



Back Country Horsemen of the Virginia Highlands

www.bchvh.org

Hello Barry, Shelby, Brittany et al,

6/16/2019

The Back Country Horsemen of the Virginia Highlands commend the Forest Service at Mount Rogers for including the public in decision making in the forest. We are especially pleased to be included in the planning stage of a project. We understand the need for forest management to keep ecosystems healthy and realize there is a lot to consider. Projects such as this can impact many people in different ways, so we hope to work closely with all parties to share information as it comes up to ensure that the public is well informed and understands the process. We are also available to contribute work hours, if needed, along any trail that may be impacted by the project. We realize that this project is in the preliminary planning stage and so will submit a more detailed response later in the process. Right now I would like to share some general feelings from our members and others I have spoken with.

The scoping letter was shared with our membership and the comments we received fall into several common categories as summarized below.

Trail Aesthetics- Most people are concerned with aesthetics along trail corridors. To quote one of our members "The purpose of trails is to provide a scenic, quiet, natural and pristine way to enjoy the forest". We request that buffers be planned to protect the trail experience where project areas cross designated trails. We would also like consideration for trails that are not designated but are important routes being used by equestrians that may be included in the future, especially trails that are listed on the Draft Working Map from 2015.

It is also a concern that any forest roads that are typically used as a trail route be returned to a state that is friendly to foot travel. For example large gravel is hard to navigate on horseback, foot and bikes and is damaging to horse's hooves as well as feet and tires. When road improvements are made we request that small gravel be used to make easier for horse, foot and bike travel.

Invasive Species- Many folks are concerned about the spread of the invasive species, especially the Autumn Olive, that are invading the trails and open areas. Many folks commented on the numerous open spaces along trails that have been allowed to grow up with these invasive plants. It is hoped that the areas that used to be open along trails that are now choked out will be treated. We also request some kind of system to better notify the public of any chemical or burn treatments taking place.

Income from Timber Sales- We are looking forward to the prospect that the funds from the timber sales will be returned to the Mount Rogers NRA for future projects. The trails, which are recognized as among the best in the east, with people traveling many miles to experience them, are in dire need of improvement and we hope we can see some progress with this revenue. As always we are available to help on any trail improvement project.

Thank you for hearing our views. We look forward to responding in more detail as the plan develops.

Sincerely,
Nancy Sluys-
President- Back Country Horsemen of the Virginia Highlands.