



File Code: 1950 and 2350
Date: November 20, 2023

To: Interested Parties
Project: Red Rock Trails Access Plan
Open for comment: November 20 to December 19, 2023

The USDA Forest Service seeks public comment on proposed trail enhancements at specific locations within the Coconino National Forest's Red Rock Ranger District. The proposed project would add approximately 39 miles of non-motorized trails and would re-route and naturalize other trails. Areas of emphasis, all within Yavapai County, include three communities: Sedona; Village of Oak Creek; and Cornville (see vicinity map). We are asking for your input on the proposed trails during a 30-day scoping period, from November 20 to December 19th, 2023.

BACKGROUND

The Red Rock Ranger District (RRRD) includes 400-plus miles of trails, with more than 1,700,000 people annually using the district trails. Throughout the past decade, the Coconino National Forest has developed a system of trails and trailheads to accommodate trail demand while concentrating use onto sustainable trail corridors, diminishing use in sensitive areas, and re-engineering poorly aligned trails.

In October 2013, the Red Rock District concluded a year-long public trail planning process for the area around the City of Sedona and the Village of Oak Creek (VOC). Results indicated a strong public demand for trail links and connectors to enhance the existing trail system; trail re-routes for added sustainability; improved trailhead access; adoption of some user-created routes; and rehabilitation of some user-created trails.

Since 2013, collaborative planning between the Forest Service and Verde Valley communities has informed this trail proposal; the City of Sedona and the Village of Oak Creek have worked with the Forest Service for more than five years to identify trail projects that meet increased demand. Project implementation would be funding dependent.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Based on non-motorized trail planning on the RRRD, the Coconino National Forest has identified a need to provide an expanded non-motorized trail system; to increase visitor experience at trails; and to improve watershed health by reducing erosion.

This project meets the 2018 Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (forest plan) objectives—supporting visitor recreation needs and protecting natural and cultural resources.

- **Provide a more effective non-motorized trail system that meets public need and balances resource impacts while reducing over-crowding and providing reasonable access and recreation opportunities to communities.** Links would be created between existing trails to enhance visitor experience and access to areas of the forest. By adding links between existing trails, trail experiences would increase, as more unique “routes.” By adding more miles of trail available to forest users, there may be a reduction in crowding and user conflicts and fewer

unsustainable user-created routes. By adding trails in the Cornville area, the community can benefit from improved outdoor recreation opportunities on national forest land.

- **Increase visitor experience at Forest Service System Trails.** Some “user-created routes,” also known as social trails, would be properly signed, aligned, and maintained. Visitors, therefore, would be able to find and stay on the designated trails, increasing the quality of experience, especially for visitors who are unfamiliar with the area. Improved trailheads and parking would benefit safety by allowing people to park in properly designed locations.
- **Reduce conflicts at certain trailheads.**
- **Improve watershed health by reducing erosion and sedimentation, improving sanitation and visitor behavior, and reversing channel incision.** User-created routes in sensitive locations would be decommissioned and naturalized. Re-directing use to sustainable alignments would contribute to improved watershed conditions by reducing trail grades, improving low-velocity drainage, and minimizing wash crossings. Placement of visitor information at trailheads would improve visitor “Leave No Trace” behaviors.

PROPOSED ACTION

This project would improve the trail system within the Red Rock Ranger District by adding approximately 39 miles of non-motorized trail through new construction, adoption, and re-alignment of non-motorized trails across the district in three communities: City of Sedona; Village of Oak Creek; and Cornville. (See attached maps.) This proposed project would construct 24.42 miles of non-motorized trail; adopt 14.80 miles of user-created routes; and naturalize 10.14 miles of user-created trails.

All trails would be closed to motorized use and open to foot, bicycle, and equestrian use, unless noted otherwise. Trails would be managed as Class 3 trails, per the Forest Service National Trails Classification System, to maintain a narrow tread with a rugged character.

	New Trail Construction	User-Created Adoption	System Trail Re-route	User-Created Naturalization	System Trail Naturalization
Turkey Creek System	20.17 miles	10.90 miles	1.69 miles	9.78 miles	0.96 miles
Construction, adoption, and naturalization of user-created routes in the Village of Oak Creek, mostly west of Verde Valley School Road on 1,800 acres of National Forest lands. Includes reconstruction and expansion of the Turkey Creek Trailhead on three acres of National Forest lands at the existing Turkey Creek Trailhead on Verde Valley School Road.					
Bell Rock Area Bypasses	0.64 miles	0.11 miles	---	0.25 miles	---
Includes adoption of the user-created Rector Connector Bypass, connecting Rector Connector Trail to Bell Rock Pathway, and extension of the existing Singletrack Bypass to the Bell Rock Vista Trailhead.					
Cornville School Trail	3.15 miles	0.91 miles	---	---	---
Construction of new trail system on National Forest lands adjacent to the Oak Creek Elementary School in Cornville.					
Doe Mesa Loop	0.15 miles	1.96 miles	---	0.11	---
Adoption and construction of hiking trail around the perimeter of Doe Mesa to be accessed from the Doe Mountain Trail.					
Hardline Trail	---	0.92 miles	---	---	---

Adoption of the user-created Hardline trail connecting Hiline Trail to the Easy Breezy/Templeton Trail junction.					
Scheurman Trail Connector	0.31 miles	---	---	---	---
Construction of a 500-foot connector to join the Carrol Canyon Trail System to Scheurman Mountain Trail offering greater connectivity and reducing conflict with the Sedona Red Rock High School and the existing Forest Service trailhead accessed through the high school parking lot.					
Total Activity	24.42 miles	14.80 miles	1.69 miles	10.14 miles	0.96 miles

TURKEY CREEK TRAIL SYSTEM AND TRAILHEAD

Background: Within the Turkey Creek area, a proposed network of designed trails would accommodate recreation use while minimizing soil erosion and damage to area resources. Currently, there is only one maintained trail in the area, the 3.5-mile Turkey Creek Trail, aligned on an old roadbed with segments in highly erosive soils.

This trail system would construct 20.17 miles of trail, adopt 10.90 miles of user-created routes, and close/naturalize 9.78 miles of user-created routes. Equestrian use would be closed in some areas due to safety issues related to slickrock and narrow, exposed sections above steep drop-offs; trails closed to equestrians would be south of Turkey Creek and west of the geologic feature known as Napoleon’s Tomb.

Action: A sustainable trail network is needed to address a legacy of unmanaged recreation in proximity to the sensitive Oak Creek riparian area. With recreational use in the Turkey Creek basin increasing, 20.68 miles of user-created routes have been inventoried. These social routes are ad hoc and unmaintained, damaging soils and vegetation and poorly meeting the needs of trail users. The project would re-route portions of the Turkey Creek Trail and would link Forest Service trails to the Red Rock State Park and nearby trails to enhance overall trail capacity.

The existing Turkey Creek trailhead has outgrown its utility, is unsafe, frequently blocks traffic and does not meet Forest Service recreation and water quality standards. An improved trailhead would be built in the vicinity of the existing Turkey Creek Trailhead adjacent to Verde Valley School Road; it would include an expanded parking lot, a toilet, and kiosk signage. The current Turkey Creek Trailhead parking lot allows for approximately five vehicles, with overflow parking going onto the residential Turkey Creek Road. In this proposal, the trailhead parking lot would be enlarged to accommodate up to 30 vehicles. Access to the expanded Turkey Creek trail system would be from the improved Turkey Creek Trailhead or the Baldwin Trailhead. In addition, access would be possible from the proposed adoption of the unofficial Transept trailhead along Verde Valley School Road.

Naturalization of approximately 9.78 miles of user-created routes would occur. Methods for trail naturalization would be determined on a case-by-case basis and may be active or passive. Passive measures include posting “trail closed” signage and/or placing debris to block access and let natural processes restore an area at a natural pace. Active methods include loosening the soil, seeding, placement of cut boughs or vertical mulch to obscure the area, and temporary area closures or fencing. To assist with restoration, juniper trees, located out of view, could be cut to use in trail naturalization efforts. Trail naturalization would be done first where watershed concerns are the greatest and where effective system trails have been established.

BELL ROCK AREA BYPASSES: SINGLETRACK BYPASS AND RECTOR CONNECTOR

The Bell Rock area would be enhanced by the addition of two connectors—a Singletrack Bypass extension and the Rector Connector Bypass—to join existing trails. Attention is needed in this Bell Rock area with a high trail density and redundant trail alignments. A need exists to assess existing trail use and how to improve visitor-use management in this busy recreation area.

Singletrack Bypass Extension:

Background: This 0.64-mile route is intended to draw a substantial amount of southbound (downhill) bike traffic off the most congested part of the Bell Rock Pathway. Increased mountain biker use of the Bell Rock Pathway promotes user conflicts. Specifically, fast-moving mountain bikers (who are traveling downhill from longer rides) conflict with the more relaxed recreational users on the Bell Rock Pathway. The extension of the singletrack bypass is intended to allow both user types to better achieve their desired experiences. Bike use on Bell Rock Pathway would still be allowed as this trail is also important for “beginner” riders and biking families with children.

This bypass extension, part of prior trail scoping, received wide public support. The proposed trail was deferred at that time, pending Forest Service design adjustments to address erosive soils. The proposed alignment would take advantage of durable rocky soils, follow contours, integrate reverse grade dips for drainage, and plant trees to screen it from the parking lot. The route’s south terminus would occur in a safe location where motorized trailhead traffic is stopped at State Route 179.

Action: This trail extension would add a southern segment to the existing system Singletrack Bypass trail that parallels the Bell Rock Pathway, completing this alternate route between Courthouse Vista and the Bell Rock Vista Trailhead. In addition, a 0.25-mile section of Singletrack Bypass trail, which crosses by Bell Rock Spring, would be decommissioned.

Rector Connector Bypass:

Background: While trails in the Bell Rock vicinity are open to equestrian use, a segment of the Rector Connector Trail comprises steep rock ledges that do not accommodate equestrians. A proposed trail extension would provide for safe equestrian use to access trails that loop between Bell Rock and Courthouse Butte. A 0.11-mile Rector Connector Bypass would avoid steep rock ledges of the Rector Trail.

Action: The proposed alignment is a legacy two-track road, now closed to motorized use, that has never been abandoned by hikers despite Forest Service efforts to close it. Like many popular user-created routes, the Rector Connector Bypass trail forms too much of an “intuitive” route desired by users. This trail proposal would adopt it and manage it as a connector between Bell Rock Pathway and the popular loops between Bell Rock and Courthouse Butte.

CORNVILLE COMMUNITY TRAIL

Background: Cornville residents seek to walk in this area on an old two-track road now closed to motorized use. Since the 1990s, the community has sought non-motorized trail opportunities on National Forest land that would link to Windmill Park and other outdoor area venues. The now defunct Cornville Trail Coalition worked with the Forest Service for more than a decade to identify potential trail locations, complicated by proximity to sensitive Oak Creek areas and land exchange proposals. The Forest Service parcel adjacent to the school has no known issues.

This project would offer multi-use trail access to Cornville residents with significant benefit to Oak Creek Elementary School students. The school has a robust outdoor recreation program, including mountain biking through the Verde Valley Wheel Fun program, with a bike park already on school property. The proposed National Forest trail would expand bike-centric opportunities onto National Forest land.

Action: A 3.15-mile trail would be constructed, and a 0.91-mile user created trail would be adopted on a parcel of Forest Service land adjacent to the Oak Creek Elementary School in Cornville. In addition, a parking area would be constructed to accommodate up to four vehicles.

DOE MESA LOOP TRAIL

Background: Currently the 0.8-mile Doe Mountain Trail climbs to the mesa-top where it simply ends; therefore, numerous user-created routes have developed as people fan out to navigate a way around the mesa, to unofficial overlooks and sport climbing sites. This proposed loop would offer a maintained trail around the Doe Mountain top and would improve user experience as well as reduces soil and vegetation impacts. As part of this proposal, the excess user-created trails not adopted as part of the loop would be restored to a natural condition.

Action: A two-mile “figure 8” loop would be created through the construction of 0.15 mile and adoption 1.96 miles of new trail on top of Doe Mesa to access views in West Sedona.

HARDLINE TRAIL

Background: This project will address demand for non-motorized trail use in the Red Rock landscape, provide an alternate route while increasing overall connectivity in a high visitor-use area.

Action: A 0.92-mile user-created route in the Cathedral Rock area would be adopted to serve as an important link to existing Village of Oak Creek trails. The route would travel from the Hiline trail to Templeton and Easy Breezy trail junction, which would offer hikers and bikers a highly desirable experience with a trail alignment in a steep slick rock wash.

SCHEURMAN TRAIL CONNECTOR

Background: Recreationists currently travel through the Sedona Red Rock High School parking lot to access the Scheurman Mountain Trail; these recreationists include those parking along Upper Red Rock Loop Road or hikers crossing the road from the Carrol Canyon trail system. This access to the Scheurman Mountain Trailhead through the school parking lot is allowed outside of school operating hours (on weekday evenings and weekends); however, it is not allowed during school hours. Need for access to the trailhead is causing conflict for both school administration and Forest Service visitors. The proposed Scheurman Mountain Connector, therefore, would allow users to seamlessly access both trail systems by offering National Forest access directly from Upper Red Rock Loop Road. Parking access to the two trail systems, during school hours, would be available at nearby recreation sites, including Pyramid Trailhead on Red Rock Loop Road or Old Post Trailhead on Chavez Road.

Action: A short 0.31-mile connector would extend from the Scheurman Mountain Trailhead to Upper Red Rock Loop Road offering a connection to the Carrol Canyon trail system (Herkenham/ Skywalker trails) and to trails west and south of the Sedona Red Rock High School (Scheurman Mountain/ Pyramid trails) in West Sedona.

Categorical Exclusion

These proposed activities fall under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulation 36 CFR 220.6, which allow that a proposed action may be categorically excluded from further documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA) only if there are no significant impacts to extraordinary circumstances and if the proposed action is within one of the categories in Title 7, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1b (7 CFR part 1b) or Title 36 CFR 220.6(d) or (e).

Based on experience with similar projects, a categorical exclusion is the proposed level of analysis for this project. This project falls under 220.6(e)(1): *Construction and reconstruction of trails*.

Resource Reviews

Archeological, botanical, and wildlife surveys have been completed for the project area and are being reviewed by Forest Service specialists. Surveys will be reviewed, as well as input from the Forest Service hydrologists, engineers, and other specialists.

Implementation Timeline

Trail improvements would begin during spring 2024. The Turkey Creek trail system would be the highest priority and use Forest Service trail crews and volunteers. In addition, assistance from conservation youth corps crews over a three-year implementation timeline would occur with funding from the Sedona Red Rock Trail Fund. Implementation of the rest of the trail proposals would balancing priorities with available funding and interest from community members and partnerships.

Opportunity to Comment

We invite you to provide substantive comments regarding the proposed action. “Substantive comments” are within the scope of the project and the decision to be made, are specific to the proposed activities in the project area and have a direct relationship to the project. If you cite or include references with your comments, we ask that you state specifically how those references relate to the proposed action. Include hard copies or functioning internet links to any references. Please submit comments prior to the close of the comment period by **December 19, 2023**.

Submit comments in writing online at <https://tinyurl.com/RedRockTrailsComments>; via mail to Red Rock Ranger District, Attention: Red Rock Trails Enhancement, P.O. Box 20429, Sedona, AZ 86341; or in person at the Red Rock Ranger District Office, 8375 State Route 179, Sedona, AZ 86351.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.

Contact Person

View project information online at <https://tinyurl.com/RedRockAccessPlan> or contact Recreation Management Specialist Kevin Kuhl, at (928) 203-7519.

Sincerely,

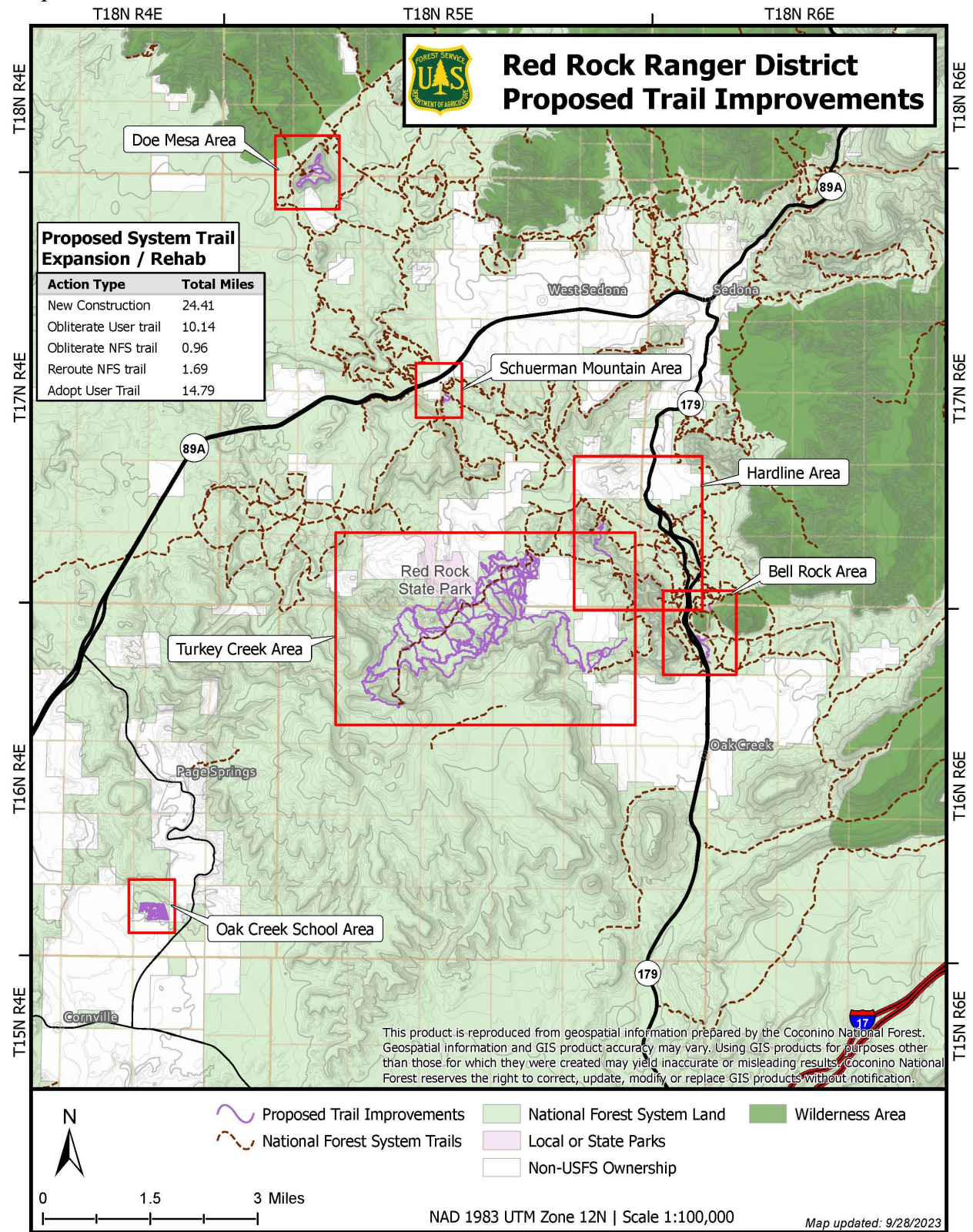
AMY TINDERHOLT
Red Rock District Ranger

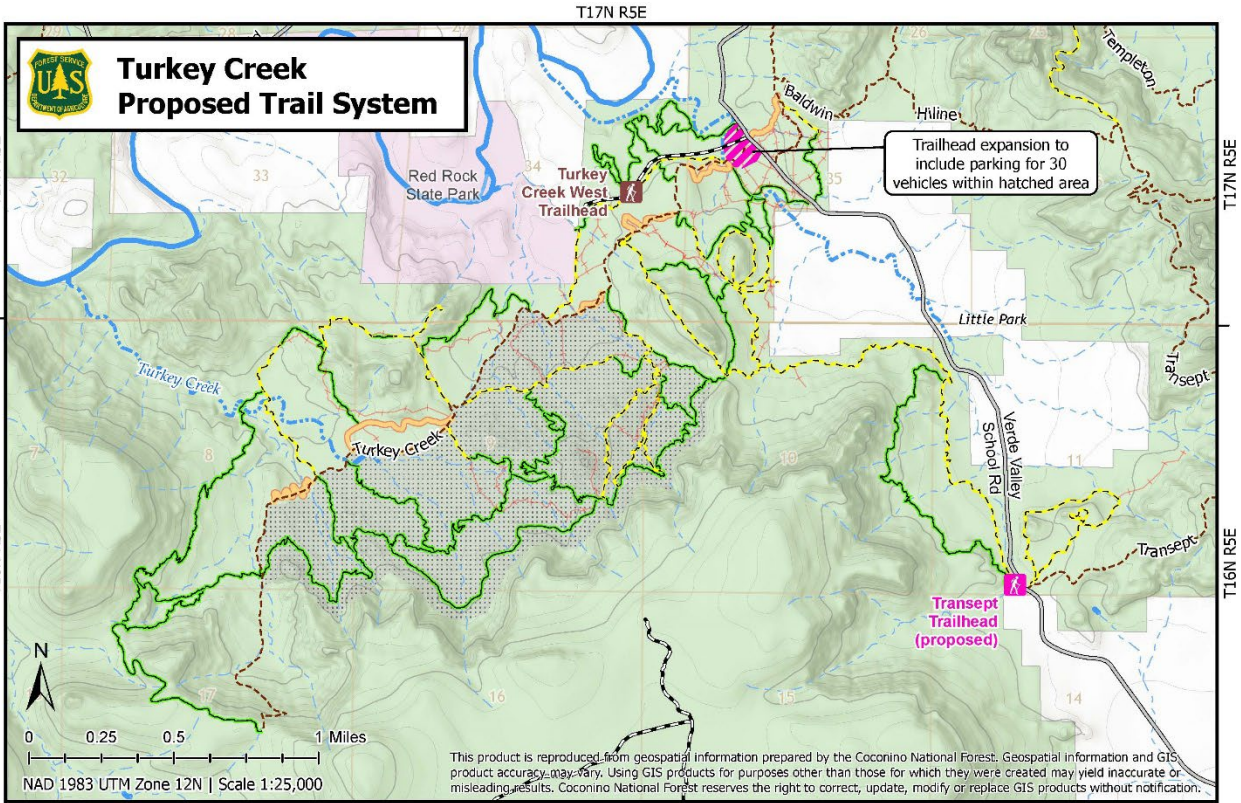
Map Enclosures

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Maps





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Proposed Modifications to Existing Turkey Creek Trail

Action Type	Miles
Keep existing NFS trail	2.62
Obliterate NFS trail	0.96
Reroute NFS trail	1.69

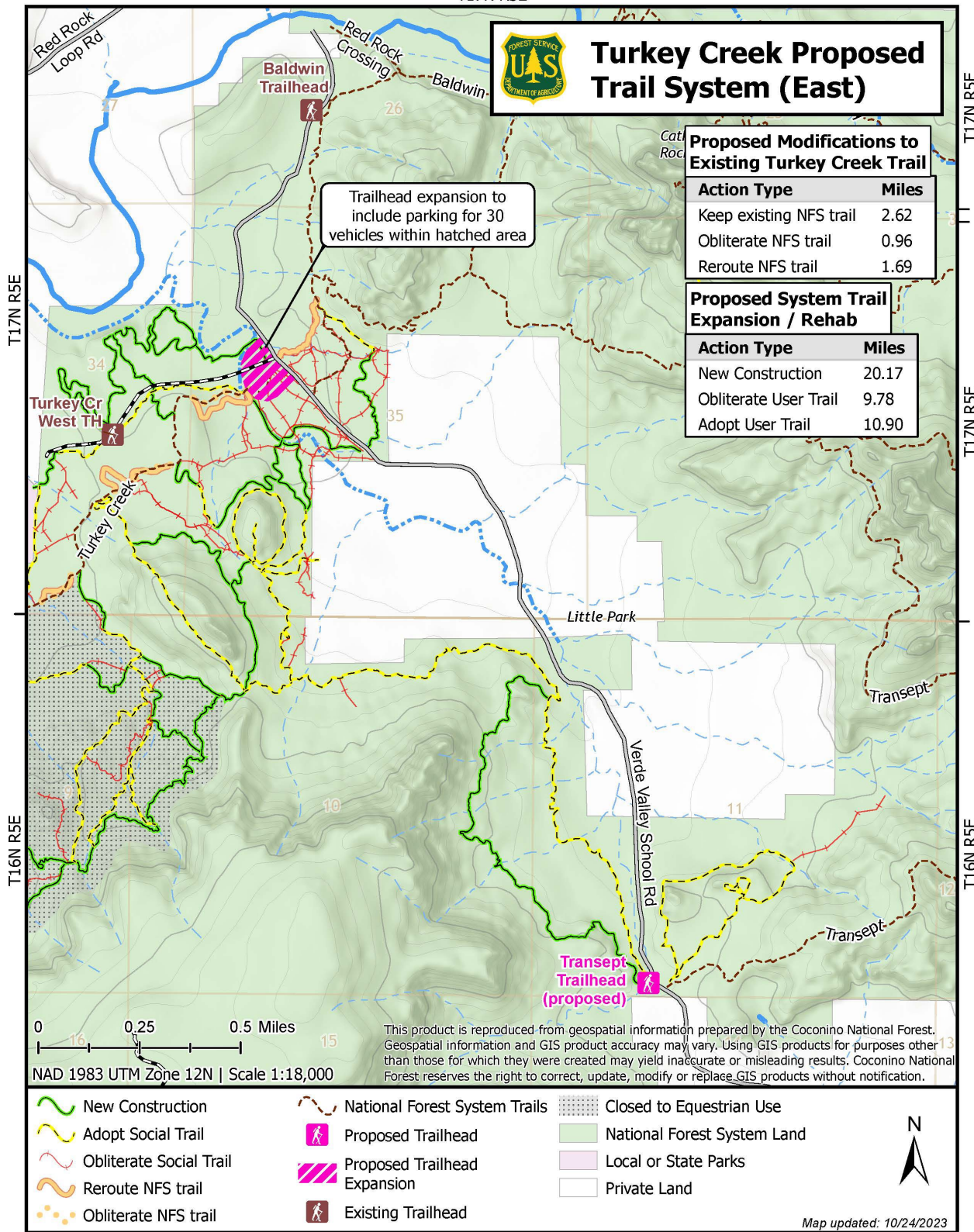
Proposed System Trail Expansion / Rehab

Action Type	Miles
New Construction	20.17
Obliterate User Trail	9.78
Adopt User Trail	10.90

- New Construction
- Adopt Social Trail
- Obliterate Social Trail
- Reroute NFS trail
- Obliterate NFS trail
- National Forest System Trails
- Proposed Trailhead
- Proposed Trailhead Expansion
- Closed to Equestrian Use
- National Forest System Land
- Local or State Parks
- Private Land

Map updated: 10/24/2023

T17N R5E



T17N R5E



Turkey Creek Proposed Trail System (West)

Proposed Modifications to Existing Turkey Creek Trail

Action Type	Miles
Keep existing NFS trail	2.62
Obliterate NFS trail	0.96
Reroute NFS trail	1.69

Proposed System Trail Expansion / Rehab

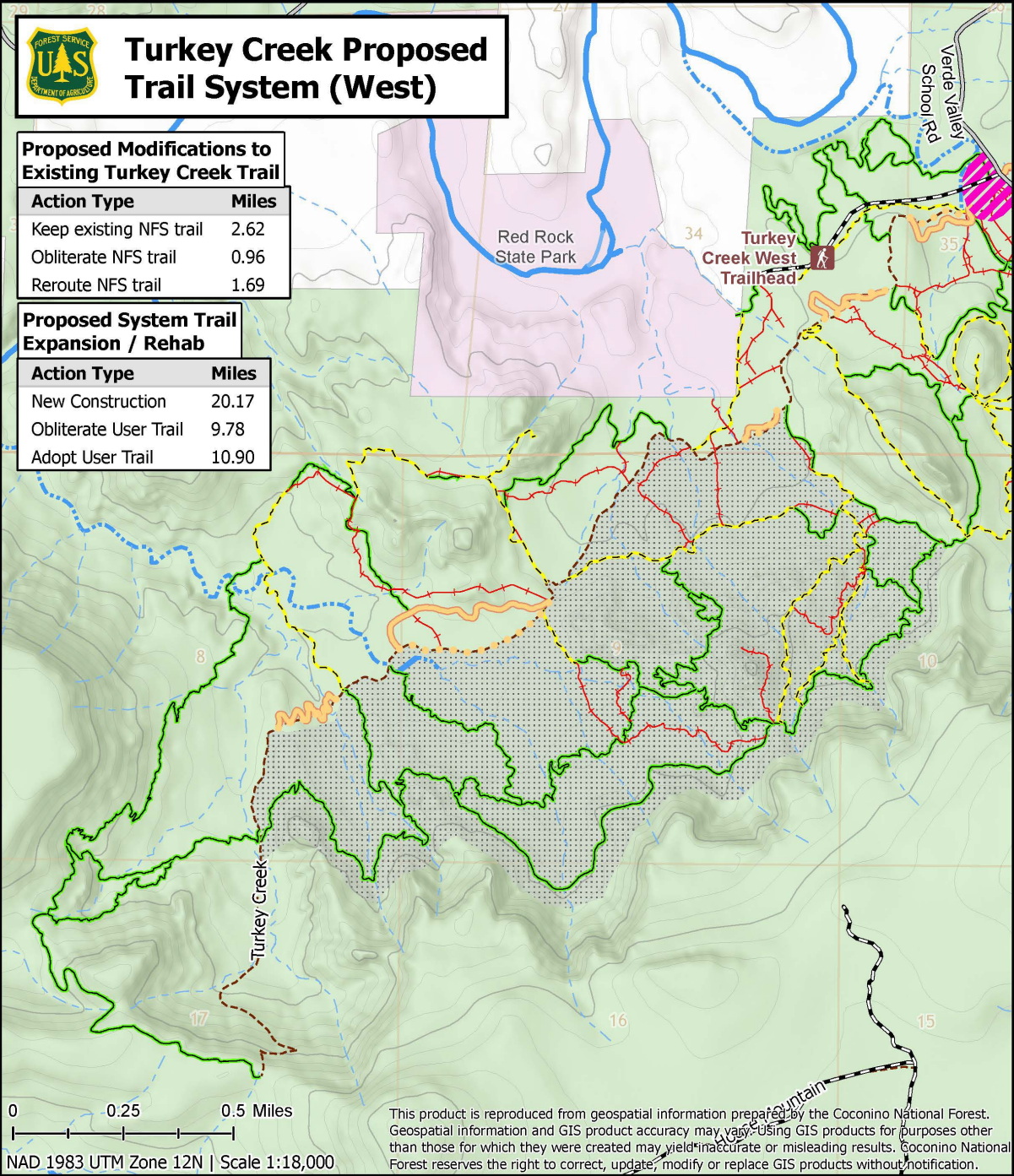
Action Type	Miles
New Construction	20.17
Obliterate User Trail	9.78
Adopt User Trail	10.90

T17N R5E

T16N R5E

T17N R5E

T16N R5E

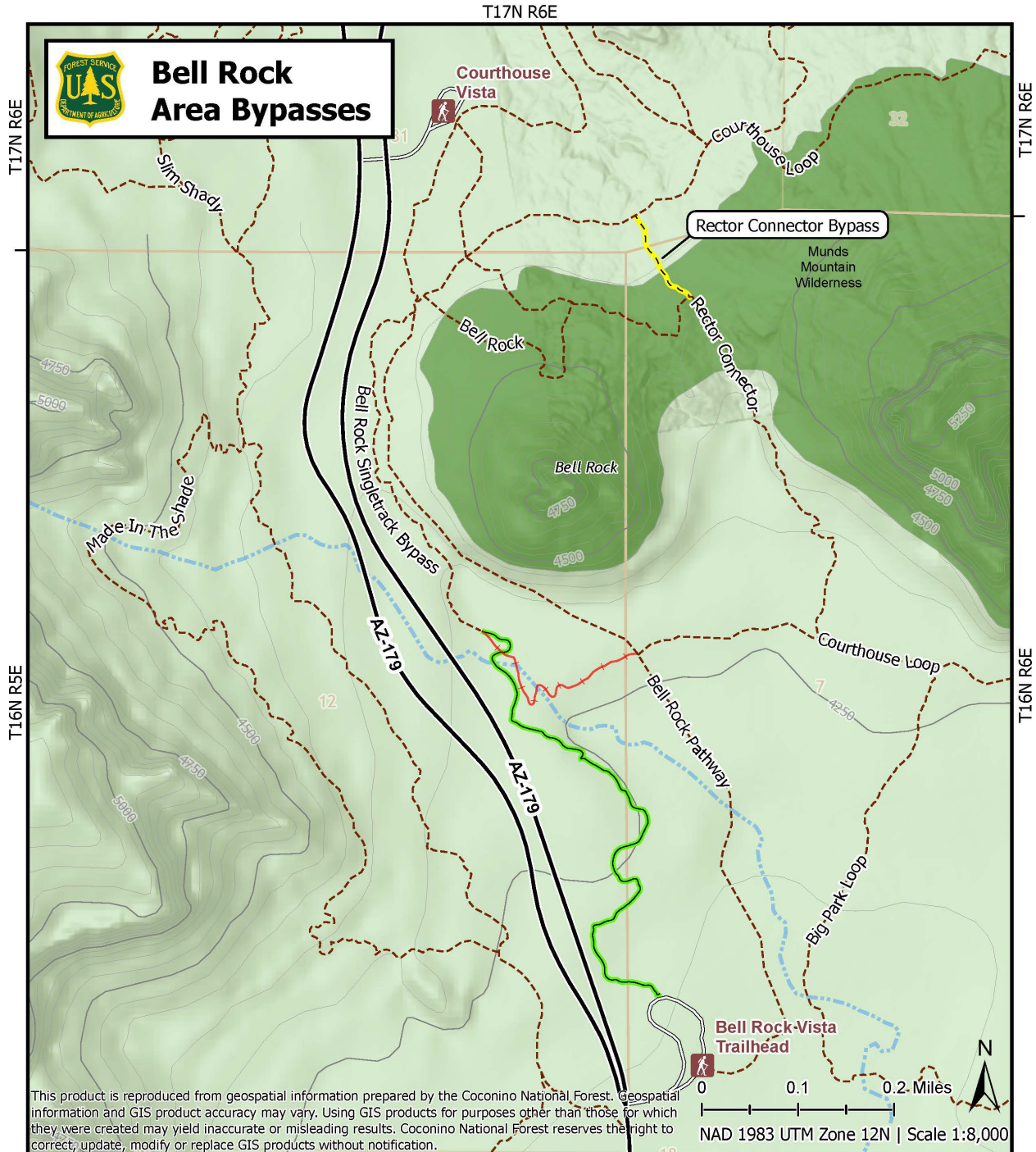


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New Construction	National Forest System Trails	Closed to Equestrian Use
Adopt Social Trail	Proposed Trailhead Expansion	National Forest System Land
Obliterate Social Trail	Existing Trailhead	Local or State Parks
Reroute NFS trail		Private Land
Obliterate NFS trail		



Map updated: 10/24/2023



Proposed Modifications to Bell Rock Area Bypasses

Trail System	Action Type	Miles
Rector Bypass Trail	Adopt User Trail	0.11
Single Track Bypass	New Construction	0.64
Single Track Bypass	Obliterate User Trail	0.25

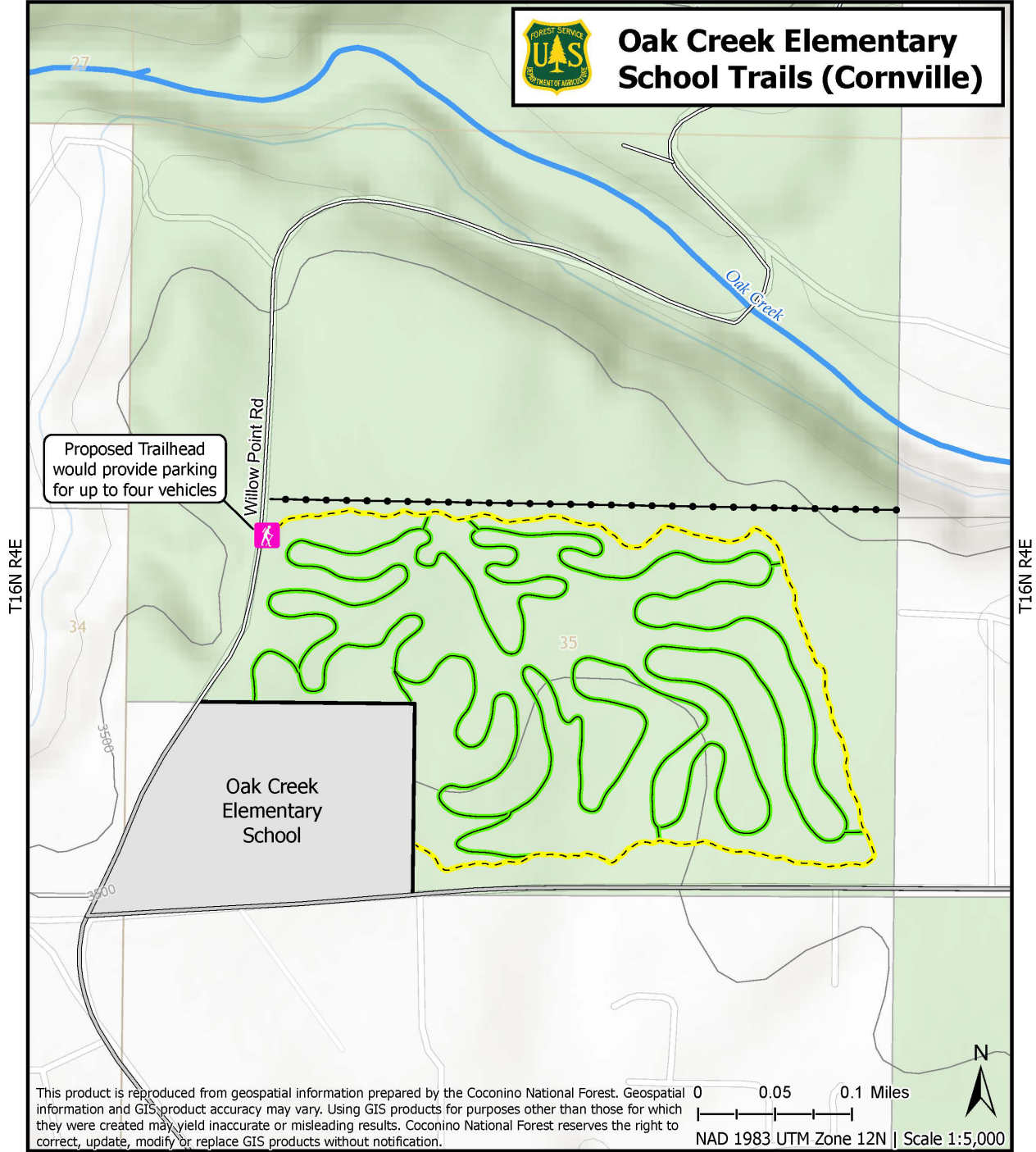
- New Construction
- Adopt Social Trail
- Obliterate Social Trail
- Existing Trailhead
- National Forest System Trail
- National Forest System Land
- Private Land
- Wilderness Area

Map updated: 10/24/2023

T16N R4E









Oak Creek Elementary School Trails (Cornville)



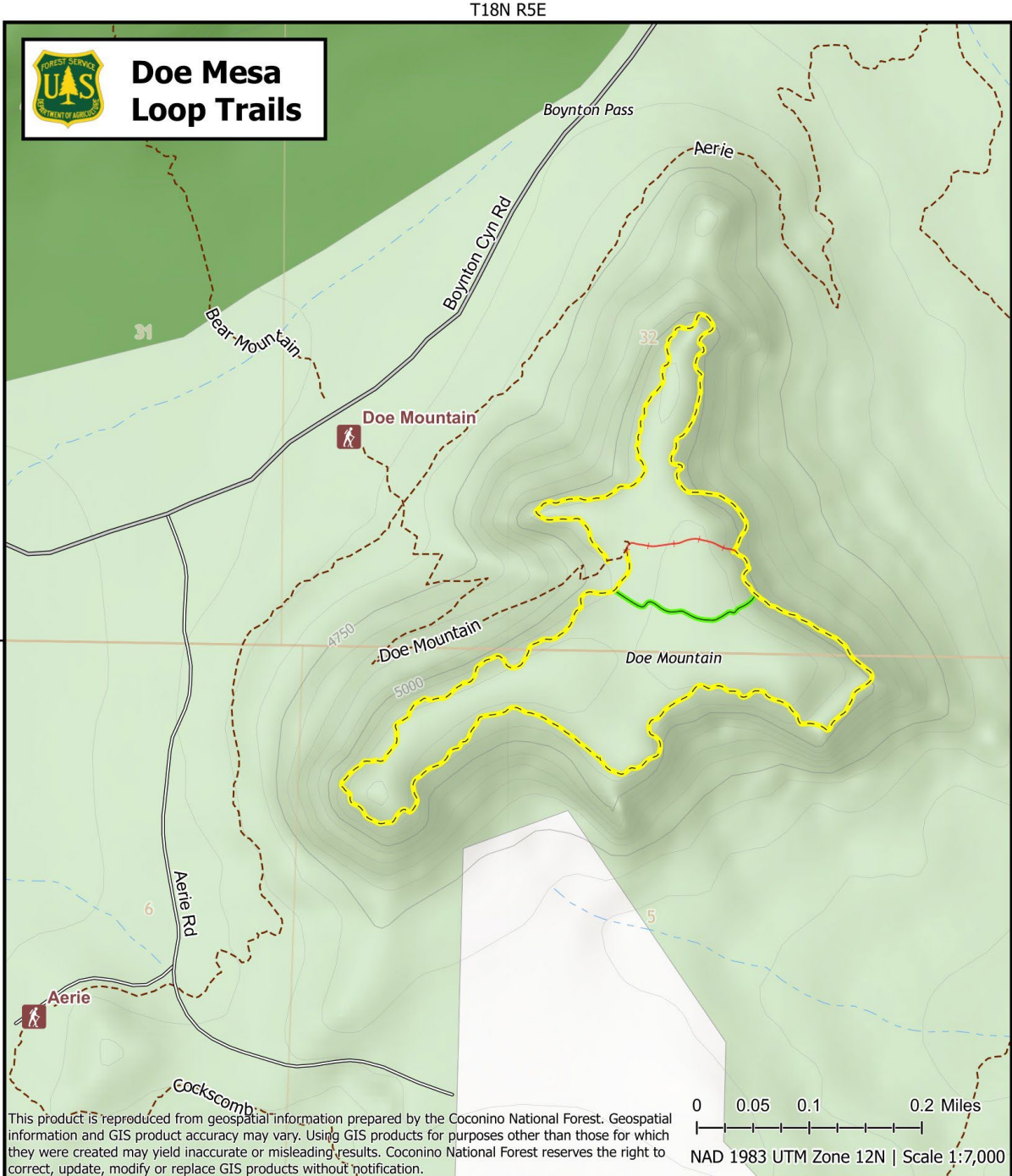
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Proposed Oak Creek Elementary School Trail System

Action Type	Miles
New Construction	3.15
Adopt User Trail	0.91

-  New Construction
-  Adopt Social Trail
-  Proposed Trailhead
-  Fence
-  Non-FS Ownership
-  National Forest System Land

Map updated: 10/24/2023



U.S. FOREST SERVICE
Doe Mesa Loop Trails

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0 0.05 0.1 0.2 Miles
 NAD 1983 UTM Zone 12N | Scale 1:7,000

Proposed Modifications to Doe Mesa Trails

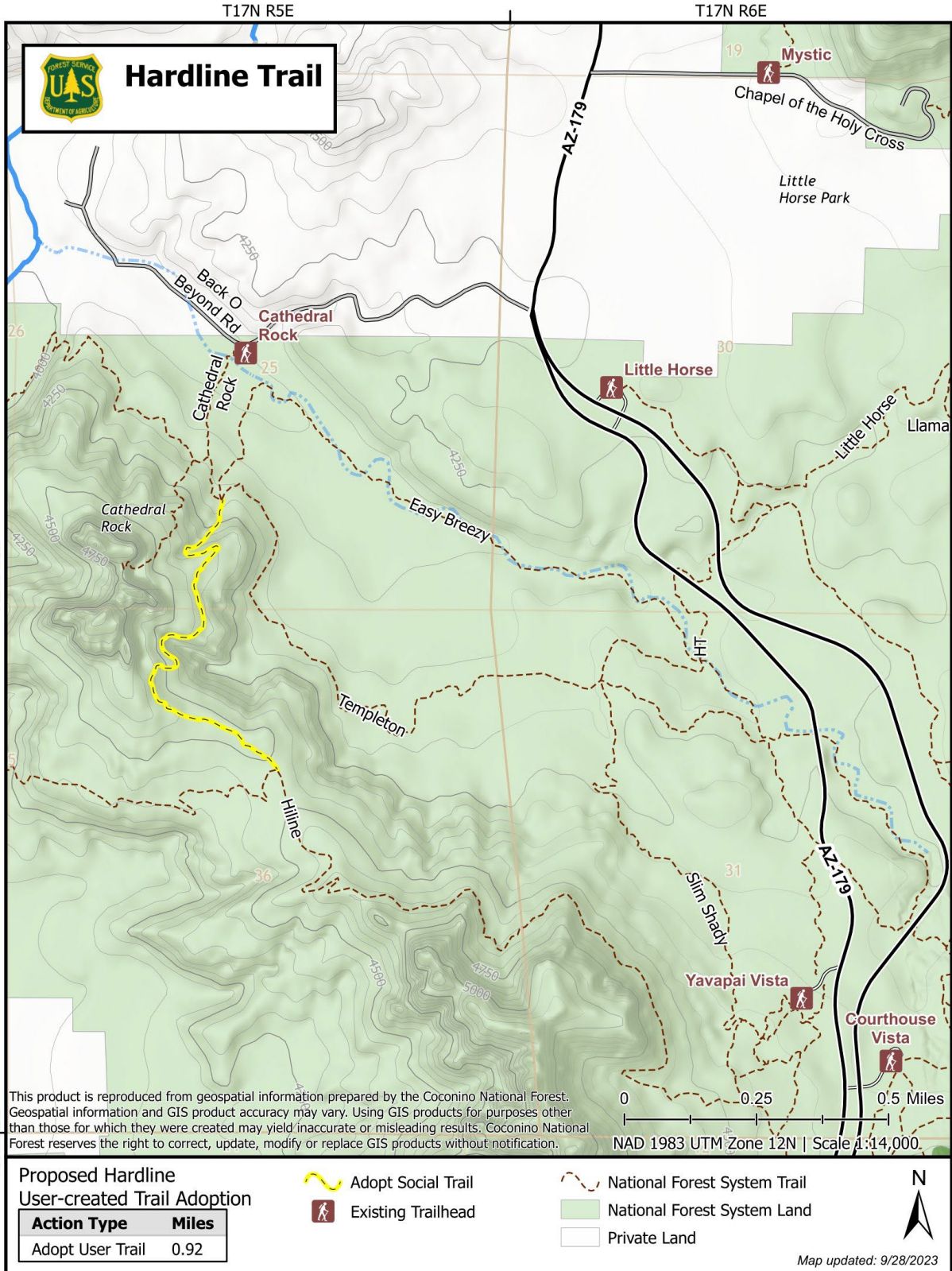
Action Type	Miles
New Construction	0.15
Obliterate User Trail	0.11
Adopt User Trail	1.96

T17N R5E

- New Construction
- Adopt User Trail
- Obliterate User Trail
- Existing Trailhead
- National Forest System Trail
- National Forest System Land
- Private Land
- Wilderness Area

N

Map updated: 9/28/2023



Hardline Trail

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0 0.25 0.5 Miles
 NAD 1983 UTM Zone 12N | Scale 1:14,000

Proposed Hardline User-created Trail Adoption

Action Type	Miles
Adopt User Trail	0.92

- Adopt Social Trail
- Existing Trailhead
- National Forest System Trail
- National Forest System Land
- Private Land

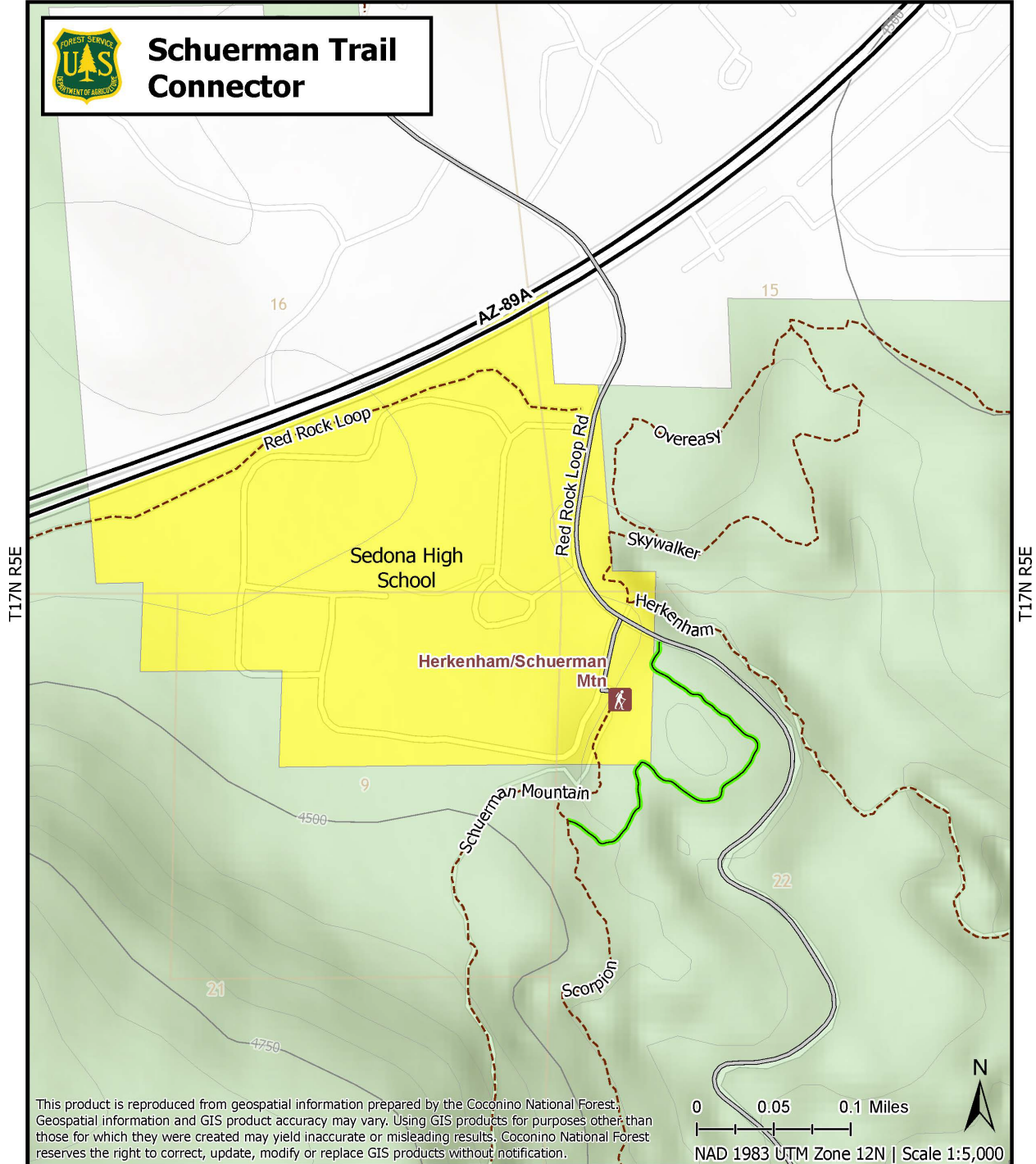
N

 Map updated: 9/28/2023

T17N R5E



Schuerman Trail Connector



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0 0.05 0.1 Miles

NAD 1983 UTM Zone 12N | Scale 1:5,000

Proposed Schuerman Trail Connector

Action Type	Miles
New Construction	0.31

- New Construction
- National Forest System Trail
- Existing Trailhead
- National Forest System Land
- Private Land
- Sedona High School

Map updated: 10/24/2023