

Questa to Red River trails project picks up steam

By **Ellen Miller-Goins**, *Sangre de Cristo Chronicle*

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Juggling the sometimes conflicting interests of hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, anglers and off-highway vehicle enthusiasts, along with the additional goals of economic development and environmental restoration, may seem daunting. However, facilitators from the National Forest Foundation were optimistic as they hosted the third in a series of meetings with the goal of building a forest trail along the river between Questa and Red River Tuesday (April 24) at Questa Village Hall.

The group's stated vision is "to create a multiuse, sustainable recreation trail that connects the communities of Questa and Red River to the land, the water and the people" that "will enhance the quality of life for locals and visitors, attract and bolster tourism, and spur economic development in both communities."

When participants unveiled draft trail maps, or as Forestry Technician Ricardo Leon at the Questa Ranger District labeled his, "idea map(s)," it became clear the group's goals had expanded from a single river trail to several trails that would accommodate the different recreation groups.

Leon's idea map, for example, outlined four different routes:

- One for hiking and horseback riding that would travel from downtown Red River into the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness;
- A walking trail in Questa;
- A canyon river trail or, rather, several trails that would accommodate different users, depending on the river's section; and
- A route for off-highway vehicles that would use Sawmill Road (Forest Road 597) and the Elephant Rock dirt bike trail in the canyon near Fawn Lakes Campground on State Road 38.

Santa Fe's Mark Werkmeister of the New Mexico Off Highway Vehicle Alliance, a statewide nonprofit alliance of motorized off-highway vehicle enthusiasts and organizations, expanded on potential OHV trail offerings with the twin goals of creating "a legal route for all motorized recreation travel modes to connect Questa and Red River" and providing "additional loop opportunities for motorized recreation in the area."

All proposed trails faced unique challenges. Carl Colonius, director of the Enchanted Circle Trails Association, said, "We could discuss how mutable users would enjoy the trail by discussing how the trail is designed, its amenities, drinking water, bathrooms. We could discuss how multiple users would enjoy the trail by discussing how the trail is designed. I would suggest we see this as a part of a system that we're working on for the whole Enchanted Circle."

As the trails group meets this June and in the fall, National Forest Foundation facilitators hope to emerge with a working draft to present to the public. Rebecca Davidson, director of the Southern Rockies Field Program for the National Forest Foundation, told *The Chronicle* the maps and ideas discussed are still open for discussion and "are subject to change, modification and edits. In the

meantime, we will work on getting a web page up and running for all the documents to date that have been developed for this effort.”

A multiple use, Americans With Disabilities-compliant trail could be included in trail planning.

In addition to monthly meetings, the group includes several breakout groups: —Fundraising and marketing (e.g. grant-writing, sponsorships, fundraising, marketing); —Landowners, which hopes to spur support from local municipalities in gaining access to private property, where it is needed, to complete the project; —River and Wetlands, which has several stated goals that include proposing “specific trail elements that model best practices for limiting erosion and creating benefits for stream and wetlands habitat.”

The group plans to meet again at noon, Monday (June 11) at the Red River Conference Center. After that, “the Foundation will take a break over the summer,” Davidson said. “We will all come back as a group in the early fall to have four more meetings. You haven’t seen the last of us. The idea is, at the end of those four meetings we’re going to be ready to roll.”

If You Go

What : Workshop on Questa to Red River trail

When: Noon, Monday (June 11)

Where: Red River Conference Center



A group of citizens from Questa and Red River are working on a plan for trails to connect the towns and popular places, such as Fawn Lakes.

Courtesy photo

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