

*Encl. to Eastman's May 5, 1972 memo*

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

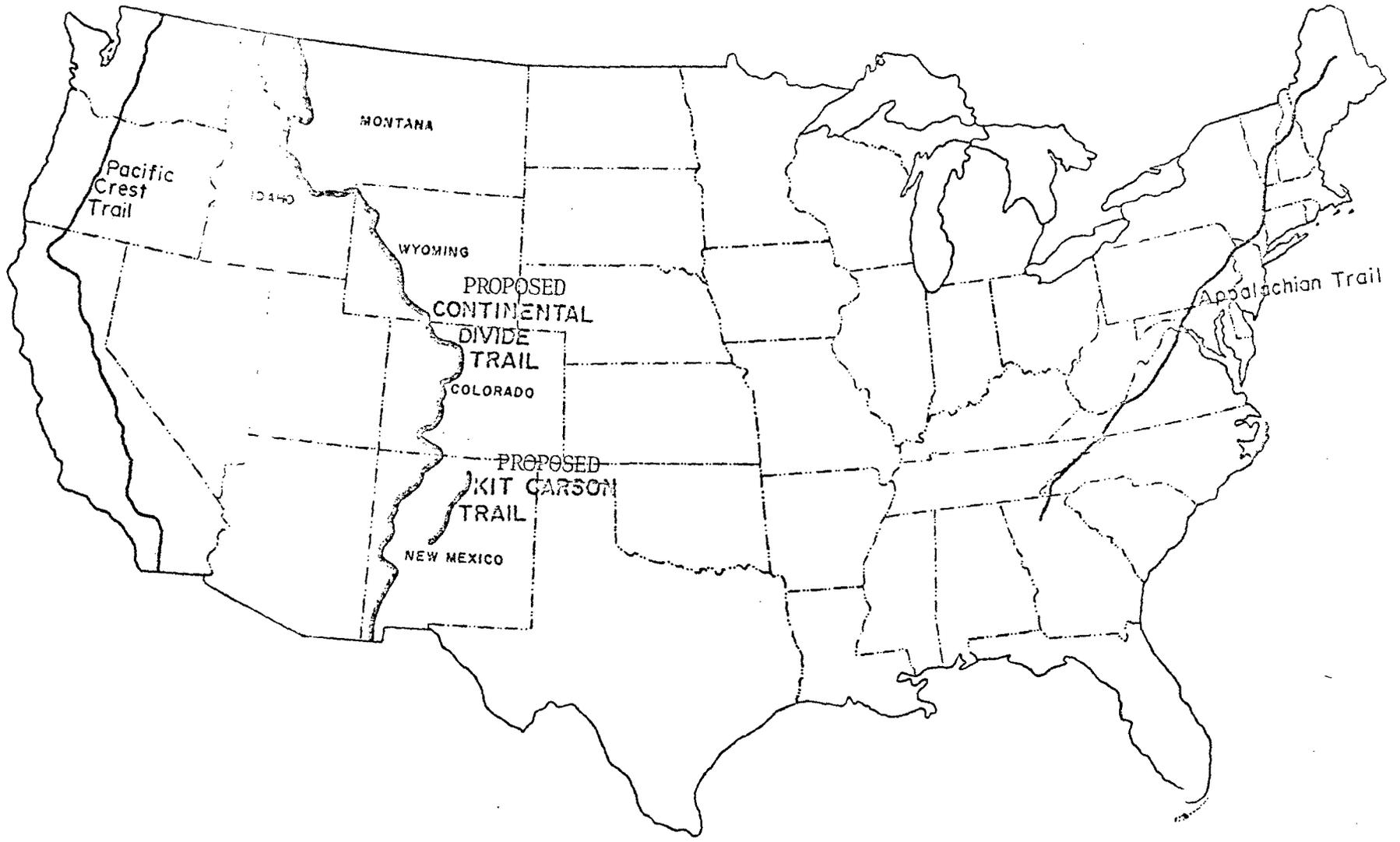
DRAFT  
ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

Proposed

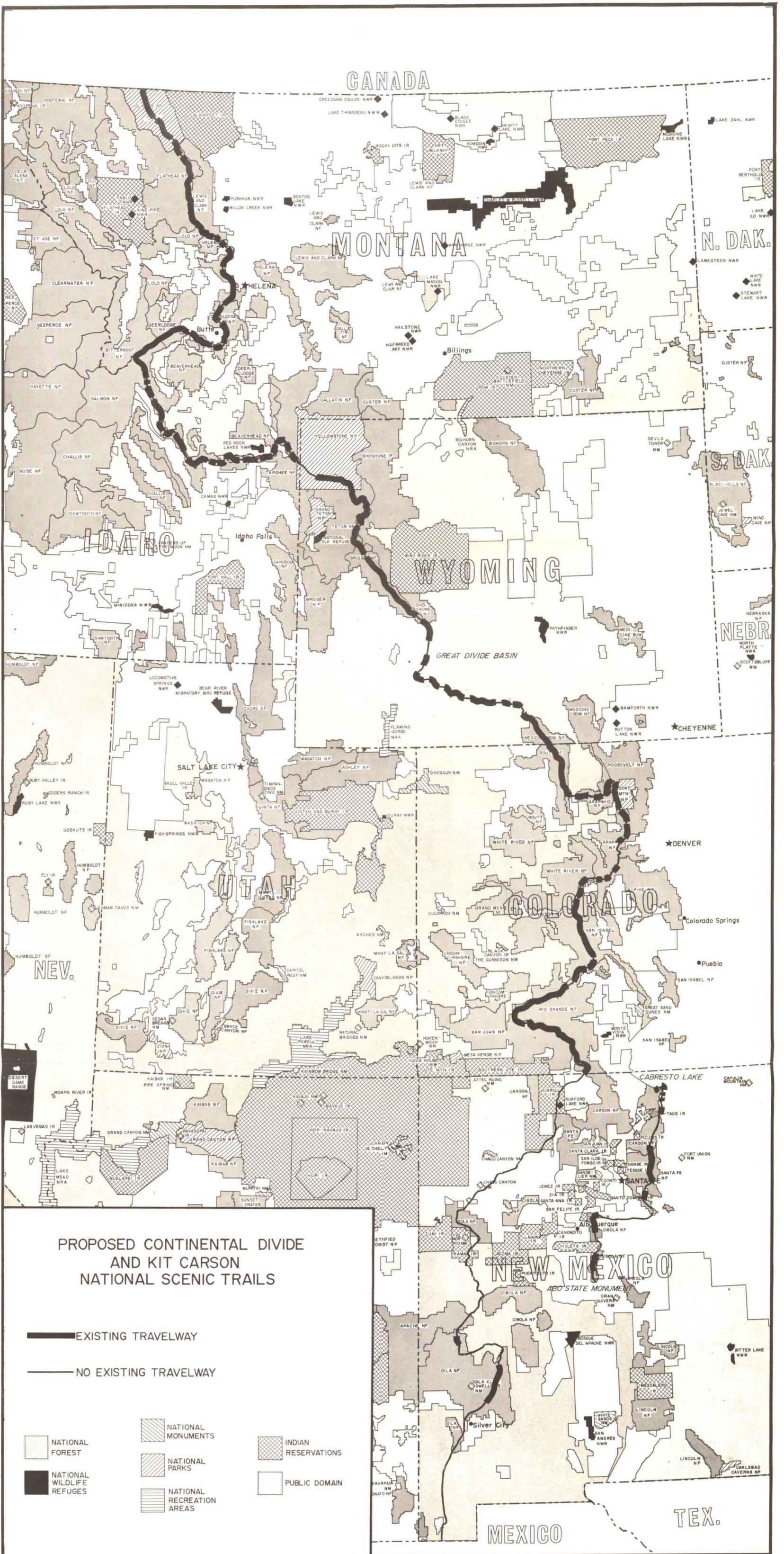
KIT CARSON NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL  
NEW MEXICO

Prepared By

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



P991D-370



PROPOSED CONTINENTAL DIVIDE  
AND KIT CARSON  
NATIONAL SCENIC TRAILS

— EXISTING TRAVELWAY

— NO EXISTING TRAVELWAY

- NATIONAL FOREST
- NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES
- NATIONAL MONUMENTS
- NATIONAL PARKS
- INDIAN RESERVATIONS
- PUBLIC DOMAIN
- NATIONAL RECREATION AREAS

SUMMARY

KIT CARSON NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL  
NEW MEXICO

(X) Draft                      ( ) Final                      Environmental Statement

1. Type of action:        ( ) Administrative        (X) Legislative

2. Brief description of action

The study report of the proposed Continental Divide National Scenic Trail recommends legislative action to authorize and designate the Kit Carson National Scenic Trail as a separate additional scenic component of the National Trails System. The proposal would establish a continuous foot and horseback trail extending approximately 370 miles through north central New Mexico. The northern end of the Kit Carson National Scenic Trail route would lie high in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains near Cabresto Lake at the northern edge of the Carson National Forest. The route would follow along the high country of the Sangre de Cristo, Sandia and Manzano Mountains and intervening lands in close proximity to New Mexico's large population centers. The trail is easily accessible to Taos, Santa Fe and Albuquerque. The trail would continue from the Carson National Forest southward in the Santa Fe and in the Cibola National Forests. The Kit Carson National Scenic Trail would terminate at the southern end of the Manzano Mountain Range near Abo State Monument.

3. Summary of environmental impact and adverse environmental effects

Approximately 50 percent of the proposed Kit Carson National Scenic Trail is in existence and is presently affecting the environmental values along the route. Some of these effects are negative and the burgeoning recreational pressures of the coming decades are expected to result in even more pronounced impacts if the trail environment along the Kit Carson Trail is not protected by some means.

If the trail is designated as proposed, the development of some of the nonexisting trail and support facilities as well as the upgrading of some of the existing trail would present a potential for minor adverse environmental effects as some removal or

disturbance of soil and vegetation would take place. Were the extended trail to become operational, additional adverse impacts would be inevitable for some of the trail segments due to the anticipated increased visitation by people and their pack animals and the resulting wear and tear and increased disposal of wastes.

Proper design, care during construction, adequate maintenance and enforcement of trail regulations would serve to mitigate these adverse effects. Inasmuch as trails by their very nature modify the environment little they cause a minimum of air and water pollution. The specific areas to undergo modification are so diverse however that detailed environmental statements would need to be prepared as the various elements of the proposal are ready to be implemented.

4. Alternatives considered

- a. Do not designate the proposed route of this Kit Carson NST.
- b. Develop the trail to maximum standards.
- c. Develop an all new trail.
- d. Extend the trail northward into Colorado.
- e. Extend the trail southward into Texas.

5. Comments have been requested from the following

This draft statement will be given wide distribution to numerous federal, state and local agencies, groups/organizations, and individuals. It is not practicable to list here all those that will be contacted; a partial, indicative listing follows:

Governor, State of New Mexico  
New Mexico Congressional Delegates

Federal Departments and Agencies

Council on Environmental Quality  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Forest Service  
Soil Conservation Service  
Bureau of Land Management  
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife  
Bureau of Indian Affairs  
National Park Service

## State Agencies

State Planning Office  
New Mexico Park and Recreation Commission  
New Mexico Department of Development  
New Mexico Highway Department

## Local Groups and Organizations

Albuquerque Park and Recreation Department  
Chamber of Commerce (Taos, Santa Fe and Albuquerque)  
Soil and Water Conservation Districts  
Albuquerque Wildlife and Conservation Association  
New Mexico Horse Council  
Taos County Historical Society  
Sierra Club (Rio Grande Chapter)  
New Mexico Mountain Club  
Rio Grande Horse Association  
New Mexico Conservation Coordination Council, Inc.  
Taos Pueblo Council  
Wilderness Society

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT  
KIT CARSON NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL  
NEW MEXICO

1. Description of the proposal

In 1968 Public Law 90-543 established the National System of Trails. Two national scenic trails were designated as initial units of the national system, the 2,000-mile Appalachian Trail and the 2,350-mile Pacific Crest Trail. The proposed Continental Divide Trail was identified as one of 14 potential national scenic trails to be studied to determine the feasibility and desirability of designating them as additions to the national trails system by future act of Congress.

The subject of this environmental statement is the recommendation resulting from that study of the proposed Continental Divide Trail, the subject of this proposal having been originally recommended as a loop trail to the Continental Divide Trail in an early reconnaissance study.

After examining the overall alignment for the Continental Divide Trail proposed in *Trails for America*, the north and south crossings of the Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico which were part of the recommended loop alignment in that state were found to lack adequate justification. The purpose of the loop was primarily to provide trail access to the spectacular mountains of north-central New Mexico. It is believed that this could best be done through the establishment of a separate national scenic trail developed on its own merits, and without connection to the Continental Divide. Thus the Continental Divide Trail Study report refers to the possible establishment of a Kit Carson National Scenic Trail--so named for the character in history who is so closely associated with that region of the state of New Mexico.

The study found that such a trail, following along the high country of the Sangre de Cristo, Sandia and Manzano Mountains and intervening lands, would be close to New Mexico's largest population centers. It would be located largely (88%) on existing public lands, is 50 percent in existence, and would make available to the recreationist a challenging stretch of country possessing awesome scenic grandeur, great natural values

and significant historic interest. Table 1 includes land ownership along the proposed Kit Carson Trail.

TABLE 1

LAND OWNERSHIP IN MILES (AND PERCENT)

STATE	FEDERAL <sup>1/</sup>	STATE AND LOCAL	PRIVATE	INDIAN	TOTAL
New Mexico	FS 288 BLM 9 <u>297</u>	25	45	--	367
	(81%)	(7%)	(12%)		(100%)

<sup>1/</sup> FS -- Forest Service  
BLM -- Bureau of Land Management

The primary purpose of this trail would be to provide a continuous, appealing trail route, designed for the hiker and horseman, but compatible with other land uses such as mining, timber harvest, and grazing. This 370-mile linear pathway, managed and administered within the guidelines for national scenic trails as established by Congress and Executive directive, would further our national goal by promoting public enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of our scenic outdoor areas.

The areas through which the trail would pass have great historical and cultural importance being rich in the heritage and life of the Rocky Mountains and the southwestern United States. The trail could be developed to provide the recreationist with examples of past periods of American development, examples of the many ways in which we now use our lands, as well as demonstrate ways in which we could make better use of our resources. The trail

could serve as a tool to increase public awareness and appreciation of environmental relationships and good resource management practices. .

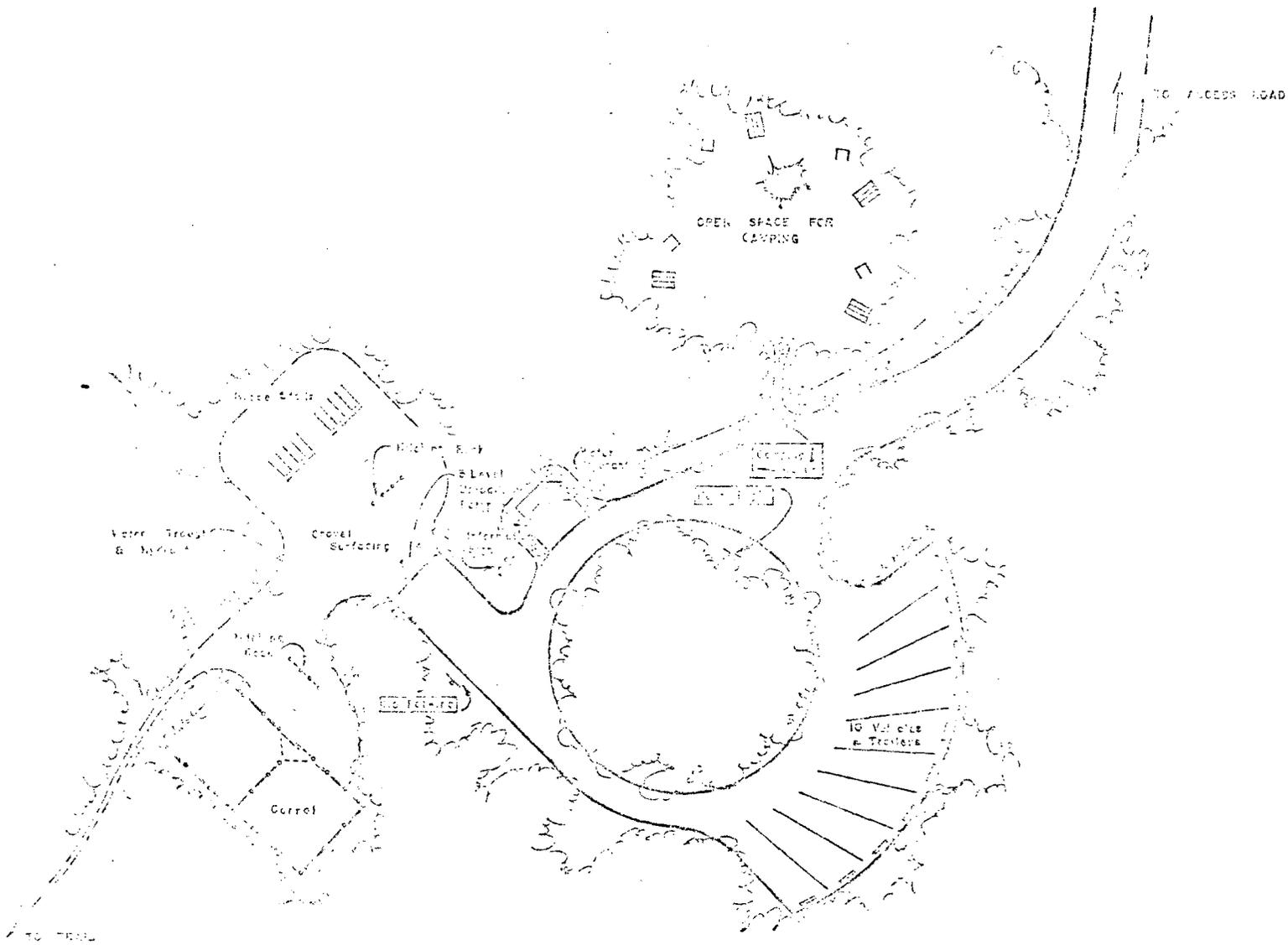
Although specific standards may vary, the Kit Carson Trail would be a simple facility for foot and horseback use in keeping with the national scenic trail concept as seen in the Appalachian and Pacific Crest Trails. Typically, this will mean a tread width varying between 18 to 24 inches and a pathway cleared of major obstructions to a maximum of 7 feet wide and 10 feet high. To keep from unduly scarring the landscape, the trails would avoid unnecessary switchbacks by using the steepest practical grade considering such factors as susceptibility to erosion and the trail user. As a practical matter, sustained grades of up to 10 percent would be used on both trails. In all cases, disturbed areas would be revegetated and stabilized.

Accommodations in the form of trailheads and intermediate resting areas would be required. Trailheads are points where the hiker and rider may gain initial access to or exit from the trails. They would provide space for parking vehicles, stock loading ramps, corrals and hitchracks, water and sanitary facilities and camping accommodations.

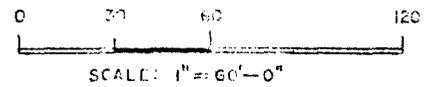
Trailheads would, of course, vary in size and makeup according to location, type and extent of expected use. The sketch on the following page illustrates a trailhead of the type commonly provided by the Forest Service adjacent to major access roads. It has been determined that 20 trailheads would be required along the Kit Carson Trail.

Intermediate resting areas would be designated sites accommodating those traveling enroute along the trails. They would be relatively primitive in nature and provide little more than camping space, fire circles, water, sanitary facilities, hitchracks and other basics. Owing to the number and rather even distribution of trailheads which can also accommodate those enroute, far fewer intermediate resting areas would actually be required. About 3 would be required for the Kit Carson Trail.

When the trails cross fragile lands or lands being protected within units of the national park system or wilderness preservation system, the land administering agencies should retain full authority to curtail any trail use which might impair or damage



TYPICAL TRAILHEAD



natural values, or the values for which those lands were being protected. The lands involved would continue to be subjected to the provisions of the legislation under which national parks or wilderness areas were established. In the event of conflicting policy, should such occur, that with the most restrictive provisions should apply. The proposed Kit Carson Trail would cross two wilderness areas. The following table (Table 2) indicates total miles of trail and existing trail in each area.

TABLE 2

AREA	TOTAL MILES	EXISTING TRAIL MILES	NONEXISTING TRAIL MILES
Wheeler Peak Wilderness Area	1	1	0
Pecos Wilderness Area	<u>31</u>	<u>31</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTALS	32	32	0

Establishment and development of the Kit Carson National Scenic Trail would be according to the trail plans presented in the Continental Divide Trail Study report. These plans have been developed with the advice and assistance of the governmental agencies, federal and state, which would administer trail segments and with other concerned organizations, groups and private citizens.

Administration of the trail would be by the present land administering agencies, except for small mileages of acquired private trail corridor which would be managed either by the adjacent federal or state public land managing agency. The Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, however, would be given overall responsibility for the implementation of a coordinated trail plan. As in the case of the two National Scenic Trails already in existence, the Appalachian and the Pacific Crest, an advisory council would be established for the trail to assist the Forest Service in the implementation and development of the trail.

## 2. Description of the environment

The Sangre de Cristo's are high country. They range up to 13,161 feet at Wheeler Peak, the highest point in New Mexico. The Sangre de Cristo Mountains include the tundra vegetation of the Arctic Alpine Zone and the spruce fir forest, aspen and douglas fir of the forested Boreal Life Zone. All together the trail would cross four ecological life zones where visitors would find much of the topography, climate, vegetation and wildlife for which the Rocky Mountain West is noted. These are the (1) Upper Sonoran, (2) Transition, (3) Boreal, and (4) Arctic Alpine Life Zones. Each is a function of soil, slope, exposure and climate--temperature, precepitation and humidity. Each of the four life zones are found along several sections of the Cit Carson Trail.

The diversity in climate and vegetative types located along the Kit Carson Trail makes for similar diversity in animal and bird populations. Although one can legitimately speak of special inhabitants of the Transition Zone and special inhabitants of the Alpine Zone, the rules covering their distribution are not nearly so rigid as the factors governing the makeup of plant communities. Accordingly, many animal and birds range widely across the various life zones along the proposed trail route.

All along the trail in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains there are many beautiful and productive timberline lakes and streams. The forests and alpine meadows are the habitat of elk, deer, bighorn sheep, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat and coyote. More than 300 species of song birds frequent these mountains.

Fishing opportunities along the proposed Kit Carson National Scenic Trail route are excellent and varied. Close to the trail streams are by and large quite small but virtually all have high water quality and are hence productive. Adding to the fishing opportunity and undoubtedly the most popular are myriad of cold water lakes, which tend to be concentrated along the central and northern sections of the proposed trail route.

## 3. The environmental impact of the proposed action

Were the prepared Kit Carson National Scenic Trail authorized and designated as proposed, the development of some of the 185 miles of the nonexisting trail, the 23 support facilities (e.g., trail-heads and intermediate rest stop areas) and upgrading of some of

the 187 miles of existing trails would present a potential for adverse environmental effects due to the removal or disturbance of soils and vegetation. For some trail segments additional horse and people impacts are anticipated due to the increased visitation after the trail becomes operational. The resulting wear and tear and solid waste disposal impacts are inevitable.

The disruption of wildlife and wildlife habitat from trail designation and use will be at a minimum. Actual construction of the trail after designation may result in a temporary displacement of the more timid wildlife not so much from loss of habitat but from noise disturbance.

Disturbance of wildlife from use will be minimal in that under the criteria for a National Scenic Trail use is limited to hikers and horseback riders.

Trail segments where overuse can be anticipated will require proper trail management to limit use to protect the environment.

Riding and pack stock will require grazing areas. These areas will require the application of good land use and grazing procedures. Overgrazing would have an adverse environmental impact resulting in the loss of wildlife habitat, soil erosion from loss of vegetative cover and water pollution from concentration of animal waste. ✓

Environmental disturbance would vary in the four life zones through which the proposed trail would pass. The Upper Sonoran Life Zone has characteristic pinon pine and juniper woodland and/or grams, galleta and buffalo grasses. This life zone would lend itself to minimal standards for trail development. The most minimal environmental disturbance during trail development would be possible and simple trail standards are advocated for both economic reasons as well as to lessen the impact on the environment. The extent of development could be the placement of trail markers within sight of each other and little or no actual tread development. The woodland areas, being steeper, would require more development resulting in a larger but still minimal impact on the environment.

The Transition Life Zone generally located in the "foothills" or sub-mountains is recognized by forests of ponderosa pine. Trail development is favorable as generally only a few trees and a minimum of brush need to be removed. Except on steep slopes a minimum of tread development is needed.

Abundant moisture gives the Boreal Life Zone luxuriant vegetation. The main trees are Douglas fir, blue spruce, Lodgepole pine, Englemann spruce, and aspen. Timberline starts in the upper elevations of this zone. The thicker vegetation and steeper slopes of this lifezone calls for the highest standards for trail development and therefore the greatest impact upon the environment. Typically, this would mean a tread width varying between 18 to 24 inches and a pathway cleared of major obstructions ranging to a maximum of 7 feet wide and 10 feet high. To keep from unduly scarring the landscape, the trails would avoid unnecessary switchbacks by using the steepest practical grade considering such factors as susceptibility to erosion and the trail user. As a practical matter, sustained grades of up to 10 percent would be used. In all cases, disturbed areas would be revegetated or stabilized by other means.

The mountain region above timberline is known as the Arctic Alpine Zone and consists of meadow and rock fields. This is the most ecologically fragile of the four zones. Any disturbances may remain as scars for many years. Trail construction and upgrading in this life zone calls for sensitive planning and extremely careful execution of that plan during construction. Trail maintenance in this life zone must be intense.

Established trends and patterns of trail use should not materially change as a result of national designation. In general, the greatest levels of use are expected where the use is already high--those segments in close proximity to population centers and in some of the more noted tourist destination areas, such as Taos, Red River, and the Pecos River area.

Projected visitation for this 370-mile trail indicates relatively heavy use upon completion and for this reason the trail should be developed immediately upon congressional National Scenic Trail designation. To insure the continuity of this trail, it is recommended that the land administering agencies should be granted the power of condemnation for trail rights-of-way.

Gross monetary benefits of about \$2 million per year have been estimated for the trail. This is a total of the direct annual expenditures on the part of the trail user as well as the indirect expenditures by private interests providing goods and services for the trail user.

4. Mitigating measures included in the proposed action

Protection of the land resource must be considered paramount in establishing a trail for the primary purpose of providing foot and horseback access to lands where man's impact remains slight and where the quality of the environment is high. To do this there must be sufficient environmental controls to protect the quality environment that called for establishment of the trail in the first place. Numerous techniques would reduce or mitigate the minor adverse environmental effects of the proposal. They include the following:

First, the trails would be designed for the hiker and horseman. No gross alteration of the land, vegetation or other resource values are envisioned. None are needed or desired. ✓

Similarly, the proposed complementary facilities such as trailheads would be designed to provide only basic but adequate services oriented solely to the trail user. Wherever possible they would be located at or near existing recreational facilities or existing man-made intrusions on the landscape, such as road crossings. They would be spaced so as to minimize or avoid congestion, overuse and adverse impact.

The suggested alignment of the proposed trail maximizes the use of existing trailways. It is recommended that where necessary these existing trails be upgraded, operated and maintained to minimum standards, consistent with environmental concerns. In this manner, the impact of an all new trail would be reduced and the impact of an existing trail would be lessened by management to adequate standards.

The establishment of a Trail Council, with public and private representatives to oversee trail development and management would serve as focal points where citizens interested in possible adverse environmental impact might address their concerns and where action could be taken to redress any possible adverse impacts.

The trail designation must be consistent with the established land management policies for the protection of wilderness, primitive, and natural lands. No provisions of legislation establishing the trail should in any manner affect the provisions

7. Any irriverisible and irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented

This proposal is basically not irreversible nor a foreclosure of choices for future generations. By maintaining the natural quality of the basic resource there is no reversion necessary, and a change in use can be made if desired at some future date.

8. Alternatives to the proposed action

In putting together the Kit Carson National Scenic Trail proposal many alternatives were considered, they included but were not limited to the following:

- ① The alternative of not recommending the proposed National Scenic Trail was considered but was rejected. It would under present conditions result in environmental degradation while failing to meet future needs and recreational demands of the recreating public.

This is because 50 percent (about 187 miles) of the proposed trail exists and is in need of at least some upgrading to minimal standards. Some of these existing trail segments are presently having a negative impact upon their environment. The degree of upgrading needed varies widely and, although comparatively, some would require little effort and expense, a significant amount needs major refurbishing. It is true that some upgrading has been programed by the involved agency; however, budget cutbacks have consistently produced little or no funds to carry out trail upgrading programs. The establishment of a totally new trail developed initially to national scenic trail standards, is considered undesirable. The alternative approach taken in the selection of a trail alignment was therefore to include as many existing trails, so long as they can be upgraded where necessary to national scenic trail standards.

Minimum trail standards are an alternative to the use of maximum trail standards during establishment and maintenance of the trail. In addition, the need for flexible standards to accommodate different kinds of terrain and varying kinds and degrees of use is recognized and the study advocates that the most minimal development standards consistent with these different circumstances be employed. In keeping with the national scenic trails concept the trail would be regarded as a simple facility for the hiker and horseman. This suggests the development of well engineered game trails, and over its greater length this would aptly describe the makeup of the Kit Carson National Scenic Trail proposal.

It was not possible under the scope of the Continental Fivide National Scenic Trail Study to pursue the alternatives of extending the proposed Kit Carson National Scenic Trail northward into Colorado and/or southward into Texas. These ideas were introduced during the study by various individuals and organizations and it would appear desirable for the Secretary and his advisory council to study these additions in depth in the event that Congress were to authorize and designate the proposed Kit Carson National Scenic Trail.

## CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION WITH OTHERS

During the course of the study the Bureau received the views of a great many people. The mass of information and views received were extremely valuable for study and planning purposes and form the principal basis for the development of the findings and recommendations.

Efforts were made throughout the study to keep the public informed and to solicit the views of citizens about the proposed trails. Sixteen formal public meetings and a host of other discussions with large and small groups were held and progress reports were issued on a regular basis. The communications media were of great assistance in publicizing the study and largely as a result of their efforts we received several hundred letters from throughout the United States containing opinions and suggestions relative to the study and the trails.

A partial mailing list of those to whom the proposal will be sent is included in the summary.