

5.4 EXISTING TRAIL SYTEM

5.4.1 SYSTEM DESCRIPTION AND ASSESSMENT

In addition to the Animas River Trail and its planned extensions, the area offers one of the nation's most complete and diverse natural surface trail systems which includes hundreds of miles of trails linking Durango to surrounding public lands. This natural surface trail system has garnered international attention as a destination for mountain bikers and has provided the training grounds for many of the country's top cyclists who call Durango home.

Highlights of the area trail network include:

- Animas River Trail and the hard surface trail system – with nearly 12 miles;
- Overend Mountain Park - with approximately 12.1 miles of natural surface trails;
- Dalla Mountain Park - with approximately 4.7 miles of natural surface trails ;
- Animas City Mountain- with approximately 9.2 miles of natural surface trails; and
- Horse Gulch/Telegraph System - with approximately 57.2 miles of natural surface trails;
- Start/End point for the nearly 500 mile Colorado Trail at Junction Creek Trailhead;
- Miles of connecting trails linking neighborhoods with destinations around the community.

5.4.2 UPDATE ON 2001 PLAN GOALS

In 2001, the City established a set of 12 major project goals for future development of its trails system. These goals were revisited as part of the 2009 planning process. The text below provides an update on these goals:.

1. *Goal: The Animas River Trail (ART) should be considered, and designed as a linear park and transportation corridor with abundant greenway areas to complement the trail.*

The ART is an integral part of the Animas River Greenway, which is considered a linear park. While the ART serves as an important transportation corridor as well, and will continue to do so in the future, it is also a very popular recreational trail that can sometimes result in user conflict due to the speed of commuting cyclists. The continued evolution of the City's multi-modal transportation network will eventually result in a more effective network of on-street bike routes and safe intersections, helping to de-emphasize the ART as a through-commuter transportation corridor.

2. *Goal: The ART and associated greenway should be designed to accommodate multiple uses such as: recreation; transportation; visual buffering; flood prevention and wetland; plant and animal habitat protection, enhancement and restoration.*

New sections of the ART are built of concrete, no less than 10 feet wide, are lighted, and meet Federal accessibility standards. This allows for a very wide variety of users including pedestrians, cyclists, in-line skaters, joggers, strollers,

dog walkers, fisherman, and other users of all ages and abilities. Natural surface trails also exist within the greenway and connect with the ART, providing anglers and others with convenient access to a less developed setting along the river's edge.

3. *Goal: The "spine" of the ART should be completed as soon as possible.*

The City has completed approximately 4.7 miles of continuous ART from 29th Street at the north end of town south to the Durango Mall. Several additional trail sections, totally approximately 1.5 miles have been completed from the Durango Mall south to the Rivera Bridge at River Road near Home Depot. Two remaining sections in this reach are scheduled for completion in 2010: (1) the "Mall Corner" trail section; and (2) the South Durango Pedestrian Bridge and Trail. Once these sections are completed, the ART will be completed from 29th Street to Rivera Bridge, a total of approximately 6 miles. The two-mile section planned from 29th Street north to the City limits near North Animas Village is under design development with construction anticipated to be phased in over several years. As the City limits expand to the north and south, it is expected that the ART will also expand with it.

4. *Goal: The ART should have looped trail opportunities in core areas, to ease congestion and provide variety and options for trail users.*

Several looped trail opportunities have been established in the core area near downtown. Additional hard surface looped trail opportunities envisioned for the core area have yet to be developed—the downtown loop connecting the Schneider Park Bridge with the 9th Street Bridge on the east side of the river, and the Roosa loop connecting the 9th Street Bridge with the Hwy 160 Bridge on the west side of the river. Several informal natural surface loops also exist within the Greenway and tie into the Animas River Trail at the pedestrian bridges in the system.

5. *Goal: The overall system of trails and bicycle lanes through city neighborhoods and along commuter routes should be designed for efficient (direct) routes that provide real alternatives to automobile travel.*

The trail system is one component of the City's multi-modal transportation network. Arterial streets within the City are another component of this network, and include striped bike lanes. The City's network of streets also include signed bike routes. The continued evolution of the City's multi-modal transportation network will result in an even more effective network of on-street bike routes and safe intersections, providing a functional alternative to motor vehicle travel.

6. *Goal: Trails should be created and extended in anticipation of, or concurrently with new development.*

Many sections of the City's hard surface trail system have been built independent of development projects. In areas where new developments have been proposed, it has been common practice for trails to be incorporated into the overall design, with the developer participating in its construction. Trail connectivity between community destination points is a core tenet of Durango's trails program.

7. *Goal: Maintain existing public lands connections and establish new ones in areas lacking public access.*

Effective and multiple public access points to the trail system and adjoining public lands is another core tenet of Durango's trails program and is also a requirement of the City's Land Use Development Code.

8. *Goal: Accessibility should be incorporated whenever reasonably practical into new trails, and into improvements for existing trails.*

City of Durango hard surface trails are built for accessibility, meeting the standards of American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and American with Disabilities Act (ADA), where applicable.

9. *Goal: Trails should be located and designed to blend with the surrounding environment.*

The City's hard surface trails are built to uniform design standards and specification in order to meet accessibility, maintenance, and aesthetic requirements of the City. Natural surface trails are typically hand built, limiting their visual impact on their surroundings.

10. *Goal: The City should regularly coordinate trail development efforts with other local governments, state, and federal agencies and private organizations.*

Trail development activities are often coordinated with other local agencies and organizations to ensure functional integration of the various trail systems developed or managed by other entities around the community.

11. *Goal: The City should consolidate in one staff position the day-to-day management of planning, design, acquisition, construction, maintenance and financing of trails.*

Day-to-day activities associated with planning, design, acquisition, construction, maintenance and financing of trails is handled by a team of full-time City employees including administrative, engineering, planning, landscape architect, and maintenance staff from several City departments.

12. *Goal: Consistent standards should be adopted to provide direction for the design, construction, and management of trails in the City.*

The City's hard surface trails are built to uniform design standards and specification in order to meet accessibility, maintenance, and aesthetic requirements of the City. These requirements are consistent with the standards of American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and American with Disabilities Act (ADA).

5.5 PRIMARY TRAIL SYSTEM GOALS

This Plan reiterates three primary goals from the 2001 Plan that will allow for the successful continuation of Durango’s trail development efforts in the coming decade.

5.5.1 COMPLETE THE ANIMAS RIVER TRAIL

The first and most important goal is to complete the Animas River Trail (ART) to the south and north city limits. While much of this work has been completed, several sections have yet to be built and should be completed prior to the sunset of the Recreation Complex/Trail dedicated sales tax in 2019. Additionally, several sections of the ART that were built in past decades are substandard and should be reconstructed to current standards to ensure user safety, good accessibility, and to reduce future maintenance costs.

5.5.2 BUILD LATERAL TRAIL CONNECTIONS TO ANIMAS RIVER TRAIL

The second most important goal is to build lateral connections to the Animas River Trail that establishes a functional and continuous trail system through the community. This includes both hard and natural surface trails. Primary hard surface lateral trails include the U.S. Highway 160 “SMART 160 Trail” east and west spine; the Santa Rita Trail linking the ART at Santa Rita Park to the Goeglein Gulch Trail and the College Mesa. Effectively developing these lateral trails will require crossing U.S. Highways 550 and 160 which will necessitate consideration of underpasses, overpasses, or at-grade intersection improvements to ensure safe and functional crossing.

5.5.3 COMPLETE A NETWORK OF TRAILS THROUGHOUT COMMUNITY

An additional goal is the continued development of other neighborhood connectors throughout the trail network. This may include both hard and natural surface trails, sidewalks and bike lanes, and bike routes that enable residents and tourists to travel throughout the community to popular destinations, and use the trails for recreation, health and fitness and transportation. Key to this is the development of loop trails that offer a wide variety of travel options for trail users.

5.6 PRIMARY TRAIL SYSTEM POLICIES

The 2001 Trails Master Plan contained specific trail policies that were used to implement the trails program over the past decade. Many of these policies are still relevant and are reiterated here:

1. The Animas River Trail will be designed to meet AASHTO standards for bicycle paths wherever feasible
2. The City will pursue creative methods of trail easement acquisition and strive to work with willing property owners when acquiring trail easements.
3. When developing trails through residential neighborhoods efforts will be made to maintain the privacy of existing residences.



4. When warranted, the City will evaluate the feasibility of incorporating trails into utility and road projects.
5. The City will protect future trail corridors through:
 - a. Easement acquisition through dedication or purchase during the development review process
 - b. Establishment of adequate building setbacks
6. The City will continue to monitor trail safety conditions, including regular inventories of trail and bridge conditions to assist in the identification of safety improvements and the development of maintenance schedules.
7. The City places a high priority on establishing the Animas River Greenway and will work with property owners along the River to incorporate trail easements and land preservation as part of new development wherever feasible.
8. The City will place a high priority on establishing and preserving public access to the Animas River where it is important to recreational users.
9. The City will maintain public ownership of public lands along the Animas River.
10. The City should develop loop trail opportunities along the Animas River Trail.
11. The City should develop trail opportunities from Durango neighborhoods to adjacent and surrounding mesas, ridges and parks.
12. The City will require new development to provide trail linkages to adjacent public lands.
13. Property along drainages is appropriate for greenway and trail development so long as compatible with protection of viable wildlife habitats.
14. The City will seek grant funds to leverage local sales tax revenues in the development of the community trail system.
15. The City will continue to encourage coordination with La Plata County in developing an integrated trail system.

5.7 TRAIL PROJECTS AND EASEMENT NEEDS

5.7.1 KEY FINDINGS OF COMMUNITY SURVEY

The City of Durango conducted a Community Attitude and Interest Survey in 2009 to establish priorities for the future development of parks, trails, recreation facilities, and the preservation of open space in the community. The survey obtained statistically valid results from households throughout the City. With respect to trails, 88% of residents have used the community trails system. The most important park and recreation facilities to Durango residents are the hiking and biking trails, natural surface trails and hard surface trails of the community. Residents would like to see more hard surfaced trails developed and more equestrian trails.

5.7.2 TRAIL NEEDS

Trail needs are divided into 3 categories—proposed future trails, trailhead improvements, and future reconstruction needs. Proposed future trails are depicted on **Figure 9 & 10** and described below.

A) Proposed Future Trails

Proposed future trails are identified and prioritized using the 2001 Master Plan as the foundation of the Plan; an evaluation of the existing gaps in the system and known future trail system within the planning area; and incorporating pertinent public input received during the planning process.

1) Completion of the Animas River Trail (ART)

- a) **South of River Road to the eventual tie in point with the SMART 160 Trail to Grandview:** The 2001 Trails Master Plan identified the Wilson Gulch area as the preferred location for the terminus of the ART and the logical crossing point to connect to the SMART 160 Trail. The final location for this extension and crossing will require close coordination with CDOT to ensure that it is consistent with the intent of the Environmental Impact Statement prepared for the Highway 160 reconstruction project;
- b) **Humane Society to Durango Mall:** This trail and pedestrian bridge crossing the Animas River upstream of the Highway 550/160 High bridge will connect the completed section of the ART south of the Humane Society with the ART behind the Durango Mall (Scheduled for completion in spring 2010)
- c) **Northeast Durango Mall Corner:** This missing link in the ART will connect the southern section of the trail with the main section of the ART as it heads north to Downtown and on to 29th Street (Scheduled for completion late 2010)
- d) **29th Street to 32nd Street:** This section of the ART is envisioned to be built close to and paralleling E. 3rd Avenue to limit impacts of the narrow and linear Memorial Park (Proposed for construction in 2011)
- e) **32nd Street to north City Limits:** This nearly 2 mile section is envisioned to be built in sections within the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad corridor. With completion of the missing links in the mainline ART as described above, this extension will become the next focus of attention for the community (this segment was under design development in 2010).

2) Construction of the Paved Multi-Use SMART 160 Trail

- a) **SMART 160 East to Three Springs Boulevard:** Several sections of the trail are either already completed or under design. As of 2009, the final alignment between the CDOT interchange area and the Sale Barn Trailhead at River Road has not yet been decided upon. The abandoned

railroad grade or the sanitary sewer line and utility corridor provide the best alternatives for this section. A natural surface alternative that passes through BLM and County property to connect to the Sale Barn Trailhead should be evaluated as an interim solution to the final alignment.

- b) SMART 160 West to Lightner Creek Road:** The 2009 approval of the Twin Buttes Conceptual Plan has elevated this project's community interest. A western section of this trail has been proposed to be constructed as part of the Twin Buttes development. Preliminary alignment analysis of the section from the Animas River to Wild Cat Canyon Road has shown that an alignment paralleling Lightner Creek may provide the ideal user experience. However, due to potential high cost of such an alternative, the limited sun exposure during winter months, and the trail's close proximity to the Highway 160, an alternative alignment should be evaluated that sets the alignment primarily on the north side of Highway 160 which would provide a less expensive and more favorable year round alignment.

SMART 160 East to Three Springs Boulevard will receive priority of the two proposed SMART 160 Trail segments. Development proposals within the entire SMART 160 corridor will be evaluated by the City to ensure opportunities to acquire appropriate easements and/or develop trail segments are realized as part of the development process.

- 3) Construction of the paved multi-use Santa Rita Trail--Santa Rita Park to Goeglein Gulch Road:** From Santa Rita Park, this trail is proposed to travel east between Santa Rita Drive and the Santa Rita drainage, then under the State Highway 3 box culvert to E. 9th Avenue where it would head north within the City road right-of-way, eventually tying into Goeglein Gulch Road and Trail towards College Mesa. As an additional phase of this trail, a defined corridor should be established through Santa Rita Park from the ART to the signalized intersection of Santa Rita Drive and Us Highway 550/160. This could be accomplished through pavement markings and/or signage within the park.
- 4) Completion of the paved multi-use Goeglein Gulch Trail to College Mesa at Fort Lewis Drive:** As of 2009, this trail terminates into a sidewalk approximately half way up Goeglein Gulch Road to the College where a previous plan envisioned a pedestrian bridge crossing to the College. Current plans call for a widening of the sidewalk to 10' to meet City trail standards and allow for consistent winter maintenance by City crews.
- 5) Safe Crossings of Highway 550/160, Highway 160 East and West, Camino del Rio, and North Main:** A range of alternative crossings and locations should be considered for providing safe passage across these busy highways. Alternatives should include overpasses, underpasses, and at-grade intersection improvements.

- 6) **Other Potential Community Trails of Interest:** In addition to the primary hard-surface multi-use trails, other trails have been identified as important to the community. Many of these trails are envisioned as natural surface or unpaved trails. Hard surfacing of any these trails should only occur if use and community support warrant. Most of the trails listed below will require negotiation of trail easements and property owner approval including private land owners and public agencies.

The trails include:

- **Riverview Trail from East 6th Ave. to Holly Ave.:** This trail would provide residents with exceptional neighborhood connectivity between Holly Avenue and Riverview Sports Complex, Riverview Elementary School, and Riverview Drive as it heads west to 29th Street and the Animas River Trail.
- **Needham Elementary School to Miller Middle School Trail:** This trail would provide direct connectivity between the school and neighborhoods separated by Junction Creek. Securing a viable route would require negotiating multiple easement acquisitions from private property owners.
- **Folsom Park to Riverview Drive:** Historically, Folsom Park has had poor access from the surrounding neighborhood with no direct connection to the park from Riverview Drive without first traveling out to Florida Road. A side yard trail, with stairs, would be required in order to make the connection.
- **Roosa Ave. to Eastlawn Ave. Trail:** This trail would allow pedestrians to bypass the steep and challenging section of El Paso Street
- **Delwood Ave. to Dalla Mountain Park Trail:** This trail would provide safe and function access to Dalla Mountain Park from the Crestview neighborhood without requiring travel along Junction Street where the sidewalks end before reaching the Dalla Mountain Park Trailhead.
- **Hillcrest Golf Course Trail:** A loop Trail around Hillcrest Golf Course.
- **Overend Mountain Park to Twin Buttes/Lightner Creek:** This trail would provide a single track connection through existing and proposed City Open Space allowing hikers and bikers to travel to and from the Dry Fork Trailhead of the Colorado Trail from town without traveling on Highway 160. The trail will require the approval and assistance of the BLM as a small portion will need to pass through BLM property near Perins Peak.
- **Trails to Lake Nighthorse:** A range of trails to connect Durango to the future recreational area surrounding Lake Nighthorse including a trail paralleling CR 211 and trails that could align through City and County open space adjacent to Bodo Industrial Park and La Posta Road.
- **Smelter Mountain/Off Leash (Dog) Area Trails:** A network of trails exists on the lower north and east facing slope of Smelter Mountain, including the old haul road trail to CR 211. These trails should be organized and improved to accommodate dog walkers and future access to Lake Night Horse.



Figure 9 - Proposed Future Trails (NORTH)



Figure 10 - Proposed Future Trails (SOUTH)

- **Horse Gulch Trails:** With City acquisition of significant acreage in Horse Gulch, the overall trail system on the City-acquired lands should be evaluated to ensure it provides safe access and a range of opportunities for all ages and abilities. Additional trails envisioned in the Gulch include a ridge line trail that would travel along the eastern ridge top of Horse Gulch and connect back to the existing trail system at the northeast boundary of public lands within the area. Horse Gulch could also benefit from an expansion/improvement of beginner level trails that would provide gentle grades, smoother surfaces and good sight lines. Additionally, improvements to Horse Gulch Road from the 3rd Street Trailhead should be evaluated to provide easier access to the meadow area within Horse Gulch.
- **Ewing Mesa Trails:** As this part of the community develops, so should the trail system, including a south rim trail connecting the rim trails above downtown Durango with the Ewing Mesa Ridge and Grandview Ridge.
- **Refinement and rerouting of trails on Animas City Mountain:** The existing trail system on Animas City Mountain is steep, erosive, and does not provide access to the western ridge above Dalla Mountain Park. Any modifications to the Animas City Mountain trail system would require approval and coordination with the BLM.
- **Animas River East Bank Trail:** This informal trail exists from Santa Rita Drive to the Highway 550/160 High Bridge on an abandoned railroad corridor. A short concrete trail passes through the Rivergate development. Additional extensions south past Rivera Bridge should be evaluated.
- **Colorado Trail Extension into Downtown Durango:** Establishing a close-in connection to the downtown Durango has long been a vision of many in the community. A route needs to be identified that is supported and approved by Colorado Division of Wildlife and Bureau of Land Management whose land the trail would need to pass through.
- **Community Loop Trail:** The community trail system largely surrounds Durango. The primary exception is north of Durango city limits in the Animas Valley. As opportunities present themselves, a trail route that would connect CR 250 to Animas View Drive or 32nd Street should be evaluated.

B) Trailhead improvements

As part of the continued development of the community trail system, the City should make trailhead improvements consistent with the recommendations of the open space trailhead assessment in Chapter 6 of this Plan. Specific and detailed trailhead assessments should be undertaken to determine amount of use, facility needs, and potential impacts (positive and negative) on adjacent neighbors. Priority areas for evaluation and consideration include Overend Mountain Park, Dalla Mountain Park, and the Horse Gulch area. Potential trailhead sites should also be identified as part of the design development associated with the extension of the Animas River Trail north, SMART 160 Trail, Three Springs, Twin Buttes, and other areas where future development warrants such evaluation.

C) Future Reconstruction

Maintenance and reconstruction needs have been identified by evaluating the existing hard surface trail system within the City to determine substandard trail sections or those in need of maintenance. This assessment has been incorporated into the Capital Improvement Plan for implementation and prioritization. Trail sections in need of reconstruction to City safety and design standards include: (1) Durango Mall north to Santa Rita Park; (2) Whitewater Park to Albertsons; (3) Schneider Park Bridge to Riverfront Park; and (4) Rank Park to 29th Street Trailhead.

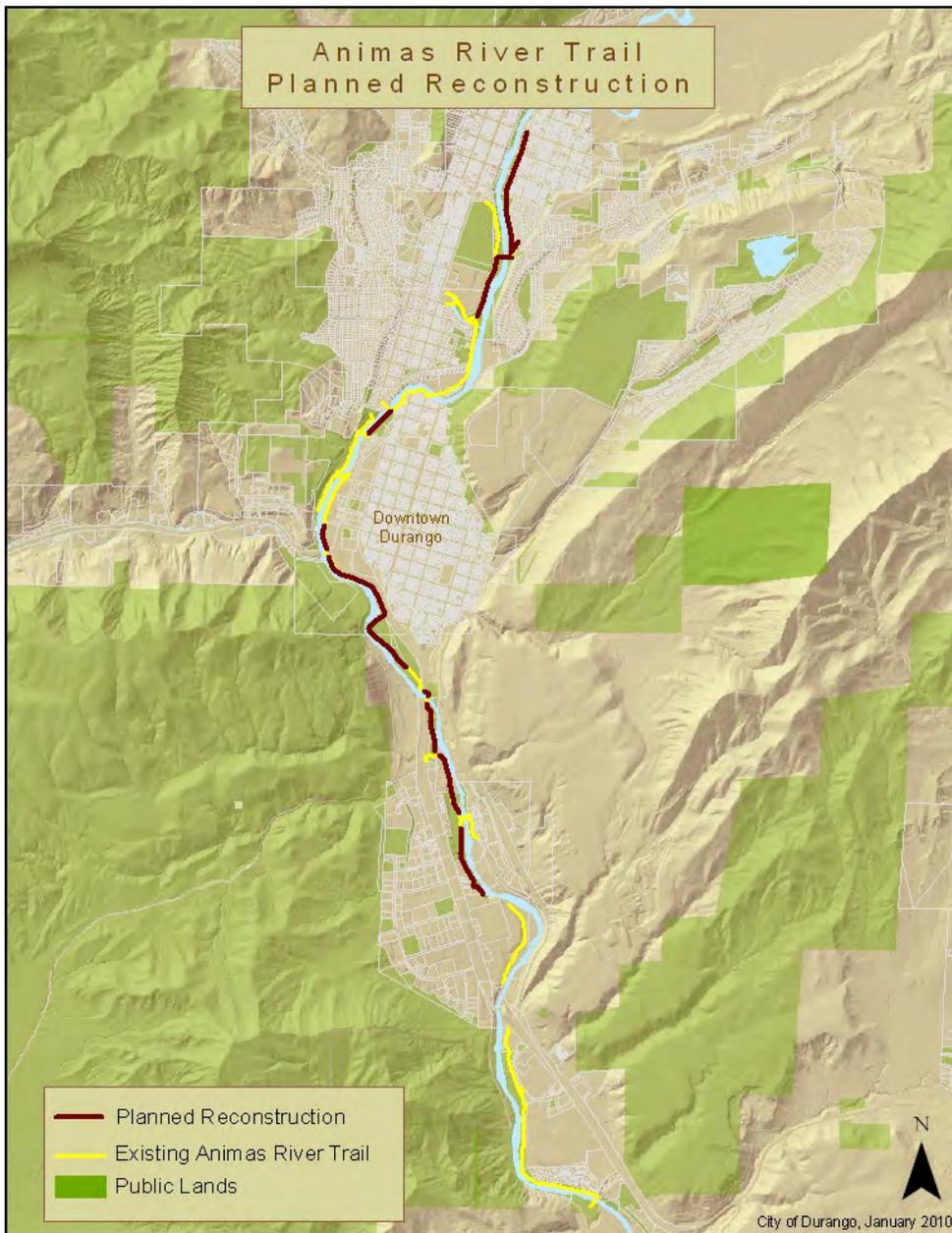


Figure 11 - Animas River Trail Planned Reconstruction