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Balancing outdoor recreation with conservation is the focus of a new draft plan

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Published December 5, 2025 at 3:16 PM MST

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How do you balance outdoor recreation with conservation of landscapes and wildlife? A group called the Montelores Coalition has come up with a draft plan for dealing with that issue.

On Wednesday, the public had the opportunity to learn about the plan at a gathering in Cortez.

Executive director Cara Gildar told the audience of about 30 that this coalition is one of 21 regional partnerships in Colorado. She said it works to consider the needs of all the communities and landscapes in Montezuma and Dolores counties, including the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.

The two counties reportedly see more than 1 million visitors to the outdoors every year.

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included extensive data-gathering, community feedback, and seven roundtable meetings.

The draft plan was developed with funding from Colorado Parks and Wildlife. It has been taken to the public at meetings in Dove Creek, Dolores, Rico, Cortez, and Mancos.

It has 14 guiding principles, one of which is that it is an advisory plan with no mandates involved.

“Montelores isn’t trying to take over anybody’s mission,” Preston said.

Another guiding principle is that people living or working in Montezuma and Dolores counties are “effective stewards of land, water, wildlife, heritage and outdoor recreation infrastructure.”

Preston and Gildar noted that outdoor recreation can cause problems for wildlife, can damage landscapes, and can come in conflict with agricultural users such as ranchers. The plan is intended to help mitigate those impacts.

“Multiple use is super important in Montezuma and Dolores counties,” Preston said.

He said surveys taken at trailheads and other sites for outdoor recreation found that more than half of the visitors in Montezuma County – some 56 percent – come from outside the county.

Goals listed in the plan include offering exceptional recreation experiences; providing equitable access to outdoor recreation; conserving natural and heritage resources; finding the capacity, workforce and funding for needed management and infrastructure; and encouraging business growth and development in outdoor recreation.

The plan can be seen and commented on at montelorescoalition.org. “Let it rip! Let us know what you think,” Preston told the audience.

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