

3.12 Recreation Resources and Section 6(f) Discussion

3.12.1 What are recreation and Section 6(f) resources and why are they important?

The I-70 Mountain Corridor provides access to abundant recreation resources, including ski resorts, hiking and biking trails, rivers and fisheries, and federally managed public lands, among others. The White River National Forest, the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests, and a number of recreation and environmental management areas managed by the Colorado River Valley Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management surround the Corridor.

In addition to the National Environmental Policy Act, other laws and regulations applicable to recreation resources include Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (36 Code of Federal Regulations 59) and Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966 (23 Code of Federal Regulations 774). Section 6(f) protects recreational lands planned, acquired, or developed with Land and Water Conservation Funds. Section 4(f) protects significant publicly owned parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges; see **Section 3.14, Section 4(f) Discussion**, for the analysis of effects under Section 4(f).

The I-70 Mountain Corridor and Recreation

The majority of Colorado's population lives along the Front Range, while most of the state's public lands are west of the Continental Divide. Access to recreation resources heavily influences traffic patterns and congestion along the I-70 highway, and the Corridor communities are dependent on recreation visitors to support the local economies. Tourism jobs, which include skiing and outdoor recreation, account for a higher percentage of total jobs along the Corridor than anywhere else in the state—more than 40 percent of jobs in much of the Corridor.

3.12.2 What study area and process was used to analyze recreation and Section 6(f) resources?

The study area comprises recreation resources within three miles on either side of the I-70 highway. The indirect impacts analysis includes districts of the White River National Forest and Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests adjacent to the Corridor. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) collected recreation resource information from Corridor counties and municipalities, the Bureau of Land Management, and the United States Forest Service. Data gathered include federal land management plans, open space and recreation plans, and geographic information system databases. National Park Service and Colorado State Parks supplied information for the inventory of Section 6(f) resources; the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Environmental Compliance provided supplemental information.

The Colorado Department of Transportation mapped the recreation and Section 6(f) resources within three miles on either side of the I-70 highway. Additional coordination occurred with the United States Forest Service and county and municipal planners to better understand amenities and functions of recreation sites adjacent to the I-70 highway. Recreation planners from the White River National Forest and Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests provided National Forest visitation projections and helped develop the methodology to analyze indirect effects on recreation resources. The Colorado Department of Transportation analyzed direct impacts to recreation sites and Section 6(f) resources using geographic information system overlays of the alternative footprints on recreation sites. Indirect impacts were estimated using National Forest land visitation estimates as an indicator of overall indirect impacts on recreation resources accessed by the I-70 highway.

United States Forest Service planners provided visitation projections, including ski area visitation, for year 2020 for the White River National Forest and year 2010 for the Arapaho and Roosevelt National

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Forests. The Colorado Department of Transportation extrapolated these projections to 2025, which was the original planning horizon for this study. Although the planning horizon has been extended to 2035, year 2035 recreation visitor days were not estimated. The 2025 projection of visitors to National Forest System lands is not updated because Forest Management Plan revisions are done on an as-needed basis and have not been updated. Because the life of most Forest Management Plans is 15 to 20 years, projections past 2025 are not available at this time. The design team will coordinate with the United States Forest Service to update visitor projections prior to or during Tier 2 processes. Therefore, the indirect effects analysis estimates recreation impacts that occur in the year 2025.

3.12.3 What agencies have CDOT and FHWA coordinated with and what are their relevant issues?

The Colorado Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) (the lead agencies) coordinated with staff at Corridor counties and municipalities, the Bureau of Land Management, the United States Forest Service, and the Colorado Division of Wildlife to discuss management priorities and concerns about impacts to recreation resources in the Corridor. The United States Forest Service expressed particular concern about indirect impacts of increased access and induced growth on the White River National Forest and Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests due to capacity improvements to the I-70 highway. Many National Forest System facilities already experience visitor use levels at or near practical capacity on summer weekends, and the United States Forest Service lacks adequate resources to maintain existing facilities or add new ones for these National Forests. The United States Forest Service feels that the White River National Forest and Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests cannot accommodate additional visitation likely to result from capacity improvements on the I-70 highway, but that visitation via transit trips could be better managed than dispersed highway trips. The Environmental Protection Agency also voiced concern that additional visitation and growth affect the sustainability of recreation resources.

3.12.4 What are the areas of recreation and Section 6(f) resources interest identified in the Corridor?

More than 700 recreation sites are located within 3 miles of the I-70 highway. Farther afield, the I-70 highway provides primary access to hundreds more sites. Seventeen recreation sites adjacent to the I-70 highway are also Section 6(f) resources. Recreation resources include trails, campsites, rivers and lakes, ski areas, other developed facilities such as parks and ballfields, and undeveloped backcountry. These resources support an enormous variety of recreation activities. The larger recreation resources are described below, and the *I-70 Mountain Corridor PEIS Recreation Resources Technical Report* (CDOT, March 2011) provides a more detailed and comprehensive discussion of recreation resources.

Access to Recreation Sites

On a broad scale, changes to the I-70 highway affect recreation resources that depend on the I-70 highway as their primary access, regardless of their proximity to the Corridor. Recreational travel is the predominant contributor to peak I-70 highway traffic, especially during summer and winter weekends. Therefore, the consideration of indirect effects strongly influenced the discussion of recreation resources for this project.

What are the recreation resources on federal lands in the Corridor?

The National Forest System lands managed by the United States Forest Service in the White River National Forest and Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests (see **Figure 3.12-1**) receive most of the recreation use in the region, especially by non-resident visitors (including Denver metropolitan area visitors). These National Forests are two of the top ten mostly highly visited National Forests in the United States. They contain 15 downhill ski areas, wilderness areas, scenic byways, and many easily accessible trails and roads, recreation sites, picnic areas, and campgrounds.

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Visitor use in year 2000 for I-70 Mountain Corridor districts in the White River National Forest and Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests was calculated to be 8.3 million and 3.2 million recreation visitor days, respectively. Year 2025 recreation visitor days for these same districts are estimated to be 11.3 million for the White River National Forest and 6.4 million for the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests. The United States Forest Service projects that developed recreation facilities in the White River National Forest will be at 90 percent of current practical capacity by 2020, while use of Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests developed recreation facilities in 2000 was already at capacity on many summer weekends. The *I-70 Mountain Corridor PEIS Recreation Resources Technical Report* (CDOT, March 2011) explains the calculations and methodologies further.

The projected visitation increases are primarily linked to increases in local and regional (including Denver metropolitan area) population, and do not consider capacity constraints on the I-70 highway. Management capacity and resource sustainability, rather than access to these resources, limit visitor use for many of the resources on National Forest System lands, especially in developed and highly managed sites like campgrounds and ski areas. The White River National Forest travel management plan proposes controlling or restricting access to sites at certain times to manage forest recreation use. The United States Forest Service has goals for the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests to add and improve facilities for dispersed recreation to support increased demand but lacks the resources to either construct these facilities or operate and maintain them adequately over time.

Federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management are concentrated at the west end of the Corridor, extending from the western end of the Corridor east to Vail. The Colorado River Valley Field Office (formerly the Glenwood Springs Field Office) manages these lands for multiple uses. Recreation uses include hunting, fishing, and off-road vehicle driving but at much lower levels than the National Forest System lands in the Corridor.

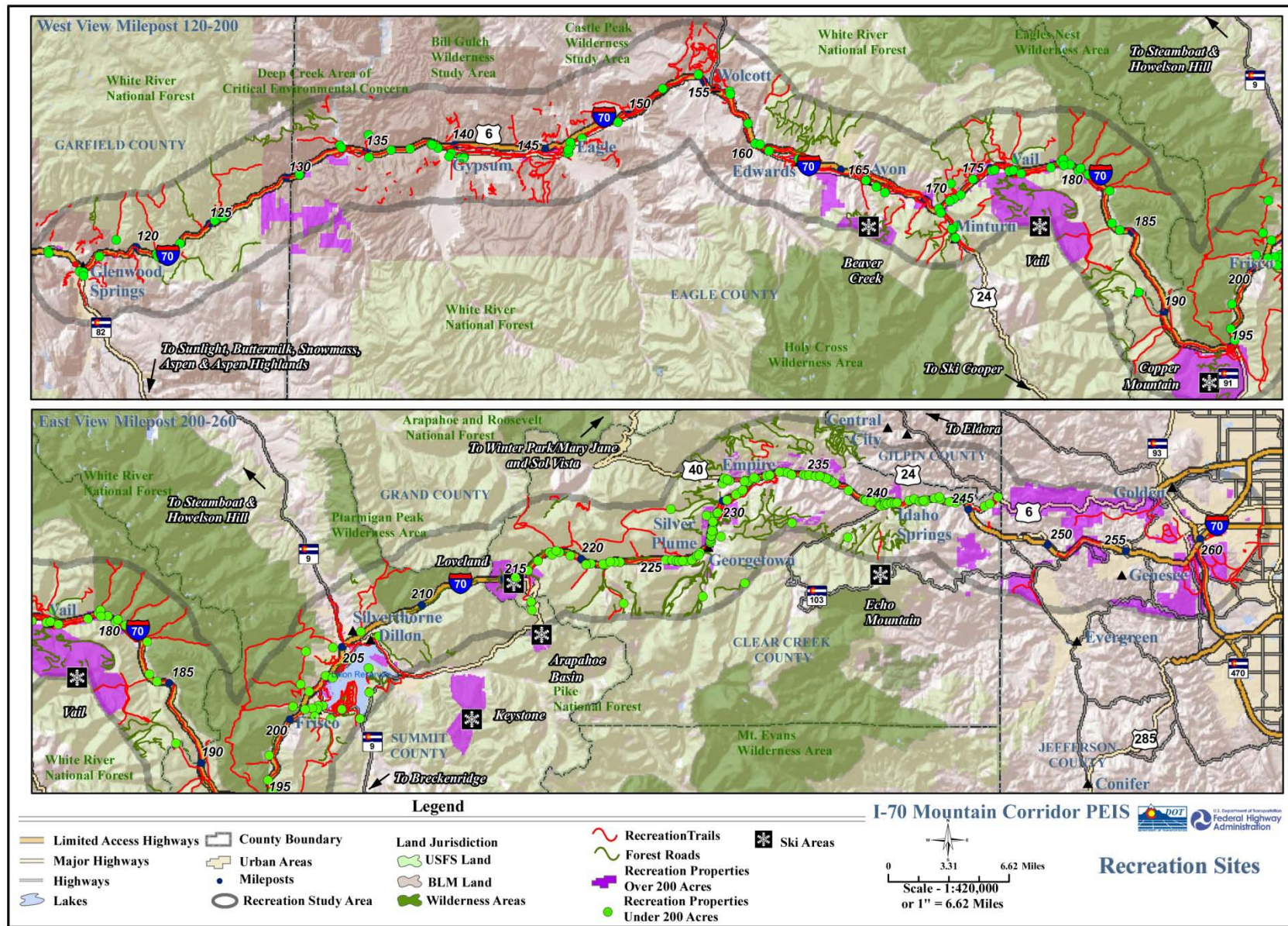
How does ski area visitation relate to the Corridor?

The Corridor provides primary access to 19 of the state's 27 ski areas (see **Figure 3.12-1**). The ski areas bring high numbers of tourists and tourism dollars into Colorado, making it the nation's top ski destination. Existing traffic congestion on the I-70 highway is thought to greatly affect ski areas by suppressing skier visits and reducing tourism revenues. Congestion caused by skiers visiting areas along the Corridor affects local Corridor travel as well.

Total year 2001 skier visits in the White River National Forest were 6.8 million, and year 2000 skier visits in the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests were 1.8 million. Using these data, skier visits accounted for approximately 82 percent of the total visits to the White River National Forest and about 27 percent of total visits to the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests. (Non-skier visits are primarily summer visits.) Extrapolated year 2025 skier visits are estimated to be 8.7 million for Corridor districts of the White River National Forest and 2.4 million for Corridor districts of the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests. These projected growth rates for skiing are relatively low compared to increases in other types of recreation use, and future ski resort expansions are anticipated to accommodate the modest growth rates projected. Therefore, unlike summer visitation, access (rather than infrastructure capacity) is considered to be the limiting factor in visitor use of the ski areas.

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Figure 3.12-1. Recreation Sites in the I-70 Mountain Corridor



What other recreation resources are in the Corridor?

Many recreation resources such as trails and rivers are adjacent to the I-70 highway (see **Figure 3.12-1**), and the I-70 highway provides access to numerous others. Recreationalists use these resources heavily now, and it is expected that their use will increase similarly to use of the National Forest System lands described above. Existing and proposed trails near the I-70 highway are most highly concentrated in the Eagle River Valley, between Glenwood Canyon and east Vail, and in Clear Creek County, between Bakerville and the Hidden Valley interchange. These areas are part of the Eagle County Regional Trails (ECO Trails) system and the Clear Creek County Greenway.

The Corridor provides access to rivers and creeks used for fishing, rafting, boating, and other water-related activities. Twelve creeks and rivers flow along the I-70 Mountain Corridor, many of which support Gold Medal fisheries. The I-70 highway also provides access to multiple lakes and reservoirs. The Stream and Wetland Ecological Enhancement Program, which is focused on integrating stream and wetland mitigation strategies into Corridor projects, identifies aquatic systems as significant recreation resources requiring protection and improvement. Water-based recreation activities are influenced by water quality, water demand, biological considerations, and the overall health of river ecosystems. See **Section 3.2, Biological Resources, Section 3.4, Water Resources, and Section 3.7, Land Use and Right-of-Way** for discussions on these topics. Other recreation resources are shown in **Figure 3.12-1** and discussed in the *I-70 Mountain Corridor PEIS Recreation Resources Technical Report* (CDOT, March 2011).

3.12.5 How do the alternatives potentially affect recreation and Section 6(f) resources?

The Action Alternatives physically impact recreation resources adjacent to the I-70 highway, and indirectly affect resources farther afield, due to access and capacity changes. Analysis indicates that up to five Section 6(f) resources could be impacted by all the Action Alternatives. In general, the Combination alternatives impact recreation resources the most because they have both the largest footprint and the biggest increase in capacity (and thus recreation use). Increased visitation benefits commercial recreation providers operating on National Forest System lands but strains the sustainability of National Forest System land resources in some highly visited areas (both developed recreational facilities and dispersed recreation areas) not equipped to handle additional visitation. Increased visitation also places increased pressure on some Corridor municipalities to provide services, such as parking. The Transit alternatives have fewer direct impacts than the Highway alternatives but result in higher increases in visitation. The Highway alternatives have more direct impacts than the Transit alternatives, but result in only modest visitation increases because the former have less capacity than the Transit alternatives and therefore induce fewer recreation-oriented trips. The Preferred Alternative initially results in impacts similar to the Transit alternatives; direct impacts are lower, but visitation increases are high. The Preferred Alternative, if fully implemented, has similar impacts to the Combination alternatives, with more direct impacts and a higher increase in recreation visitation.

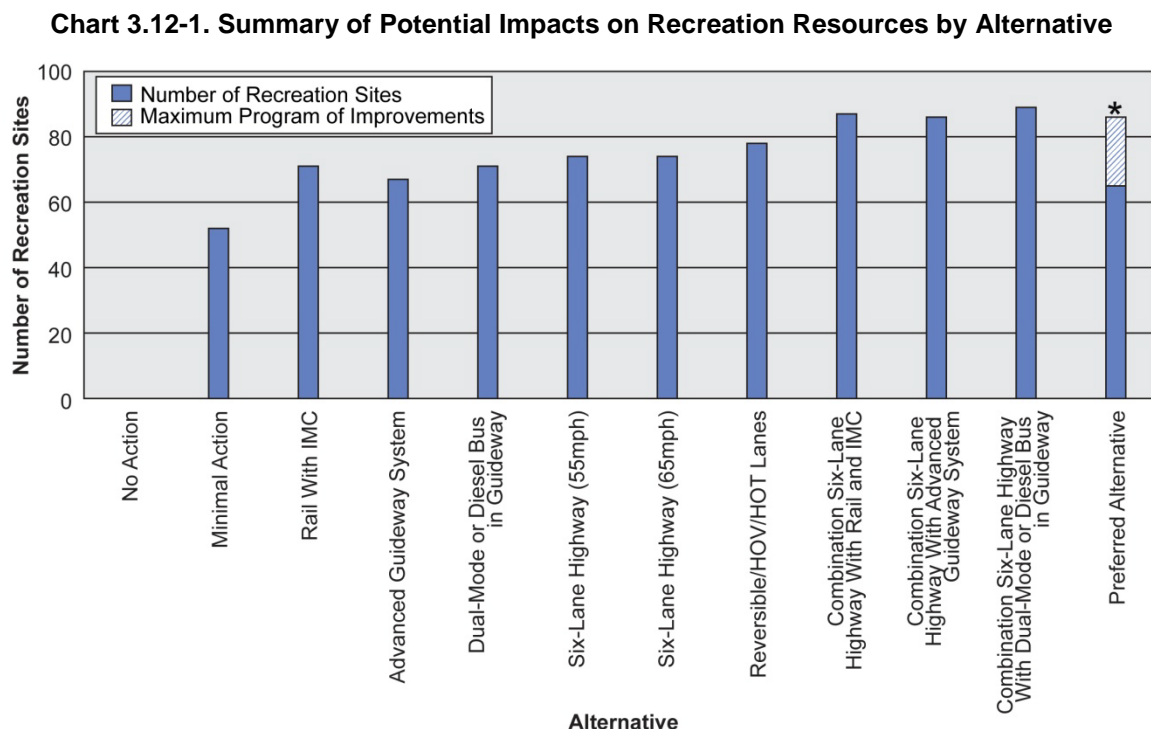
How do the alternatives directly affect recreation and Section 6(f) resources?

Nearly 90 existing and proposed recreation resources fall within the Action Alternative footprints, which include the limits of proposed improvements, 15-foot construction zones to each side of the improvement limits, and 15-foot sensitivity zones beyond the construction zone. Potentially affected recreation resources include five Section 6(f) resources: the Georgetown Lake Recreation Area access road, Genesee Park in Jefferson County, the Blue River Trail in Silverthorne, a portion of the Vail Trail, and a portion of the Eagle Valley Regional Trails between Avon and Dowd Junction.

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All Action Alternatives, except the Minimal Action Alternative, include a third tunnel bore at the Eisenhower-Johnson Memorial Tunnels that directly affects the Loveland Ski Area. The third bore conflicts with “The Face” ski run and the access tunnel under the I-70 highway that returns to the base area from the north side of the I-70 highway. Loveland Ski Area management has indicated they can adapt to these impacts. All Action Alternatives, except the Minimal Action Alternative, impact many of the Clear Creek County Greenway recreation resources and trails west of Vail Pass. The lead agencies will coordinate with Clear Creek County to identify the locations of these impacts and discuss creative design solutions during Tier 2 processes.

Chart 3.12-1 illustrates the number of existing and proposed recreation resources that may be temporarily or permanently affected by the Action Alternatives. These numbers include the five Section 6(f) resources that experience impacts under all Action Alternatives. The Minimal Action Alternative affects 50 sites, which is the fewest of the Action Alternatives. In general, the Transit alternatives directly impact fewer recreation sites than the Highway alternatives, and the Combination alternatives impact the most at up to 86. The Preferred Alternative directly impacts between 63 and 84 recreation sites. The No Action Alternative does not directly affect any recreation resources.



* Impacts of the Preferred Alternative are presented as a range, with the solid and hatched bars together representing the full implementation of the Preferred Alternative. The solid bar represented implementation of the Minimum Program of Improvements only. The hatched area is presented as a range because the adaptive management component of the Preferred Alternative allows it to be implemented based on future needs and associated triggers for further action. Section 2.7.2 describes the triggers for implementing components of the Preferred Alternative. For NEPA documentation and analysis purposes and based on information available today, the Preferred Alternative must be fully implemented to meet the 2050 purpose and need. The Minimum Program of Improvements does not meet the 2050 purpose and need.

Key to Abbreviations/Acronyms

HOT = High Occupancy Toll
IMC = Intermountain Connection

HOV = High Occupancy Vehicle
mph = miles per hour

How do the alternatives indirectly affect recreation and Section 6(f) resources?

The analysis of indirect impacts focuses on the potential for National Forest visitation increases or decreases resulting from the alternatives. The United States Forest Service visitation data allow CDOT to quantify possible changes in recreation use, which is not possible with other Corridor resources that lack visitation data. Although the analysis focuses on National Forest System land visitation, the data are representative of overall impacts on recreation resources accessed by the I-70 highway, including those outside of forest lands. Although many other factors affect recreation patterns (such as United States Forest Service management policies, the national economy, technology, and user preference), this analysis focuses on transportation impacts. See the *I-70 Mountain Corridor PEIS Recreation Resources Technical Report* (CDOT, March 2011) for details on the methodology. The analysis estimated the indirect impacts to National Forest System lands using two methods:

- Analyzing access to and use of National Forest System lands by comparing estimated National Forest visitation in year 2025 (the estimates do not consider the capacity of the I-70 highway and are considered to be very general estimates of visitor use) to the number of estimated recreation-oriented trips resulting from each alternative in year 2025 (predicted by the travel demand model). This analysis considers how congestion on the I-70 highway affects access to National Forest System lands.
- Analyzing additional visitation to National Forests likely to occur as a result of induced or suppressed resident population growth in the Corridor due to the alternatives. This analysis considers how Corridor population growth affects the amount of visitation to National Forests by Corridor residents. Population growth estimates were based on 2025 Colorado Department of Local Affairs population projections. Estimates of resident visitor trips were based on assumptions regarding resident visitation to National Forests.

Table 3.12-1 summarizes the estimated changes in visitation by alternative to I-70 Mountain Corridor districts of the White River National Forest and Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests. The No Action Alternative and Minimal Action Alternative are estimated to suppress National Forest visitation, although the United States Forest Service feels this is unlikely in the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests. The travel demand model shows a relatively small number of induced recreation-oriented trips for the Highway alternatives; thus, the Highway alternatives probably slightly increase nonresident visitation. The travel demand model shows higher numbers of induced tourism- or recreation-related trips for the Transit alternatives, Combination alternatives, and Preferred Alternative, and correspondingly, these alternatives likely induce visitation to National Forests. Induced population growth in the Corridor is anticipated only in the vicinity of White River National Forest (see **Section 3.7, Land Use and Right-of-Way**), where current growth is already a concern for United States Forest Service planners. Induced growth in the vicinity of Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests lands is a much more limited concern.

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Table 3.12-1. Annual Change in National Forest Destination Trips

Alternative	White River National Forest ¹		Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests ²	
	Winter Destination Trips (millions of trips)	Summer Destination Trips (millions of trips)	Winter Destination Trips (millions of trips)	Summer Destination Trips (millions of trips)
No Action	-0.9	-0.8	-0.4	-0.4
Minimal Action	-0.7	-0.6	-0.3	-0.3
Transit-only	0.7	0.5	0.2	0.2
Highway-only	0.2	0.1	0.05	0.05
Combination	1.3	1.0	0.4	0.4
Preferred Alternative ³	0.7 to 1.3	0.5 to 1.0	0.2 to 0.4	0.2 to 0.4

¹ Includes I-70 Mountain Corridor districts only: Sopris, Aspen, Eagle, Holy Cross, and Dillon.

² Includes I-70 Mountain Corridor districts only: Clear Creek and Sulphur.

³ The Preferred Alternative is presented as a range because the adaptive management component allows it to be implemented based on future needs and associated triggers for further action. Section 2.7.2 of this document describes the triggers for implementing the Preferred Alternative.

These estimates of changes to visitation are theoretical and general, and are provided as an indication of possible pressure for recreation use associated with the alternatives. As explained in the previous section, access to ski areas is considered to be the limiting factor on skier visits, and planned ski resort expansion is anticipated to accommodate future growth. Ski areas benefit greatly from the additional visitation induced by most of the Action Alternatives. National Forest System lands, on the other hand, already experience visitor use levels at or near their practical capacity, and the United States Forest Service lacks adequate resources to maintain existing facilities or add new ones. Additional visitation strains some National Forest System resources under current management conditions. United States Forest Service management activities are the most important factor in responding to these visitation pressures. The United States Forest Service feels that, although visitation pressure is greater under the Transit alternatives, they could better manage visitation via transit trips than dispersed highway trips.

The health of water-based recreation resources such as streams and fisheries is affected by winter maintenance activities, including applications of liquid deicers and traction sand during snowy conditions. Traction sand increases sediment loads in streams, and liquid deicers often increase chloride concentrations in exceedance of standards for aquatic life. See **Section 3.2, Biological Resources**, and **Section 3.4, Water Resources**, for more information.

How does construction of the alternatives affect recreation resources, including Section 6(f)?

Project construction temporarily impacts access to and use of some recreation sites. The direct impacts analysis already includes these sites because the Tier 1 alternative footprints include the 15-foot construction zone and additional 15-foot buffer to each side of the limits of proposed improvements. The number of recreation-oriented trips in the Corridor could decrease during construction if visitors choose to avoid construction areas due to actual or perceived congestion and delay. The bulk of construction activity occurs during the traditional spring, summer, and fall construction seasons, and affects winter recreation trips less than summer ones.

What are the project effects on recreation resources in 2050?

The project's effects on recreation resources in 2050 likely continue the trends discussed above. Increased highway or transit capacity improves access to recreation destinations, and population increases continue to increase travel demand up to 2050. Expanded access and mobility from the I-70 highway improvements continues to benefit developed commercial recreational facilities on National Forest System lands, while increased visitation to other National Forest System land areas (both developed

recreational facilities and dispersed recreation areas) strains the integrity of the natural resources located within these recreational environments. The United States Forest Service is likely to implement some additional management actions by 2050 to attempt to balance visitor access with the health of recreation resources in specific priority areas; these necessary management activities certainly play an important role in meeting the goal of sustainability of those resources due to access provided by proposed Corridor improvements in 2050. **Chapter 4, Cumulative Impacts Analysis**, provides additional analysis of the alternatives in relation to past and current trends and other reasonably foreseeable future actions and events.

3.12.6 What will be addressed in Tier 2 processes?

The Colorado Department of Transportation will conduct further analysis of direct and indirect impacts on recreation resources during future project-specific Tier 2 processes. Additional analysis of direct impacts on recreation resources during Tier 2 processes will determine the degree and extent of impact. The lead agencies will continue to coordinate with all jurisdictions regarding direct and indirect impacts to recreation resources, and specifically with Eagle County, Summit County, Clear Creek County, Jefferson County, and the United States Forest Service regarding ECO Trails, the *Clear Creek County Greenway Plan* (2005), and United States Forest Service management activities. The mountain pine beetle infestation continues to change conditions surrounding recreation resources, and the United States Forest Service confirmed that these conditions are most appropriately addressed during Tier 2 processes.

Corridor communities strongly advocate maintaining and improving trail connectivity along the I-70 highway. The Colorado Department of Transportation will consider during Tier 2 processes the following approaches to incorporate and maintain future bike routes in the I-70 highway right-of-way and improve bike and other non-motorized path connectivity, in a manner compatible with CDOT and FHWA guidance:

- Refer to principles applied to the Glenwood Canyon bike path and river access
- Consider policies to help identify state and federal transportation funding for pedestrian enhancement and connectivity
- Consider whether moving trails elsewhere is a more economical option to modifying the design of proposed transportation components
- Continue to coordinate with local jurisdictions, including the United States Forest Service regarding their motor vehicle facilities

The lead agencies will develop specific and more detailed mitigation strategies and measures, and develop best management practices specific to each project, during Tier 2 processes. The lead agencies will also adhere to any new laws and regulations that may be in place when Tier 2 processes are underway.

3.12.7 What are the approaches to programmatic mitigation planning for recreation resources?

The phased approach of the Preferred Alternative allows for ongoing opportunities to avoid and minimize impacts to recreation resources, establish effective mitigation, and employ I-70 Mountain Corridor Context Sensitive Solutions. Primary mitigation strategies to avoid or reduce direct effects to recreation resources include replacement or enhancement of functions of parklands or trails; design efforts to minimize the area of impact; and realignment of affected trails. The lead agencies will consider principles applied to the Glenwood Canyon recreation resources—including the bike path, hiking amenities, and river access—during development of mitigation for impacted recreation resources elsewhere in the Corridor. The lead agencies must mitigate any impacts to Section 6(f) resources with replacement lands of equal value, location, and usefulness as the impacted lands.

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Other strategies to mitigate direct impacts may include the following: facilitate efficient access to recreation sites from transportation networks; include outdoor recreation and tourism in the CDOT regional planning processes; consider intermodal transportation networks and transportation hub development; consider off-peak use incentives; consider river access “hot spots” mitigation actions; increase the capability to access recreation sites on mountain passes from road networks.

Mitigation of indirect impacts includes strategies outlined in the *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (Colorado State Parks, 2008) and United States Forest Service consideration of Forest Management Plans and the continuing and evolving use of land management techniques. The availability of resources and funding for implementation of recreation and forest management techniques is a major factor in the accommodation of increased visitation and protection of recreation resources. The *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* suggests these goals can potentially be achieved by establishing funding partnerships through regional collaborative forums and through state/federal cost-share agreements to renovate federal properties.

Mitigation of construction impacts on bike paths, trail heads, and other recreational amenities includes maintaining pedestrian and bicycle access during construction and addressing special events to maintain access during those times. Mitigation strategies to accommodate the demand for recreation-oriented trips on the I-70 highway during construction include minimizing lane closures or reductions during peak travel weekends. **Section 3.8, Social and Economic Values**, provides additional mitigation strategies for providing timely and accessible public information on construction activities.