

Colorado Offroad Trail Defenders
Mile Hi Jeep Club
Rollins Pass Restoration Association

April 4, 2021

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Boulder District Ranger
USDA Forest Service
Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests & Pawnee National Grassland
2140 Yarmouth Avenue
Boulder, CO 80301

Greetings,

On behalf of the organizations listed above, we submit this letter as a formal request for the Forest Service to reopen NFSR 501.1 to public motorized travel between the Corona Pass summit and Yankee Doodle Lake. This route has been referred to as the Boulder Wagon Road since its initial construction in the 19th century. Reopening this road would allow motorists to once again travel over the historic Corona/Rollins Pass from Rollinsville to Winter Park, which they have been unable to do for the last 30 years.

History:

The Boulder Wagon Road was built in the late 1880s to support commerce over the pass from Boulder to the Fraser River valley. Originally a private toll road used by wagons pulled by oxen and mules, this pass crossing was the only reasonable method for materials to travel westward over the Continental Divide. Many years later, a railroad was built to the south, eliminating the need and profitability of a toll road at this location.

With railroads expanding, the Moffat Tunnel built through the mountains replaced the rail line over the top. The rail line over the pass was abandoned, and rails and ties removed. The former railroad bed through the Needles Eye Tunnel became an automobile path (Rollins Pass Road), with the Boulder Wagon Road serving as a secondary route. Rollins Pass Road was promoted as an auto tour route in the mid-20th century and was heavily used by tourists. Jenny Creek Road, originating near the town of Eldora, was the original Boulder Wagon Road feeder. It was connected to the main Rollins Pass Road near Yankee Doodle Lake for continuous motorized travel.

In the 1960s, a pipeline permit was issued to a natural gas company and a pipeline was built along the Boulder Wagon Road route. The pipeline ran for a short distance under the original roadbed, and a second parallel roadway was built alongside the original roadway for construction and service vehicles. Shortly thereafter, in the early 1970s, the Boulder Wagon Road was closed to public motorized use by the Forest Service and designated as an admin road, accessible only to the Forest Service and the pipeline company.

At the time of the original closure of the Boulder Wagon Road, motorists could still drive over the pass via the Rollins Pass Road. However, disaster soon struck. The last remaining tunnel on the railroad bed suffered a rockfall in 1979 and the local land managers closed that route over the pass. The tunnel was briefly reopened after undergoing repairs in 1989, only to be permanently closed after another rockfall in 1990. This closure, combined with the closure of the Boulder Wagon Road, caused there to no longer be a continuous route open over Corona Pass, and it has not been traversable by

vehicle for the last 30 years. Both sides of the pass are open to vehicles, but not the short distance between them, forcing motorists to drive ~90 miles around on highways to reach the other side.

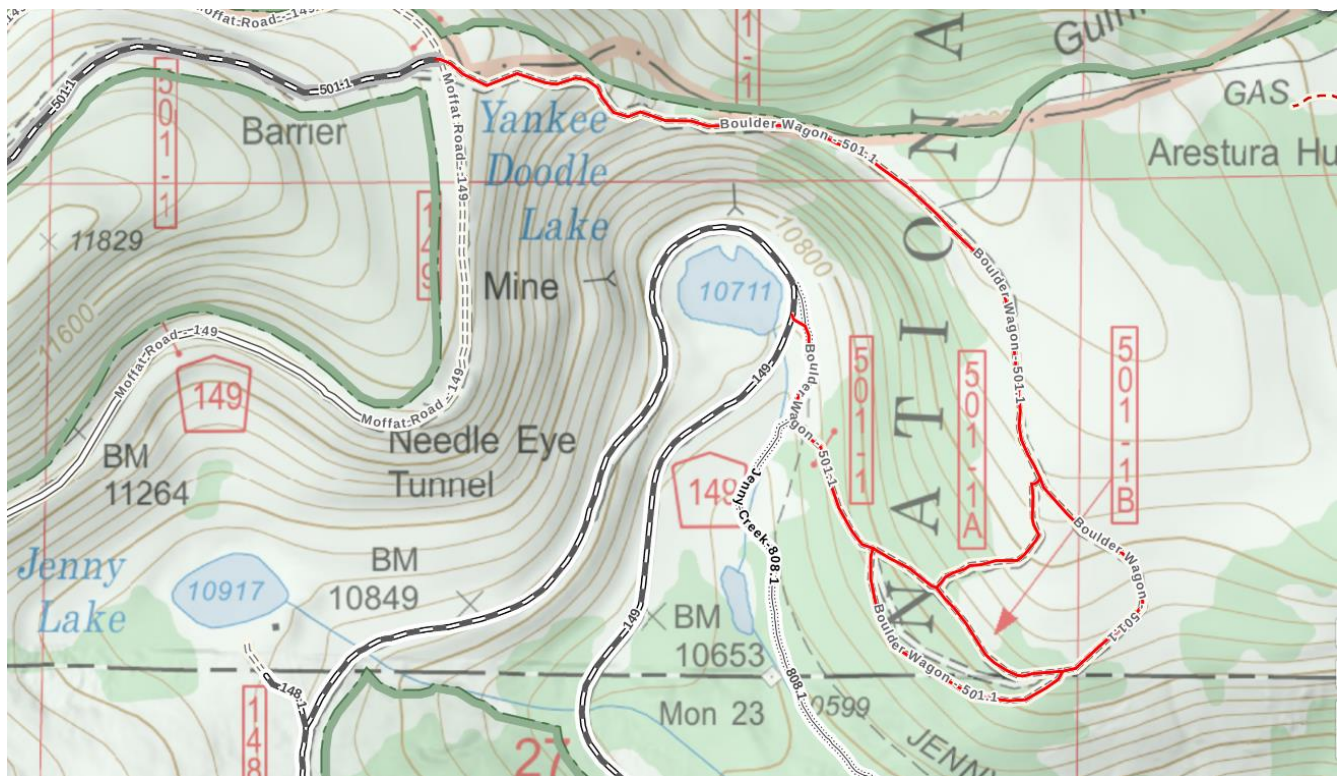
Request:

Corona/Rollins Pass remains a highly popular scenic route even though it is no longer a through-route. This route would be even more valuable to the public if it could once again be driven across the Divide from Rollinsville to Winter Park. With the growing popularity of overlanding, motorized recreationists are increasingly seeking long, scenic, off-highway routes from one point to another. If this pass could be reopened, it would provide a connection across the Continental Divide linking hundreds of miles of dirt roads and 4WD trails.

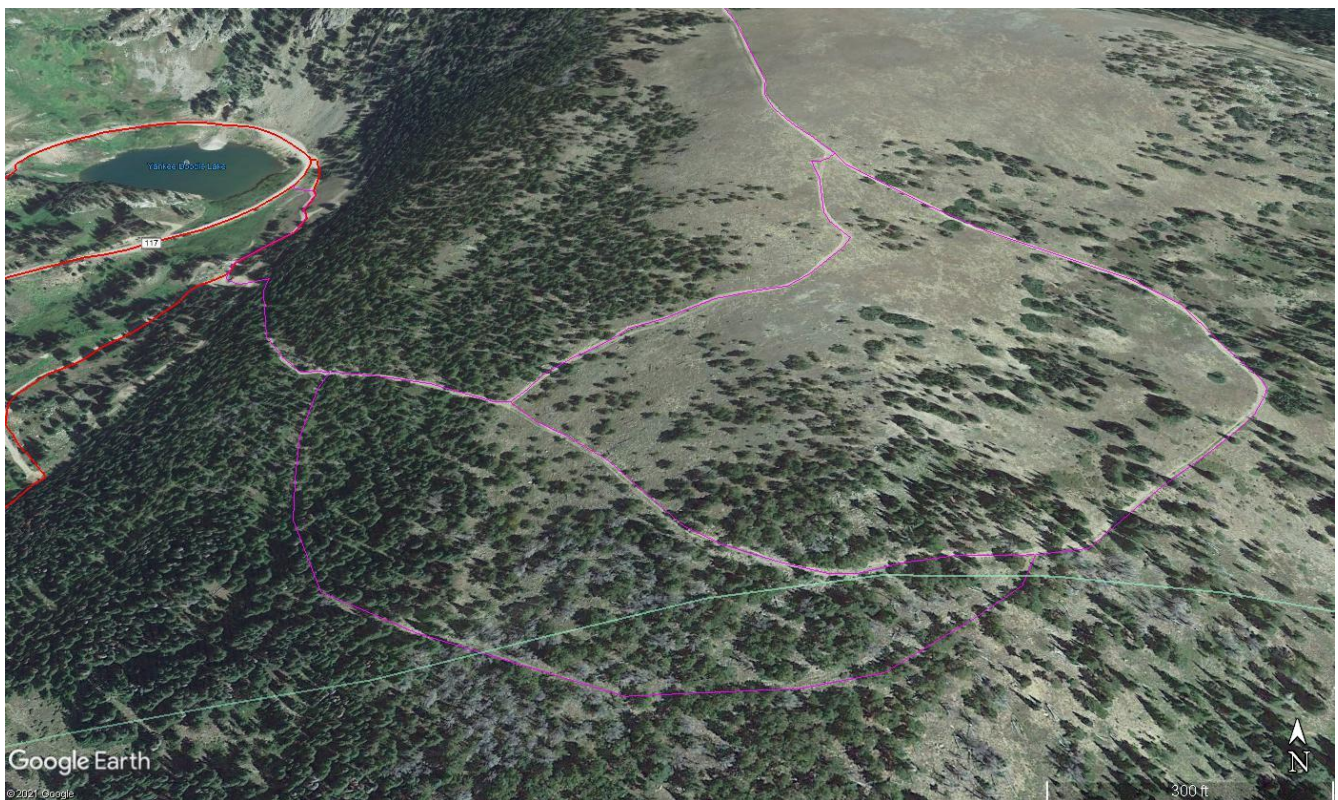
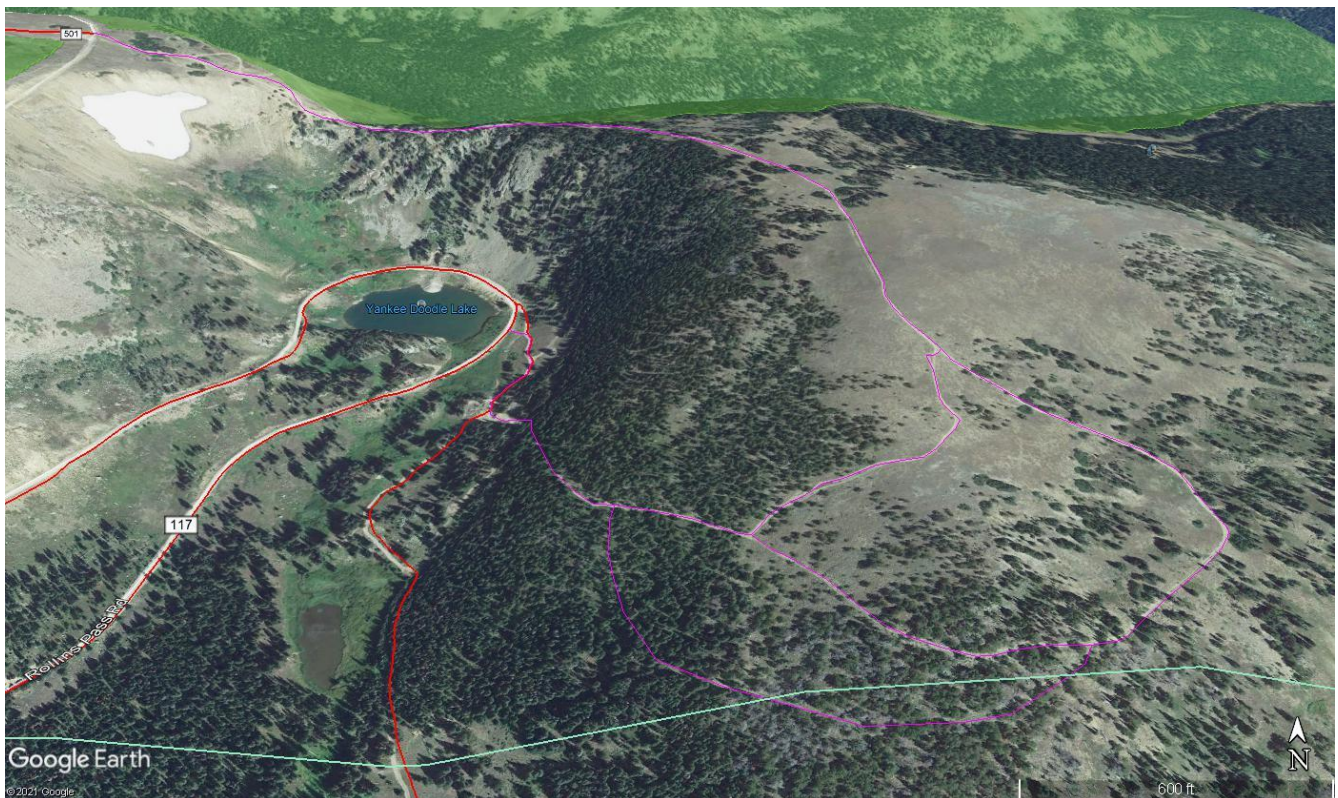
We recognize that the necessary repairs to the Needles Eye Tunnel to reopen the Rollins Pass Road over the pass are cost prohibitive and unlikely to ever be performed. This fact precludes use of the old railroad grade over the pass.

We are therefore requesting the reopening of the existing Boulder Wagon Road (NFSR 501.1) roadway for public motorized access over the Corona Pass with minimal cost to taxpayers.

This route segment is shown in red in the map below and is 1.63 miles in length.



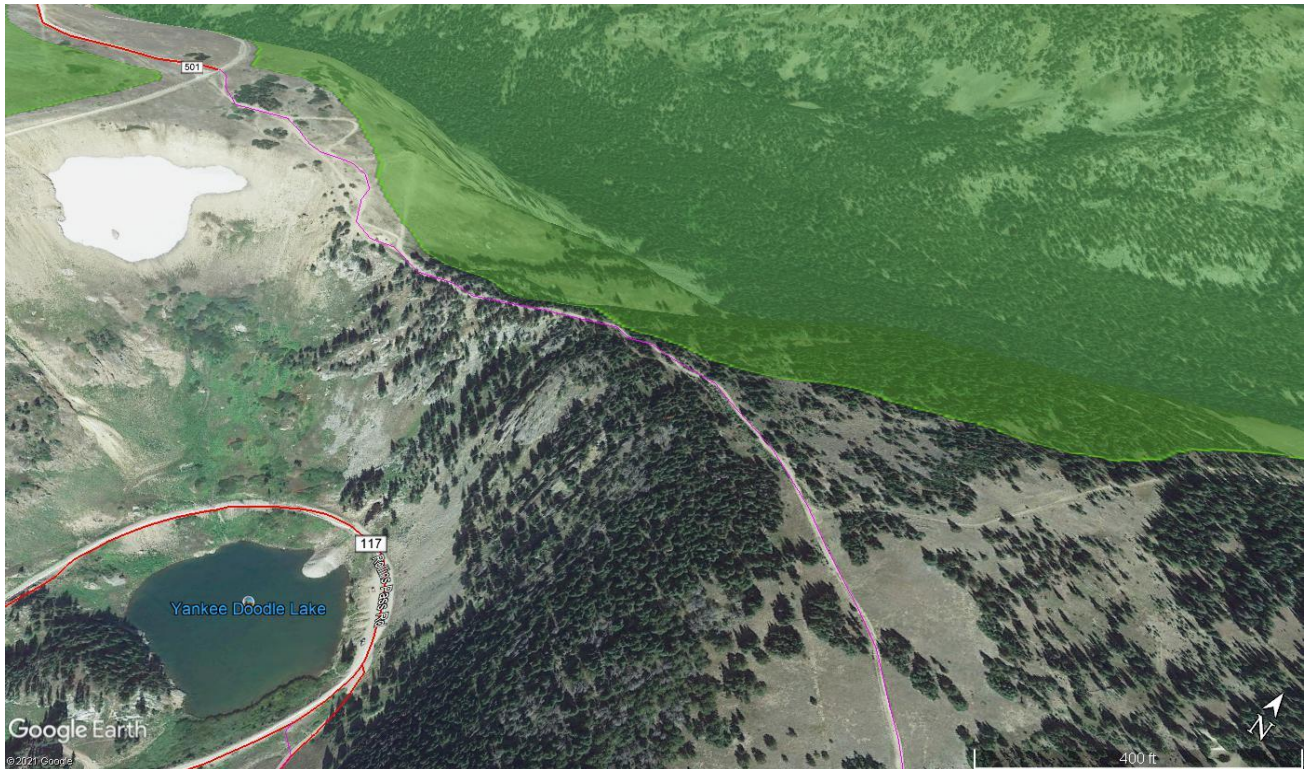
The following Google Earth screenshots illustrate the route (purple lines) and its relation to the adjacent Indian Peaks and James Peak Wilderness Areas (green shaded areas). Note that the legislation that designated these Wilderness Areas specifically cherry-stemmed the Boulder Wagon Road to allow for continued motorized use of this route.



As seen above, the route splits into several paths when it reaches the shoulder of the ridge. The southernmost branch is the one marked as NFSR 501.1, the main Boulder Wagon Road route. As evident from satellite imagery, that pathway is naturally reclaimed and no longer exists on the ground. The main route appears to follow NFSR 501.1B before rejoining 501.1. The route marked as 501.1A is

another alternate pathway that shortcuts the broader curve. However, it appears to follow a steeper slope and is likely less sustainable. We are only requesting that one of these paths be opened to public use. The Forest Service will have to determine which pathway through this section is best.

The next two screenshots show the upper section of the Boulder Wagon Road where it traverses a narrow ridge before intersecting the currently open portion of NFSR 501 at the summit of Corona Pass.



As shown in detail in the image above, there are multiple braided pathways on the uppermost section of the route immediately prior to the junction with NFSR 501. The traditional Boulder Wagon Road went straight up the ridge, but a secondary route with some additional switchbacks was built by the pipeline company to provide a gentler slope for their service trucks. One of these switchbacks intrudes briefly into the Indian Peaks Wilderness Area.

While the Forest Service will have to determine the best path through this section, it is clear from these images that the original pathway straight up the ridge still exists as a viable route on the ground. While the switchbacks built by the pipeline company may serve as a more sustainable route in places, providing a gentler grade and keeping vehicles away from the buried pipeline, they are not necessary for four-wheel-drive vehicles capable of climbing steep grades.

The lower switchback that intrudes into the Wilderness of course cannot be opened to any motorized use. However, the Forest may wish to incorporate the upper switchback into the public route. Whichever pathways are NOT included in the public route can be signed and/or barricaded to prevent them from being driven, or possibly recontoured and restored.

Conclusion:

Designating the Boulder Wagon Road as open to public motorized users has many advantages. First and foremost, it would restore what was once one of the most popular scenic auto tour routes in Colorado, allowing the public once again to cross the Divide between Rollinsville and Winter Park. This would open new opportunities for overlanders and other motorists to combine Rollins/Corona Pass with numerous other dirt roads and four-wheel-drive trails on both sides of the Divide.

It would also allow this pass to be driven as a large loop with either Berthoud Pass or Trail Ridge Road for either a long day trip or a multi-day excursion. An additional benefit is that some people with four-wheel-drive vehicles may choose to take this pass as a more interesting route between the Denver area and Winter Park, alleviating some traffic on Highway 40, which can get extremely congested during popular weekend travel times.

As the last year has shown, demand for outdoor recreation opportunities in Colorado is at an all-time high. Opening a new through-route across the Continental Divide will help disperse recreationists across the landscape and will decrease impacts from users who formerly had to drive the same route twice as an out-and-back. Thus, reopening the connecting route between both sides of Corona Pass provides a win-win opportunity to both increase recreational opportunities *and* decrease overall environmental impacts.

We see reopening the Boulder Wagon Road as requiring little more than some paperwork by the Forest Service and the removal or opening of the single gate across the roadway near Yankee Doodle lake at the east end of this route, plus installing signage to delineate the proper road alignment. We can provide signage for identification of the Boulder Wagon Road and caution signs to suggest high clearance vehicles at certain points along the route and indicate direction.

While we acknowledge that this trail was closed in the 1970s due to resource damage concerns, any damage from that time has long since been restored. We are willing to adopt this road and perform all necessary maintenance to mitigate against any future resource damage, harm to the natural gas pipeline, or motorized incursions into the adjacent Wilderness Area.

Funding for necessary maintenance, barriers, signage, etc. would be provided by our respective organizations as well as grants from the Colorado Parks and Wildlife OHV fund. The Forest Service would only have to perform the requisite level of environmental analysis (likely an EA) to designate this road as a route open to motorized use under the Forest's travel management plan. We suggest that the most appropriate designation would be as a trail open to all vehicles, which would make it

eligible for CPW OHV grants. It is also possible that this road could qualify for funding under the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA).

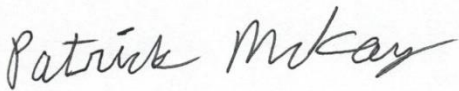
While we are not aware of any significant opposition to reopening the Boulder Wagon Road at this time, we are more than happy to work with the Forest Service to resolve any concerns that arise during the EA process. We ask the Boulder Ranger District to consider our proposal and hope that you will be willing to initiate the process to begin analysis this year. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



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And:



Patrick McKay
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On behalf of:
Colorado Offroad Trail Defenders, Mile Hi Jeep Club, and Rollins Pass Restoration Association

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