

Doyle Mountain Trail System Proposal



John Robison photo

RE: Grand View Travel Plan, DOI-BLM-ID-B000-2017-0002-EA

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The BLM is seeking public input on 1,365 miles of inventoried motorized routes across the 251,000 acre Grand View Travel Planning Area (the actual route network is much higher due to trail proliferation). The ultimate outcome will be the designation of motorized, non-motorized and non-mechanized access routes within Owyhee County.

There is a unique opportunity to create a concentrated non-motorized, non-mechanized trail system in a corner of the Grand View Travel Management Area in and around Doyle Mountain. This trail system would complement the surrounding motorized trail system and give equestrians, trail runners, hikers, backpackers and hunters a highly desirable place to go, relieve pressure on other trails and trailheads, and keep these trails open to the public for maintenance and restoration funding, stewardship and monitoring instead of being ignored and overlooked.

The Owyhee Initiative Agreement asked that the BLM create travel plans that “*include a multiple use recreational route system that provides a wide range of recreational opportunities and experiences for all users while protecting natural and cultural resources.*”

Here are other relevant excerpt from the Agreement that provides some important background:

Travel Management: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will fulfill its responsibility to develop and implement travel plans for the BLM managed lands outside of wilderness areas in Owyhee County within specified time frames. All public land users are expected to benefit from improved safety, route maintenance, maps, signs, education, and new opportunities provided by establishment of travel route systems.

Recreation use in the Owyhees is increasing dramatically, along with the ecological and social impacts:

Recreational use and management

One of the primary areas of impact to Owyhee County from the four-county population occurs in the form of increased recreation. Not only are there more users due to regional population growth, but the uses have continued to diversify and expand with varied degrees of impact.

-Social and Community Assessment for Owyhee County, Authors: J.D. Wulfhorst, Neil Rimbey, Scott Jensen and Paul Lewin, Agricultural Economics Extension Series No. 16-01. December 2016.

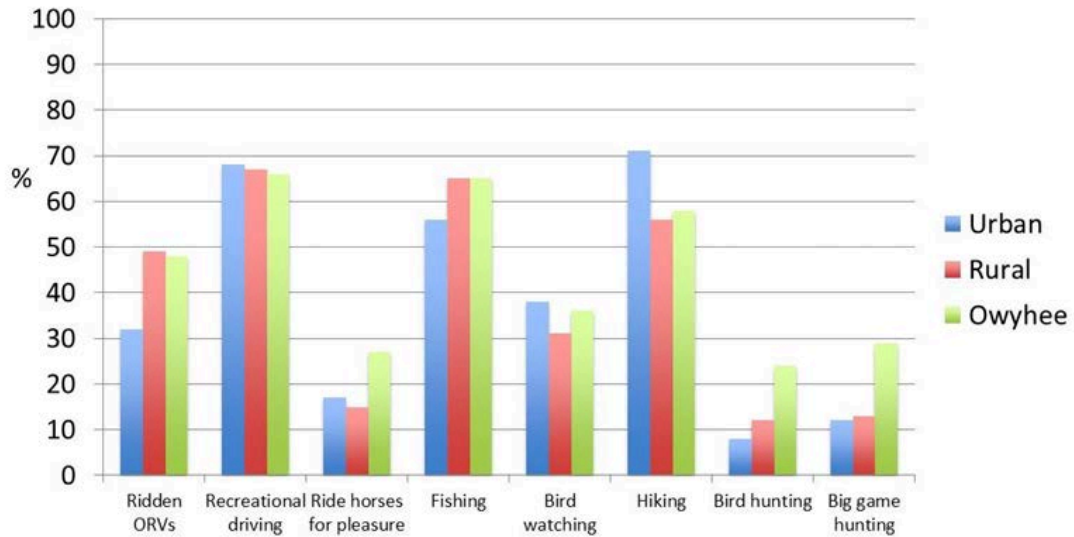


Figure 16. *Percent of respondents indicating they participated in each recreational activity during the past year in southwestern Idaho.*

This use is expected to continue to increase:

“Over the next 30 years, we’re predicting by 2050, there will be about 1.1 million people in the Treasure Valley.”¹

The BLM and local community members are well-aware of potential and growing conflicts among user groups and on natural resources. While improved education and etiquette can go a long way to increase respect among all user groups, trail runners, hikers, equestrians and hunters often seek out non-motorized, non-mechanized trail systems and can be displaced by persistent motorized recreation, particularly in certain types of terrain.

Out of the 1,365 miles of trails under consideration, the BLM is considering a maximum of **just 6 miles** of non-motorized trails (<1%), even though J.D. Wulfhorst, Neil Rimbey, Scott Jensen and Paul Lewin noted the strong interest by non-motorized recreationists. The BLM is considering either 0 or just one mile of non-mechanized trails in all of the alternatives. None of these options will be sufficient to meet the BLM’s goals of providing diverse recreational opportunities, reducing conflict and enhancing resource conditions. This ratio is also inconsistent with the Owyhee Resource Management Plan:

¹ <https://boisedev.com/2022/05/05/boise-population-2022-2/>

Recreation Management Objective RECT 5 (BLM 1999:39): “Develop a trail system that provides a range of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities for the public’s enjoyment of primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized, semi-primitive motorized, and roaded natural settings.

While members of the public will still be able walk or ride horses anywhere on public lands, quiet recreationists will be limited in their ability to access trails appropriate for their preferred form of recreation and will not be allowed to develop new trails:

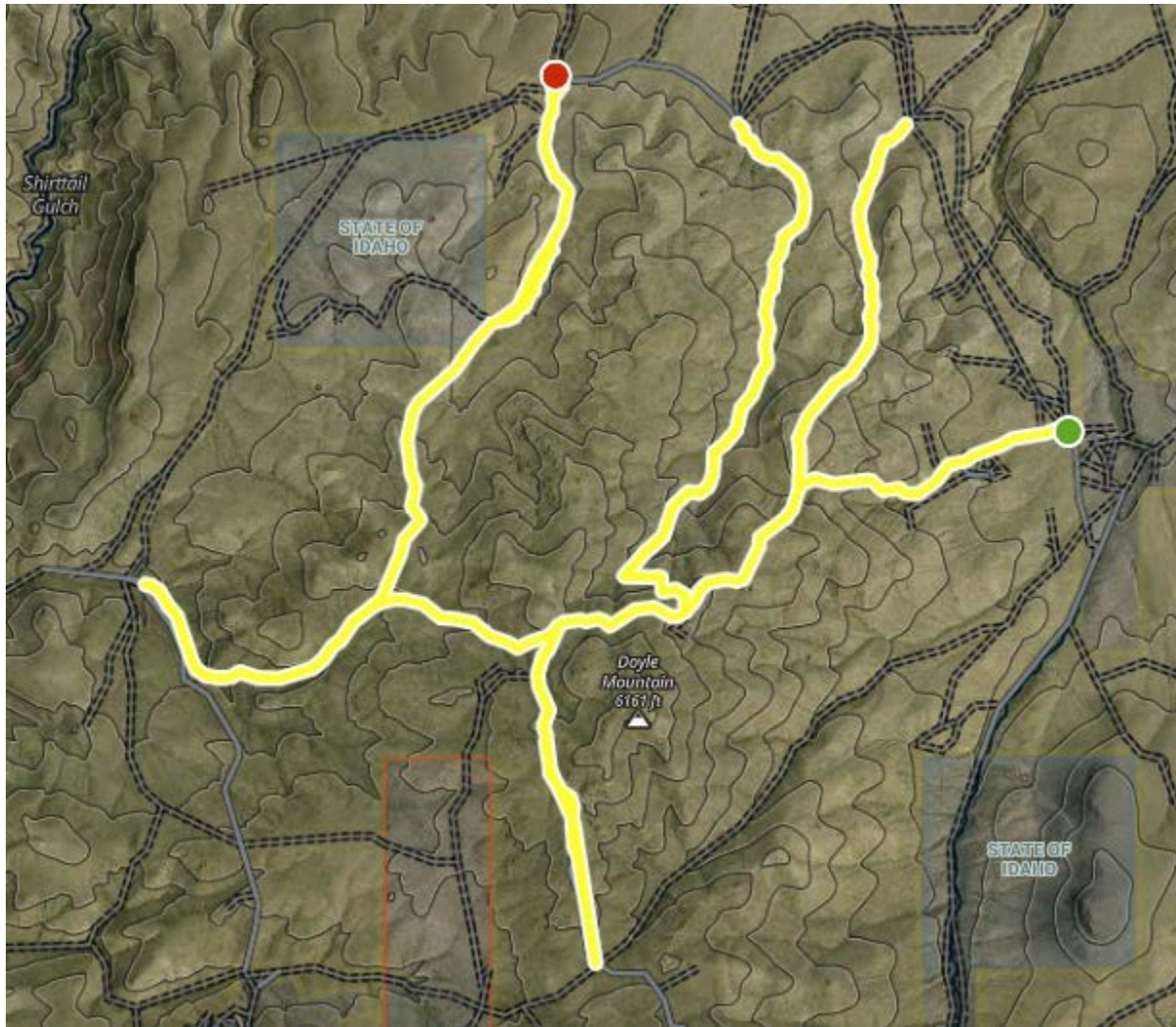
Regardless of travel route designations, visitors can travel by foot or horse anywhere on BLM managed lands within the TMP on routes or cross-country. However, trails created through repeat cross-country travel would be closed, not including domestic livestock use of livestock and wildlife created trails that are not considered routes. Grand View EA p. 9.

While recreating cross country through sagebrush is fine for some, many others prefer to travel on a trail at least part of the time. In the past, the BLM has said that recreationists seeking non-motorized, non-mechanized trails could travel on any of the closed routes on the BLM maps. However, ethical recreationists are unlikely to recreate on a trail that is officially described on the map as “closed” or “authorized use only” as these terms can be confusing. In addition, many of these closed routes are redundant user-created trails that are not preferable for non-motorized use, are closed due to resource issues, or are slated for restoration. Finally, BLM maps are no longer going to show the closed routes the BLM is directing these recreationists to go to. As motorized use continues to expand, non-mechanized recreationists are going to have fewer opportunities to experience their preferred form of recreation on their public lands.

Fortunately, there is already an **excellent network of routes in the Doyle Mountain area** that is well-suited for non-motorized, non-mechanized recreation. The BLM has already proposed designating a 1.7 mile long isolated section of non-motorized trail in the Doyle Mountain area under all alternatives (Route 37GV4165.100B). However, the BLM is considering designating the surrounding trails as single track motorized, for authorized use only, or closed. A solitary, 1.7-mile long non-motorized trail segment doesn’t create a compelling, high-quality experience when surrounded by either motorized, authorized or closed trails.

If the BLM were to designate the surrounding trail network as non-motorized and non-mechanized, however, these trails would make an excellent 13 mile-network of hiking and equestrian trails and a great destination for day hikers and backpackers who are wondering where to go in the Owyhees among all the motorized trails. We note that

the BLM recently designated 37 miles of trails in the NCA for hikers and equestrians instead of closing them outright.



Proposed Doyle Mountain non-motorized, non-mechanized trail network (these routes are closed under Alternative B or single track motorized under Alternatives C and D).

Note that this trail system is not a closed loop system but a network of spurs. This is because the trails on the perimeter (Route ID: 37GV4165 to the northeast, Route ID: 37GV4024 to the east, Route ID: GVX1265 to the west, and Route ID: 37GV4500 to the north) are either proposed open or authorized use, and have a surface that can accommodate OHV use. Motorized recreationists would still be able to utilize these perimeter trails and hikers and equestrians along these routes would expect to see motorized recreationists.

Access and parking to the Doyle Mountain Area

Access is provided coming from the Missile Base or Steiner Valley Road/Poison Creek Cutoff Roads, making navigation easier and lost vehicles less likely. The Magpie Creek/Pixley Basin Road/Doyle Mountain that leads to the trailheads is well-maintained and pull out parking areas can be found on BLM land.



Impressive views and intriguing rock formations on the summit of the 6,161' Doyle Mountain.

The Doyle Mountain Trails

Doyle Mountain is a wonderful, 6,161' tall, non-technical peak with impressive 360 degree views of the surrounding peaks and undeveloped valleys with intact sagebrush steppe habitat. The hike to the summit from the upper parking area along trail 37GV4165.100B and to the summit is two miles single track (one-way) with 1,000' elevation gain. The hike to the summit from the lower parking area is four miles (one way) of mostly single track with 2,000' elevation gain from trails GVX1229 and 37GV4165.100. This lower parking area should be usable during spring, depending on snow levels, while the upper one would be open in the late spring, summer and fall.



Pullouts on BLM land have sufficient room for parking and for horse trailers to turn around.

Pixley Basin Road to Doyle Mountain Summit (4 miles)

The lower route follows a motorized two track, 37GV4165, open under all alternatives, before turning on to a narrower route with one easy fence crossing. The route climbs up a draw as a single track and weaves between increasingly impressive rock outcrops and native vegetation.



Hikers navigate between impressive granite rock outcrops on the trail to Doyle Mountain (Trail GVX1229).



The trail to Doyle Mountain (Trail GVX1229) has outstanding views of the surrounding valley and Pixley Basin Road.

Unfortunately, Trail GVX1229 is also experiencing erosion issues from dirt bikes.



Braided motorized trails and erosion on Route GVX 1229.



Dirtbike tracks and gullies on Route GVX 1229



Gullying on 37GV4165.100, south of the junction with Route GVX 1229 from dirt bike tracks

Trail GVX1229 joins route 37GV4165.100 at a saddle and the trail climbs toward Doyle Mountain. Unfortunately, this trail has multiple sections that are experiencing erosion from multiple parallel dirt bike tracks that have turned into gullies.



Erosion from unsustainable motorized activities on Route 37GV4165.100 to Doyle Mountain.

As the ruts erode, they get deeper and deeper until they are no longer rideable and motorcyclists move to the side, repeating the process. There were several other sections of trails like this where the hillside, soil and slope are just too erosive for this type of activity. Designating these trail segments as “single track motorized” as proposed in Alternatives C and D does not meet the BLM’s minimization criteria. These and the other gully sections do not fit the definition of single track but are really open play areas which is not a valid category for this portion of the travel management plan. The BLM would be well-justified in closing these trails on this basis alone. These trails are very different from the nearby sand washes where erosion is usually not as much of an issue.



Close up of gully on Gully on 37GV4165.100, south of the junction with Route GVX 1229

As the trail levels out, there are no longer erosion issues and the single track trail is well-suited for travel by foot and horse. A developed spring at the end of spur GVX1292 can provide water for recreationists and packstock. There are also several flat areas that can serve as tent sites.



Route GVX1289 on the way to Doyle Mountain. A developed spring at the end of spur GVX1292 can provide water for recreationists and packstock.

At the junction of trails GVX1289 and 37GV4165.100B, there is a saddle with scenic views toward Pixley Basin. Recreationists can then hike cross-country through low vegetation and up a moderate slope to the summit of Doyle Mountain.



A track from a dirt bike hill climbing toward Doyle Mountain summit.

Some motorcyclists have driven cross-country and created a hill climbing trail towards the summit which could lead to future gullying. To date, the dirt bike trails stop short of the summit but more pioneering is likely, particularly if trail GVX1289 is left open to single track motorized as proposed in Alternatives C and D.



Looking west from the summit of Doyle Mountain toward War Eagle Mountain



Taking a rest at the summit of Doyle Mountain.

Doyle Mountain itself is a worthy destination, but by designating the connecting spur trails for non-motorized, non-mechanized recreation as well, the BLM can create a great day trip destination or weekend backpacking loop with multiple options. Because of the layout of the ridges and valleys, this trail system would also be a superb place to appreciate peace and quiet if these spurs were non-motorized and non-mechanized.

Reservation Gulch Trail (2.4 miles)

Continuing on GVX1289 from the saddle below Doyle Mountain, the trail ventures down Reservation Gulch which hosts healthy sage steppe vegetation and lots of mule deer sign in March.



Reservation Gulch (trail GXV1289) is isolated and could provide a secure area for wildlife and a peaceful valley for quiet recreationists.

Hogpen Gulch Trail (2.8 miles)

Hogpen Gulch, trail GVX1288, has impressive scenic views at the high point. The BLM has proposed either keeping this open for single track or closing it. This route would be an excellent non-motorized, non-mechanized spur.



Hogpen Gulch, trail GVX1288. This upper section has impressive scenic views but is experiencing erosion damage from dirt bikes.



Hogpen Gulch, trail GVX1288, showing parallel dirtbike tracks.



Significant gullying farther downslope along trail GVX1288 in Hogpen Gulch



Gullying farther downslope along Route ID: GVX1288, Hogpen Gulch

Lower Hogpen Gulch supports a two track open to motorized vehicles for livestock operations but the adjacent sand wash (Route ID: 37GV4500) still provides a sense of remoteness and solitude on the lower stretch, making a non-motorized, non-mechanized route down the Hogpen Gulch to the junction with Route ID: 37GV4500 a compelling trail addition.

Lower Birch Warm Springs Loop (7.5 miles)

A 1.2 mile long walk on the multiple use two track Route 37GV4500 (trail suitable for all vehicles) brings you to a developed spring (and water source) and the start of the Lower Birch Warm Springs loop (37GV4501, 37GV4165.100 and Route ID: GVX1199). A 3.3 mile long, 1,354' climb up this protected valley brings you back up toward Doyle Mountain. This single track trail is currently proposed as either authorized use only or open to all motorized but would be best suited as a non-motorized, non-mechanized recreational trail with administrative access for authorized motorized use.



View looking south toward Doyle Mountain from the Lower Birch Warm Springs Trail 37GV4501. Instead of this trail being designated as Open or Authorized Only, we recommend it be managed as a non-motorized, non-mechanized recreational trail with administrative access for authorized motorized use

The return route to Lower Birch Warm Springs goes down trail 37GV4165.100 which is a ridgeline trail and then a sand wash in the valley bottom, both of which have sections in need of restoration. A 1.3 mile walk along multiple use trail (Route ID: GVX1199) brings you back to Lower Birch Warm Springs.



The second half of the Lower Birch Warm Springs loop (37GV4165.100, north of the junction with Route GVX 1229) has sections with redundant trails.



The lower half of trail 37GV4165.100 features open country.



Bedrock outcrops along route 37GV4165.100 give the trail variety.



The bottom section of Route ID: 37GV4165.100 is mostly sand wash but steeper sections are experiencing erosion from dirt bikes and could benefit from trail stabilization work.

Trail partnerships

While the majority of all these trails are in good condition, each one of the trails described has at least one section with braided trails, severe gullying, or soil damage from dirt bike tracks. This damage seems to be related to the soil type and slope rather than riding style or route selection and would likely continue to persist as long as motorized use continues. There is no motorized route through any of these trails that can avoid these severely damaged areas or avoid contributing to the erosion, which makes it difficult for the BLM to designate these for motorized use and still meet the minimization criteria.

If these and other similar routes were instead restored and kept open to the public as non-motorized, non-mechanized, it would allow for the BLM to invest funding to restore the slopes, maintain the trail and encourage public partnerships for stewardship and future monitoring.

If the BLM converts these routes to non-motorized, non-mechanized trails, we believe that it would be possible to arrest the damage, restore these slopes over time and manage the recreational uses so it does not contribute to erosion. An official non-motorized, non-mechanized designation would also make it easier for quiet recreation and conservation partner organizations to bring resources to help restore and maintain these trails.

For example, installing check dams at regular intervals (intervals determined largely by slope and gully width) would immediately help slow runoff and therefore erosion. Soil would build up behind the dams and gully side slopes would begin to revegetate, allowing more soil accumulation and within the channels. Using hand tools to pull in gully side slopes, as well as native seed and scattering brush as ground cover over bare surfaces, would also help recovery. Annual monitoring to determine the need for additional check dams or ground cover after the first year would be ideal, until soil has stabilized.

Benefits of a Doyle Mountain non-motorized, non-mechanized trail network

All totalled, these routes could constitute a 15.4 mile network of non-motorized, non-mechanized recreational trails (building from the already proposed 1.7 miles). This network would still be at most only 6% of the total trail network in the Grand View Travel Management Area. This complex would give non-motorized, non-mechanized recreationists options for day trips or weekend outings and return visits. There are spring developments at both the northern and southern parts for water sources and also several flat locations for tent camping. The elevational range from 4,000 to 6,000 feet and multiple trailheads give recreationists both cool and warm weather options. The fact

that these spurs include both ridges and valley bottoms creates a natural soundscape for those who are seeking a unique quiet recreation opportunity.

These designations would not displace motorized uses from this general area. Motorized recreationists would still be able to utilize the perimeter roads and exterior trails. Branching off the perimeter route 37GV4500, there are six single track motorized trails located in sand washes that are far more suitable for single track motorized recreation.

Wildlife values

Numerous studies have shown that all forms of recreation can adversely affect wildlife if not properly managed. We support seasonal closures on these routes as needed to protect wildlife. OHV use, however, has certain additional elements, such as noise, that can interfere with wildlife behavior and communication. Managing a portion of an area for natural soundscapes can play an important role in protecting wildlife.

Other quiet recreation opportunities

We note that this 15.4 mile network would still be far short of the 37 miles of non-motorized routes the BLM designated in the 112,087-acre NCA (half the size of the Grand View Travel Planning area). The BLM should consider some additional non-motorized, non-mechanized routes nearby for a better overall balance with the other users. There is a lot of potential for another non-motorized, non-mechanized loop network just south in Pixley Basin using some routes currently in limbo: (GVX1291, GVX1338, GVX1327, GVX1329, GVX1326, and GVX1291).

Summary

Creating a small corner of the Grand View travel planning area and Owyhee County for quiet recreationists could help reduce user conflicts and create some quiet space for wildlife too. We know that all types of recreational activities are going to increase so having a specific place that hikers and equestrians could go to in the future could be helpful. For motorized enthusiasts, there are still hundreds of miles of trails in the surrounding area that don't have the same natural resource issues.

About our organizations

Since 1973, the Idaho Conservation League (ICL) has worked to protect Idaho's clean water, wilderness, and quality of life through citizen action, public education, and professional advocacy. As Idaho's largest statewide conservation organization, ICL represents over 25,000 supporters who have a deep personal interest in making sure that travel management plans are protective of water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and landscape integrity.

Idaho Trails Association (ITA) is a volunteer-based non-profit dedicated to the care and stewardship of Idaho's hiking trails. ITA's small staff and hundreds of volunteers clear and maintain trails across the state every year as well as offering education and outreach events aimed at getting more people outside to experience Idaho's incredible public trails.

Since 1935, The Wilderness Society (TWS) has led the effort to permanently protect nearly 112 million acres of wilderness in 44 states. We have been at the forefront of nearly every major public lands victory. Our mission is to unite people to protect America's wild places, and we have a presence on Capitol Hill and in communities across the nation, with regional offices in Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, California, Idaho, Maine, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Washington and Wyoming.

Idaho Rivers United is a nonprofit environmental advocacy organization that is dedicated to protecting and restoring the rivers and streams of Idaho. For over 30 years, IRU has been working to defend Wild and Scenic Rivers, recover native fish populations, reform hydropower policy, and promote enhanced water quality in all of Idaho's rivers. IRU represents 3,500 members throughout Idaho and beyond, who enjoy, depend on, and advocate for healthy, intact rivers.

Sincerely,

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