

Upland and Floodplain Vegetation Technical Report

**State Highway 82 / Entrance to Aspen
Environmental Reevaluation**

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**Colorado Department of Transportation, Region 3
and
Federal Highway Administration, Colorado Division**

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1.0 Affected Environment

This report provides a reevaluation of the upland and floodplain vegetation analysis presented in the 1997 State Highway 82 Entrance to Aspen Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Preferred Alternative selected in the Record of Decision (ROD) issued in August 1998.

1.1 Methodology

Geographic Information System (GIS) data showing vegetation were obtained from Pitkin County and the Colorado Department of Wildlife.¹ The data were overlaid on aerial photos and was compared to the existing (1997) condition described in the FEIS. Additionally, the existing upland and floodplain vegetation in the project corridor was verified through field reconnaissance on July 11, 2006.

1.2 Regulatory Overview

There have been no new or changed regulatory requirements regarding upland or floodplain vegetation since the publication of the 1997 FEIS and ROD. Since the publication of the FEIS and ROD, Pitkin County has adopted land use policy guidelines (Pitkin County 2002). The Ecological Bill of Rights was adopted through the Pitkin County Land Use Code on July 5, 2006 in Title 8, Article 2, Section 2-310. The Ecological Bill of Rights notes that citizens have the right to preservation of natural riparian areas and wetlands and the right to a landscape kept free of noxious and invasive weeds.

1.3 Description of the Existing Condition

The FEIS, page IV-44, notes that there is very little native vegetation in the project area due to agricultural, residential, commercial or recreation uses that have occurred in the project area. Native vegetation exists in the form of small parcels of sagebrush shrub lands near the airport, and floodplain communities surrounding the Roaring Fork River, Maroon Creek and Castle Creek Drainages.

The description of upland and floodplain vegetation provided in the FEIS has not changed substantively as verified during the field reconnaissance and as shown in Appendix A.

Two components of the Preferred Alternative have been constructed since the publication of the FEIS and ROD: (1) Owl Creek Road and West Buttermilk Road have been relocated to create a new, signalized intersection with State Highway 82 near the Buttermilk Ski Area; and (2) the roundabout at the Maroon Creek Road intersection has been completed.

¹ The vegetation was interpolated by biologists working with these agencies using satellite imagery and color infrared photography. In some cases the data predates the FEIS information.

In addition, the Maroon Creek Bridge Replacement Project is currently under construction, scheduled for completion by spring of 2008. This project is being constructed as a bridge replacement without any increase in roadway capacity. However, it will accommodate the Entrance to Aspen Preferred Alternative in the future by removing the center median and re-striping for two general-purpose lanes and two exclusive bus lanes (see the Introduction to the Technical Report Volume for more detail).

The intersection of Truscott Drive and State Highway 82 was completed in 2001. While this intersection is not part of the Entrance to Aspen Project, its configuration accommodates the alignment for the east approach to the Maroon Creek Bridge Replacement Project.

A transportation easement across the Marolt-Thomas Open Space was conveyed from the City of Aspen to CDOT in August of 2002, as part of land exchange and mitigation agreements between CDOT and the City of Aspen and Pitkin County. (Refer to Appendix A and B in the 1998 Record of Decision for details of the open space conveyance agreements and mitigation commitments.)

2.0 Environmental Consequences

This section describes the environmental impacts of the Preferred Alternative that have changed since publication of the FEIS and ROD. Impacts considered included impacts from the construction, operation, and maintenance of the Preferred Alternative selected in the ROD.

2.1 Methodology

Current conditions were compared against the construction and operational impacts that might alter the existing upland and floodplain vegetation when compared to the information presented for the Preferred Alternative in the 1997 FEIS and 1998 ROD.

2.2 Preferred Alternative

The impacts as presented in the 1997 FEIS are still valid and no new or greater impacts to upland and floodplain vegetation were identified in this reevaluation.

Based on existing upland and floodplain vegetation in the study area, there is no evidence of any substantive, long-term adverse effect on these vegetation resources from the previous intersection or roundabout construction. The current construction of the Maroon Creek Bridge is being done using Best Management Practices (BMPs) to protect and restore upland and floodplain vegetation.

3.0 Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures described in the 1997 FEIS have been implemented for components for the Preferred Alternative already constructed or currently under construction. These measures also would be implemented during construction of future components of the Preferred Alternative. The measures are considered adequate to minimize impacts to upland and floodplain vegetation in the project area. No additional mitigation would be needed based on current conditions and regulations. A summary of impacts and mitigation measures is provided in the following section.

4.0 Summary of Impacts and Mitigation

Impacts are summarized below in Table 4-1 as identified in both the FEIS and this reevaluation. Mitigation measures listed in the table are those from the 1998 ROD, unless additional measures are noted as being required due to findings of the reevaluation.

Table 4-1
Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Topic	FEIS Impact	Reevaluation Impact	Mitigation Measures
Upland and Floodplain Vegetation	Permanent replacement of vegetation with pavement Construction disturbance of grasses and irrigated pasture established along highway right-of-way Partial reestablishment of some vegetation over cut-and-cover tunnel	No change	Revegetate disturbed uplands with dryland shrubs and grasses Revegetate riparian and wetland areas with approved riparian/wetland seed mixes Transplant displaced trees and shrubs to disturbed areas where construction is nearly complete Riprap protection at bridge piers will be buried and topsoiled and allowed to naturally revegetate.

5.0 Agency Coordination

Data was obtained from Pitkin County and the Colorado Division of Wildlife for the vegetation reevaluation.

6.0 References

Pitkin County 2002. Pitkin County Land Use Policy Guidelines.

<http://www.aspenpitkin.com/pdfs/depts/7/landusepolicyguidelines.pdf>.

7.0 List of Preparers

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Appendix A: Field Reconnaissance Photos

Native sagebrush near
airport on south side
Highway 82



Residential
subdivision east side
of Highway 82 east of
Central Mountain
College



Floodplain vegetation
across Highway 82 at
Maroon Creek Bridge



Looking east along
Main Street