

Sun Corridor Trail Alliance: Flagstaff to Sedona Route Recommendation

By Adam Smath

Introduction

The Sun Corridor Trail project is a multi-agency effort being coordinated by the Sun Corridor Trail Alliance [SCTA] to develop a multi-use recreational trail utilizing existing routes (trails and primitive roads) from Douglas, Arizona to Las Vegas, Nevada. The trail will link cities and towns allowing residents easy trail access and providing locations for recreationalists to rest and explore while traveling along the route's entirety. The route will travel through Arizona, California, and Nevada connecting over 41 cities and towns, 23 of which are located in rural areas. The trail has the potential to increase local economic spending, increase property values, and provide additional recreational opportunities for citizens and tourists. The process of linking existing routes to create the trail makes the project unique, speeds up implementation and saves a significant amount of money vs. creating a new trail. The trail will primarily focus on meeting the needs of off road cyclists such as 'Gravel Cyclists' and 'Credit Card Tourists', but will also be viable for walking/hiking, e-bike, and equestrian use in some sections. This practicum project will consist of collecting field data, mapping, participating in SCTA stakeholder meetings, assisting in managing social media and web marketing, and creating material for a future guide book. The project will support planning efforts by aiding in route selection within the Coconino County National Forest and Coconino County in Northern Arizona.

All Tested Routes

The map on the left shows all the forest roads and trails tested for the Flagstaff to Sedona Section by the field researcher by riding a route specific gravel bike. The researcher collected GPS data, field notes, photos, and videos along the routes to aid in deciding which routes fit the Sun Corridor Trail Alliance Selection and Exclusion Criteria. The routes are marked with colors indicating the operational maintenance level as specified by the United States Forest Service. Some maintenance levels were assessed and chosen by the field researcher using the USFS maintenance level criteria.

Route Recommendation

This map on the right provides the final route recommendation for the Sun Corridor Trail in the Coconino Section from Flagstaff to Sedona Arizona. The map provides areas of interest and some photos of the areas of interest are provided below between the two maps. This recommended route provides a relatively consistent bike riding experience to recreationalist while meeting the Sun Corridor Trail Alliance Selection and Exclusion Criteria and highlighting astatically pleasing and environmentally diverse locations.

Conclusion

Ultimately having the Sun Corridor Trail take Blue Grade road [USFS 689] and Stoneman Lake road [USFS 213] best meets the selection criteria and provides a more consistent experience to users. Schnebly Hill road [USFS 153] provides beautiful views and a unique experience to cyclists, but the heavy off-roading traffic, presents of jeep tours, and steep rough terrain makes it extraordinarily difficult to navigate on a gravel bike or any bicycle for that matter. Schnebly Hill road [USFS 153] also closes seasonally to motor vehicles due to traitorous conditions that were observed by the field researcher which included numerous rock slides, sand slides, deep mud, large flowing washouts, and deep snow in shaded southwestern slopes when the route was tested on March 21st of 2020. Additionally the roughly 2,000 feet of elevation over an 8 mile section on Schnebly Hill road is physically exhausting to climb and physically painful and dangerous to descend on a gravel bike.

A final important note is that the field researcher's main caveat with the route recommendation is that the most southern five miles of route 179 leading to and from Sedona needs improvement for cyclist safety and comfort. The most southern five miles of route 179 provides no bike lane and a road shoulder that varies from one foot to 4 inches in width. The shoulder is also often obstructed with picker bushes, broken glass, and roadway debris. The speed limit along this section is 55 mph which is daunting to a cyclist with such a small margin of error on the roadside and a heightened fear of distracted driving. The Sun Corridor Trail Alliance should seek acquire grant funding to implement a bike lane or separated paved or dirt route through this section.



Photos From Field Testing

Graffiti Old Farm Stucture
On USFS 762D



Priest Draw Climbing Area
On the Priest Draw Trail
Near USFS 235



Brollier Park Cabin and Homestead
Near USFS 91



Tlaquepaque Art and Culture
Off Rt 179 in Sedona



Mormon Lake Village, AZ



Data Credits:

-Mastering ArcGIS, Tutorial Data 7th edition by Maribeth Price (2015) [DVD-ROM] McGraw-Hill Higher Ed: Dubuque, Iowa
-USDA Forest Service, Southwestern Region, Regional GIS Coordinator, "MVUM Roads" [vector digital data], Published 03-8-2020
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/r3/landmanagement/gis/?cid=STELPRDB5201889&width=full> Accessed 03-18-2020
-USGS The National Map: 3D Elevation Program. USGS Earth Resources Observation & Science (EROS) Center: GMTED2010. Data refreshed January, 2020.

