



Mesa Verde Back Country Horsemen

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To Whom it May Concern:

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Mesa Verde Back Country Horsemen (MVBCH), consisting of approximately 60 members, regarding the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest Draft Assessment Plan. It is the mission of MVBCH to perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country and wilderness and to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use. We assist our local government agencies in the maintenance and management of our public lands, trails and horse friendly camps, and to educate, encourage and solicit active participation in the wise use of the back country resource by horsemen and the general public commensurate with our heritage. This year, in 2017, our members contributed just under \$80,000 of volunteer work on our public lands.

Our comments are going to be specific to the area of the San Juans, as this is closest to our volunteer efforts. We want to thank you for engaging stakeholders across the board for feedback and input on this revision and for doing your best in incorporating the 2012 Planning Rule.

We heavily support the Wilderness Act and maintaining its integrity. We request that you continue to support the position that forest units must not designate routes or trails as open for motorized or mechanized vehicle use in agency-recommended and designated wilderness. Allowing motorized or mechanized vehicle use in these areas we feel would diminish the opportunity for solitude, degrades its naturalness and undeveloped character, and adversely affects the opportunity for historic and traditional wilderness recreation, such as hiking, horseback riding and packing, hunting, fishing and camping.

We believe that your management of this area can be greatly enhanced by reaching out to partners such as Back Country Horsemen. More isn't necessarily better. Take care and maintain what you have. Population has exponentially increased in Colorado, and therefore the demands on public lands are increasing. However, equestrian use is a historic use and should be maintained. This means trailheads and access must be maintained for us.

Part of our mission is keeping access open for all designated uses. We want to ensure that our historical use of our trail system and back country remain, keeping horse access open and available everywhere it currently is. We are pleased to see that horseback riding is a heavy use in this FS area and that you have recognized that in your assessments. We know it will continue to be. It's important to keep looking forward when planning for outdoor experiences. Trailheads must be designed (if new) or expanded (if existing) for the size of our horse trailers. As more places become more popular, our use is hindered by lack of space.

To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country and wilderness; To work to insure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use; To assist the various government and private agencies in their maintenance and management of said resource; To educate, encourage and solicit active participation in the wise use of the back country resource by horsemen and the general public commensurate with our heritage; To foster and encourage individuals to join and participate in their local, State, and National Back Country Horsemen organizations.



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Providing the spectrum or variety of recreation settings necessary to meet the demand for quality recreation necessitates a conscious choice of how those healthy and resilient lands will be allocated and managed – decisions that **must** be made as part of a strategic land management plan.

Dispersed recreation, especially in the San Juans, is predominantly nonmotorized use, so planning keeping this demand in mind is paramount. We do appreciate that user conflicts, especially with mountain bikes, has increased over time, no doubt due to the increase in users recreating outside. Again, mindful planning needs to go into new areas that will be proposed. Horse camping facilities, such as at Beaver Park and Lone Cone Peak should remain.

All in all, it seems this preliminary assessment is comprehensive and well thought out, covering all aspects required by the 2012 Planning Rule. We look forward to providing specific comments to areas in the future when more detailed analyses and recommendations are brought forth. Please place us on your mailing list for future mailings regarding this project.

Sincerely,

Latifia "Tif" Rodriguez

MVBCH Board Member and Political Affairs/Public Lands Chair

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