

# Coalton Trail Improvements Project

Coalton Trail, located in southern Boulder County, is managed by Boulder County Parks & Open Space (BCPOS) and provides important recreational access into one of the largest and most significant grassland ecosystems in the county. Conservation easements protect the adjacent South County Grasslands, which also is a BCPOS-designated Habitat Conservation Area for prairie dogs.

Primary access to the Coalton Trail is from the [Coalton Trailhead](#) on McCaslin Boulevard in Superior, which recorded almost 38,000 visitors in 2019 and over 52,000 visitors in 2020. Visitation surveys indicate that, in addition to residents from Boulder County, around 23% of visitors are residents of the City and County of Broomfield.

The Coalton trail connects a busy trailhead in Superior with the larger City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) trail system and is part of the mountain biking “Dirty Bismarck Loop,” a 13.8-mile off-road (thereby “dirty”) trail route that roughly follows the former Morgul-Bismarck Loop of the Coors International Bicycle Classic.

The Coalton Trail was created in 1996 when a portion of Boulder County Road 76 was converted to serve as the trail. The former road lacks proper drainage along the 12-foot wide and 2.9-mile long trail. Additionally, there is a steep section, approximately 1500-feet in length, that averages a 10% grade with portions that exceed 15% for several intervals. This steep section provides a challenge for many trail visitors and often erodes, resulting in high maintenance costs and degraded user experience, particularly after storm events.

The objective of this capital maintenance project is to bring the Coalton Trail up to a standard consistent with the Meadowlark Trail to the north and enhance the user experience by changing the character of this segment to be like surrounding trails. Surface and drainage improvements are needed to better accommodate regional trail users and provide a consistent 10-foot trail cross section for the entire trail length. Utilizing the historically disturbed former roadway right-of-way, the trail allows visitors to traverse through a biologically diverse area recognized by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program and by the county as Critical Wildlife Habitat.

While current trail conditions can be managed by some users, its rocky, eroded, and sometimes muddy surface challenges accessibility to the general public much of the year. Capital maintenance improvements are critical to providing a well-surfaced trail for visitors and community members to enjoy

the natural beauty of the grasslands in southern Boulder County. It also will help BCPOS address on-going maintenance costs associated with repairing the trail ad hoc in response to variable weather conditions.

As part of this effort, BCPOS, along with OSMP and other partner agencies, plans to extend the Rocky Mountain Greenway (RMG) designation north into Boulder County along the Coalton and Meadowlark trails from State Highway 128 to the Town of Superior. In addition to improving the visitor experience and long-term maintenance requirements, this project will improve the surface and drainage conditions of the Coalton Trail to better conform and accommodate regional trail use envisioned and expected of the RMG.

