Rocky Mountain National Park
Colorado

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Crater Trail Environmental Assessment

Newsletter
September 2016

Background

Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) is considering options for management of the Crater Trail, which originates near Milner Pass and extends to above tree line east of the Continental Divide. Park staff will be preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) and invites public input in advance of preparation of the EA. The Crater Trail in its current configuration is resulting in harm to park resources and is not sustainable from a trail construction and maintenance perspective.

The public scoping process has begun and comments are invited through October 3, 2016. The EA will analyze a range of alternatives to meet project objectives, evaluate issues and impacts on park resources and values, and identify mitigation measures to lessen the degree or extent of these impacts.

Project Need

The project is needed to determine the long-term management and use of the Crater Trail area, which is in designated wilderness. Currently the trail is closed year-round, pending completion of this EA that addresses threats to natural and cultural resources. The trail is mostly within the Specimen Mountain Research Natural Area and likely originated as a social trail. It passes through a prehistoric archeological site above treeline, where substantial erosion is occurring, and lies within the Specimen Mountain Bighorn Sheep Protection Area. A decision is needed on the management and use of the trail that takes into consideration these sensitive resources and addresses the poor trail condition.

Erosion on the Crater Trail

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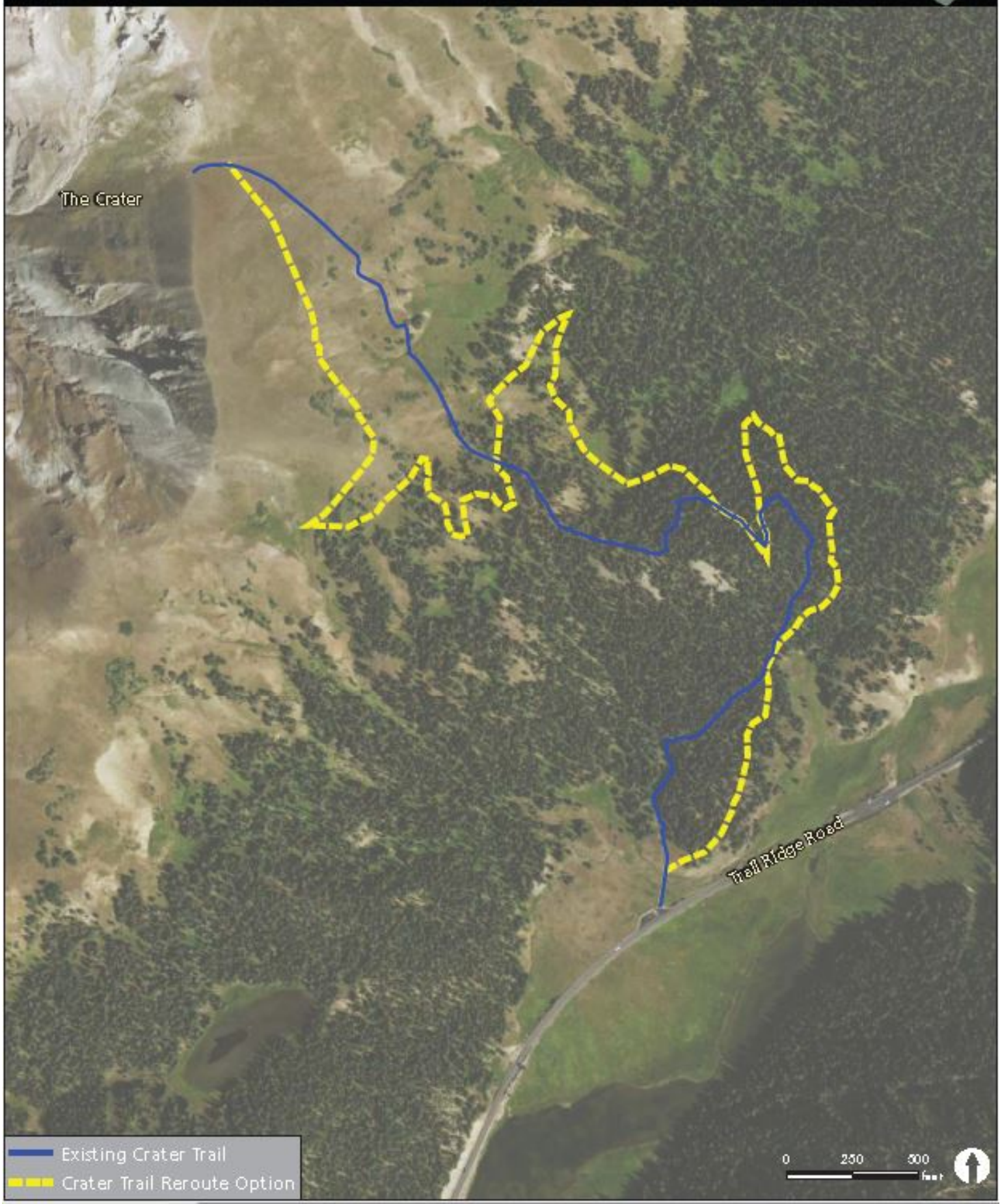

Options for Management of Crater Trail

Preliminary options that have been identified for management of the trail and surrounding area include reconstructing the trail within the current alignment, rerouting the trail to a less steep gradient, or permanently closing the trail. Also under consideration is allowing continued use of the current trail and implementing minor improvements within the limits of the existing trail maintenance program (the no action alternative). If the trail or segments of the trail were abandoned due to reroutes or closure, abandoned trail segments would be restored to natural conditions through active replanting or natural revegetation.

View of the Crater

Next Steps

Park staff encourage public participation throughout the planning process. There will be two opportunities to comment formally on the project – one starting now during initial project scoping and again following release of the EA. Comments received during the scoping period will be used to help define the issues and concerns to be addressed in the EA, while also assisting with analyzing the different alternatives. The EA will analyze a range of alternatives to meet project objectives and evaluate potential impacts on park resources such as vegetation, wildlife, wilderness character, soils, visitor use, cultural resources, and other important park resources.

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Public Scoping Meeting

The park is hosting a meeting about the proposed project on Tuesday, September 13, 2016, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Grand Lake Fire Protection District Station located at 201 W. Portal Road in Grand Lake. This will be an opportunity to express ideas, concerns, and recommendations about alternative actions and have questions answered. There will be a short presentation at 6:15 p.m., and park staff will be available to answer questions until 7:30 p.m. The public is invited to visit at any point during the scheduled time to review materials and provide written comments.

Send Us Your Comments

Comments must be received in writing by close of business on October 3, 2016. Comments can be submitted at the public open house described above or online by visiting: http://parkplanning.nps.gov/romo. Look for "Crater Trail." Comments may also be sent to the following mailing address:

Superintendent
Rocky Mountain National Park
Estes Park, CO 80517

Public scoping comments will be accepted through **October 3, 2016.**

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. Although you can ask in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee we will be able to do so.

Keep Informed

For updates and information about the process, press releases, newsletters, planning documents, and the EA when completed, please visit our website at: http://parkplanning.nps.gov/romo.