

# 3. Wildlife and Trails Checklist

**W**hile the Wildlife and Trails Primer (Chapter 2) is a topical presentation of wildlife and trails issues, this chapter presents wildlife concepts in a sequence you might follow in planning a trail.

The checklist provides a broad framework for considering wildlife while planning trails. It also highlights important issues to consider at specific points in the planning process, raising questions rather than providing answers.

The checklist's organization is complementary to such trail planning processes as that developed by the Austin Metropolitan Trails Council with assistance from the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service. (For more information, see the council's website: <http://www.austin360.com/greenzone/amtc/build.htm>)

### *Specific questions addressed*

How well wildlife concerns are represented in a planning process depends on how well the following are understood:

- 1) the specific wildlife species and populations being affected,
- 2) their habitats, and
- 3) the proposed recreational activities affecting that population.

The steps outlined in the checklist should help trail planners become more familiar with these issues.

### *A generalized process*

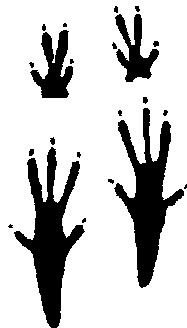
Every trail project is unique and not all of the detailed steps and questions in the checklist will be relevant to each project. Therefore it is important to adapt the checklist to your own situation.

For example, in an urban setting it may not be possible to identify a range of options for a trail. The only

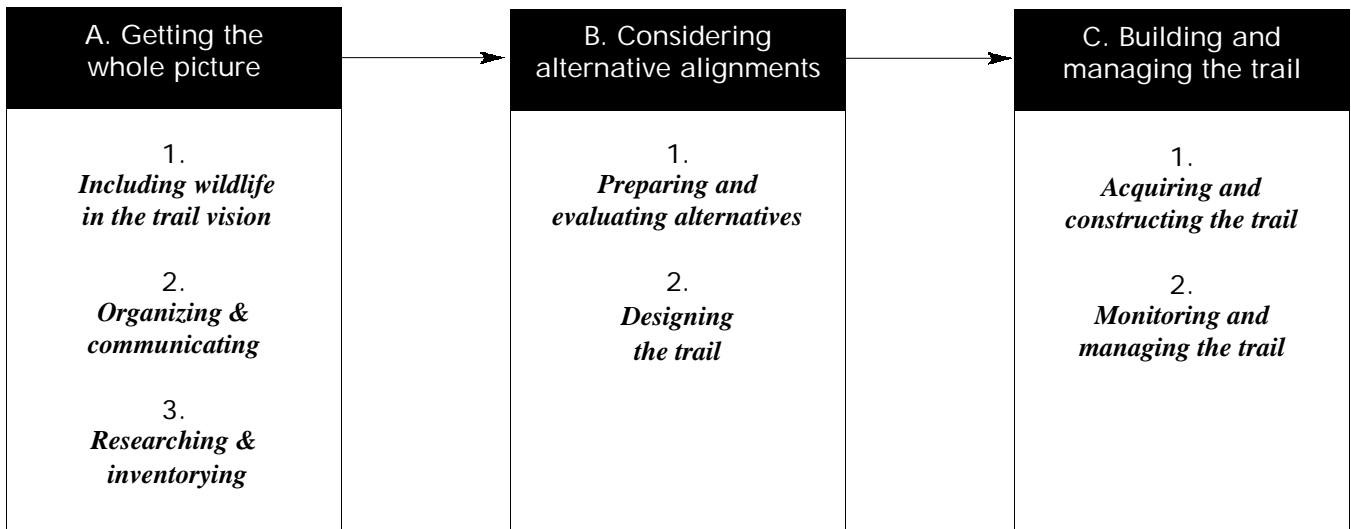
possible alignments may be along drainages or other existing corridors not attractive to most kinds of development.

Similarly, many trail projects in Colorado improve existing roads or trails, rather than create new alignments. Developing wide-ranging alternatives may not make sense in such cases.

Also, users of the checklist from states other than Colorado will need to find substitutes for the Colorado-specific resources.



## Wildlife and Trails Checklist



### *Comments welcomed*

It would be very helpful to have your comments and suggestions on the Wildlife and Trails Checklist.

Please send them to:

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## A. Getting the whole picture

### 1.

#### *Including wildlife in the trail vision*

Look at the broader landscape. What opportunities or constraints are there for trails and wildlife in the broader landscape? What plans are there for other trails or wildlife across the landscape? In general, what kinds of landscapes would the trail pass through? Would any be areas that currently have no trails and little human modification? Do you foresee any cumulative trail impacts by adding a new trail?

Develop preliminary goals for the project. What activities do you foresee for the trail? What are your wildlife goals for the project?

Develop initial trail concepts. What destinations, users, and activities do you foresee for the trail?

Keep wildlife concerns within the focus of the project vision. Are there biologists or other professionals available to advise you on wildlife and trails concerns?

Look for opportunities to coordinate your trail project with conservation and other complementary projects. Are there opportunities to coordinate habitat restoration, protection, or acquisition with the trail project? Where?

### 2.

#### *Organizing & communicating*

Create a profile of the kinds of users who are likely to use the trail. What are likely levels and seasons of use? Are there organizations that would be interested in the trail project? Would any help monitor the trail area for wildlife issues?

Identify the groups interested in wildlife in your trail area. What wildlife and conservation organizations would be interested to know of your trail project? Would any help monitor the trail area for wildlife issues?

Share your ideas and findings with other community members, including both trails and wildlife enthusiasts, property owners, and land managers. Who are people and organizations that would feel strongly for or against the project? How can you inform and involve them?

Meet with agency planners. Are there city or county land-use planners and federal or state resource planners who understand the broader context of the area where you are considering a trail? Is there an area-wide land-use, open space, or trails plan? If the trail might cross federal land, is there an existing management plan? Is your trail concept consistent with these plans?

Start a public discussion of the trail and its implications for wildlife. What are the best ways to reach the various groups interested in your trail? Community meetings, field trips, a web site? What are the wildlife issues that must be addressed in planning the trail? Do the ideas you hear seem to complement or conflict?

## A. Getting the whole picture, cont.

### 3.

#### *Researching and inventorying*

Determine the physical extent of the project. Over what area might the trail extend? What elevational ranges?

Conduct a preliminary biological inventory. What are the area's sensitive plants, animals, and wildlife habitats? Are there any special opportunities for wildlife education? How impacted already are wildlife in the area? How much modified is the area—is it urban, suburban, agricultural, pristine?

Determine the habitat/ecosystem types present in the area of the proposed trail and the potential species or communities of special concern. What do the Colorado Natural Diversity Information Source (available online Fall 1998) and other sources indicate are likely species or communities of special interest in the area?

Draw inferences from scientific studies done in similar habitats or with similar wildlife species. Does the Colorado State Parks wildlife/trails bibliographic data base include any such relevant references?

Learn from others who have completed projects with similar wildlife issues. Are there case studies in Chapter 4 of this handbook with similar wildlife issues? Does the Trails Section of the Colorado State Parks website ([www.dnr.state.co.us/parks/](http://www.dnr.state.co.us/parks/)) include trails projects through similar environments? What lessons can you draw from the experiences of others?

Review data found to date and conduct a site visit with a wildlife biologist or other scientists to identify potential wildlife opportunities and constraints. Are there areas to avoid because of resource sensitivity or areas to consider because of restoration potential or lower sensitivity? Which areas would provide the most interesting route and have the least impact on wildlife? Are there special opportunities for wildlife education?

Identify seasons of special concern for the important wildlife species or communities. Are there times of year, such as elk calving or eagle nesting season, that are particularly sensitive to disturbance from people? Are there alternatives for the trail away from such areas? Would seasonal closures of a trail near such areas be workable?

Identify important plants in the area. Are there any sensitive plant species or communities in the area? Are there ways to present these communities to trail users without disturbing sensitive species?

Evaluate the extent of existing impacts to wildlife and the landscape. What are the existing impacts to wildlife? How much have humans already modified the area? Is the area primarily natural, managed, cultivated, suburban, or urban? Will the trail provide access to back-country or areas that have never had trails before? How can you minimize the trail's contribution to habitat fragmentation?

Take a step back. Given what you have learned to this point, how well do you think this project will fit into its larger ecological context?

Formalize the project goals. How would you revise the preliminary project goals based on what has been learned? What do members of the public and others think of the project goals?

## B. Considering alternative alignments

### 1.

#### *Preparing and evaluating alternatives*

Create distinctive alternative plans. With this handbook's rules of thumb as a guide, develop alternative plans that maximize the opportunities and minimize the constraints for wildlife. Especially look for opportunities to coordinate the restoration of degraded habitats. Get professional help preparing and evaluating alternatives, if possible. Where an existing trail is to be improved, alternatives might include different management strategies.

Consider alternatives for trailheads and other support facilities. Sites for trailheads and parking areas are sometime overlooked in evaluating wildlife impacts of trails. They need careful design and review.

Evaluate the alternatives. Conduct an internal evaluation of the alternatives using the goals set earlier.

Ask others to help evaluate the alternatives. Conduct an external evaluation of the alternatives with wildlife biologists or other agency personnel, public, environmental groups, landowners, land managers, and others, as appropriate. Summarize the pros and cons of each alternative.

Select a preferred plan. Review the comments made during the evaluation process and select one of the alternatives or create a hybrid plan incorporating the best qualities of two or more plans.

### 2.

#### *Designing the trail*

Refine the selected plan. Develop site designs, budgets, and timetables.

Develop management strategies. Consider how the trail will be managed, maintained, and monitored.

Develop an environmental education/interpretation plan. The plan should explain how to communicate to trail users the specific wildlife issues of this trail.

Develop a volunteer plan. Outline support tasks for involving volunteers in monitoring or managing wildlife.

Conduct a final review of the plan and its components. Review the final plan with a wildlife biologist and other specialists to make certain all the parts went together in ways that support wildlife.

## C. Building and managing the trail

### 1.

#### *Acquiring and constructing the trail*

Look for opportunities for complementary conservation. In acquiring the land needed for the trail, look for additional areas that can be set aside for wildlife conservation at the same time and for the partners to implement such efforts.

Implement the plan. Be careful to impact wildlife as little as possible during construction.

Communicate to all interested parties. Share the progress about the trail and what is being learned about co-existing with wildlife.

### 2.

#### *Monitoring and managing the trail*

Manage the trail. Implement the plan to manage the trail corridor and activities within it.

Monitor. Using staff or volunteers, monitor the important plants and wildlife of the alignment, looking for impacts. Adjust management plans as appropriate.

Communicate to all interested parties. Share the progress about the trail and what is being learned about co-existing with wildlife.