

Recreation User Group
Meeting 12
April 11, 2018
MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting Attendees

Representative	Organization
Mark Flint	Westland Resources/Southwest Trail Solutions
John Bricker	Tonto Recreation Alliance (TRAL)
Rich Smith	TRAL
Evan Pilling	Sonoran Desert Mountain Bicyclists
Fred Gaudet	Arizona Trail Association
Elizabeth Butler	Friends of Tonto National Forest & equestrians
Jim Schenck	Superior Community Working Group
Paul Burghard	Tonto National Forest (TNF) Globe District
Mark Sando	TNF Trails Coordinator
Greg Waterman	Sun City Anthem Hiking Club
Bill Scott	Sun City Anthem Hiking Club
Rick Schonfeld	Westland Resources
Mary Morissette	Resolution Copper Company (RCC)
John Godec	Godec, Randall & Associates (GRA)
Debra Duerr	GRA

Welcome and Introductions

John Godec welcomed everyone. He mentioned an email from Arizona Trails Association alerting people to the availability of a trails grant. This was discussed by the group as a potential resource. The Town of Superior would like to pursue this if a suitable grant-writer can be found.

Clarification was provided on recent discussions about the status of the proposed International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) trails. Mary Morissette explained that Resolution originally contracted with IMBA to develop the preliminary plan. Tonto National Forest then asked whether any of the proposals discussed with them could be consolidated, and the RUG was assembled to do that. Mark Flint emphasized that the IMBA concepts have been very valuable, helping to communicate the overall planning goals and providing positive and negative control points. The next step was to evaluate the feasibility of the routes for construction, and Westland has been looking at this proposal from that perspective and discovered that a number of the proposals would prove too challenging to construct. Flint assured the RUG, however, that the current proposal includes many resources for mountain biking as well as hiking, equestrian, and motorized vehicle use.

Godec reminded the group that a major objective is to keep this plan within the realm of an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Forest Service. Pablo Burghard agreed that the TNF objective is to make sure the proposal is sustainable and manageable, so something at the EA

level is much more manageable. A RUG member asked how much environmental work would need to be done on the trails. This was discussed, and will depend on the final proposal.

Discussion of Revised Semi-Final Trail System

Rick Schonfeld reported that the focus of work since the last RUG meeting has been on conducting field work. He showed a map of the current system that's being looked at. The blue routes have been "ground-truthed" and flatter connections near the Town of Superior still need to be field checked, along with a proposed equestrian trail at the south end of the system. Mark Flint thought that about 2/3 of the system has been field-checked, with the 'easier' flatter routes to be done now, while the weather is getting hotter.

Evan Pilling provided details of the field work and the specifics of the current plan (see slide presentation). He remarked that the terrain in this area is spectacular and he has been very impressed with the opportunities for attracting users. He said this is still a work in progress and provided an overview of the plan objectives, including sustainability, positive user experience, natural resource protection, and multi-user opportunities. He pointed out the 'reference points' for the system are Telegraph and Wood canyons.

Pilling showed a map of what has been ground-truthed so far. He noted that Westland has been trying to find east-west connections between the two canyons and associated Forest Service roads. In some cases, they have playfully created names for trail segments, such as the Wood Canyon Epic or Highline for mountain bikers, Dead Cow because of an ambient smell, and Calcedony Trail because of the geology. He provided observations on the best uses for several trails; for example, the LOST will be more suitable for hikers and equestrians since bicyclers don't like to ride in sandy washes. Conversely, the slick rock trails in Wood Canyon are more attractive to mountain bicyclists as it is too steep and rocky for horses. A loop around Telegraph Canyon is more moderate terrain but the higher up you get the more challenging it is. A segment runs along the rim above Arnett Canyon that could link with other trails (avoiding the existing target shooting areas) including a back-country trail. An east-west trail that horses currently use would be a 'backbone' to other connecting trails. There are several loops in the eastern area of Wood Canyon.

It was observed that this plan represents primarily a loop system, which RUG members thought was an attraction and an advantage. It may, as well, take some pressure off the Arizona Trail. It was suggested that, ultimately, the trails be marked with the difficulty level, e.g. Blue Diamond, Black Diamond.

There are about 45-50 miles of trails in this system, of which about 30 have been ground-truthed. It would be almost exclusively new construction, although there are existing user-created and primitive routes. A question was discussed about whether to find more back country routes or more trails closer to town. RUG members asked if there is access to this system and whether access and parking have been considered. Pilling said that Westland is evaluating primary access off SR177, along Arnett Road. The next step in the planning process is to look at access, parking, staging, and camping.

The group had a discussion about the use of washes as part of the trail system, and wondered how much of this proposal is located in washes. There was general agreement that this is not desirable from either a resource or permitting standpoint. The Forest Service said they want as little of this as possible; it's acceptable to cross washes but not to traverse significant portions of them. It was noted that since people have been using these routes for years, it will be difficult to manage if we try to close it off because of the wash.

A RUG member asked what happens to the existing single track that is already in the area south of the high school/golf course that is used by locals. Westland agreed they will need to address this. Another question is what happens to the shooting areas; it was recommended that a designated shooting area be enforced, but this existing one is located on private property. Everyone recognized that this is a controversial, difficult, and political issue to manage.

The Tonto National Forest noted that several ongoing planning efforts could impact this proposal, reminding the group that the forest is designed for multiple use. They are looking at revising the Forest Plan and at designated Wilderness Areas in the southern end of this study area adjacent to Bureau of Land Management jurisdiction. Also, the Travel Management Plan is not yet completed. Given this, TNF is reluctant to make any commitments about this plan, or the level of environmental assessment that might be required until the proposal is finished and evaluated in light of all the other actions underway on the forest.

Comments and questions included the following:

- RUG members asked for more information about the Forest Service designated Wilderness Areas process that was mentioned. Mark Sando can provide details. There is a GIS database that includes the areas under consideration. After evaluation, the Forest Supervisor would make a recommendation on any designations, which must be done by Congress. The group felt that any wilderness area could be avoided by the RUG routes.
- What accommodation is being made here for single track motorcycle?
 - It was felt that everything being proposed for hiking or biking would be suitable for motorcycles if they were to be designated both motorized and non-motorized. Rich Smith asked if TRAL could get a copy of the flagging for these trails so they can go and look at them.
- Regarding washes, TRAL emphasized that there are many historic trails that are located in washes and have been used forever. The washes are ephemeral for the most part.
 - Mary Morissette explained that the issue for washes is "fill", which would require a Sec. 404 permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers; we cannot get into this arena for this project. The Corps of Engineers would need to determine whether a wash is a 'water of the United States'.
- It was noted that the shooting issue has the potential to become a bigger problem and could have unintended consequences. TNF suggested that this area could be considered for designation as a "Congested Area", which would preclude shooting.

Pilling showed photographs from their field work of various areas. RUG members were very impressed with the potential and commented that the photos made this process and this proposal much more “real”.

The group then reviewed copies of the maps and made comments and observations.

Next Steps & Agreements

Westland plans to complete ground-truthing of the remaining route segments before the next RUG meeting. At the next meeting, the group hopes to agree on a plan and decide whether to have a public meeting for review. After this process, the plan will be submitted to the Forest Service.

Next Meeting

The next RUG meeting is planned for:

**Wednesday, May 23, 2018
10:00 AM**

The location will be determined.