



CONSERVATION & RECREATION STRATEGY

ADOPTED JANUARY 2025



ROUTT RECREATION & CONSERVATION ROUNDTABLE

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ABOUT

ABOUT THE ROUTT RECREATION & CONSERVATION ROUNDTABLE

Locals and visitors alike are drawn to Routt County, Colorado for its natural surroundings and recreational opportunities. Recreation helps drive the economy and improve the lifestyle of those who live in and visit this mountain community. With demand for outdoor access and trails ever increasing, thoughtful coordination amongst decision-makers and stakeholders in land management has become critical.

In response to this need, the **Routt Recreation and Conservation Roundtable (RRCR)** was convened in 2019 to provide non-binding recommendations to land managers within Routt County (the County) engaged in recreation and conservation planning and policymaking. [Click here to see the RRCR's Charter.](#)



The RRCR is designed as a diverse, representative body of the community that comes together in a collaborative environment for information sharing, understanding, and discussion – all with this Strategy in mind.

The RRCR is composed of **26 Roundtable members**, an **Executive Committee**, and **several Ex Officio members**. The 26-member Roundtable provides non-binding recommendations to the Executive Committee, the voting body for the RRCR made up of public land managers and municipalities within the County. Several Ex Officio members are appointed for their specific role and expertise within the community, and provide input to the RRCR as necessary. See the table below for a makeup of the RRCR.

The RRCR is a proud member of **Colorado Parks & Wildlife's Regional Partnerships Initiative**, a network of regionally-based coalitions known as Outdoor Regional Partnerships that bring together broad interests to advance conservation and outdoor recreation priorities for their area of the state. This statewide initiative works to ensure that Colorado's land, water, and wildlife thrive while also providing for equitable and quality outdoor recreation experiences.

Funding for the development of this Conservation & Recreation Strategy was made possible by the Regional Partnerships Initiative's grant program.

For more information about the RRCR, visit the Roundtable's website here: <https://routtrcr.org>.



Makeup of the Routt Recreation & Conservation Roundtable

Roundtable Members	Executive Committee Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptive Users • At-Large (5 Seats) • Economic & Community Development • Equestrian • Hunting & Fishing • Land Trusts • Mountain Biking • Natural Resource & Environmental Advocacy • Quiet Use & Hiking • Ranching & Farming • Recreational Boating • Road and Gravel Biking • Special Use Permit Holder • Summer Motorized • Trail Running • Wildlife Conservation • Winter Motorized • Winter Non-Motorized 	Ex Officio Roundtable Members
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureau of Land Management • City of Steamboat Springs • Colorado Parks & Wildlife • Routt County • State Land Board • U.S. Forest Service
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado Department of Transportation • Steamboat Ski Resort • Steamboat Springs Chamber of Commerce • Yampa Valley Community Foundation

ABOUT THIS STRATEGY

In addition to providing non-binding recommendations to land managers within Routt County, the RRCR also serves as a community connector or “connective tissue” between the many ongoing recreation and conservation efforts in the County. As such, this **Conservation & Recreation Strategy** was collaboratively developed by RRCR members and identifies areas and gaps in conservation and recreation that the RRCR can support *without* duplicating existing efforts in the County.

This Conservation & Recreation Strategy is organized into three main pillars: **Conservation, Destination Management, and Recreation**. Under each of these categories nests a **Vision, Goals, and Priorities**.

To support implementation of this Strategy an **Implementation** process – revisited annually – captures priority projects to be started or completed within the year by the RRCR. The current Implementation details can be found on Page 13.

Annually, the RRCR will track progress against the Visions, Goals, and Priorities and update Implementation accordingly. Every five years, the RRCR will revisit and update as necessary the Visions, Goals, and Priorities. These medium to short timelines help ensure that the RRCR remains adaptive to changing conditions and trends while also remaining committed to the Strategy’s overall Visions, Goals, and Priorities. More information on how this Conservation & Recreation Strategy was developed can be found in Appendix C.



PURPOSE OF THIS STRATEGY

A five-year framework of **Visions, Goals, and Priorities** is intended to help the RRCR **1)** prioritize projects led by the RRCR itself, and **2)** guide the RRCR in deciding whether or how to support a community-led project and/or policy initiative.

Any project and/or policy implemented or supported by the RRCR must align with this Conservation & Recreation Strategy.

WHY THIS STRATEGY?

The RRCR recognizes that Routt County faces an increasingly challenging landscape in which to manage and advance the benefits and sustainability of both conservation and recreation. Increasing population growth and visitation is often coupled with capacity challenges at recreation amenities such as trailheads and waterways; competing land uses and values on how to use and manage land; and rapidly evolving trends in and expectations for recreation.

Furthermore, the County's ecosystems and wildlife populations are rapidly changing due to both human and non-human caused impacts from climate change, recreation, different land uses, and natural disasters to name a few. The RRCR understands that with a rapidly changing landscape, unexpected hurdles will need to be overcome in the future.

This challenging landscape, and the knowledge that unexpected hurdles lie on the horizon, are why the RRCR's Conservation & Recreation Strategy was developed. The Guiding Principles, Visions, Goals, and Priorities set forth in this Strategy serve as a foundation upon which the RRCR will be able to respond, adapt, and rise to the current and future challenges that face its region.

RELEVANT ROUTT COUNTY PLANS

The RRCR strives to support the capacity of its partners by helping identify and fill gaps in conservation and recreation efforts that benefit Routt County's communities and landscapes.

THE RRCR UNDERSTANDS THAT WITH A RAPIDLY CHANGING LANDSCAPE, UNEXPECTED HURDLES WILL NEED TO BE OVERCOME IN THE FUTURE.



By acting as the region’s “connective tissue,” the RRCR does not duplicate existing efforts nor interfere with existing regulatory or comprehensive plans. Rather, the RRCR aims to support carrying out those efforts and plans as a community partner.

A list of current plans relevant to the RRCR are captured in the table below. The RRCR may also look to these plans for guidance as they implement or support projects and/or policies within the County.

Relevant Plans to the RRCR (*note: each plan is hyperlinked*)

<p>Land, Water, & Wildlife Management Plans (Federal, State, Other)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routt National Forest - Land and Resource Management Plan • Bureau of Land Management - Colorado River Valley Field Office Resource Management Plan • Bureau of Land Management - Little Snake Field Office Resource Management Plan • Colorado’s Outdoors Strategy • Colorado Parks & Wildlife Habitat Partnership Program - Northwest Colorado Distribution Management Plan • Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment • Yampa Integrated Watershed Management Plan
<p>Community, County, & Municipal Plans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routt County Master Plan & Unified Development Code • Routt County Climate Action Plan • Community Wildfire Protection Plan • Routt County Hazard Mitigation Plan • Routt County Open Lands Plan • City of Steamboat Springs Parks, Recreation, Open Space, Trails and Yampa River Master Plan • Stagecoach Community Plan • Sarvis Creek Area Plan • Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan • Hayden Community Action Plan: Enhancing Outdoor Recreation to Foster Business Revitalization • Steamboat Springs Area Community Plan • West Steamboat Springs Area Plan • Yampa Master Plan • Oak Creek Comprehensive Plan • Hayden 3 Mile Area Plan

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The RRCR believes that the health, diversity, and productivity of Routt County’s public lands will be sustained for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations by following twelve guiding principles.
Any projects and/or policies implemented or supported by the RRCR must align with these Guiding Principles.

Utilize public input and collaboration among diverse user groups to promote strategic planning, action, and implementation; use feedback to determine project success. **1**

Utilize a thoughtful and deliberate approach toward issues and needs that are critical to protecting and conserving Routt County’s environment, including watershed health and wildlife management. **2**

Be adaptable and resilient – We can’t predict how recreational demands may change. We need an approach that is adaptable over the long-term so we can manage for an uncertain future. **3**

Act holistically – Federal, state, and local governments and diverse user groups must collaborate to identify ways they can effectively and efficiently solve problems that occur across jurisdictional boundaries. **4**

Find the optimal combination of recreation and conservation – both are needed to sustain quality of life, and both are beneficial to local economic well being, personal health, and Colorado’s natural resources. **5**

Use sound physical, biological, and social science to inform the planning and management of outdoor recreation. **6**

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

7

Ensure sustainable and diverse funding sources to protect the environment and support outdoor recreation, including development and maintenance of recreational amenities and enforcement of new and existing rules and regulations.

8

Support stewardship of our outdoor environments and promote education on how to best care for land, water, and wildlife through ethical outdoor behavior.

9

Build and maintain community awareness of issues related to outdoor etiquette, recreational options, and the value of the resource.

10

Support access for underrepresented groups, including people of color and people with disabilities.

11

Support recreation and environmental best practices for outdoor recreation that can be practiced by locals and visitors alike.

12

Honor and preserve the historical and legal protections of all public lands in Routt County.

VISIONS, GOALS, AND PRIORITIES



Visions, Goals, and Priorities are nested under three main pillars: **Conservation, Destination Management, and Recreation** (see Page 11).

Visions describe what future the RRCR aspires to support achieving for Routt County; **Goals** are methods by which the RRCR can achieve its **Visions**; and **Priorities** further guide how the RRCR can accomplish its Goals, vet projects for **Implementation**, and decide whether or how to support a community-led project or policy initiative.

This framework will be revisited every five years by the RRCR to ensure that Visions, Goals, and Priorities are still relevant. Annually, the RRCR will track progress against the Visions, Goals, and Priorities and update Implementation accordingly.

CALL TO ACTION

The success of the RRCR's Conservation & Recreation Strategy hinges on continued collaboration of the RRCR's membership and community at large. RRCR members are encouraged to lean into this unique, collaborative forum to work together and lead on the shared Visions, Goals, and Priorities laid out in this Strategy, and to continue serving as Routt County's community connectors for advancing conservation and recreation.

	CONSERVATION	DESTINATION MANAGEMENT	RECREATION
VISIONS	Routt County’s forests, waters, and wildlife are healthy, connected, and resilient to future impacts.	Locals and visitors enjoy and feel safe recreating in Routt County, while respecting and protecting the County’s special landscapes.	Locals and visitors to Routt County have access to exceptional, diverse recreational amenities in both the front country and backcountry.
GOALS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Conserve Routt County’s highest quality remaining undisturbed or highly functioning forests, waters, wildlife habitats, and connectivity corridors.2. Restore the ecological health and quality of impacted or degraded forests, waters, wildlife habitats, and connectivity corridors.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Improve the overall quality of recreational experiences in Routt County.2. Elevate and support best stewardship practices and communicate them to both locals and visitors.3. Ensure that people of all abilities and backgrounds are able to enjoy diverse recreational experiences throughout Routt County.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Enhance public access and cross-jurisdictional connectivity to existing trails and other recreational amenities.2. Improve conditions of campsites, trails, trailheads, parking, and other facilities in both dispersed/ undeveloped areas and developed areas.3. Meet and/or grow recreational demand responsibly and with thoughtful consideration of community values and environmental impacts.

	CONSERVATION	DESTINATION MANAGEMENT	RECREATION
PRIORITIES	<p>1. Support habitat protection, restoration, and wildlife conservation efforts by land managers in Routt County.</p> <p>2. Encourage directing new recreational infrastructure and development to areas where such development can occur in ways that avoid or minimize impacts to forests, waters, wildlife habitats, and connectivity corridors.</p>	<p>1. Research, implement, and/or support pilot projects to creatively and adaptively address visitor use challenges, including visitor conflicts and heavy visitation.</p> <p>2. Support unifying strategic stewardship messaging across the County that specifically speaks to minimizing adverse impacts while recreating.</p>	<p>1. Support the capacity of land management agencies to improve recreation experiences including improving public access; maintaining existing facilities; and building new facilities as needed.</p> <p>2. Encourage land management agencies to collaborate with the RRCR to ensure that recreation efforts are aligned with community values, ecosystem protection, and this Strategy.</p>

Cross-Cutting Priorities

The following priorities apply to each Goal.

1. Support funding and capacity-building for volunteer organizations, local non-profits, and government agencies by pursuing public and private funding opportunities that secure needed on-the-ground volunteers and staff. Volunteers and staff can improve on-the-ground efforts on Routt County’s public lands from restoration activities, trail maintenance, and building projects to education, outreach, resource monitoring, and more.
2. Strengthen the RRCR’s efforts to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in conservation, destination management, and recreation in Routt County.

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation details (see table on Page 14) identify specific projects that the RRCR itself will lead on in support of this Strategy. Descriptions of each project are provided in Appendix B. This Implementation process was collaboratively developed by RRCR members and will be revisited annually to track progress and/or prioritize new projects.

The **Routt Decision Support Tool (DST)** supports Strategy Implementation. The DST is an interactive Web Map and spatial analysis tool that combines natural resource, recreation, and land use data including but not limited to understanding habitat connectivity and locations for new recreation amenities. Although the DST was developed for use by the RRCR, it is open to anyone including public land managers and land use planners. The RRCR encourages community partners to utilize the tool in support of their own decision-making.

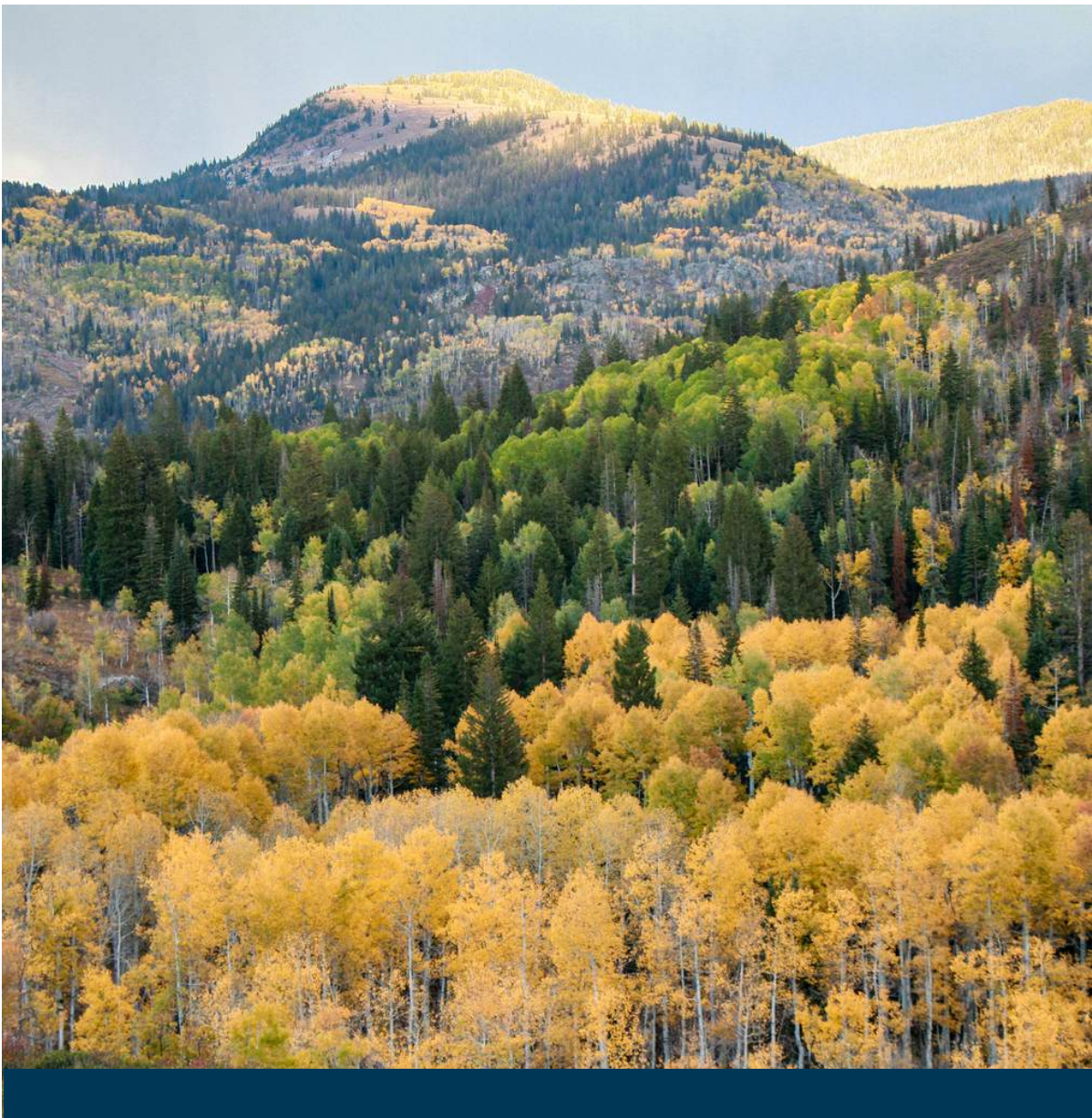
The RRCR also empowers Routt County residents to evaluate proposed projects on their own by using this tool. Residents can find a guide developed by RRCR member organization Keep Routt Wild to learn more about using this tool on their own **[by visiting here.](#)**



STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

See Appendix B for more details on the purpose, context, scope, and measures of success for each project.

Project	Conservation	Destination Management	Recreation
Medicine-Bow Routt Sustainable Recreation Management	●	●	●
Identify Habitat Protection & Restoration Opportunities	●		
Identify River Health & Access Improvement Opportunities	●	●	●
Identify Opportunities to Support Volunteers & Partners	●	●	●
Develop Visitor Pledge & Communications Campaign		●	



Learn more at
routtrcr.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The **Routt Recreation & Conservation Roundtable's Conservation & Recreation Strategy** was collaboratively developed by its members and other individuals listed below. Funding for this effort was provided by **Colorado Parks & Wildlife** and **Great Outdoors Colorado** through **Colorado's Regional Partnerships Initiative**. *All photos in this document are courtesy of Kent Vertrees.*

Routt Recreation & Conservation Roundtable Members

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Kristen Jespersen
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Laura Soard
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Tim Wohlgenant
Yampa Valley Community Foundation

Facilitators

Keystone Policy Center is the fiscal sponsor,
project manager, and facilitator for the RRCR.

Special thanks to Matthew Mulica, Christine
Zenel, and George Jutras





APPENDIX B: STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

Medicine-Bow Routt Sustainable Recreation Management

Purpose & Context: Medicine-Bow Routt National Forest is a critical destination in Northwest Colorado for year-round recreation. Increased visitation to the area has raised concerns in the community regarding social, environmental, wildlife, and safety impacts. To address these concerns, the RRCR has identified a process to fund and implement new data collection in addition to two dedicated seasonal rangers at both the Dry Lake parking lot and the winter backcountry permit area. The project will also identify long term funding to maintain the [Dry Lake Trailhead Web Camera](#) that the RRCR installed in 2022.

Project Description: Over the next few years, a subcommittee will develop a data collection protocol to understand baseline conditions and compare those conditions to future changes at the site. The subcommittee will also seek pathways and funding for hiring rangers that ensure compliance with permit regulations and safety guidelines, implement parking management strategies to alleviate congestion, educate visitors on camping and recreation etiquette, and monitor conditions. The subcommittee will also identify long-term funding for the Dry Lake Trailhead Web Camera.

Measures of Success: To measure success of this project and its contributions to all three Strategy Goals, the subcommittee will compare data pre- and post-hiring of seasonal rangers. Although specific data criteria have not yet been determined, they will focus on quantitative and qualitative metrics such as visitor satisfaction, number of illegally parked vehicles, incident rates, etc.

Identify Habitat Protection and Restoration Opportunities

Purpose & Context: The RRCR is interested in identifying areas where habitat conservation, protection, and restoration are needed and may be in conflict with or impacted by climate change, development, land use, and/or outdoor recreation in the near to long-term future. This information will ultimately inform decision-makers and the overall community.

Project Description: The RRCR will undergo a habitat prioritization activity broken out into three phases: 1) identifying key values and priorities for habitat conservation/protection and restoration (of RRCR members, land managers, and key stakeholders), 2) synergizing the Routt Decision Support Tool with other key/updated data layers from Colorado's Outdoors Strategy, and 3) creating a prioritization matrix or map illustrating areas of potential low to high conservation value, and low to high development/land use/outdoor recreation value. The final prioritization matrix/map will be shared with the broader community and used to evaluate the potential of the RRCR to develop consensus recommendations for new habitat protection, conservation, and/or restoration policy initiatives or projects.

APPENDIX B: STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

Measures of Success: The RRCR will evaluate the effectiveness of the habitat prioritization matrix/map over time by determining how, how often, and who the tool is being utilized by to support the Strategy's Conservation Goals.

Identify River Health and Access Improvement Opportunities

Purpose & Context: River health and access is an important and ongoing conversation in Routt County, including where to improve access and river health. Although many partners in Routt County address river access and health, the RRCR strives to support their capacity. This includes but is not limited to project funding, communications, public engagement, etc.

Project Description: Among other opportunities that may arise, the RRCR will also develop a community engagement plan to understand new values, concerns, and desires for river access and health. Results from the community engagement plan will be used to inform a decision support tool, or suite of recommendations, to be shared with partners to inform their decision-making and prioritization. This decision support tool/suite of recommendations will be updated as necessary, pending shifts and perspectives in the community.

Measures of Success: The success of this project will be determined by the level of community buy-in for the final decision support tool and/or suite of recommendations.

Identify Opportunities to Support Volunteers and Partners

Purpose & Context: Routt County's need for volunteers and other capacity support, particularly for on-the-ground conservation and recreation projects, is great. The RRCR will maintain a catalog of land managers' needs to determine where the RRCR can add support and/or spread the word to other partners.

Project Description: The RRCR will maintain a catalog of volunteer and capacity needs representative of the region by interviewing Roundtable members including land managers. At each RRCR meeting, the RRCR will revisit this catalog to understand priority needs, identify how the RRCR can support a need, and/or identify how the RRCR can spread the word about a need. Examples of support include organizing community volunteer days and providing funding for volunteer efforts.

Measures of Success: The RRCR will understand if this project has been successful over time by evaluating whether or not its partners' capacity needs are met, or close to being met.

APPENDIX B: STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

Develop Visitor Pledge and Communications Campaign

Purpose & Context: Stewardship, safety, and other destination management information is often inconsistent, with different but similar messages spread by different organizations and agencies within Routt County. At the same time, the behavior and safety of visitors is of utmost importance. Visitors can only be good stewards of Routt County's special places, and maintain their own safety outdoors, with effective communication and education. The RRCR seeks to address inconsistent messaging by developing a singular visitor pledge and communications campaign that will be the go-to source of stewardship and safety information.

Project Description: The RRCR is developing a simple, effective, and catchy visitor pledge and communications campaign based on messages that the whole Roundtable has prioritized (e.g., Leave No Trace, bear awareness, trailhead etiquette, etc.). The pledge can be signed onto by visitors on the RRCR website, and will also be disseminated throughout the County. Incentives will be identified for signing the pledge (e.g., coupons to local businesses). Ultimately, the RRCR hopes that the visitor pledge and communications campaign will become easily identifiable so that both visitors and residents remember its messages when they see its logo.

Measures of Success: Although the effectiveness of education initiatives are difficult to measure, the RRCR will quantitatively measure the success of this Destination Management project by evaluating the number of visitor pledges signed and the number of locations where it is posted. Anecdotally, the RRCR may also collect evidence from land managers and community members noting any behavior change relevant to the visitor pledge and communications campaign.

APPENDIX C: STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The **Routt Recreation & Conservation Roundtable's Conservation & Recreation Strategy** was collaboratively and iteratively informed and developed over many years; the process is summarized below.

Phase One: 2021-Early 2023

The RRCR begins understanding the values, visions, goals, and priorities of each RRCR member by conducting a Human Ecology Mapping exercise (Appendix D), and listening to presentations from each RRCR member and the perspective of their seat. The RRCR, in consultation with SE Group, additionally develops a Routt Decision Support Tool that combines natural resource, recreation, and land use data to help evaluate proposed projects and policies.

Phase Two: Spring-Summer 2023

Informed by Phase One, the RRCR begins brainstorming and building consensus on visions, goals, priorities, and potential projects centered on conservation, destination management, and recreation; the RRCR does so by having numerous in-depth discussions and work sessions. Survey ranking and a prioritization matrix help drive discussion forward (Appendix E).

Phase Three: Fall-Winter 2023

Phase Two resulted in a significant amount of goals, priorities, and potential projects. The RRCR continues to refine these over many more discussions and work sessions to whittle them down to an actionable scale. Phase Three concludes with formulating the basic structure of this Strategy: Visions, Goals, Priorities, and Implementation for three main pillars: Conservation, Destination Management, and Recreation.

Phase Four: Spring 2024-Winter 2025

The RRCR adopts this Conservation & Recreation Strategy and forms subcommittees to launch Implementation. The RRCR begins using this Strategy to decide whether and how to support community-led projects and policy initiatives brought forward to the Roundtable, ensuring they are aligned with this Strategy.

APPENDIX D: HUMAN ECOLOGY MAPPING DOCUMENTATION

The final report, *Landscape Benefit Priorities, Relevant Drivers of Change, and the Importance of Strategic Actions: Results from the Routt Recreation & Conservation Roundtable* [can be found here](#).

APPENDIX E: PROJECT PRIORITIZATION DOCUMENTATION

Documentation of the RRCR's prioritization efforts to refine this Strategy's Visions, Goals, Priorities, and Implementation [can be found here](#).

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