (West Maroon and Gothic)

- [“Tourism, Recreation Committee Members Appointed”](#)

The STOR Committee membership includes all of the following:

- Gunnison County, County Commissioners Jonathan Houck and John Messner
- City of Gunnison, City Councilor Mallory Logan and City Manager Russ Forrest
- Town of Crested Butte, Town Councilor Paul Merck
- Town of Mt. Crested Butte, Town Councilor Nicholas Kempin
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Chris Parmeter, Game Warden
- U.S. Forest Service, Matt McCombs, District Ranger
- Bureau of Land Management, Elijah Waters, Field Manager and Kristi Murphy, Outdoor Recreation Planner
- National Park Service, Bruce Noble, Superintendent
- Gunnison-Crested Butte Tourism Association, John Norton, Executive Director
- Gunnison County Stockgrowers’ Association, Bruce Allen
- Crested Butte Mountain Resort, Erica Mueller, Vice-President
- Western State Colorado University, Scott Borden, Graduate Faculty
- Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District, Frank Kugel, Executive Director
- Gunnison Trails, Tim Kugler, Executive Director
- Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association, Dave Ochs, Executive Director
- Gunnison Wildlife, Navid Navidi
- Gunnison Nordic, Joellen Fonken
- Crested Butte Nordic Center, Christie Hicks, Executive Director
- Crested Butte Land Trust, Noel Durant, Executive Director
- Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Kevin Alexander
- Gunnison O.H.V. Alliance of Trailriders (GOATS), Ben Breslauer

Below are just a few examples of stewardship in Gunnison County

PARADISE CLEANUP

Saturday, October 21st
10:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Meet at the 4-Way Stop

BBQ and BEER to follow for participants at Oh-Be-Joyful
beer provided by **IRWIN BREWING CO.**

please bring gloves, sunscreen, water | tools and snacks provided



Volunteers at the Paradise Cleanup (above) and the Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association Work Weekend (below).

