



Flagstaff Biking Organization
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July 12, 2023

Robert Wallace
Open Space Supervisor
City of Flagstaff Parks, Recreation, Open Spaces and Events
Flagstaff, AZ 86001
Submitted electronically

Dear Mr. Wallace,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan Draft, (GOMTP).

We are generally supportive of the plan as laid out in the Draft and are pleased that the City has taken the initiative to manage trails-based recreation on Observatory Mesa. Some of our comments repeat input from our response to the first draft to continue to highlight these needs and perhaps amplify the fact that they may not be duly emphasized in this draft.

Background

Flagstaff Biking Organization (FBO) is a group of cyclists who came together to “promote bicycling as a safe and attractive means of transportation and recreation in Northern Arizona.” Our initial project was to put on a Bike to Work Week for our community in May 2002. Building on the success we started to expand our efforts to keep people informed of cycling related issues and galvanize support for better and safer facilities, trails, and trail access. We have a successful and ongoing 21+ year relationship with the Coconino National Forest, Coconino County and the City of Flagstaff, including being a co-signer of the Flagstaff Trails Initiative’s Flagstaff Regional Trails Strategy. Please see <http://www.flagstaffbiking.org> for more information on our organization.

Many of our supporters recreate in the Observatory Mesa area. Our supporters will be directly affected by the results of the analysis and its subsequent decision. Please consider our comments as generally representative of our substantial supporter base's interests.

The Plan Needs More Focus on Trail User Experiences (besides aMTB)

Move page 60 to Section 1! Then write more detail into the Draft from the resources referenced there and public comments.

We are amazed that so many trail plans, including this one, don't focus on the purpose and need for trails that address user experiences! We mentioned this in our previous comments and this concern has only marginally been addressed.

Why does the City intend to build trails? For whom? How will these trails meet unmet public landowner/user needs?

Establishing Purpose and Need is key to overcoming lesser concerns throughout the NEPA Process.

Although this iteration of the Draft improves upon the previous version, it relegates the "Recommendations: User Experience" to the second to last page of the document in an appendix. Additionally, it defers elaboration on this topic to third-party documents.

Tell us what sort of features will be included in the directional mountain bike trails and how these address user Needs with the same enthusiasm that the Draft has embraced and elaborated upon Adaptive MTB!

Directional mountain bike trails

We are very excited to see these routes included in this Draft!

Given the proximity to town and the elevation available, Observatory Mesa is a prime location for several mountain bike focused directional trails. Communities all over the world are developing trail systems specifically to address this need, and Flagstaff should as well. These trails should afford a range of opportunities for different skill levels and incorporate jumps, berms and constructed features. There is already an expressed-demand on Observatory Mesa for this type of trail in the several user-created routes. These types of trails are vital to engaging kids in mountain biking, a healthy outdoor activity, as well as being a fun recreational amenity for all riders. The front-country and already significantly impacted nature of this location is perfectly suited to this type of user experience.

We support the adoption of trail 3.36 (aka Hot Pockets) and realignments, if needed, as a directional MTB trail and closed to other uses or managed primarily for mountain bike use.

We understand that a downhill trail above Thorpe Park and the disc golf course is problematic because it would be mostly located in Section 17, needs to avoid the disc golf course, and that the area is currently heavily used. However, we believe a directional mountain bike trail on the east side of the mesa should still be a priority to provide for this user experience. Specifically, we recommend locating a directional mountain bike trail outside of Section 17 on the other side of the current FUTS Trail. The starting control point would either be the Observatory Mesa Trail (Loop trail 3.3) or the nearby proposed 5.1 trail and extend downhill on the north side of the drainage that the 3.10 social trail that is proposed for adoption is located. The lower control point, or ending point, is proposed to be located at or just northwest of the 3.10/FUTS intersection.

E-bikes

E-bikes absolutely must be included in this Plan because their exclusion from this Draft pre-empts analysis of their suitability from any National Environmental Policy process.

Although it may be determined that e-bikes are not desirable for inclusion in this project, the failure to include them as part of an Alternative for the GOMTP preempts the decision making process.

We recognize that, similar to snowboard use at ski resorts in the early days of snowboarding, there is a significant amount of somewhat unwarranted concern about these bikes. That understood, they are growing substantially in popularity and they are not apt to just disappear. ***There will be e-bike use on Observatory Mesa.*** Whether that use is managed or unmanaged is what this Plan needs to come to terms with. Just signing the area “closed to e-bikes” will have little to no effect on the choices of e-bike users to access the trails. Will the Flagstaff Police Department be enlisted to ticket e-bike users? We think that this is unlikely. Without formal enforcement e-bike use will persist and this sort of unaddressed need only leads to perpetual user conflict and potential confrontation between users.

Connecting to outlying communities

Trails to Baderville and Bellemont would help to provide non-motorized recreational and transportation opportunities and better tie our communities together. This concept was first introduced by the Flagstaff Loop Trail planning effort, and we would like to see it preserved.

We had made this comment on the first draft, and have heard casual reference to this concept in conversations with the City Staff, and this concept should be acknowledged within the document, regardless if it is outside the scope of planning for this effort.

We look forward to working with City staff on the details of this planning, and eventually

helping to generate volunteers and perhaps funding to support its implementation, if that is appropriate.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the Board of Flagstaff Biking Organization

Anthony Quintile and Joe Hazel