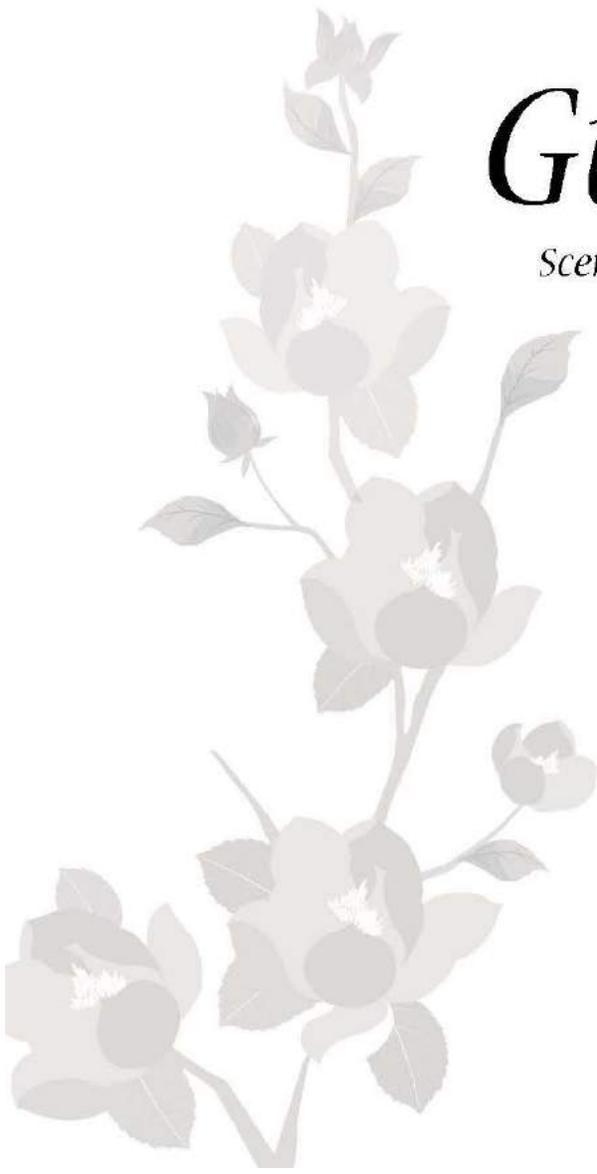




Guanella Pass

Scenic and Historic Byway Corridor Management Plan

May 2018



Foreword:

The original Guanella Pass Scenic and Historic Byway Corridor Management Strategy (CMS) was completed in 2001.

In 2016, the Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways Commission published a “Program Guidance Summary” which provided the 26 Colorado scenic byways the criteria to “*establish and maintain Byways that promote, preserve and enhance the significant intrinsic resources of the State of Colorado*”. One of the new requirements included the completion of an update to the Corridor Management Plan every ten years.

The current document has been developed to update, but not replace, the original CMS.

Overview and Introduction:

The Guanella Pass Scenic and Historic Byway is located 40 miles west of Denver and is accessed via I-70 at Georgetown and via US Highway 285 at Grant. The Guanella Pass Road was designated as a State Scenic Byway in 1990 and a National Forest Scenic Byway in 1991. The Byway runs north/south for approximately 24 miles and traverses forest, riparian areas, and alpine tundra habitat. From the summit of Guanella Pass, visitors experience majestic Mount Bierstadt (14,060 feet), one of Colorado’s most popular fourteeners. The northern portion of the road leading to Guanella Pass lies in Clear Creek County and within the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests. The road south of the pass lies in Park County and within the Pike National Forest.

The 2001 Guanella Pass Scenic and Historic Byway Corridor Management Strategy (CMS) was an important planning document which provided a vision for the future and outlined strategies for management of the natural, scenic, recreational, historical, cultural, and archeological resources.

The document provided general recommendations for the entire Byway and then identified specific management recommendations for nine management zones associated with the Byway. The management zones, as determined in the 2001 CMS, were as follows:

- A - Georgetown
- B - South Edge of Georgetown to Cabin Creek
- C - Waldorf Basin
- D - Cabin Creek to Silver Dollar Lake Road (Naylor Lake Road)
- E - Silver Dollar Lake Road (Naylor Lake Road) to Duck Lake
- F - Duck Lake to Falls Hill
- G - Geneva Basin and Buno Gulch
- H - Falls Hill to Grant
- I - Mount Evans Wilderness

It is important to note that the CMS anticipated the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) Road Improvement Project for Guanella Pass, which was completed in 2015.

Studies/Projects/Events/Accomplishments post-2001 Corridor Management Strategy:

- a. September 2002 – release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the road project
- b. January 2003 – release of the Record of Decision (ROD) for the road project
- c. 2005 – Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Guanella Pass and Silver Dollar Lake Roads Area Recreation Management/Development Projects
- d. 2007 – Road construction from milepost 9.3 to 17.0 was completed on the Clear Creek County side; this project included the Bierstadt trailhead with 48 parking spaces, a bathroom facility, interpretive signs and a trail leading to the summit of Mt. Bierstadt; the Guanella Pass trailhead with 58 parking spaces, a bathroom facility, interpretive signs and access to the South Park Trail; a new parking area at the intersection of Guanella Pass Road and Silver Dollar Lake Road (Naylor Lake Road) which offers approximately 20 parking spaces and is open during the winter road closure period.
- e. July 2008 - Guanella Pass Scenic and Historic Byway “Revised and Updated Interpretive Plan”
The overall objectives of this plan were to:
 - Facilitate and enhance the visitor’s experience.
 - Help accomplish management goals by preserving, maintaining, or improving ecosystem health and encouraging thoughtful land use and minimal human impact.
 - Assist in the preservation, maintenance, and enhancement of the scenic and cultural attributes of the corridor.
 - Encourage understanding and partnerships in land management goals and objectives.
 - Develop appropriate signage (of which the following has been installed): three signs at Lower Silver Dale as north entrance orientation and introduction; two signs at the Marshal Tunnel on abandoned mine safety, mining techniques, and an overview of the watershed; three signs at Silver Dollar on diverse ecosystems, wildlife, and user ethics; one sign on glacial depression at a geologic site; one sign on landscapes at the Beaver Overlook; three signs at the Duck Creek Picnic area on water quality, mining, historic transportation and winter safety; two signs at Abyss Trailhead on geology, land morphology and wilderness; three signs at the Whiteside Byway entrance for orientation and introduction.
- f. May 2009 – Revised Record of Decision changed road surface type to asphalt with chip seal overlay
- g. 2009 – Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests (ARNF) Transportation System Alternatives Study
The Forest Service submitted and received a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks planning grant (\$580,000) to examine the intensive levels of visitation which have resulted in traffic congestion and parking shortages at Mount Evans, **Guanella Pass** and Brainerd Lake; and associated impacts to natural resources and visitor experience quality by conducting an alternative transportation study.

ARNF project goals were to:

- Identify, verify, and document transportation, visitor, and resource concerns;
- Assess capacity levels where appropriate; and
- Identify feasible short-term and long-term alternative transportation and congestion management solutions.

- h. September 2011 – Clear Creek County accepted the road as being substantially complete on their side.
- i. May 25, 2012 – The Re-Opening Celebration in Georgetown of the Clear Creek County side of Guanella Pass. This Celebration was hosted by the Town of Georgetown and included guest speakers, classic antique cars and food.
- j. March 2013 – Funds were received from the results of the Cabin Creek Pumped Storage Hydroelectric Project, FERC Project No. 2351, Final Settlement Agreement with the USFS. This agreement was a result of the FERC process for the relicensing of the Cabin Creek Hydro Plant and awarded to the USFS: 1) \$577,000 for the design and construction of campsites in the Guanella Pass corridor; 2) \$150,000 towards the modification of the Guanella Pass and/or Clear Lake Campgrounds to help meet USFS Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines to promote the accessibility of the Guanella Pass area recreation facilities for the public; 3) \$15,000 to allow the USFS to facilitate the rehabilitation of user created campsites in the corridor and to place physical barriers (i.e. Boulders) where needed in newly closed areas along the corridor to prevent camping in these areas; 4) \$10,000 to place closure signs within the rehabilitated recreation corridor; and 5) assistance to design and install three (3) interpretive panels reflecting Cabin Creek operations at the vehicle pullout and overlook on Guanella Pass Road near the main gate to the project.
- k. 2013-2015 – Construction of the Rutherford Trail. In a combined effort, the members of the Historic Public Lands Commission (HDPLC) with support from the Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC) constructed the new trail from Georgetown to Silver Dale. The trail runs adjacent to South Clear Creek and offers excellent hiking and snowshoeing.
- l. 2014 – A Framework for Wayshowing – “Wayshowing” is communication in the form of maps, signs, and other media intended to aid the traveler in their wayfinding. This 2014 assessment effort combined the input of local officials, transportation, and tourism specialists and resulted in recommendations to help travelers navigate the byway.
- m. 2014 – ARNF Transportation System Alternative Study, Technical Memo 5.1, Alternatives Components by Site was published by Resource Systems Group for the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration/Central Federal Lands, and the U.S. Forest Service.

The purpose was to identify and describe potential alternative transportation and visitor use management components to provide the USFS with the tools needed to address transportation, recreation, and resource management-related needs at Guanella Pass, Mount Evans and Brainerd Lake.

Potential Transit Components included:

- Hiker shuttle service from Georgetown or a Guanella Pass Road location
- Interpretive tours from Georgetown via van or shuttle bus on Guanella Pass Road
- Parking management strategies
- Visitor use management strategies

- n. 2015 – ARNF Transportation System Alternative Study, Technical Memo 3.7, Summary of Methods and Results from the 2014 Guanella Pass Visitor Survey - published by the Resource Systems Group.

Visitor Profile: ARNF Transportation System Alternatives Study Guanella Pass Visitor Survey

During summer 2014, Resource System Group conducted a visitor survey at Guanella Pass. The purpose of the survey was to collect information that will help the US Forest Service (USFS) improve transportation conditions, and recreation and resource management at Guanella Pass. In particular, the survey instrument was designed to collect information about visitors' perceptions, experiences, and expectations, with respect to transportation conditions and services, recreation opportunities, and visitor experience quality at Guanella Pass and on the Mt. Bierstadt Trail. The survey instrument was also designed to help identify transportation-related issues experienced by visitors at Guanella Pass, and assess visitors' opinions about potential changes in operations to modify and improve transportation services and facilities.

1. Age

- i. Weekday visitors (41%) were much more likely than weekend day visitors (26%) to be 45 years of age or older.
- ii. About one-third of visitors on weekend days (34%) and weekdays (31%) were between 25 and 34 years of age, and a majority (73% on weekend days and 58% on weekdays) were between 18 and 44 years of age.

2. Residency

- i. The vast majority (99%) of all visitors were residents of the United States.
- ii. Visitors' state of residence varied significantly between weekdays and weekend days.
- iii. The vast majority (84%) of visitors on weekend days were residents of Colorado and few (16%) were residents of other states.
- iv. In contrast, about two-thirds (64%) of visitors on weekend days were residents of Colorado, and only about one-third (36%) were residents of other states.

- v. A majority (66%) of weekday visitors were residents of Colorado, but a substantial proportion (34%) were from other states.
- vi. Among Colorado residents at Guanella Pass, the greatest proportion (70%) lives in the greater Denver area.
- vii. The majority of Colorado respondents live on the Front Range.

3. Education Level

- i. Regardless of the day of week, the vast majority (82%) of visitors has earned a college, business or trade school degree or higher; this includes about one-third (34%) of visitors who have earned a master's, doctoral, or professional degree.

4. Ethnicity

- i. The vast majority (95%) of visitors reported their race as white.
- ii. Very few (5%) visitors reported being Hispanic or Latino.

5. Group Size

- i. Solo hikers were more common on weekdays (21%), while larger parties were more common on weekends.
- ii. The average group size was 3 people, regardless of the day of week (28%).
- iii. Most groups of five or more people had fewer than 10 members, whether they were contacted on a weekday or weekend day (16%).
- iv. Regardless of the day of week, less than one-fifth (18%) of visitor groups were hiking with one or more children under the age of 16.

6. Sites Visited (Mt. Bierstadt Summit)

- i. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of visitor groups hiked all the way to the summit of Mt. Bierstadt, regardless of the day of the week
- ii. Nearly half of all visitor groups hiked four to five hours on the Mt. Bierstadt Trail. On average, visitor groups hiked just under five hours on the trail.

7. Activity

- i. Hiking Bierstadt Trail was by far the most popular activity (99%), regardless of the day of week.
- ii. Scenic driving (21%) and picnicking (14%) were the second and third most common activities among visitor groups, regardless of the day of week.

- iii. Hiking on the Mt. Bierstadt Trail was the primary activity for the large majority of visitor groups (91%), regardless of the day of week.
- iv. Very few (7%) visitor groups, regardless of the day of the week, reported activities other than hiking on the Mt. Bierstadt Trail as their primary activity.
- v. Regardless of the day of week, relatively few groups visited or planned to visit other locations on Guanella Pass Road during their trip, with the most common being the hiking trails at Silver Dollar Lake (7%) and Clear Lake Campground (6%).

8. Crowds

- i. More than half (55%) of all visitors on weekend days felt crowded on the trail and more than one-third (36%) felt crowded on the summit of Mt. Bierstadt.
- ii. Less than one-third (30%) of visitors on weekend days did not feel crowded at any point during their hike. In contrast, two-thirds (66%) of weekday visitors did not feel crowded at any point during their hike on the Mt. Bierstadt Trail.
- iii. However, about one-quarter (26%) of weekday visitors reported feeling crowded on the trail, and almost one-fifth (16%) of weekday visitors felt crowded on the summit.

9. Travel Direction

- i. The vast majority (82%) of visitor groups traveled to and from Guanella Pass via Georgetown.
- ii. Relatively few (11%) visitor groups traveled one-way on Guanella Pass Road (i.e., from Georgetown to Grant, or vice versa) on their trip to Guanella Pass.
- iii. Less than one-fifth (17%) of Guanella Pass visitor groups traveled through Grant at any point during their trip to Guanella Pass.

10. Arrival Time

- i. Visitor groups' arrival time at Guanella Pass did not vary significantly between weekdays and weekend days.
- ii. Nearly half (42%) of visitor groups arrived at Guanella Pass before 7 AM, and nearly two thirds (62%) arrived by 8 AM.
- iii. The vast majority (92%) of all visitor groups arrived at Guanella Pass on the same day they took the survey, regardless of the day of week.

11. Parking Location

- i. The majority of all visitor groups traveled to Guanella Pass in a single vehicle, regardless of the day of the week.
- ii. Half (50%) of all weekday visitor groups were able to park in the Mt. Bierstadt Trailhead parking lot, whereas only about one-third (39%) of visitor groups were able to park there on weekend days.
- iii. However, about half of all visitor groups, regardless of the day of week, (48% on weekdays and 52% on weekend days) parked along the roadside on Guanella Pass Road.
- iv. Few visitor groups parked in the Square Top Lakes Trailhead parking lot, regardless of the day of week (2% on weekdays and 9% on weekend days).

12. Parking along Guanella Pass Road

- i. Visitors who parked in parking lots were significantly more likely to think their parking locations were safe, convenient, easy to find, well-marked, and uncongested.
- ii. While very few (2%) visitors who parked in a designated lot thought where they parked was unsafe, nearly one-quarter (23%) of visitors who parked along the roadside thought where they parked was unsafe.
- iii. More than three-quarters (78%) of visitors who parked along the roadside thought where they parked was congested.

13. Parking at the summit of Guanella Pass

- i. Three-quarters (75%) of visitors on weekend days thought that parking congestion at Guanella Pass was moderate to extreme. Very few (8%) weekend visitors thought there was no parking congestion at all.
- ii. While weekday visitors were less likely than weekend visitors to report that there was parking congestion at Guanella Pass, more than half (58%) thought that parking congestion was moderate to severe.

14. Information Sources

- i. The vast majority (88%) of visitors indicated they'd be likely to use a website for information about parking and crowding at Guanella Pass when planning a future trip.
- ii. A smartphone app ranked second among the information sources, with two-thirds (67%) of visitors indicating they'd be likely to use one to plan a future trip to Guanella Pass.
- iii. About one-third of visitors indicated they'd be likely to use social media (35%), text updates on a cellular phone/smartphone (36%), and a tourist information center (34%) for information about parking and crowding at Guanella Pass.

- iv. Fewer visitors thought they'd be likely to use a telephone information line (25% to 28%) or AM radio station (i.e., highway advisory radio; 15%).
- o. 2015 – Transit Feasibility Analysis and Recommendations, Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest Transportation System Alternative Study - published by the U.S. Department of Transportation, John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center. The purpose of this study was to document transportation, visitor, and resource concerns; assess user capacity levels where appropriate; and identify feasible short-term and long-term alternative transportation and congestion management solutions for Guanella Pass and Mount Evans.
- p. June 24, 2016 – the Grand Re-Opening Celebration of Guanella Pass from Georgetown to Grant at the summit parking lot.
- q. 2017 - A Mount Evans and Guanella Pass Scenic Byway tear away map was developed in conjunction with Clear Creek Tourism Bureau and has been handed out to thousands of visitors. Updated tear away maps for 2018 were printed with 52,000 copies for the visitor centers and community center.
- r. 2017 – Upper Silver Dale Recreation Management Analysis. In preparation for an anticipated increase in recreational use due to new Forest Service camping restrictions along Guanella Pass Road, this study was commissioned by the Clear Creek County Open Space Commission to analyze recreation management in an area encompassing the Leavenworth Creek Road and historic Argentine Central Railroad grade to Pavilion Point. Recreation management opportunities, constraints and options were identified which addressed camping, parking, waste management, and signage.
- s. 2017 – Trail enhancements - Loop trails were developed around Silver Dale in cooperation with the Volunteers from Outdoor Colorado, HDPLC and the Clear Creek County Trails Team. New camping and parking regulations were initiated.

Summary:

1. **Critical Concerns:** (in no particular order)
 - a. Visitor capacity, Front Range population growth
 - b. Road safety, traffic congestion, lack of parking
 - c. Human impacts on wildlife habitat
 - d. Tundra protection, i.e. increasing social trails
 - e. Visitor preparedness and safety
 - f. Management expenses - USFS, Clear Creek County, Park County
 - g. Environmental impacts from dispersed recreation – i.e. shooting, camping, campfires
 - h. Appropriate signage – i.e. updated, condition issues (damaged?)
 - i. Multi-modal transportation conflicts, i.e. bicycles/vehicles
 - j. Climate change - opening and closing dates, weather patterns
 - k. Partner and business commitment - advocacy groups needed
 - l. Technology – staying current
 - m. Emergency services – increased call volumes

2. Goals and Recommendations:

- a. Improve Road and Parking Management (in coordination with counties and FS)
 - i. Consider implementing a managed-use reservation system (dependent on number and type of reservations available); limit number of vehicles; increase parking lot sizes; install onsite barriers to deter and prevent unendorsed roadside parking.
 - ii. Implement a transit element - identify shuttle service operators to provide an alternative transportation (commercial vehicles pay for each individual trip or visitor).
 - iii. Consider tolling the road.
 - iv. Install a permanent vehicle counter to gather on-going data for future decisions.

- b. Improve Visitor Use Management (to address safety and environmental issues of over use)
 - i. Encourage and educate visitors to visit during the week to help distribute use throughout the week and reduced traffic and congestion on weekends and holidays.
 - ii. Consider recreation user fees and/or a reservation permit system.
 - iii. Implement visitor use monitoring for adaptive management.
 - iv. Consider variable message information signage to communicate user information, i.e. traffic and parking conditions.
 - v. Consider congestion pricing as a management tool
 - vi. Ensure coordination of special events with respect to general public usage.

- c. Improve Communication and Public Education
 - i. Ensure information on websites is up-to-date. Website examples:
 1. Clear Creek County Tourism Bureau
<http://clearcreekcounty.org/things-to-do/leisure/maps/>
 2. South Platte Ranger District <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/psicc/sopl>
 3. CDOT www.codot.gov/travel/scenic-byways
 4. Georgetown www.georgetowncolorado.org and www.town.georgetown.co.us
 5. Americas Byways www.comeclosertoAmerica.com
 6. Clear Creek County www.co.clear-creek.co.us/index.aspx?NID=689
 - ii. Check brochure information a minimum of once a year for accuracy and relevancy.
 - iii. Signage
 1. Implement 2014 "Wayshowing" study recommendation.
 2. Update interpretive and educational signage.
 - iv. Develop programs and partnerships to promote the protection of the natural environment by teaching outdoor ethics and awareness (i.e. Leave-No-Trace).

- v. Research outreach and educational programs targeted at younger generations and school groups to promote appreciation and a connection with the resource.
 - 3. Junior Ranger program specifically for Guanella Pass
 - 4. Discovery Agent app
 - 5. Experiential education
 - vi. Coordinate with Visitor Centers regularly on message and materials.
- d. Develop Financial Sustainability
- i. Create committee from local businesses to support the byway and marketing efforts.
 - ii. Determine possible revenue generating sources, i.e. decals, patches, stickers for walking sticks.
 - iii. Identify grant and other funding sources.
- e. Address New Technology and Apply as Appropriate
- i. Create a scenic byway tour app using the Forest Service OnCell apps developed by the Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forest and Pike and San Isabel National Forest

3. Future Considerations:

1. Consider broader national designation or special land use designation by combining Guanella Pass and Mount Evans Scenic Byway Management Areas.
2. Support USFS effort to consider and evaluate alternative transportation modes/methods.

4. Scenic Byway Committee tasks to meet goals:

1. Match goals and recommendations to the annual action plan;
2. Delegate work to organizations;
3. Obtain additional volunteers and a volunteer coordinator for committee; and
4. Get creative!

This update was collaboratively developed by the group of stakeholders listed below.

Scenic Byway Plan Committee Participants:

Cassandra Patton, Director, Clear Creek County Tourism Bureau
Jan Bowland, Historical Society of Idaho Springs
Smoky Anderson, Clear Creek County Open Space Commission and
Ambassador to the Historic District Public Lands Commission
Nancy McNab, Mount Evans Volunteer Coordinator
Sally Guanella Buckland, Clear Creek County Resident
Lori Denton, Recreation Program Manager, Clear Creek Ranger District
Nicole Malandri, Recreation Fee Manager, Clear Creek Ranger District
Lisa Leben, Special Projects Manager, Clear Creek County
Kent Brown, Georgetown Town Administrator
Brian Banks, South Platte District Ranger
Lisa Heagley, South Platte Recreation Program Manager
Julie Holmes, Clear Creek County Resident
Daniel Cressy, Regional Landscape Architect, US Forest Service and Member of the
Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways Commission

