



CUCHARA MOUNTAIN PARK Master Plan

Acknowledgements

This master plan is a result of a collaboration of the following groups:

HUERFANO COUNTY

Gerald Cisneros, Commissioner

Max Vezzani, Commissioner

Ray Garcia, Commissioner

John Galusha, Administrator

CUCHARA MOUNTAIN PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Sue Alt

Bob Jacobs

Lois Adams

Jim Littlefield

Bob Bennhoff

Mike Moore

Bill Coppola

Deb Nott

Mike Fleener

SE GROUP

Claire Humber, Director of Resort Planning & Design

Mark Kane, Director of Community Planning & Design

Pete Williams, Senior Associate

Jason Hoover, Senior Associate

Gabby Voeller, Associate

Liz Grades, Staff

Ellie Wachtel, Staff

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Contents

1 Introduction..... 5

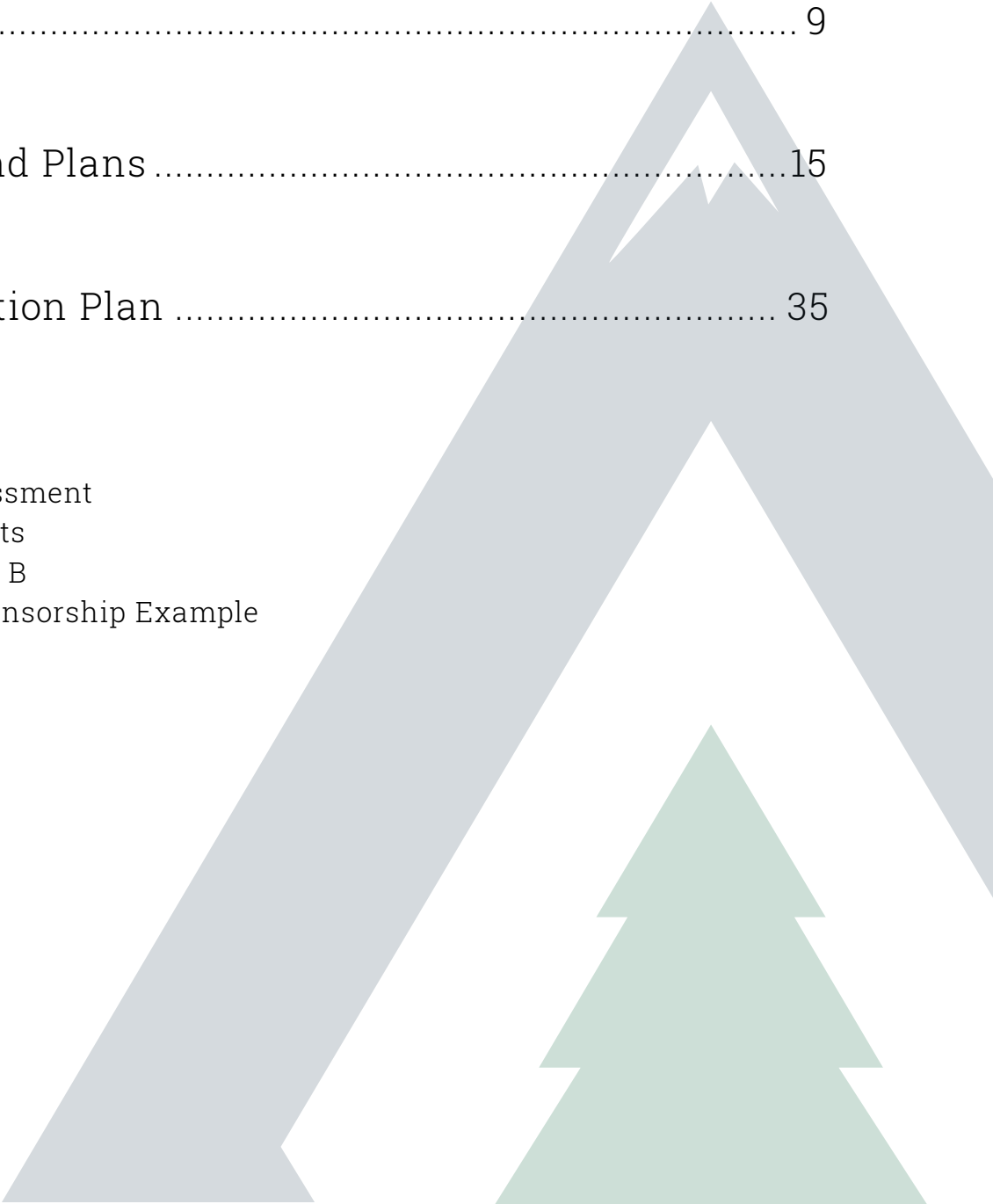
2 Process..... 9

3 Activities and Plans 15

4 Implementation Plan 35

Appendices

- I. Market Assessment
- II. Survey Results
- III. Concepts A & B
- IV. Business Sponsorship Example



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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction





Introduction

Cuchara Mountain Park is a new county-owned recreation facility located in the Spanish Peaks of Huerfano County. In 2017, the Cuchara Foundation provided Huerfano County the money to purchase 47 acres at the base of the former Cuchara Mountain Resort for use as a public mountain park. Efforts began immediately to refurbish existing structures and build a new trail on the property. Looking towards the future, this master plan lays out a long-term vision for the park. This plan envisions the park revived with outdoor activities, programs, and events for both residents and visitors. The community's mission and goals, developed through a public process, guided this vision and the recommendations, financial analysis, and priorities that will bring about its implementation.

MISSION

The Cuchara Mountain Park, as created by Huerfano County, is an environmentally friendly destination for year-round recreation, education, and cultural programs in harmony with nature.

GOALS

- Offer residents and visitors a place to recreate, gather, and connect with nature
- Attract tourists be self-sustaining, and provide economic benefits to Huerfano County
- Provide a pleasant venue for music, arts, and cultural events and programs
- Increase access to and use of the San Isabel National Forest through partnerships with the Forest Service
- Offer outdoor experiences that are accessible to all
- Offer eco-friendly facilities and activities



LOCATION MAP



LOCATION

The park, at the former Cuchara Mountain Resort, is in southwestern Huerfano County. The park is located a mile up Panadero Avenue from State Highway 12. State Highway 12 is a Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway known as the Highway of Legends. The village of Cuchara, a small historic commercial center with bed and breakfasts, shops, and restaurants, is three miles north of the park on State Highway 12. Cuchara has a small year-round population but is a popular summer destination with multi-generational cabins and people staying in the area for many weeks. Cuchara is 11 miles from La Veta, a larger town with a thriving art scene, many retirees, and heavy summer visitation. Walsenburg, the county seat, is 27 miles from Cuchara, and has a younger, largely working class and year-round population. Walsenburg is located on I-25; 50 miles south of Pueblo, 92 miles south of Colorado Springs, and 163 miles south of Denver.





HISTORY

The ski area, then known as Panadero Resort, first opened for the 1981/1982 season. It operated on and off for the next two decades under many different owners. The resort had five lifts, snowmaking on the entire mountain, and averaged 22,000 visitors annually. A ski area Special Use Permit (SUP) allowed the resort operate on surrounding National Forest System (NFS) land. The ski area last operated in the 1999/2000 season. In 2002, the Forest Service terminated the ski area’s SUP, based on the limited snowfall and the ski area’s inability to draw enough visitors to be financially viable. The NFS land remained open to public use but the lower area, the base of the ski area became private property closed to the public. In 2017, the Cuchara Foundation raised and donated \$150,000 for Huerfano County to purchase 47 privately-held acres at the base for use by all Huerfano residents as a county-owned park. The Foundation remains involved in the park and led efforts in summer 2017 to rehabilitate the day lodge building and construct a hiking and cross country ski trail on the property.

PLAN PURPOSE & ORGANIZATION

This master plan is a long-range strategic plan to create an accessible and enjoyable year-round hub for recreation, education, entertainment, and social events that is financially responsible and ecologically friendly.

The planning process considered the area’s existing demographics, tourism, and recreational opportunities to determine the programming best suited for the site. Studies of other ski areas, the history of skiing at Cuchara, industry trends, and financial estimates guided an analysis of possible ski operations at the resort.

The plan shows a park that is well-suited to the natural environment and surrounding community. It includes recommendations for facilities and associated activities, programs, and events, and estimated costs and potential revenue for each. A priority phasing plan offers a strategy for progressing the park goals.





CHAPTER TWO

Process



Process

The Community Vision Plan for Cuchara Mountain Park (see Chapter Three) was the result of a robust public engagement process and an analysis of the market and the site itself. The public engagement process involved both residents and visitors in the planning of the park. The market assessment explored area demographics, existing recreational opportunities, and industry trends. The site analysis considered the physical condition of the parks. To guide the plan’s implementation, the planning team conducted an analysis of potential ski area operations and costs and revenues (see Chapter Four). This plan is a high-level analysis and strategy; it is up to the committee to carry it through and conduct more detailed planning and analysis as necessary.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Cuchara Mountain Park planning process was driven by area residents and visitors’ vision for the park. This was discussed through stakeholder discussions, a survey, and two open houses.

Stakeholder discussions were held on February 26th at the La Veta Community Center. 56 people attended these small group discussion sessions, representing the local tourism and real estate industries, Huerfano County government, the

arts community, outdoor recreation groups, and the residents around the park. The stakeholders discussed existing recreational opportunities in the county, a vision for the park, and ideas for activities, events, facilities, and programs. Other focus groups were held in Walsenburg with students and leaders of the Sangre De Cristo Center for Youth and with La Veta School District teachers and administrators.



ONLINE SURVEY

Cuchara Mountain Park Survey

Vision

7. What word or phrase best describes your EXISTING experience with Cuchara Mountain Park?

8. What word or phrase best describes your DESIRED FUTURE experience with Cuchara Mountain Park?

Back Next

20%

Immediately after those discussions, a survey was launched to gather feedback on a vision and specific activities, programs, events, and facilities. The survey was available online and as a hard copy at local libraries. Nearly 700 people viewed the survey online with 481 complete responses. Approximately 2/3 of respondents listed their primary residence as outside the county and 83% had visited the park before. See a summary of survey results in Appendix II.

The survey results guided the development of two draft Community Vision Plans for future layouts of the park (see Appendix III). These plans were shown to the community at an open house at the La Veta Library on April 24th. 40+ people attended to offer feedback on the plans and the draft mission statement and goals. The plans were also posted online for those who could not attend the open house.



A final open house was held on September 2nd at the park to share the plan with the community, celebrate the park, and gather any last comments.

The Cuchara Mountain Park Advisory Committee (CMPAC) met throughout the process to provide their input and ideas and discuss the implementation of the plan. Two of three County Commissioners actively participated on the committee.



MARKET ASSESSEMENT

The planning team prepared a market assessment to provide perspective on the potential for Cuchara Mountain Park as a viable winter and summer recreation area. The assessment looked at demographics, tourism statistics, and outdoor recreation participation to understand the size and characteristics of the market. A regional competitive analysis considered trends in the ski and outdoor recreation industries, existing recreational opportunities and attractions in the area, and comparable nearby winter and summer destinations. See Appendix I for the full report.

Key Findings

- » The year-round population of Huerfano County is small (6,521) but does grow significantly in the summer months, especially around Cuchara. Over half of the homes in the Cuchara and La Veta zip code are second homes, primarily used during the summer months.
 - » Second homeowners typically visit with large family groups interested in recreational activities, programs, and events. Their incomes tend to be higher than the Huerfano County average. **Exploring options to embrace the seasonal boom of second home visitors and seasonal residents would be advantageous for Cuchara.**
 - » Visitors come to the area for the natural beauty, arts, the scenic Highway of Legends, small-town charm, and outdoor recreation. **Summer activities at Cuchara Mountain Park could encourage visitors to stop or extend their trips, spending money in the county.**
 - » The area’s winter visitation is low and many businesses close for the winter. The county’s small population would make it more difficult to generate revenue at the park in the winter. **Long-term, winter activities at the park could bring new visitors, encourage second homeowners to visit during the winter, and support a year-round economy.**
- » The county’s year-round population is older (median age 54.5), especially compared to the state as a whole (median age 36.3). The county residents have lower incomes than the state average, with a median household income of \$33,257, compared to \$62,520 statewide.
 - » Nationally, participants in outdoor recreation tend to have higher incomes and are younger than Huerfano County residents. **Cuchara Mountain Park could offer accessible and affordable activities to match the county demographics and encourage under-represented groups to partake in outdoor recreation.**
- » Existing summer recreation opportunities in the county include lake-based activities and golfing at Lathrop State Park; hiking, fishing, and camping in the San Isabel National Forest; the Walsenburg Wild Waters water park; and horseback trail rides. **Activities at Cuchara Mountain Park should complement rather than compete with the existing opportunities.**
- » Monarch Mountain and Wolf Creek are small, successful Colorado ski areas with significant and consistent snowfall. Their adjacent towns, Salida and Pagosa Springs, have strong local skier bases, amenities for destination visitors, and strong summer tourism. The ski areas, in turn, provide winter tourism to keep local businesses open year-round. **Monarch and Wolf Creek are slight competition, but primary models for Cuchara given their snowpack, local skier base, and support of the local economy.**
- » Festivals and events draw many visitors to the area throughout the summer. **Cuchara Mountain Park could be a venue for existing festivals or host new festivals to draw additional visitation.**



EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Cuchara Mountain Park is 47 acres at the base of the former ski area. The old ski lifts and snowmaking systems are in place but a full assessment by certified professionals is necessary to evaluate the infrastructure and begin repairs. The day lodge building has been rehabilitated for public use and has some basic amenities. The adjacent former ski patrol building, pictured below, would require significant work to reopen. Some shrubs and trees have grown in the ski trails, but they are otherwise intact. A trail along Baker Creek on the eastern edge of the property was constructed summer 2017 but no trails currently exist to hike or bike up the mountain.

currently exist to hike or bike up the mountain.



EXISTING CONDITIONS





CHAPTER THREE
Activities
and Plans





Activities and Plans

Based on public input, the planning team developed a Final Community Vision Plan for Cuchara Mountain Park, with general locations of proposed facilities. Descriptions of the proposed facilities and associated activities, programs, and events can be found on the pages following the maps. A financial analysis, priority phasing plan, and best practices for sustainable design and management are in Chapter Four. Additional planning, design, and feasibility studies are necessary before constructing many of the elements of the plan.

The Community Vision Plan maps show the park at three different scales - an overview map with the park and proposed trails on adjacent NFS land, a full property map, and a base area detail map.

PLANS A & B

At the April Open House, attendees were presented two Community Vision Plans for the park, Plan A and Plan B (see Appendix III). Plan A had minimal new activities and facilities, with little intended to generate revenue. Plan B had more activities and facilities, including some intended to generate revenue



such as downhill skiing and tubing. In general, open house attendees were open to all the activities included in Plan B but emphasized that development should occur carefully and slowly. They advocated for an initial build-out resembling Plan A, with the Plan B activities and facilities added as the park raises money and gathers momentum. These sentiments were taken into account in developing the priority phasing plan for the park, found in Chapter Four. In the end, the Final Community Vision Plan closely resembles Plan B, except with an on-property hiking trail to the top of Lift 4, fewer trails on NFS land, a viewing deck rather than an observatory at the top of Lift 3, and sledding on the beginner ski hill before the surface lift is built.

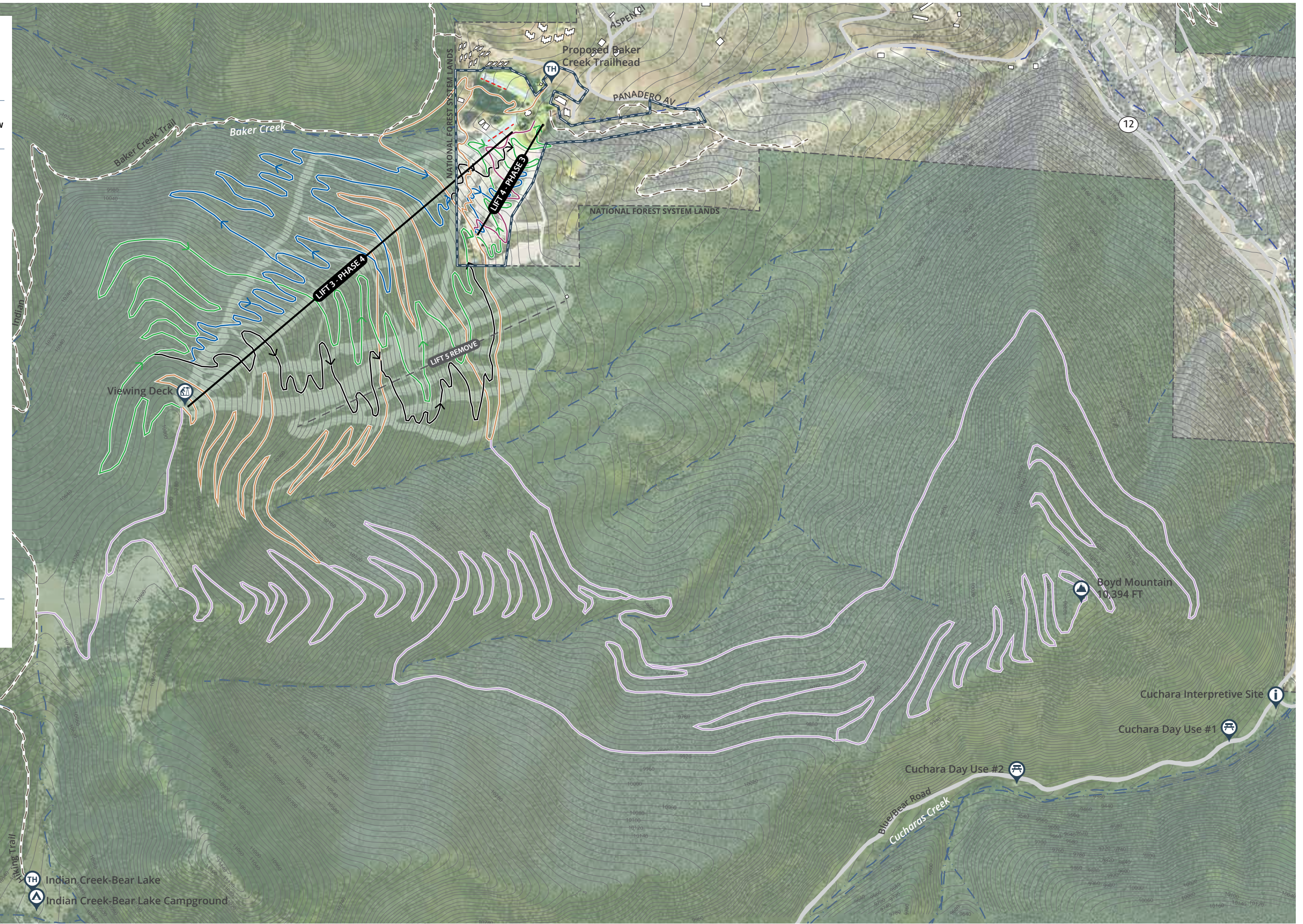
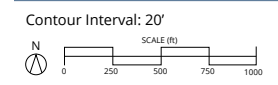


CUCHARA MOUNTAIN PARK
Final Community Vision Plan: Overview
June 2018

LEGEND

- Existing Ski Trails
- NFS Lands
- Cuchara Mountain Park Boundary
- Parcel Boundaries
- Existing Ski Lift
- Proposed Surface Lift
- Lift to be Removed
- Roads
- Existing Trails
- Stream

- Proposed Trails**
- Hiking Only Trail
- Hike/Bike Trail
- Hike/Uphill Bike Trail
- Beginner Downhill Mountain Bike Trail
- Intermediate Downhill Mountain Bike Trail
- Advanced Downhill Mountain Bike Trail





Programs

- Arts and Crafts
- Cultural/Historical
- Outdoor Classroom
- Mountain Bike Skills Camp
- Ski School
- Kids Camp
- Guided Snowshoe Tours
- Orienteering
- Birding



Events

- Music Festivals
- Weddings
- Food and Beverage Festivals
- Mountain Bike Festival
- Adventure Races (i.e., Tough Mudder, Ragnar, 24-hour Mountain Bike)
- Trail Running Races
- Mountain Bike Races



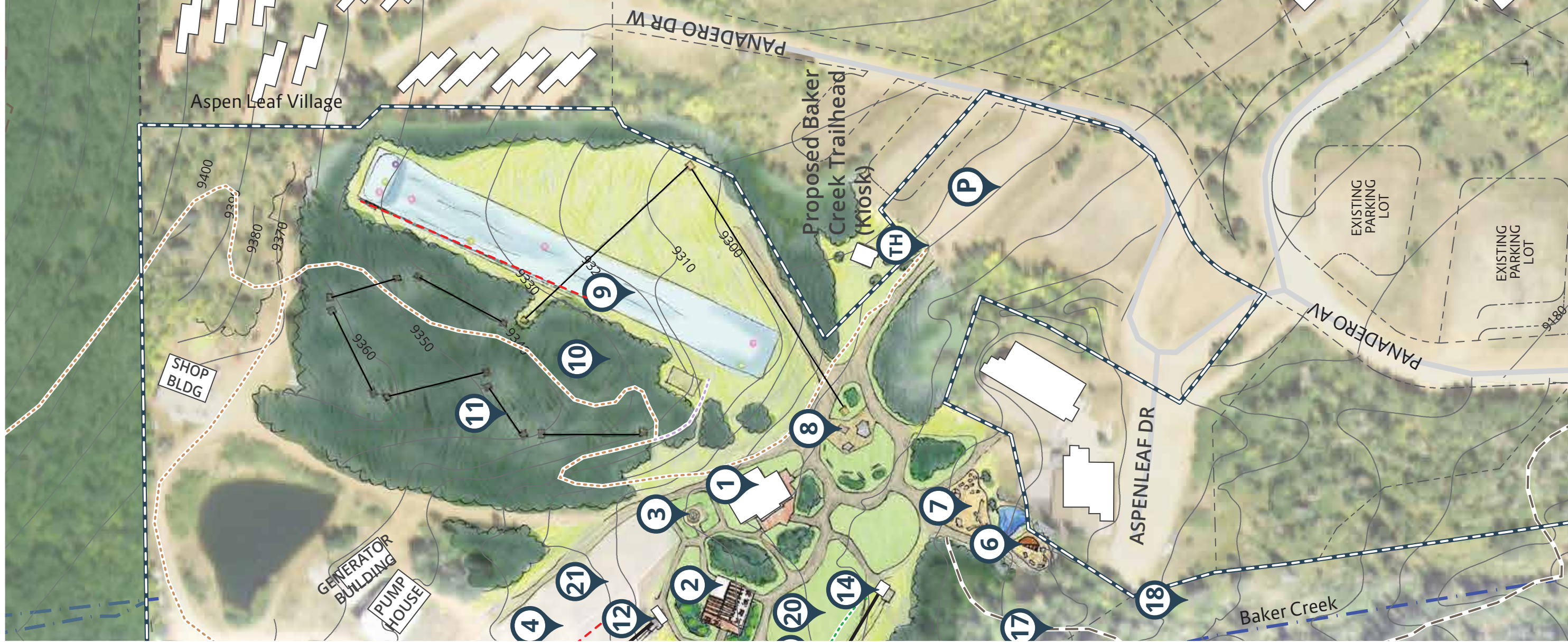
Activities

Summer

- Hiking/Nature Trail (Existing XC ski trail)
- Mountain Biking (XC, Climbing Trail, Lift-served Downhill)
- Climbing Structures
- Aerial Adventure Course/Canopy Tour
- Multigenerational Play Area
- Birdwatching
- Picnicking
- Fire Ring/Storytelling/S'mores
- Night Stargazing Hikes
- Viewing Deck Stargazing
- Scenic Lift Rides
- Camping (Yurts)
- Mini Golf
- Disc Golf
- Summer Tubing

Winter

- Snowshoeing
- Tubing
- Downhill Skiing (Lift 3 & 4)
- XC Skiing
- Backcountry Skiing
- Sledding
- Fire Ring/Storytelling/S'mores
- Night Stargazing Hikes
- Camping (Yurts)

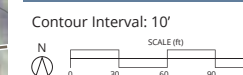




CUCHARA MOUNTAIN PARK
Final Community Vision Plan: Base Area
June 2018

LEGEND

- Existing Ski Trails
- NFS Lands
- Cuchara Mountain Park Boundary
- Parcel Boundaries
- Ski Lift
- Proposed Surface Lift
- Roads
- Existing Trails
- Stream
- Proposed Trails**
- Hiking Only Trail
- Hike/Bike Trail
- Hike/Uphill Bike Trail
- Beginner Downhill Mountain Bike Trail
- Intermediate Downhill Mountain Bike Trail
- Advanced Downhill Mountain Bike Trail



- Programs**
- Arts and Crafts
 - Cultural/Historical
 - Outdoor Classroom
 - Mountain Bike Skills Camp
 - Ski School
 - Kids Camp
 - Guided Snowshoe Tours
 - Orienteering
 - Birding

- Events**
- Music Festivals
 - Weddings
 - Food and Beverage Festivals
 - Mountain Bike Festival
 - Adventure Races (i.e., Tough Mudder, Ragnar, 24-hour Mountain Bike)
 - Trail Running Races
 - Mountain Bike Races

- Activities**
- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Summer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiking/Nature Trail (Existing XC ski trail) • Mountain Biking (XC, Climbing Trail, Lift-served Downhill) • Climbing Structures • Aerial Adventure Course/ Canopy Tour • Multigenerational Play Area • Birdwatching • Picnicking | <p>Winter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire Ring/Storytelling/ S'mores • Night Stargazing Hikes • Viewing Deck Stargazing • Scenic Lift Rides • Camping (Yurts) • Mini Golf • Disc Golf • Summer Tubing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snowshoeing • Tubing • Downhill Skiing (Lifts 3 & 4) • XC Skiing • Backcountry Skiing • Sledding • Fire Ring/Storytelling/ S'mores • Night Stargazing Hikes • Camping (Yurts) |
|--|--|---|

- KEY**
- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Day Lodge - Meeting, Seminar, Gathering Space with Rentals 2 Small Cafe - First Aid, Patio, Small Stage, Dance Floor 3 Fire Ring 4 Beginner Ski Terrain - New Surface Lift 5 Amphitheater 6 Outdoor Classroom 7 Multigenerational Play Area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 Climbing Structures 9 Tubing Hill (Summer, Winter) 10 Phase 2: Low Ropes Course 11 Phase 4: Canopy Tour/Aerial Adventure Course 12 Lift 3: Phase 4 - Skiing, Downhill Mountain Biking, Scenic Lift Rides 13 Downhill Skiing 14 Lift 4: Phase 3 - Skiing, Downhill Mountain Biking, Scenic Lift Rides | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17 Interpretive Trail/XC Ski Trail 18 Revive Mini Golf Course 19 Disc Golf 20 Event Lawn 21 Sledding |
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FACILITIES

DAY LODGE

Continuing improvements would make the day lodge a flexible and inviting hub for park activities such as education, social functions, relaxing by the fire, entertainment, and meetings. In addition, the ticket office would sell lift tickets and tubing passes and distribute the equipment for disc golf and mini golf. Eventually, a space for ski and mountain bike rentals would be added as those activities are established at the park.



CAFÉ BUILDING

The old ski patrol building would be transformed into a flexible, multi-purpose space with a café and meeting/performing areas inside. It would have bathrooms and first aid and a café with an adaptable deck upstairs. The deck would host outdoor dining, entertainment, and dancing. The café would operate weekends in the winter and summer, events, and school field trips. The county should look into a concessionaire to operate the café. As the café does not have regular hours, it would sell pre-packaged snacks and beverages.



AMPHITHEATER

A natural amphitheater built into the hillside would host events and concerts in the summer. There would be rows of tiered seating and a small stage at the bottom. The first phase of construction should be the stage, with folks sitting on picnic blankets and lawn chairs on the grass. Eventually, tiered seating would be added. In the winter, the amphitheater must be covered in snow to minimize the hazard to skiers.



FACILITIES

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

An outdoor classroom, by the pond, would have wooden benches for students and a teaching area with a blackboard built into the natural features. Local school groups could use the space to gather and learn about forest or pond ecology and local history. Camps and other programs could use the space to regroup after a team building exercise or playground activity.



FIRE RING

A fire ring would be located near the day lodge as a winter gathering place. Parents could sit by the fire and watch their children in the beginner ski area/sledding hill. The fire pit could be used year-round as well, for storytelling and s'mores for summer camps and school programs.



VIEWING DECK

A viewing deck at the top of Lift 4 would have a beautiful view of the valley and out to West Spanish Peak. The deck would have picnic tables for people to enjoy after a hike, bike, or lift ride up to the spot. The deck would also host astronomy programming with telescopes stored near the deck or weddings and other events. Once Lift 3 opens, a viewing deck would also be constructed there.



ACTIVITIES

HIKING

Cuchara Mountain Park would be a hub for hiking on NFS land. The park could be a trailhead for the Baker Creek trail with a trail connection to the existing trail. A hiking trail on the property to the top of Lift 4 is an immediate priority. Later, the park must work with the Forest Service on trails on NFS land to the top of Lift 3, around Boyd Mountain, and connecting to the existing Indian Creek trail. Many of these trails would also be open to mountain bikers.



MOUNTAIN BIKING

Cuchara Mountain Park would be a regional destination for mountain bikers. The initial priority is mountain bike trails on the property, with lift-serviced biking available once Lift 4 is open. Later, trails would be built on NFS land, with downhill trails available from the top of Lift 3. Trails would exist for riders of all ability levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced) and instructional programming and rentals would be available. Once the network is relatively built out, the park could host mountain bike races and festivals.



SLEDDING

The slope on the north side of Lift 3, marked number 4, would be the designated sledding hill before the surface lift is installed or during the week, when the ski area is not operating. It will be a free activity and sleds would be available in the day lodge for rental. The obstacles currently on the hill, such as the base of an old lift tower, must be removed.



ACTIVITIES

BEGINNER SKIING

A beginner ski area is essential to reintroduce skiing to the county and create a family-friendly atmosphere. The area to the right of Lift 3, with its gentle slopes, would be a designated beginner ski area. A 300 foot magic carpet surface lift would transport the skiers up about 50 vertical feet. Snowmaking would be necessary in this area. This area would be heavily used by learn to ski programs and ski school for area kids and visitors.



MULTI-GENERATIONAL PLAYGROUND

Multi-generational playgrounds create opportunities for all ages to play together and exercise. The playground, in addition to typical playground elements such as slides and swings, would be accessible to the mobility-impaired and have shade structures and seating areas. Other possible amenities include outdoor fitness stations, chess boards, or balance beams. If possible, natural materials should be used.



ROCK CLIMBING

Climbing structures would be located near the park entrance. They are imagined to be short structures designed for bouldering and not requiring a harness or belay. Manufacturers make structures that are climbable by kids of all ages without special footwear. The structures would feel like real rock with lots of handholds and footholds. If interest and capital exists for a more commercial venture, taller structures could be built that would require a harness and belay and would charge a fee.



ACTIVITIES

WINTER TUBING

Winter tubing, where riders slide down the hill in an inner tube, would draw visitors to the park. A magic carpet surface lift would transport the riders and the tubes up the hill, enabling riders to go up and down again. Snowmaking would be required for the tubing and snow would form lane barriers. Riders would purchase timed passes at the day lodge ticket office and receive a tube as they approached the hill. The operation would require a few employees to sell tickets and monitor the lift and tubing.



SUMMER TUBING

Summer tubing would take place on the same slope as winter tubing. Summer tubing requires the installation of lanes, made of a synthetic material. The synthetic material mimics the slippery snow surface. A magic carpet surface lift would transport riders and the tubes to the top of the slope. The magic carpet infrastructure and the tubes themselves are identical to winter tubing. Passes would be sold in the day lodge ticket office and the operation would require a few employees to sell tickets and monitor the lift and tubing.



LOW ROPES COURSE

The low ropes course would be a simple, natural challenge course through the woods. The course would be designed for team building activities for school groups, camps, and retreats. The course would not require technical gear and the course would be easy to construct with logs, boards, and ropes.



ACTIVITIES

CANOPY TOUR/ AERIAL ADVENTURE COURSE

A canopy tour or aerial adventure course, an expensive undertaking, would be a later installation. A tour or course is envisioned for the low ropes course site once funds have been raised. The tour or adventure course both occur in the tree canopy and require a harness and a helmet. A canopy tour is walkways in the trees, with small platforms at destination trees (top image). The canopy tour may also have a few ziplines but is generally designed to be accessible to all ages. Aerial adventure courses have more challenge features that require climbing, swinging, traversing, maneuvering obstacles, and ziplines.



DOWNHILL SKIING

Downhill skiing would be available once Lift 4 and the snowmaking system are up and running. Lift 3 and skiing on NFS land could be added if smaller ski operations are successful and the Forest Service reissues the Special Use Permit. Skiing would be operated by a private concessionaire and open on weekends through the winter. From the top of Lift 4, there would be five trails and over 200 feet of vertical. Lessons, rentals, and ski school would be available. Ski operations would require instructors, ski patrol, lift operators, lift maintenance, groomers, ticket sellers, and snowmaking operators.



ACTIVITIES

PICNICKING

There would be many spots around the park to enjoy a picnic. There would be picnic tables and wooden benches near the climbing structure, tables on the deck of the café building, and additional tables on a patio at the top of Lift 4 for those who hiked, biked, or took the lift there. People could also spread blankets out on the event lawn or the amphitheater hill. Food would also be available for purchase at the café.



YURT CAMPING

Yurts at the top of Lift 4 would be used for camping year-round. They would be equipped for winter with a wood stove and open to backcountry skiers or snowshoers looking to access NFS lands. In the summer, people could hike, bike, or take the lift up to yurts. The yurts would be relatively comfortable camping facilities with bunk beds and tables and chairs. School programs and camps could also use the yurts for overnights.



SCENIC LIFT RIDES

Lift 4 would operate in the summer for residents and visitors to experience the scenery. Tickets could be purchased at the day lodge and then riders would have fantastic views of West Spanish Peak and the valley. Once at the top, people could enjoy a picnic and then hike, bike, or take the chairlift down.



ACTIVITIES

DISC GOLF

Disc golf is a frisbee based game where players throw specialized flying discs at targets, elevated metal baskets. Like golf, the fewer number of throws the better. The course would spread across the property, traversing the ski trails and going up and down the mountain, with the holes primarily in the woods. The course should be designed around the proposed trails. Disc golf tournaments are also growing in popularity and the park could host. Disc golf courses are generally free to use but discs can be rented or purchased.



MINI GOLF

Mini golf is an offshoot of golf that uses short courses (usually 10 yards from cup to tee) on an artificial putting surfaces. The courses can have artificial obstacles such as tunnels, ramps, windmills, and other designed features to match the course theme. Miniature golf would require a small concession for the clubs and balls. A course exists along the creek but would need to be rehabilitated and improved.



BACKCOUNTRY SKIING

The ski runs would be open to backcountry skiing at all times. With Cuchara Mountain Park a county facility, the park would be a public entry for those looking to access the NFS land for backcountry skiing. Backcountry skiers could park at the base and ski up, first on park property and then crossing onto NFS land. After returning to the base, they could enjoy the amenities of the base area, such as the fire ring or the café.



ACTIVITIES

CROSS COUNTRY SKIING

Already, the park is the trailhead for the local cross country skiing trails. Spanish Peaks Alpine Alliance (SPAA) grooms the new Baker Creek trail that begins on the park and extends via easements onto adjacent land. The Cuchara Mountain Park should protect these easements going forward and look into easements for additional trail opportunities on appropriate terrain.



SNOWSHOEING

The Cuchara Mountain Park trails and those on adjacent NFS land will be open for snowshoeing in the winter. Snowshoers could park at the base area and follow the hiking/biking trails up the mountain for winter outdoor recreation. Like backcountry skiers, snowshoers would use the park amenities, such as the fire ring or café. Additional programming could be available for snowshoeing such as rentals or guided tours.



NATURE INTERPRETATION TRAIL

Interpretive nature signage would be placed along the existing cross country ski trail. The signage would give information about local wildlife, ecology, and geology and identify plants and trees.



PROGRAMS

ARTS AND CRAFTS

Given the nearby arts community, Cuchara Mountain Park would host a variety of arts-related programming. Possibilities include nature painting groups and classes, programs to build fairy houses with children, craft fairs, and natural material sculpture workshops. The park should partner with the Spanish Peaks Art Council to bring programming to the park.



CULTURAL/ HISTORIC

Park programming would celebrate and embrace local Native American cultures, Hispanic heritage, or the history of trade in the valley. Possible programming includes dances, history talks, and theater shows. The amphitheater, dance floor, and event lawn would be ideal spaces for these programs. The park should partner with the Francisco Fort Museum, the Historical Society, and the Latino Club.



OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

The outdoor classroom would be utilized for a wide range of nature-related educational programming. School groups could meet in the classroom for instruction about the ecology or local history. Talks for children or adults about area wildlife, astronomy, and geology could also take place in the outdoor classroom. The park should partner with the La Veta School District and Huerfano School District to encourage them to use the space.



PROGRAMS

MOUNTAIN BIKING SKILLS CAMPS

With a network of mountain bike trails, Cuchara Mountain Park would be a great place to learn to ride. Experienced riders would offer skills camps geared towards beginner riders. These programs would be available to Walsenburg and La Veta schoolchildren, possibly as part of after school or Friday programming. Camps would be offered throughout the summer to visitors as well.



KIDS' CAMPS

The activities and facilities at the park are well-suited to kids' camps. Kids could take nature hikes, play on the climbing structures and multi-generational playground, gather at the fire ring for storytelling and s'mores, learn about the environment at the outdoor classroom, and attempt the low ropes course. Initially, existing camps may want to utilize the park for a day of activities. As the park grows and more activities are available, full-week camps with kids from the county and summer visitors would occur.



ORIENTEERING

Orienteering at the park would be an exciting program for both kids and adults. Checkpoints could be set up throughout the woods with maps and compasses available for school programs or visitors to the park. School children would learn to use a map and compass and enjoy the scavenger hunt like activity. The checkpoints would be moved and remapped occasionally. With a checkpoint course, the park could host orienteering races. The park should partner with the Rocky Mountain Orienteering Club.



PROGRAMS

GUIDED SNOWSHOEING

In the winter, locals would offer guided snowshoe tours on the property and adjacent NFS land. The tours would highlight the natural history and scenery of Cuchara. They could be conducted for a small fee or encouraged donation. Having snowshoes for rent would open these programs to a wider audience. Tours should be conducted at regular times, alongside other programs and events at the park, and for school groups.



BIRDING AND ECOLOGY

Community members would offer regular birding and ecology tours and programs at the park. The programming would be accessible to area residents and visitors of all ages. Certain tours could have a hiking component while others would be lecture-oriented, taking place at the base and the outdoor classroom. Possible programs include bird walks, wildflower and plant identification walks, and wildlife talks.



ASTRONOMY

The area's dark skies make it a prime location for stargazing. Astronomy programs would be led by local experts or the area could host groups from metropolitan areas. These programs could include night stargazing hikes to the telescopes at the Lift 4 viewing deck, school astronomy courses, or public presentations. The park should partner with the Southern Colorado Astronomical Society for programming.



EVENTS

MUSIC CONCERTS

Concerts would be staged at the park throughout the summer, and the amphitheater is an ideal venue for these events. The park could draw a variety of new acts to the area and also host shows for existing area music festivals such as the Celtic Music Festival, the Spanish Peaks Festival, or Sonic Bloom. For larger events, buses or other transit options from La Veta and Walsenburg should be considered.



WEDDINGS

With the beautiful setting and proper facilities, there would be a strong demand for weddings at the park. There are many potential venues on the property, such as the viewing deck at the top of Lift 4, the event lawn, the amphitheater, and the dance floor of the café building. For larger events, buses or other transit options from the accommodations should be encouraged.



FOOD & BEVERAGE FESTIVALS

The event lawn would be used for food and beverage festivals such as beer, chili, or barbecue festivals. Booths would be set up on the event lawn and additional programming could take place at the amphitheater or café patio. The park should find outside entities looking for a venue to host their events. For larger events, buses or other transit options from La Veta and Walsenburg should be considered.



EVENTS

MOUNTAIN BIKE FESTIVALS

Mountain bike festivals, would celebrate the trails and bring enthusiasts to the area. Possible programs include a short race, bike demos, maintenance sessions, live music, group rides, skills clinics, and a stunt show. The park should partner with Colorado Mountain Bike Association or Colorado Springs and Pueblo mountain biking groups. Staging a festival would not require as extensive of a network as a race, as most of the activity would occur in the base area.



RACES

With the base as an ideal start and finish area, the property and adjacent NFS land could host many types of races. Mountain bike and trail running races would start on the property before following the new trails on NFS land. Races with man-made obstacles, such as Tough Mudder or Warrior Dash, would probably take place on the park itself. Adventure races and other orienteering races would probably extend onto NFS land as well. Local trail running, mountain biking, and orienteering groups should be contacted to see if they would be interested in holding races at the park.





CHAPTER FOUR

Implementation Plan

Implementation Plan

This chapter provides the necessary information to guide the phasing, operations, and funding of the park. It contains a priority phasing plan that organizes the activities, events, programs, and facilities listed in Chapter Three into four phases suited to the community's vision and the existing conditions of the park. This plan is informed by a costs and revenue analysis of all proposed activities, events, facilities, and programs. Further details, including preliminary cost estimates, are available for activities such as downhill skiing, tubing, and lift-served mountain biking. Additional information is also available for skiing operations with financial information from small ski resorts and case studies of their operational models. Finally, a next steps section offers suggestions for funding and partnerships to begin development of the park.

PRIORITY PHASING PLAN

As expressed through various community engagements, the preferred path for development at the park proceeds carefully, focusing on community amenities first, while adding larger revenue-generating activities that may require partnerships and significant capital expenditures later on. The phasing plan described in this chapter is a general outline for how to proceed with park development based on the level of community priority, and considers the balance between capital and operating costs and potential for revenue generation. For that information, listed for each facility and associated activity, program, and event, see the matrix on page 41. The plan is flexible and subject to change based on grants, volunteer enthusiasm, donations, and park visitation. Ideally, Phase 1 has a timeline of 0 to 3 years, Phase 2 has a timeline of 3 to 5 years, Phase 3 has a timeline of 5 to 10 years, and Phase 4 has a timeline of 10+ years. However, these are only approximations - if fundraising is successful, high capital cost facilities could be added sooner. Alternatively, if visitation is low, delaying implementation of particular facilities is advisable.

Each phase description includes a guiding principle for development during that phase, a list of facilities to construct, the institutional capacity and necessary outreach, a status and list of action items related to downhill skiing, and a set of compatible activities, programs, and events.



PHASE 1

Short-term

Community-based amenities that draw visitation to the park.

FACILITIES

Disc golf course	Nature interpretation signage
Mini golf course	Multi-generational playground
Fire ring	Climbing structures
Multi-use trail to the top of Lift 4	Trail connection to existing Baker Creek Trail and trailhead kiosk
Picnic tables at the top of Lift 4 and in the base area	Continue enhancing the Day Lodge

Institutional Capacity: At this phase, the park is volunteer driven. This phase is critical for building relationships with local and state partners. The CMPAC and Huerfano County are writing grants and hold events at the park to build community support and fundraise. Mini golf and disc golf can generate revenue to fund future improvements.

Skiing: Explore the status of snowmaking and lift infrastructure and the potential for private concessionaires. Conduct further feasibility analysis on the ski operations.

Compatible activities, programs, and events: The facilities listed above provide for activities, programs, and events to bring people to the park along with the necessary amenities (i.e. day lodge, picnic tables) for a full experience. The park should prioritize adding facilities that support multiple activities, programs, and events. For example, by constructing a multi-use trail, there can be hiking, volunteer-led nature hikes, and a trail running race. At this phase, events such as races and concerts will be small-scale and not intended to generate significant revenue. Programs to bring school children from La Veta and Walsenburg begin, with nature hikes, the playground, and rock climbing.

ACTIVITIES

- Disc golf
- Mini golf
- Hiking
- Mountain biking
- Picnicking
- Sledding
- Backcountry skiing
- Snowshoeing
- Rock climbing
- Cross country skiing
- Multi-generational playground

PROGRAMS

- Day Lodge Talks
- School Field Trips
- Outings for hiking, backcountry skiing, and snowshoeing
- Volunteer-led nature hikes
- Orienteering
- Kids' camps

EVENTS

- Trail races
- Group picnics
- Disc golf tournaments
- Concerts on the hillside

PHASE 2

Medium-term

Vibrant community park preparing for future larger operations

FACILITIES

- Amphitheater
- Café and patio
- Outdoor classroom
- Viewing deck with telescopes
- Boyd Mountain hiking trail
- Camping Yurts
- Low ropes course
- Lift and Snowmaking Infrastructure*
- Enhance Event Lawn
- Continue enhancing the Day Lodge

Institutional Capacity: At this phase, the park is still volunteer driven. Like Phase 1, CMPAC and Huerfano County are writing grants and holding events at the park to build community support and fundraise. As the number of events and programs held at the park increases, part-time staff capacity may be necessary. CMPAC and Huerfano County must work closely with the Forest Service on trails on NFS land. They should also reach out to local groups and individuals who might be interested in hosting concerts, performances, weddings, or family reunions at the park.

Skiing: If the findings in Phase 1 were supportive, assess and prepare Lift 4 and snowmaking equipment for operation in Phase 3. Secure a private concessionaire and/or business sponsorships.

Compatible activities, programs, and events: The new facilities in Phase 2 enable the park to host more programs and events, including revenue-generating ones such as weddings and festivals. The park could also continue to host many of the programs and events compatible with Phase 1, but at a larger scale. For example, school field trips, with the addition of the outdoor classroom, low ropes course, telescopes, and trails, could happen more frequently and with bigger groups.

If funding and community enthusiasm is there, consider adding a facility from the Phase 3 list. A revenue generating activity, such as tubing, would provide funds for the capital costs of Phase 3 facilities.

ACTIVITIES

- Yurt camping
- Stargazing
- Hiking and mountain biking on NFS land
- Low ropes course

PROGRAMS

- Outdoor classroom programs
- Cultural/historical programs
- Arts and crafts
- Astronomy

EVENTS

- Music concerts and shows in the amphitheater
- Weddings and other private events
- Food and beverage Festivals
- Teambuilding and retreats



PHASE 3

Long-term

Investing in facilities that generate revenue

FACILITIES

Lift 4	Winter Tubing venue
Tubing surface lift	On-property mountain bike trails
Skiing surface lift	Rental facility for mountain bikes and skiing
Additional Boyd Mountain trail	Continue enhancing the Day Lodge
Summer Tubing venue	

Institutional Capacity: At this phase, the park will need paid employees to manage operations and run the lifts and activities. A strong volunteer force would help reduce costs and can assist with skiing, events, and programs at the park. At this phase, advertising and outreach to summer visitors and population centers such as Pueblo and Colorado Springs is necessary to generate the desired visitation. The park must continue working closely with the Forest Service as activity at the park increases and for additional trails and possibly skiing on NFS land.

Skiing: If Phase 1 and Phase 2 led to downhill skiing being feasible and financially sustainable, then Lift 4 would operate for skiing on weekends. A surface lift would be installed on the hill adjacent to Lift 3 for beginner skiing, ski school, and lessons. If skiing at Cuchara is successful and popular, work towards opening up Lift 3. This process will require working with the Forest Service for a new Special Use Permit, a Master Development Plan, NEPA analyses, and assessing and repairing the lift and expanding the snowmaking system.

Compatible activities, programs, and events: Again, the enhanced facilities will increase the scale of the existing activities, programs, and events at the park. The park should look into expanding existing facilities, such as the café or amphitheater, to accommodate increased visitation. A network of mountain biking trails will enable the park to host races, festivals, and skills camps along with revenue generating downhill mountain biking activities during the summer.

ACTIVITIES

Downhill skiing
Downhill mountain biking
Scenic lift rides
Winter tubing
Summer tubing
Beginner skiing

PROGRAMS

Ski school
Mountain bike skills camps

EVENTS

Mountain bike races
Mountain bike festivals

PHASE 4

Very Long-term

Outdoor recreation hub continuing to expand facilities

FACILITIES

Lift 3	Additional NFS land multi-use trails and mountain biking trails
Lift 3 Viewing Deck	
Canopy Tour/Aerial Adventure Course	Continue enhancing the Day Lodge

Institutional Capacity: By phase 4, the park relies on many paid employees to organize events and programs, operate the lifts and other activities, and staff the café and rentals shop. Volunteers are still essential for maintaining trails and staffing larger events and leading programs. With skiing and many trails on NFS land, the park must work closely with the Forest Service. The park advertises across Colorado, Texas, and the southwest and reaches out to groups who might be interested in hosting larger, revenue generating events at the park.

Skiing: In Phase 4, the ski area operations include Lift 3 and skiing to the top of the mountain. The ski area has a Special Use Permit to operate on NFS land.

Compatible activities, programs, and events: Phase 4 is not intended to increase the types of activities, programs, and events offered at the park. Rather, the many existing revenue generating activities bring people to the area, support the local economy, and allow the park to maintain and further expand its operations to continue to attract visitors.

The sources of revenue include skiing, races, tubing, a canopy tour/aerial adventure course, private events, festivals, scenic lift rides, and downhill mountain biking. At this phase, the park reinvests the revenue to enhance the existing facilities to generate additional revenue and maintain visitation. For example, possible improvements in Phase 4 include converting the low ropes course into a canopy tour/aerial adventure course or the climbing structures into a climbing wall, and expanding and improving the ski terrain, trail network, and Day Lodge.

ACTIVITIES

Canopy tour/aerial adventure course

PROGRAMS

EVENTS

Phasing Matrix

The matrix below provides a sense of community support, costs, infrastructure requirements, potential revenue, and potential for public-private partnerships. This information was used to develop the phasing plan to guide the CMPAC and Huerfano County as they develop the park. The matrix allows CMPAC and the county to pick and choose facilities, activities, programs, and events based on a variety of factors, including park visitation and finances. The matrix guides both the development of the phases themselves and decisions and priorities within phases.

The community priority level was determined by the survey (see Chapter 2) while the other categories were determined by analysis of operations at other resorts and recreational facilities. Facilities, listed first, were given a rating for community priority, capital costs, and infrastructure requirements. These facilities, when operated for activities, programs, or events have a rating for operational costs, revenue potential, infrastructure requirements for operation, community priority, and potential for public-private partnership. Some facilities, such as Lift 4, are connected to multiple activities, events, or programs.

Facilities	Community Priority	Capital cost	Infrastructure Requirements (power, water, sewer)	Phase
Base Lodge	medium	medium	high	All
Hiking Trails, Multi-use Trails	high	medium	low	All
Cross Country Skiing/Snowshoe Trails	high	medium	low	1
Interpretive Nature Trail	high	low	low	1
Sledding Hill	high	low	low	1
Natural Playground	medium	low	low	1
Climbing Structures	medium	low	low	1
Low Ropes Course	medium	low	low	1
Picnic Tables	high	low	low	1
Disc Golf Course	high	low	low	1
Mini Golf Course	medium	low	low	1
Fire Ring	medium	low	low	1
Yurts for yurt camping	medium	medium	medium	2
Café Building	medium	high	high	2
Amphitheater	high	high	medium	2
Outdoor Classroom	medium	medium	low	2
Viewing Deck	medium	medium	low	2
Lift 4*	high	high	high	2/3
Snowmaking System*	medium	very high	high	2/3
Downhill Mountain Biking Trails**	medium	high	low	3
Surface Lift for Beginner Skiing*	medium	high	medium	3
Winter Tubing Venue**	high	high	high	3
Summer Tubing Venue**	medium	medium	medium	3
Lift 3*	medium	very high	high	3/4
Canopy Tour**	low	very high	low	4
Aerial Adventure Course**	low	high	low	4

* See Ski Area Economic Data page 46

** See Analysis of Revenue Generators page 43

Capital costs, operational costs, and potential revenue were categorized as:

Very Low: \$0 - \$10,000

High: \$100,000 - \$500,000

Low: \$10,000 - \$50,000

Very High: \$500,000 and up

Medium: \$50,000 - \$100,000

Activities	Community Priority	Annual Operational Costs (labor, maintenance, permits/insurance)	Infrastructure Requirements (power, water, sewer)	Revenue Potential	Potential for P3/ Concessionaire	Phase
Hiking	high	low	low	low	low	1
Mountain Biking	high	low	low	low	low	1
Sledding	high	very low	low	low	low	1
Using Playground (free)	medium	low	low	very low	low	1
Using Climbing Structures	medium	low	low	low	low	1
Using the Low Ropes Course	medium	low	low	medium	low	1
Picnicking	high	low	low	very low	low	1
Using the Disc Golf Course	medium	low	low	medium	medium	1
Using the Mini Golf Course	medium	low	low	medium	medium	1
Backcountry skiing	medium	very low	low	low	low	1
Snowshoeing	high	very low	low	low	low	1
Cross Country Skiing	high	medium	low	low	low	1
Yurt Camping	medium	low	medium	medium	medium	2
Lift-served mountain biking**	medium	high	medium	high	high	3
Downhill Skiing*	medium	very high	high	medium	high	3
Winter Tubing**	high	high	high	high	high	3
Summer Tubing**	medium	high	medium	high	high	3
Beginner Skiing	medium	high	high	medium	medium	3
Going for a scenic lift ride	medium	high	medium	medium	high	3
Using the Canopy Tour	low	medium	low	high	high	4
Using the Aerial Adventure Course	low	medium	low	high	high	4

Programs	Community Priority	Annual Operational Costs (labor, maintenance, permits/insurance)	Infrastructure Requirements (power, water, sewer)	Revenue Potential	Potential for P3/ Concessionaire	Phase
Kids' Camps	medium	medium	low	medium	medium	1
Orienteering	medium	low	low	medium	medium	1
Country Skiing	medium	low	low	medium	low	1
Guided birding/ecology tours	high	low	low	medium	low	1
Arts and Crafts	medium	low	low	medium	low	2
Cultural/Historic Programs	medium	low	low	medium	low	2
Outdoor Classroom Programming	high	low	low	low	low	2
Astronomy programs	medium	medium	medium	medium	low	2
Mountain Biking Skills Camps	medium	medium	low	medium	low	3
Ski School	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	3

Events	Community Priority	Annual Operational Costs (labor, maintenance, permits/insurance)	Infrastructure Requirements (power, water, sewer)	Revenue Potential	Potential for P3/ Concessionaire	Phase
Music Concerts	high	medium	high	high	high	1
Races	medium	low	medium	high	medium	1
Team-building retreats	medium	low	medium	medium	low	1
Weddings	high	low	high	high	low	2
Food & Beverage Festivals	high	medium	high	high	high	2
Mountain Bike Festivals	medium	low	medium	high	medium	3

* See Ski Area Economic Data page 46

** See Analysis of Revenue Generators page 43

Capital costs, operational costs, and potential revenue were categorized as:

Very Low: \$0 - \$10,000

Low: \$10,000 - \$50,000

Medium: \$50,000 - \$100,000

High: \$100,000 - \$500,000

Very High: \$500,000 and up

Analysis of Revenue Generators

An important aspect guiding the selection of a recommended or “preferred” program for multi-season recreation at Cuchara Mountain Park is an understanding of the possible economic performance of the proposed facilities. The following table summarizes a range of the typical capital costs, visitation, price points, revenue and operating margins associated with the revenue-generating facilities discussed in this plan. Ski operations were not included in this table due to the uncertainty around the capital costs for the lift and snowmaking system. To analyze potential ski operations, industry economic figures are on page 46 and case studies of small ski area operations are on page 48.

It is important to note that these ranges represent data from “typical” operations of the activities listed, and are based on similar circumstances, operations and experiences observed at other multi-season areas nationwide.

	Capital Cost		Visits		Ticket/Ride Price		Potential Revenue		Operating Margin	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Aerial Adventure Course	\$300,000	\$500,000	6,300	15,000	\$30	\$45	\$189,000	\$675,000	50%	50%
Canopy Tour	\$500,000	\$900,000	8,000	12,000	\$90	\$110	\$720,000	\$1,320,000	80%	80%
Disc Golf	\$5,000	\$10,000	2,500	4,000	\$5	\$7	\$12,500	\$28,000	60%	60%
Mini Golf	\$50,000	\$500,000	10,000	30,000	\$10	\$20	\$100,000	\$600,000	60%	80%
Summer Tubing	\$50,000	\$100,000	6,500	7,500	\$10	\$15	\$65,000	\$112,500	60%	80%
Winter Tubing	\$250,000	\$500,000	10,000	40,000	\$12	\$25	\$120,000	\$1,000,000	30%	80%
Yurt Camping (per yurt)	\$5,000	\$20,000	50	100	\$100	\$200	\$5,000	\$20,000	10%	20%
Lift Served Mountain Biking			6,000	25,000	\$25	\$40	\$150,000	\$1,000,000	50%	60%

Capital Costs are the estimated costs to acquire and install the activity, and do not include on-going operational expenses.

Visits is the estimated amount of annual participation per occurrence (i.e., if one person took four rides on the mountain coaster it would count as four visits).

Ticket/Ride Price is the average amount charged to participate in a particular activity. Averages account for the estimated price of a single ticket and seasons passes.

Potential Revenue is the estimated visits times the estimated Ticket/Ride Price.

Operating Margin is potential revenue less the related estimated operating expenses. The Operating Margin percentages in the table are based on similar operations at other multi-season areas. Generally speaking higher percentages are preferred, indicating less operating expense relative to revenue which leads to higher profit.

Other Capital Costs

The following capital costs cannot be estimated until further planning is undertaken.

- » **Hiking trails:** Traditional USFS-style hiking/mountain biking trails (2-3 feet wide) cost ±\$14,000 per mile. ~19 miles in vision plan.
- » **Mountain biking trails:** Modern mountain biking trails (six feet wide, banked corners, rollers, etc.) cost ± \$40,000 per mile. ~11.5 miles in plan.
- » **Existing facility improvements:** There would be significant infrastructure costs associated with building upgrades, terrain upgrades, etc.

Revenue Opportunities

In addition to the tickets, there would be many other opportunities for revenue generation.

- » **Equipment rentals:** Renting skis, mountain bikes
- » **Retail:** Selling logo clothing and items that are necessary and/or forgotten items (sunscreen, water bottles, hats, etc.)
- » **Program and Event Participation:** Program registration or entry fees into special events.
- » **Food & Beverage:** Food and beverage sales at the cafe or events



TRAILS MEAN BUSINESS

A robust trail system is both a community amenity and a major driver of economic activity. Trails attract people to visit, live, or work in a place. These days, many tourists plan their vacations around the availability of trails. In visiting and using the trails, tourists spend nominal amounts on user fees, but generate significant secondary revenue for the local economy. Locals and other day users will spend money on food and beverage, gas, and possibly other activities. Overnight visitors generate a greater economic impact, spending money on lodging, entertainment, goods, and other activities in addition. For example, Estes Park has estimated that trails users will spend \$79.84 (overnight visitors), \$23.67 (day visitors), or \$11.31 (local day users) per day at town businesses. With a trail system that attracts thousands of trail users, the economic benefits will outweigh the cost of land acquisition, trail construction, and maintenance time and time again.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT AND DESIGN

Build sustainable trails (minimize erosion, limit clearing, etc.)

Have signage that encourages hikers to stay on the trails

Landscape with native plants and remove invasives

Perform regular maintenance on landscaped areas (watering, mulching, pruning, etc.)

Monitor soils subject to excessive foot traffic and excavate if necessary

Hold ecology related tours at the park to promote awareness and appreciation for the natural world

For building projects use recycled materials, incorporate existing structures, and improve energy efficiency when possible.

Encourage carpooling and shuttles from population centers

Limit development adjacent to stream corridors

Add boulders or fencing to restrict access to sensitive areas such as the stream bank

Post educational signage and include information on park maps about "Leave No Trace" Principles



Ski Area Economic Data

Benchmarking is often used in the analysis to determine relevant operating revenues and expense levels for similar ski areas. A benchmarking evaluation entails the use of industry data to compare a resort's operational and financial characteristics with similar sized and located ski areas. This comparison with peer ski areas helps understand the financial implications of operations and new facilities.

Ski Industry benchmarking typically utilizes the NSAA (National Ski Areas Association) Economic Analysis. This analysis is performed through an annual survey of member resorts' physical characteristics (e.g., size and capacities), and financial performance by operating department.

The information presented below is for ski areas with under 3,500 vertical transport feet per hour (VTFH), a size classification of ski areas based on lift rise and capacity. This is a relatively small sample size, with only 13 such ski areas providing data. Therefore, there is significant variability in this data and it should be used as a snapshot rather than a guideline.

	0 - 3,500 VTFH
	2016/17
Number of areas	13
Average Vertical Transport Feet per Hour (VTFH)	2,478
Average skier visits	62,649
Revenue	\$3,209,000

The following table summarizes the average percent of total revenue generated by the main-revenue generating departments of comparable ski areas.

	0 - 3,500 VTFH	
Revenue Category by %	2016/17	2015/16
Tickets	37.4%	37.9%
Snowplay & other winter ops	8.4%	7.6%
Lessons	7.2%	6.8%
Food and beverage	16.7%	16.3%
Retail stores	3.1%	3.3%
Rental shops	9.7%	10.2%
Accommodations/lodging	0.9%	0.7%
Miscellaneous	0.0%	0.0%
Other	15.4%	15.9%
Property operation	1.1%	1.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table Information:

"Snowplay and other winter ops" includes activities such as tubing, cross country skiing, or snowshoeing

"Other and Miscellaneous" includes additional sources of revenue/ expenditures such facility rentals, paid parking, or other operations

The following is breakdown of expenses by percentage for comparable ski areas.

	0 - 3,500 VTFH	
Expenditure Patterns by % of Revenue	2016/17	2015/16
Cost of goods	8.5%	8.5%
Direct labor	30.8%	30.8%
Maintenance & repair	4.9%	4.8%
Other direct	7.7%	8.4%
Payroll taxes/workers comp	7.1%	6.9%
Electric power/fuel	6.1%	5.4%
Gen. and admin.	15.8%	17.1%
Marketing/adv.	3.4%	3.7%
Insurance	2.7%	2.9%
land use fees	2.5%	2.6%
Property/other taxes	2.3%	2.4%
Miscellaneous	-17.4%	0.0%
Depreciation	13.6%	14.3%
Amortization	0.0%	0.0%
Operating Leases	0.7%	0.4%
Interest	0.7%	0.5%
Profit BT	10.7%	-8.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The average small ski area has double the total visitors as Cuchara's busiest season and triple the total visitors as Cuchara's previous average from when it was in operation
- Tickets are the largest source of revenue for these ski areas, although they provide less than 40% of total revenue
- Food and beverage, rentals, lessons, snowplay (i.e. tubing), and other (assumed to be event rentals, parking, etc.) are other significant generators of revenue
- At the smallest ski areas, snowplay and other winter ops make up a higher portion of revenue than they do at larger resorts
- Labor, administration, and depreciation are the largest expenses for small ski areas. For smaller ski areas, maintenance/repairs, and electric power/fuel also make up a higher proportion of expenses
- During the 2015/2016 season, these small ski areas, on average, had losses of about 8.7% of their total revenue

Case Studies of Community Ski Areas

The following case studies of small, community ski areas across North America provide some examples for the CMPAC to consider as they evaluate the future of skiing of Cuchara. The discussed ski areas' management includes non-profits, governments, and private concessionaires. Financial information, when available, is presented to describe the success of each model.

CAMDEN SNOW BOWL

The Camden Snow Bowl is a ski area owned and operated by the Town of Camden, Maine and its Park and Recreation Department. The Snow Bowl has 105 skiable acres, is open around 65 days a year, and averages 35,000 skier visits annually. Approximately 15% of these visitors are from the town, 25% from within a 30-minute drive, and 60% from further away. The town of Camden has a very strong summer tourism economy and a 2013 economic analysis showed that the ski area winter operations brings in \$3.7 million in economic impact annually. The town operates the ski area as an Enterprise Fund to provide a community resource and bring an economic benefit to the area. As an enterprise fund, the expenses and revenue for the Snow Bowl are separate from the town's general fund; the ski area keeps the revenue it makes in good years and uses that to support bad years. The ski area makes a small profit in good snow years but does lose money in other years. The ski area has asked the town to help when expenses drastically exceed revenue, but for the most part, the ski area operates on its own financially. The ski area has 8 year-round employees, 91 seasonal employees, and 30 volunteer stewards who contribute 12 hours per week. The ski area director manages the employees and reports to the Town Manager.

Beyond skiing, the Snow Bowl hosts the U.S. Toboggan National Championships, an event that brings in about \$50,000 in profit each year. In the summer, there are hiking and mountain biking trails, a lift operates, and the lodge hosts weddings and other events. The ski area typically makes about \$25,000 in profit over the summer and is looking to expand operations.

The Ragged Mountain Recreation Area Foundation, a nonprofit, has been key to the ski area's financial stability. The foundation and the town residents have raised money for capital improvements at the ski area. The foundation raised \$4.5 million for improvements in 2016 which matched a \$2 million-dollar bond measure approved by town voters. In addition, a major snowmaking infrastructure improvement was funded by a federal grant.



EAGLECREST SKI AREA

The Eaglecrest Ski Area is owned and operated by the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ), Alaska. CBJ subsidizes operations at the ski area. The ski area's mission is to be a community-oriented winter recreation year-round summer outdoor recreation destination with affordable non-motorized activities. The Eaglecrest Foundation, a 501c3 funds capital improvement projects and the ski area has also received grants from foundations. A private operator, Alaska Zipline Adventures, offers a zipline tour in the summer at the ski area. The Eaglecrest Ski Area earns a flat fee and a percentage of gross revenue and the zipline tour has been profitable. The City and Bureau of Juneau contribute about \$700,000 to subsidize operations each year, about 25% of annual operating costs. Lift tickets, rentals, and sales provide 62% of the annual revenues. The remaining funds are contributions from the Eaglecrest Foundation (~\$75,000 per year) and \$150,000 - \$250,000 from the operator of the zipline. A board of directors, appointed by the city, oversees a general manager of the ski area.

LAUREL MOUNTAIN

Laurel Mountain Ski Resort is a small ski area in Pennsylvania that is operated by a private concessionaire but is within a state park. The concessionaire owns and operates two other local ski areas and the three are on a joint season pass. The resort is known for its extremely steep slopes and is located 72 miles from Pittsburgh. The ski area was founded as a private club and before being donated to the state in 1964. The resort operated until 1989, closed for 10 years, and then operated off and on from 1999 to 2005 before closing again. After it closed, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources spent \$6.5 million dollars on lift, trail, and snowmaking improvements, to make the ski area ready for an interested concessionaire. The concessionaire reopened the ski area for the 2016/2017 season and it operated in the 2017/2018 season as well. No information is available on the resort's visitation or finances since operation began.

MT. SIMA

Mt. Sima is a ski area in Yukon, Canada operated by a non-profit but subsidized by the Yukon government. The Friends of Mount Sima Society non-profit, manages the ski hill. The Yukon Territory government contributes significantly to operating expenses and capital improvements. The government has funded snowmaking improvements, groomers, and terrain improvements to draw elite athletes to train at the ski area. The society also raises hundreds of thousands of dollars through private donations, sponsorships from 40 local businesses, grants from ski clubs, and the Yukon Lotteries. For sponsoring, business logos are displayed on lift chairs, signs, lift towers, runs, and the website. The resort also offers summer mountain biking (with the lifts operating one day a week), paragliding through an outfitter, concerts, and event rentals. Previously, the resort had been run by the Great Northern Ski Society (GNSS) with a subsidy from the City of Whitehorse. When GNSS had financial troubles, the city refused to offer additional funding and the resort closed. Friends of Mount Sima managed to raise the necessary funds that year and the ski area reopened the next season.

BIGROCK MOUNTAIN

Bigrock Mountain is owned and operated by Friends of Bigrock, a community non-profit. From 2000 to 2013, the Libra Foundation, in partnership with Maine Winter Sports Center, owned and operated the area. The foundation invested in \$6 million in capital improvements and gave a subsidy, between \$100,000 and \$250,000 annually, for the difference between expenses and revenues. In 2013, the Maine Winter Sports Center decided to end their involvement. The ski area looked like it might close but community members and local businesses raised sufficient funds to maintain operations. Corporate donations contributed about 80% of the total fundraising. The local businesses have continued to support the ski area and the nonprofit also received a \$350,000 donation from a local philanthropist. The installation of a snow tubing has also been profitable for Friends of Bigrock.

SKI COOPER

Ski Cooper, in Leadville, Colorado is operated by the Cooper Hill Ski Area non-profit. Ski Cooper is on Forest Service Land and the lease is held by Lake County. In good snow years, the ski area does make a profit through ticket sales. However, in bad snow years such as 2011/2012, the ski area lost almost \$500,000. The ski area sees about 60,000 visitors annually and has the small community ski area niche in the vicinity of the larger resorts on the I-70 corridor. The ski area, with a base at 10,500' and an average annual snowfall of 260," does not have snowmaking, helping keep expenses low.

WHALEBACK MOUNTAIN

Whaleback Mountain in New Hampshire is owned and operated by a non-profit. The small ski area has about 13,000 skier visits per year. Starting in 2005, a private group operated the mountain but they were forced to close due to debt in 2013. Later that same year, the Upper Valley Snowsports Foundation (UVSSF) purchased the ski area at a bank auction. To do so, they raised significant funds from foundations, private individuals in the community, and local businesses. The mountain hosts a ski race series, after school programs, competitive teams, community events, and kids' camps. Volunteers also contribute many hours to mountain operations.

KENDALL MOUNTAIN RECREATION AREA

Kendall Mountain Recreation Area is a small, community ski hill in Silverton, Colorado. The ski area is on Bureau of Land Management Land and operated by the town of Silverton. The town, with a population of 630, has a strong summer tourism economy and an outdoor recreation minded community and therefore chooses to subsidize the ski area operations. The operations are small, with 16 skiable acres, a double chair, and no snowmaking. The ski area has about 2,700 annual visitors and hosts many school programs and community events. Annual expenses are about \$50,000 annually and ticket sales bring in about \$35,000, with the town makes up the difference. The town is interested in expanding the ski area to draw people to Silverton in the winter and support the local economy.

	Land Ownership	Operator	Capital Improvement Funding Source	Government Subsidized?
Camden Snow Bowl	Government	Government	Non-profit, Bond Measure	Capital Improvements, not operations
Eaglecrest	Government	Government	Non-profit, grants	Yes (\$700,000 per year)
Whaleback	Non-profit	Non-profit	Non-profit, businesses	No
Mt. Sima	Non-profit	Non-profit	Non-profit, businesses, government	Yes
Ski Cooper	Government	Non-profit	Non-profit	No
Bigrock	Non-profit	Non-profit	Foundation, non-profit, businesses, major donor	No
Howelsen Hill	Government	Government	Government and Steamboat Resort	Yes (\$700,000 - \$1,000,000 per year)
Laurel Mountain	Government	Private	Government	Capital Improvements, not operations
Pajarito	Government	Private	Private	No
Kendall Mountain	Government	Government	Government	Yes (\$20,000 per year)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Few community ski areas are profitable or break even and many rely on government subsidies to operate
- Even fewer community ski areas can afford additional capital costs or establishing maintenance reserves within their annual budget. Ski areas turn to non-profits, foundations, grants, and governments to provide the funds
- Major events, such as the Toboggan Championships at Camden Snowbowl, provide significant revenue for the ski area
- Weather patterns and snowfall have an impact on visitation, which in turn impacts the ski areas' ability to break even or make a profit
- Business and corporate sponsorship are additional sources of revenue for many ski areas
- There are few community ski areas with strong summer visitation to provide additional revenue but many are interested in exploring those opportunities

Next Steps and Funding

With the analysis and priorities in hand, the following pages offer ideas and recommendations to assist implementation. This section includes strategies to continue building awareness and support for the park; organizations who provide volunteers to build trails and facilities and lead park operations; and sources of funding, from grants to creative solutions to tap into local resources. Links are provided for further information.

BUILDING SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Partnering with the United States Forest Service

The park must work with the Forest Service to connect existing trails and build new trails near the park, with the park possibly promising to build and maintain the new trails. A trailhead kiosk and connection to the Baker Creek trail is an initial project that the organizations can work together on. The park must also engage in the Forest Service's environmental review process for trails and possibly skiing in the future.

Organize Park Events

Get people out to the park and get them excited about the vision of what it will become. Organizing events for National Trails Day, National Park Rx Day, and National Get Outdoors Day are all great opportunities to take advantage of existing national events.

Create a "Friends of the Park" Group

Friends groups have been the driving force behind countless successful outdoor recreation projects, particularly those projects that have encountered obstacles or opposition and need steadfast advocates. A Friends group can help raise money, build awareness, and host park events. The Friends group could also be a dedicated group for trail maintenance and other volunteering needs at the park. The group should complement the existing Cuchara Foundation as a park-specific group dedicated to the Cuchara Mountain Park.

Create a website

It's helpful to have all the information about your project in one place where the maximum number of people can access it and get updates on project progress (including contact info for board members). This includes posting project information to social media and sending invites to events.

BUILDING THE PARK WITH ORGANIZATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS

Another way to build support is to utilize trail and environmental stewardship groups for projects. These groups can give projects visibility and can engage the community in building the project and caring for the land.

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC) is a nationally recognized statewide non-profit dedicated to motivating and enabling people to become active stewards of Colorado's resources. They have thousands of people volunteering annual on outdoor stewardship projects. These projects take place across Colorado – from city parks and open spaces, to grasslands and foothills, to alpine meadows and peaks (<http://www.voc.org/about-us>)

Americorps

Americorps is a network of national service programs that place volunteers in communities. The volunteers' salaries are paid by the federal government while they work in the community. The Americorps NCCC program is a young adult program that places volunteer teams in communities to work on trail building projects, constructing low-income housing, educating citizens about sustainability, or mitigating natural disasters. Cuchara Mountain Park used these volunteers in summer 2017 to make improvements to the day lodge and build the Baker Creek Trail. The park should explore using those volunteers for projects in the future. The VISTA program places individuals in a community for a year to work with an organization or local government. At no cost to the park, a VISTA volunteer could organize park events, conduct social media outreach, and complete grant applications. (<https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/amicorps/>)

Colorado Mountain Biking Association

Colorado Mountain Biking Association (COMBA) is a non-profit whose mission is to develop and preserve great mountain biking experiences in Colorado. COMBA frequently partners with the Forest Service to build and maintain trails. The organization also hosts mountain biking and trails events throughout the year. (<http://www.comba.org>)



GRANTS AND OTHER FUNDING SOURCES

Great Outdoors Colorado

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Grant Program is a competitive grant program for park and open space land acquisition and development, outdoor recreation, environmental education, and conservation. The program is funded by the Colorado Lottery and has provided \$1.1 billion in lottery proceeds since 1992 in all 64 counties of the state. Grants are generally awarded in two funding cycles, with deadlines in the spring and fall. GOCO is currently prioritizing projects that aim to repair the disconnect between youth and nature, connecting people to the outdoors by increasing bike and pedestrian access, and protecting urban and rural land. (www.goco.org)

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Colorado Land and Water Conservation Fund provides grants for the state Recreational Trails Program. Eligible applicants are any local, county, or state government with control over public lands. These projects must enhance the outdoor recreation resources on public land. To receive the grant, the local government must provide a 100% match. (<https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/Trails/LWCF/LWCFGrantsProcess.pdf>)

Non-Motorized Trails Grant

A grant funded by a partnership of Colorado Parks and Wildlife, GOCO, and the federal recreational trails program. A 30% match is required. Grants are available for large and small trail construction/maintenance, planning, and support. This includes constructing new trails and trailheads, maintenance or reconstruction of existing trails, enhancing existing trailheads, engineering and feasibility studies, and building and enhancing volunteer organizations. The grant can be awarded to governments, non-profits, or recreation districts. (<http://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/TrailsGrantsNM.aspx>)

Trails Connecting People

Trails Connecting People with Nature is a Sierra Club initiative that works to ensure that access to the outdoors is increasingly equitable and available to all communities. The Sierra Club Foundation awards one year trail grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000 towards trail creation or maintenance projects that engage new leaders and provide opportunities for communities to connect with nature. (<https://content.sierraclub.org/ourwildamerica/nearby-nature>)

Non-Grant Funding Sources

User fees for non-residents or visitors could be a potential funding source for future activities. These fees could help towards operating costs, but additional sources of revenue would be needed for capital costs.

Business sponsorships are a major source of funding for many small, community ski areas. Mt. Sima in Canada offers business sponsors signage and logos on lift chairs, towers, and ski runs; recognition on signs, the website, and social media; and ski passes. This sponsorship model could be used for activities beyond skiing as well (see Appendix IV for Mt. Sima's informational flyer to businesses).

The park must continue outreach to individuals for private donations. Outreach and events should be done during the summer when there are many visitors and part-time residents in the area.

Parking fees could generate revenue and encourage carpooling, given the limited facilities at the park and the neighborhood.

Coordinate with the owner of Buildings A & B for amenities at the park. The owner of the buildings could provide certain facilities, reducing what the park needs to provide.