

FIELD TRIP
COLORADO MOUNTAIN – TELEGRAPH TRAIL
May 22, 2017

Participants: Roy Barkley – HLCNF Recreation; Doug Powell – HHAA, TSH Collaborative; Gayle Joslin - HHAA

We met at the Telegraph Trail parking lot at the Moose Creek Station at 9:30. Weather was calm and warm.

Doug and Roy discussed the history of the Telegraph Trail and that it had not been part of the Forest Service trail system in the past, but was now being considered. As a system trail, Roy noted that it would be open to non-motorized but mechanized use.



Doug noted that the trail had had relatively little use over the years and was a narrow, quiet trail (see photo above) until this past year when, in October 2016, he discovered that it had been extensively cleared for much of the trail, 3 to 4 feet wide (photo below) from the crest of Colorado Mountain to its base at the Moose Creek Station. The trail has taken on a fire-break appearance.



Inexperienced sawyers had done at least some of the work based on the techniques used, such as improper cuts.



Logs have been cut into many chunks, and some seem to have been placed for sitting benches.

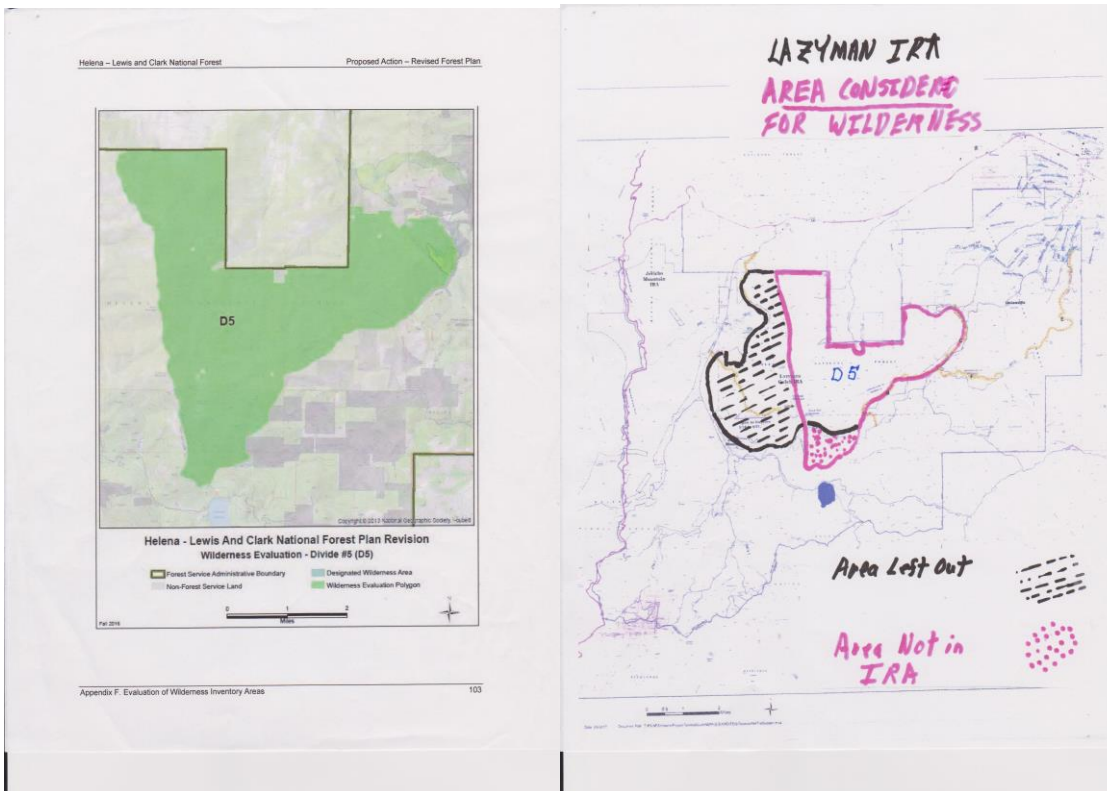


Doug surmised that a youth group may have done the work, but Roy denied that it was done under the direction of the Forest Service. In discussing the reasoning behind the expansion of the trail, we all agreed that it appeared to have been done to benefit mountain bike users, in that even some large rocks have been moved.

Doug pointed out mountain bike tracks and explained that at the top of Colorado Mountain (we didn't get to the top) that many mountain bike tracks occur and come down to the west along the historic trail.

The nature of the historic Telegraph Trail (from the 1800's) has been damaged with trail expansion and cutting of huge trees that used to have the copper line insulators attached. (See photo below.) Trees sporting insulators are still standing along portions of the trail that have not been expanded.

Doug expressed his frustration with changes to the trail and that he felt the Wilderness assessment of the Lazyman-Black Mountain area had been woefully incomplete because the boundary for analysis had been drawn along the drainage boundary rather than along the IRA boundary, thus substantially reducing the size of the area assessment because the entire west flanks of Colorado, Black Mountain, and the Lazyman area were excluded. Doug explained that he had for years taken Wilderness Walk hikes along this trail promoting its wilderness character.



In the spirit of full disclosure, Roy indicated that he personally was supportive of mountain bike use on wilderness trails. He wondered if Doug's guided hikes hadn't contributed to the status of the trail now. Doug said he wouldn't have guided those hikes if he knew this is what would have become of the trail.

Gayle expressed her concern that mountain bikers do not have a connection to the landscape but rather have a conquest mentality and it really doesn't matter to them where they are riding because it's the physical challenge rather than a connection with the landscape that they are seeking. While hikers often choose an area that provides solace and opportunities for quiet interaction with nature. Both she and Doug had spent their entire lives in this area, and it would be heart-breaking to see it transformed into a biking mecca and fire-break for Helena, when such measures are not required. Fire management needn't involve razing this IRA.

Roy noted that the HLCNF is endorsing Nevada Mountain, and Electric Peak, but Gayle noted that those areas are not out Helena's backdoor like Lazyman-Black Mountain is. There is a public constituency for this beautiful place that is close to town while mountain bikers have tons of other areas to use, including Brooklyn Bridge.

Brooklyn Bridge bike route is supported if it sticks to the road. HHAA is opposed to the mountain bikers' desires

to move the trail off of the Brooklyn Bridge road which was supposed to have been pulled back to a non-motorized trail via the 2003 Record of Decision for the Clancy-Unionville Project. Instead, the Forest is proposing to use that road for timber harvest for the next 10-20 years.



Roy holding a telegraph insulator attached to large tree.

She reiterated comments recently made by Supervisor Avey when he said he strongly believes the Forest has a covenant with the public to do what they say they are going to do. Yet, when questioned about previous decisions made by the Forest (CU ROD of 2003) his response was that he was managing “from here forward.” Apparently, no covenant exists relative to decisions that occurred prior to his arrival. She expressed that it is hard to have confidence in the agency when such decisions are not honored. Never-the-less, Helena Hunters and Anglers Association has supported a Brooklyn-Bridge bike route if it sticks to the road.

For a host of reasons, HHAA does not want to see mountain bike trails throughout Lazyman. Those reasons include wildlife security, hiking opportunity close to Helena – citing that mountain bikes displace hikers, and the fact that this area went through a Congressional designation process and deserves more respect that it is getting through the Forest’s analysis of it. Roy noted that Lazyman-Black Mountain had never been endorsed by the Forest Service. Doug acknowledged that, but he pointed out that the people had shepherded this place through the Wilderness Designation process and for that reason alone it deserved more consideration than the FS has given it in the Wilderness evaluation process of the pending Forest Plan.

Doug relayed the long, agonizing process that the City of Helena Collaborative Working Group had gone through relative to the Lazyman-Black Mountain and Jericho Inventoried Roadless Areas. The Collaborative had voted to retain Lazyman-Black Mountain IRA but allow activity in the Jericho IRA. He said this decision was very difficult for him to make because Jericho is a major wildlife movement corridor and has amazing country. He thought the Collaborative’s decisions would have carried quite a bit of weight but it now appears that it may not, and all of those months of meetings, and him driving 400 miles round trip to make it to

those meetings may have been for naught since Supervisor Avey said the Collaborative would be treated just like any other group.

Given its long public-support history for Wilderness, Doug and Gayle asked Roy, as representing the HLCNF, to consider their request to designate this trail and the Lazyman-Black Mountain area as at least "non-mechanized" as the Forest planning process moves forward, because places near Helena need to exist for hikers and wildlife, not just for mountain bikers who are tending to supersede both.

During the hike, we observed: coyote tracks and scat; 2 groups of elk: one group of 7 and the other group of about 30.

