

Eldorado Canyon to Walker Ranch Connection Feasibility Study

Nov. 28 to Dec 9, 2018 Public Comment Period

Compendium of comments received by written correspondence

12/09/2018

I wanted to be sure these points which I posted to the comment section of the website are circulated. i'm not crazy about the connector idea, i think conflicts are inevitable given that all of the (viable) north options involve some combined use of the existing eldorado canyon trail between the state park and Walker. that trail is already incredibly busy esp on weekends. a related, and possibly more critical issue is the parking in the park. i volunteer there and see the parking fill up by 10 AM on summer weekends which effectively closes the park to additional visitors. finally i don't think the cost estimates are even close - who will pay for the over runs? this proposal came up over 10 yr ago when i was on the climbing committee in Eldorado and it was soundly defeated. it's puzzling to me why it has so much support now. the initial study, resulting in a 100+ page pdf complete with extensive land surveys and maps, must have cost at least \$10,000! wish we could follow that money!

12/08/2018

I want to make a few more points before the deadline (the survey won't let me add them since I already commented).

- The view and possible noise factor (whoo hoo) from the beloved Rattlesnake Trail may be altered.
 - The intensive use and high erosion potential here will be a trail building and maintenance taxpayer burden for a single user group.
 - Impossible management and enforcement issues for remote unauthorized, trail building (a longtime habit of bikers in this area, i.e. "The Angry Ranger Trail" on Flagstaff and many trail systems on National Forest) will degrade resources. These may be used by motorized ebikes and dirt bikes as is occurring all over the County.
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12/06/2018

Thank you for the thorough and thoughtful study of adding a mountain bike connection between Eldorado Springs and Walker Ranch.

However, I must object to moving ahead without first fixing the road and the parking situation in Eldorado Springs.

A committee of residents studied at length a set of upgrades to the road that would have also improved the parking, eliminated dust, and reduced speeds thru the town. At that time the State Park and the County were intending to fund the upgrade with \$200,000. Unfortunately, the State and County were unable to reach agreement with Eldorado Springs Water company, the owner of the 1/3 mile of dirt road.

Currently the town's residents endure the dust, potholes and health impacts of an unimproved dirt road that lacks provisions for proper drainage and that is extremely heavily trafficked.

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Note that the current use of the road includes >200,000 visitors per year to the state park, >40,000 users per year to the private pool, 4 to 5 water trucks (18 wheelers that are > 80,000 pounds when loaded) per day for the operation of the water company. The resulting dust and road damage impacts significantly the lives of the residents of the town. Furthermore, uncontrolled parking during peak usage frequently results in occlusion of emergency vehicle traffic.

If the road is upgraded and parking improved, the addition of new recreational uses makes perfect sense. This is an ideal location for those in or near Boulder and Denver to recreate.

Unfortunately, without attention to the road and parking in Eldorado Springs new uses will bring more vehicles into an already overstressed area and will further degrade the quality of life, and health conditions for the residents of the town.

12/05/2018

First, thank you for your efforts and thanks for considering the comments below. I filled out the questionnaire but too quickly and briefly, while not addressing some important issues. I'd like to add the following under "Additional Comments" as an "email comment", anonymously, of course. I will next send separate comments specifically about the issue of commercialization, which should stand apart and alone from all other sorts of issues.

I live in rural Boulder Co.

I favor the "Do Nothing" option. Any new trails would diminish public safety and damage sensitive environments.

New trails for a single-use group -- mountain biking -- will negatively impact visitor enjoyment of relatively quiet experience for hikers and equestrians. There would be substantial and worrisome safety risks to pedestrians and equestrians with the addition of mountain biking.

Any new trails should not be constructed in the southern part of the study area for the many and valid reasons identified in the feasibility study. Good job on that part of the analysis.

Any trail building inevitably results in disturbing soil leading to introduction of undesirable invasive plants. In the feasibility study, I do not see any meaningful or adequate attention to this serious problem with respect to monitoring, or remediation, of the inevitable and predictable damage caused by invasive plants.

Expenses of trail-construction and maintenance are enormous. Surely there must be better uses for limited budgets than to serve just one special interest. Considering, in addition, all of the environmental costs and impacts on neighborhoods, I find that this mountain biking plan is fiscally irresponsible.

There should be no bike access to the State Park on the Fowler Trail. I am informed by State Park personnel that this option is off-the-table permanently.

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Please consider the deleterious impacts of attracting yet more users to the area that cannot accommodate more traffic, more dust, and more disruption to the tiny community of Eldorado Springs. Residents of the valley just east of the village will also be impacted by parking overflow. Such overflow parking is already causing hazardous conditions along Eldorado Springs Drive and Prado Drive during busy days.

12/05/2018

And again, many thanks for your efforts and for considering the comments below that are intended for "Additional Comments" as an "email comment", anonymously, of course.

I live in rural Boulder Co.

The issue of commercialization.

Many commercial mountain biking outfits use Boulder City and Boulder County open space lands. Some are local, some regional, and some out-of-state.

I recently encountered a commercial outfit loading trails (Doudy Draw / Spring Brook trails) with 80 riders at one time, out-of-compliance with City regulations. This activity is about making as much money as possible, with clear disregard for passive users and environmental degradation, not to mention damage to our trails, which provide for their profits.

I have observed out-of-state, multi-day commercial tour groups using OSMP trails for a few hours and then disappearing. (Do all such groups have commercial permits and pay fees? How would we know?)

Any connector (Eldo-Walker Ranch) trail built for mountain bikers will, of course, provide a well-advertised route to/from Winter Park. Such a connection would obviously attract ever more commercial outfits and their numerous riders in bunches, thereby exacerbating the overload on the trails and posing ever greater risks for passive users.

Please consider limiting or forbidding commercial activities on any new Eldo-Walker trail.

What are the plans to handle commercialization, including fee structure?

11/30/2018

If the north option is selected, I would request to preserve as much of the old trail everywhere there is a reroute as possible, to allow some space that is hiker only/to reduce user conflict.

In the proposal, the Visitor Experience section seems to undervalue the strengths the south option has but the north does not: expanded trail capacity for the already congested Front Range trail systems; a new loop option for hikers and runners, prior public enthusiasm for the south option, and preserving a hiker [and equestrian] only trail (ie, the north trail). Also, the south option ends at a trail head, providing easy access from both ends, in part mitigating the concern with exacerbating parking conditions at Eldorado Canyon State Park. The north option is not as easily accessible at the Walker end- at the bottom of a steep

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hill from the Ethel Harrold trailhead, and at the bottom of the stairs from the Crescent Meadows side. For mountain bikers, entering the Walker Ranch trails at Crescent Meadows offers a better choice of out and back riding options if you are not completing the Walker loop, or if you are using the new trail as an access point to Gross Dam Rd and other mountain roads like 68J (avoiding highway 72/Coal Creek Canyon; avoiding Flagstaff Rd).

11/28/2018

Volunteer Naturalists have been studying butterflies, and plants in the Walker Loop Trail for several years. We have evidence of the importance of this critical habitat of the South Trail. I attach the 2018 findings. These were written by Daniel Fosco. These are critical reasons for support of the North Trail.

11/28/2018

I have looked at your website and I don't see where either the north or south proposal has any plan for the increased traffic and parking problems these proposals will create. I don't think either of these plans should be approved without a complete study and plan for **all** aspects. The omission of any plan for parking is rather a large oversight and should be included before any decisions are made.

Basically, there is nowhere for the increase in traffic to go. Also, how is an already overcrowded area supposed to accommodate these extra users?

Boulder County Audubon Society



December 9, 2018

To: OSMP, CPW, and BCPOS Land Managers

Subject: Eldorado Springs–Walker Ranch Trail Proposal

The Boulder County Audubon Society thanks you for your careful consideration of the North vs. South alternatives for routing the trail, and for your initial decision to rule out the South option. That option would have unacceptably fragmented existing habitat blocks, as well as having other deleterious effects.

Overall Plan

The remainder of this letter concentrates on specific issues concerning the design and management of the proposed north alternative.

The Feasibility Study needs to be comprehensive, not limited to trail alignment.

BCAS urges all three agencies to seriously consider the overall desirability of and impacts that would result from the plan. If it is constructed, there will be vastly increased usage of already badly overextended recreational resources, particularly in Eldorado Canyon State Park, and residents of the town of Eldorado Springs and surrounding neighborhoods will be adversely affected. Illegal parking along the state highway and on Prado drive already reaches levels that are completely unacceptable and that endanger public safety during popular seasons, especially on weekends.

Therefore, all three agencies, as part of the trail study need to develop management plans for handling increased use and for dealing with parking problems, conflicts between user groups, and impacts on residents. Failing to develop such plans and present them for public review would be completely irresponsible.

Since the current parking situation is already out of control, it would seem that dealing with illegal parking along SH 93 and Prado Drive be undertaken before the planning proceeds, demonstrating to the citizens both the agencies' capability and intent to deal with the problem *before* making it worse. Therefore, coordinating with law enforcement agencies is critical. The idea of a shuttle bus is a good one, but it needs actual analysis, including budget.

It should be noted that most of the Feasibility Study is justified on the basis of regional trail connections. This is somewhat problematic, since the likely use will be not to connect existing trails, but to bring a whole new set of users to a trailhead/park that is already overwhelmed on many days of the year, displacing many current users, such as family picnickers at Eldorado Canyon State Park and trail users at OSMP's trailheads on Eldorado Canyon Drive.

OSMP Habitat Conservation Area

BCAS's greatest concern with the Feasibility Study is its blasé treatment of the Western Mountain Parks Habitat Conservation Area, largely ignoring the purposes and long-established policies for managing HCAs. Here are the HCA characteristics and management goals (Visitor Master Plan, pp. 49-50):

Characteristics

- Tend to be located in more remote areas.
- Typically represent the largest blocks of an ecosystem type with few, if any, trails or roads.
- Lower level of visitor use; no or few trails and trailheads.
- Naturally functioning ecosystems (but may contain areas with evidence of human use and impacts).

Goals

- Maintain, enhance, and/or restore naturally functioning ecological systems.
- Maintain, enhance, and restore habitat for species of concern identified in the Boulder County and the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plans.
- Provide public access and passive recreational opportunities that foster appreciation and understanding of ecological systems and have minimal impacts on native plant communities and wildlife habitats or other resources.
- Eliminate all undesignated trails, unless they are made part of the designated trails system or provide specialized access to appropriate low-use destinations.
- Where sustainable infrastructure exists, continue to allow public access to appropriate destinations.

The trails envisioned in the Feasibility Study fly in the face of HCA purposes and policies. They would add a new visitor group and a great deal of visitor conflict.

It appears that trail construction and increased numbers and types of visitors would contribute to fragmentation of the HCA, particularly segment N4. Nothing in the feasibility study seriously addresses this issue. Nor is there any consideration of whether the buffer zone for the Golden Eagle nest needs to be enlarged in light of increased use and extensive construction activity.

Visitor Conflict

The treatment of visitor conflict is misleading and wholly inadequate, using cherry-picked statistics (only 2% of all visitors experience pedestrian-bicycle conflict). The visitor surveys pick up some of the conflicts, but ignore many of them. Nobody was asked, "Have you abandoned trails you previously used because they were opened to bicycles?" In fact, several of the trails at the southern end of the OSMP system have been largely abandoned by hikers since they were opened to bikes. On page 73 of the study, you state, "Initial impacts associated with change of management would likely level over time, as

visitors become accustomed to new use patterns.” Much of that levelling would occur because users would find other places to hike or commune with nature.

Reducing conflict by driving open space users away is illegitimate in our view.

Conclusion

We would suggest that this Feasibility Study is honing in on details of trail routing without ever looking at the big picture, and that it is not receiving adequate public input. Most people are simply unaware of it. Even those who are well aware of open space issues are concentrating on the Master Plan and don't know much about the Eldo-Walker discussion. This neglect is likely to produce a backlash in the long run, and we suggest some rethinking.

Best regards,

Raymond Bridge, Conservation Chair, Boulder County Audubon Society



09 Dec 2018

To: Boulder County Commissioners
Boulder City Council
Boulder County Parks & Open Space Advisory Committee
Boulder Open Space Board of Trustees
Eric Lane, BCPOS
Dan Burke, OSMP
John Carson, Manager, ECSP
Madeleine West, DNR
Marni Ratzel, BCPOS
Kacey French, OSMP
Jeff Moline, BCPOS
Matt Jones, Commissioner-elect
Luis Benitez, SOC Outdoor Industry
Jared Polis, Governor-elect

BMA is pleased to have a trail connecting Eldorado State Park and Walker Ranch take a great step forward. This not only creates a great riding opportunity from the Boulder to Walker Ranch, but connects the towns of Boulder, Nederland and Winter Park with the last missing link for the multi-use regional trail, the [Indian Peaks Traverse](#). This connector has been an ongoing priority for BMA since 1999 and we appreciate the effort required to coordinate the staffs of three agencies to reach a recommendation. For this, the staff members participating in this effort deserve our heartfelt thanks!

While we still maintain that the southern route creates a better user experience due to the ability to avoid an out-and-back trail in the ever crowding Front Range, create a great loop trail for runners and hikers, separate hiking and biking traffic and generally put more miles on the ground, we acknowledge staff's research that the northern route has less environmental impact and are supportive of the northern route as a great addition to the multi-use trails of Boulder County.

One recommendation we'd like to see considered as we move ahead with the northern route is to avoid dropping users all the way back down to the bottom of Walker Ranch at South Boulder Creek and instead examine options that connect in the direction of the Ethel Harrold Trailhead. This opens the trail use to a broader spectrum of riders due to decreased elevation change in the final connection to Walker Ranch and makes a more feasibly regional connection for a broader segment of users (not just riders) trying to make their way to Nederland and Winter Park.

Additionally, we encourage staff to keep the elevation grades friendly towards bikes, avoiding hike-a-bikes. Decisions like proposing N4 over N3 options are a great example of this and we'd like that to be extended to all trail alignments.

We also want to consider the ways the parking impacts can be minimized on the state park and the town of Eldorado Springs by focusing on creating a connection from OSMP lands that is so enjoyable that users prefer to ride into the park vs drive, regardless of if they intend to continue on towards Walker Ranch. This is currently possible leveraging Fowler and Goshawk Ridge trails and possibly the creation of the streamside trail running East/West through the park. While these items were not in scope of the feasibility study, we believe they need to be considered while the focus is on this area so we can solve problems now while create a better system wide experience.

Once again, thank you for your effort to date and we look forward to continuing to work together to make this happen!

Boulder Mountainbike Alliance

12/08/2018

Subject: BCNA Comments on the Eldorado Canyon to Walker Ranch Connection Feasibility Study

Boulder County Nature Association (BCNA) appreciates all the work and professionalism OSMP, BCPOS and CPW have put into the Eldorado Canyon to Walker Ranch Connection Feasibility Study, including an effective website and public participation program. BCNA also thanks you for the opportunity to participate in the review process and submit comments. Like you, BCNA believes a process that addresses all stakeholder comments and concerns results in a more acceptable and defensible decision. Below are the BCNA comments on the study as it stands now, recognizing that it is still a work in progress and your analysis is not yet completed.

Ridership and the No Action Alternative

Projected ridership is critical to the validity of this study. If projected demand is high, costs may be justified. However, if projected ridership is low, costs may not be justified, and the no-action alternative may become the preferred alternative. Therefore, BCNA requests that the feasibility study demonstrates and documents that the methodology used to project demand is valid for this specific study, and the parameters and data used are representative of the study area.

In addition, BCNA requests the agencies to demonstrate and documents that the cost-benefit analysis for each of the three alternatives is comprehensive and addresses all costs, including construction, operations and maintenance, environmental and social. Stakeholders need to understand how each alternative ranked in terms of costs and benefits.

Preferred Route

If the projected ridership and benefits are great enough to justify costs, BCNA supports the North Route over the South Route. It also believes the N3 segment should be closed. In addition, we ask that the final design lays out a route that minimizes ecological impacts, including those related to habitat fragmentation. We prefer as direct a route as possible that ensures rider safety and minimizes trail erosion, while minimizing switchbacks.

However, several BCNA members also are concerned about impacts on trail hikers. Some see mountain biking and hiking as incompatible uses, and risks to hikers as unacceptable. Dodging speeding bicycles can result in injury, especially if bicycles are not detected by hikers until the bicycles are upon them. Therefore, BCNA requests that the study address impacts on hikers and various potential mitigation measures to avoid or, at least, minimize impacts. In addition, we request the agencies to track the various uses, including determining whether hiking declines due to bicycle traffic. Furthermore, the agencies should make it easy for users to submit complaints, as well as accident and near-miss reports.

Mitigation Measures for Eldorado State Park and Eldorado Springs

Some BCNA members are fearful that riders will have a significant impact on the State Park and the community – that riders will drive through the community to the park, increase local traffic congestion, overwhelm the parking area(s), and create overcrowded conditions. Therefore, BCNA requests that the study clearly states ridership assumptions about all trail access points associated with the preferred alternative (i.e., how riders will access the trail) and what the related impacts will be. If a significant percentage of riders are expected to access the trail via the State Park or other sensitive areas, BCNA requests that the study lists cost-effective mitigation measures that will be used to address each impact.

If mitigation measures can not sufficiently reduce impacts on the Park, the community, and other sensitive areas to the satisfaction of impacted stakeholders, BCNA would support the no-action alternative, especially if projected ridership is low and adverse impacts outweigh benefits.

BCNA looks forward to seeing your responses to public comments and refinements to the feasibility study and its recommendation.

Sincerely,

Gerry Kelly
Chair, Issues and Conservation Committee
Boulder County Nature Association

Eldorado Springs Community Association (ESCA)

November 28, 2018: ESCA Members Against Proposal for Mountain Bike Connection Through Eldorado Springs/State Park to Walker Ranch

(This letter represents the viewpoint of perhaps a majority of attendees [but not all] at the two recent ESCA meetings where this was discussed.)

We, the undersigned, are residents of Eldorado Springs. We are against the recommended re-building of the Eldorado Canyon Trail to create a mountain bike connection to Walker Ranch. Many of us have lived here a long time and have long enjoyed climbing or hiking in Eldorado Canyon State Park. The main issues with the proposed mountain bike trail connection (that we see) include a severe lack of adequate parking for the existing Park users (much less for a large category of new Park users), a real concern about pedestrian safety, and the loss of a pretty good hiking trail that is already heavily used. **The recommended alternative admits some of these deficits without addressing how to deal with them.**

Congestion and Parking: For some years, on weekends with good weather, from March through October, traffic backs up on the east side of the entrance booth in the State Park, often snaking much of the way through the town of Eldorado Springs. Part of this is due to a lack of adequate parking in the State Park to accommodate all of those wishing to visit—with the Park frequently filling up. (The Park also fills up on many Fridays.) Especially in the summer, many Park users will give up on waiting in this queue and park in the town of Eldorado Springs—taking up both resident and pool parking. (None of the parking in Eldorado Springs is public.) The combination of the queue of cars and this illegal parking mean that many residents cannot park at their houses during the day on weekends (if they leave their houses and return). So, adding in a significant set of new Park users will obviously make things worse and will partly displace legal parking spots in the Park for the existing picnickers, climbers and hikers.

We believe that the number of mountain bikers wanting to use one of the proposed new trail connections will be significant because it is so much easier to drive to Eldorado Canyon State Park from Golden or Boulder than to the existing trailheads at Walker Ranch. In fact, this is likely the very reason for the strong push to make this new mountain bike trail connection.

It is worth pointing out that mountain bikers will probably be much more prone to parking in the town of Eldorado Springs (without permission on private land) than other Park users because riding an extra quarter or half mile is relatively easy on a bicycle (as opposed to walking).

Pedestrian Safety: Many or most of us own some sort of bicycle and have ridden east down Eldorado Springs Drive through the Park and or through town. It is downhill, and one tends to go relatively fast especially on a mountain bike. Both the Park and the town of Eldorado Springs also have a large of pedestrians especially at times when the Park is busy. **So, it seems likely that with lots of additional mountain bikers, there will be several accidents involving mountain bikers running into pedestrians or dogs.** (The same can be said on the proposed “multi-use” trail.) The proposed plans do not include funds for any extra enforcement either on the trail or on the road through town.

Loss of a Trail: Every heavily-used “multi-use” bicycle/hiking trail in the area favors mountain bikes over pedestrians because it is harder for the mountain bikers to stop or get off their bikes to go around pedestrians. So, regardless of any actual rules, pedestrians and dogs almost always have to yield to mountain bikes. If the multi-use trails are heavily used, then dogs typically aren't allowed. This means that pedestrians (and especially those with dogs) sometimes avoid walking on heavily-used multi-use trails.

Solutions like allowing odd/even days for hiking and biking won't work well at all here because these trails are already so heavily used by pedestrians. This is unlike Centennial Cone where the trail was essentially developed for mountain bikes but has also been managed for hikers. Telling climbers in Eldorado Canyon that their climbing access is closed on some days or telling picnickers that they can't stroll up the premier trail in Eldorado Canyon State Park on some days is a non-starter.

Eldorado Canyon State Park is perhaps the most heavily used state park in Colorado for hiking. This is remarkable given that Eldorado Canyon only has three relatively-short trails: the Fowler Trail, the Rattlesnake Gulch Trail, and the Eldorado Canyon Trail. **With the proposed mountain bike trail connection, the Eldorado Canyon Trail will be lost to those who would walk (perhaps lost in thought) without fear of getting run over.** This travesty is merely to allow creating a *connecting* trail to Walker Ranch and will affect all of the existing Park users who hike on the existing trails (since the trails not opened to mountain bikes will be ever more crowded with pedestrians). Further, the temptation to poach rides down the Fowler Trail will be very high for some mountain bikers—displacing the pedestrians there, too. This is already a minor problem which would become much worse if this trail connection were opened. (The State Park will not be given any additional funds for staff to prevent this.)

In the summary of “Visitor Experience Findings,” it was found that “Trail Aesthetic and Character” was overall a strong plus. While that might be true for mountain bikers on the Eldorado Canyon Trail, it will not be true for existing users who will find degradation in this area (compared to how the trail is now)—partly due to having to get out of the way some of the time for mountain bikes and partly due to a much wider, more road-like graded trail. The finding of “minor impact on visitor conflict” appears rather naïve unless/until hikers somewhat abandon the trail to mountain bikes. **Think about the streams of families with small kids and dogs on leash hiking up and down the Eldorado Canyon Trail on summer weekends for the last several years—and try to reconcile that with mountain bikes flying down the trail. No mountain bike/hiking trail in the front range has both {lots of families with small kids (and dogs)} and {mountain bikes descending quickly (or ascending slowly but still faster than pedestrians)}.**

Other Options: Many of us feel that an additional mountain bike trail in the general area might be nice. However, it simply doesn't work to create a new connection involving having mountain bikers drive up the road through Eldorado Springs and into the State Park (as proposed). That said, perhaps a new route that doesn't include the Walker Ranch or Rattlesnake Gulch Trails could be devised that could spur off of the existing Dowdy Draw mountain bike trail network—and go around Eldorado Mountain to the south of what has been suggested.

Sincerely,

Kurt Aronow
Cathy Proenza
Kathleen Folz
Thomas Quay Williams
Alan Brown
Eric Sween
Marion Zimmerman
Joe Janicke
Bay Roberts
Tod J Smith
Jerilyn DeCoteau

(And several others who voiced support in recent ESCA meetings)

Nov. 5, 2018

Hello members of POSAC!

I'm happy to have an opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Jason Vogel and I am the president of a newly formed 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation called the Indian Peaks Traverse Coalition. We are a grass roots group of hikers, trail runners, backpackers, conservationists, mountain bikers, and others committed to a vision of connecting Boulder to Winter Park with a non-motorized, back country trail which we call the Indian Peaks Traverse (IPT). We intend to provide near- and long-term support to the many land management agencies whose involvement will be necessary to make the IPT a reality. Check out our website for more info: <http://indianpeakstraverse.org/>

The current Eldorado Canyon to Walker Ranch Connection Feasibility Study that Boulder County Parks and Open Space is participating in represents the final missing link of this trail that we still need permission for (there are still many sections that need to be built!). My colleague Allyn Feinberg and I have done some extensive critical thinking about this important trail opportunity and published an article in the Boulder-based news blog *The Blue Line* outlining some crucial issues that staff and the hired consultants need to address to make a good recommendation about where to align this trail.

I hope you will take the time to read this article and provide some feedback to us and to staff to make sure that we give this unique opportunity the attention it deserves.

<http://www.boulderblueline.org/2018/10/24/next-steps-for-developing-a-trail-from-eldorado-canyon-state-park-to-walker-ranch/>

With warm regards,

Jason Vogel
President
Indian Peaks Traverse Coalition
303-525-0832