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Grand Junction, CO 81507
May 10, 2022

Ouray Ranger District
Uncompahre National Forest
2505 South Townsend
Montrose, CO 81401

RE: Blue Lakes Management Plan

TO: Dana Gardunio, District Ranger

Introduction The purpose of this letter is to offer my comments for the Visitor Use Management Plan which is being prepared by Forest Service, personal to establish rules for hiking and camping in the Blue Lakes Area, west of Mt Sneffels. The problem of crowding and damage to the alpine environment has been going on for years, but seems to have exploded the last few years and controls and regulations are definitely needed.

The Management Plan was first directed to the Blue Lakes, but the Forest Service soon noticed that nearby lands had similar problems, and Forest Service decided to expand the Management Plan to include Mt Sneffels, Blaine Basin and the trail head areas on the north side of the Sneffels Range, plus Yankee Boy Basin on the south side of the Sneffels range. The management area has been divided into 5 zones, each which has unique characteristics and problems. (I have included the NF map with boundaries shown for convenience of the reader

My approach for providing comments is to review and comment for each zone separately. The basis for my comments is personal observations, which extends over a 50 year period (My first ascent of Sneffels was in 1970) and from the narratives prepared by Forest Service personnel on the 5 zones.

Blue Lakes Wilderness Zone ..The first thing one notices when one reaches lower Blue Lake is the number of people, much more than the usual high altitude basin in Colorado. The Ouray paper had some interesting numbers on use of the Blue Lakes trail ---740% increase of use from 2010; total hikers from June to Oct of 22,204 last year; and more. This same paper summed up the situation well in describing recreation-related impact: human waste is unburied, vegetation at campsites has been lost, dogs are off-leash, illegal campfires" and more

My first recommendation is to reduce the number of visitors to the basin; another reduction for campers and establish a permit system. I don't know enough to suggest an exact a permit number; but I would start on the low side-perhaps about 3 campers and 20 hikers a day. WA 14

The second approach is to provide rules and regulations on proper camping. Third, allow no camping above timber line and require all visitors to stay on the trail. Fires should not be allowed.

An essential (maybe the most important!) is to develop a human waste disposal device, and/or procedure; one that assures it is used, and waste is removed.

Patrolling rangers are absolutely needed on a daily basis.

Mount Sneffels Peak Mount Sneffels is probable the best known mountain in the Northern San Juans. It is very visible from the highway, and relatively accessible from the south. Most climbers and site seers approach Mt Sneffels from the south west. The majority climb up to the saddle on the SE ridge (Lavender Col) then up the rocky couloir; a few go up the SW ridge, which involves more rock scrambling. Actual damage to the route seldom occurs on the upper mountain, because most of the surface is rock and climbing is a one day event. I.

I would suggest more developed parking areas and more camping sites on the approach.

. It is suggested that signs and posts be placed along the road way in needed places and in Yankee Boy Basin to define public-private boundaries, and to define where camping areas are located.

I would also set direction signs along the approach route, and even at the summit. It can be difficult to find the 'down route' from the top, and there have been several falls when a climber follows the wrong 'down route'.

I suggest building a trail from in the section between Lavender Col and the lower foot trail at the bottom..Much of the this section has been scraped bare by the down climbers. . The ground in this section is very hard and smooth and it is difficult to keep from sliding(.The trail is more to help 'down climbers , but will be a real asset).

Also, nearby the trail to Blue Lakes Pass has deteriorated, has much loose gravel, and 2-3 ft vertical spots and can be difficult to both climb and descend.

Yankee Boy Zone Yankee Boy refers to the land at the very end of the valley formed by Sneffels Creek. It provides access to Mt Sneffels and the road to it is very scenic. It has paths for foot travel, rough trails suitable to ATVs and roads passable by 4-wheel vehicle. It is only about an hour from Ouray, and takes people to the alpine Zone fairly quickly.

The fairly large amount of visitors has created several problems. . There is trash and human waste:even though there is a toilet, people still don't use it. Part of the area is private, and trespassing occurs.Also, vehicles frequently drive unto the tundra . Enforcement people are needed, at least for a few hours.

Lower East Dallas Zone County . County Road 7 passes through the Lower East Dallas Zone; it is the main access road to the Blue Lakes Trail. . It appears that all the land shown on the map for this Zone belong to the National Forest. County Road 7 meets both the trail leading to the Blue Lakes (which goes north to south) and the Dallas Trail running west to east (at the same point) People planning to hike or camp e park their vehicles at some point in this Zone.

The Blue Lakes received 35,000 visitors last year; a lot of space is needed for that many vehicles. The Forest Service has not designated places for parking, nor have they graded out soil, brush and trees,(at least I have never seen any). It is obvious that parking places must be constructed and signs included

There are several sites that have been used for camping; it is unlikely that permission has been obtained from the National Forest for that use.

There is only one toilet, (a one hole at the trailhead) in a building Since waste can be trucked out, it would be possible to construct more toilets.

The entire area should have patrol officers to monitor and issue fines for vjiation.

County Road 7 is maintained by Ouray County. It is assumed that roads south of the Forest Service boundary. It usually gets very rough. The FS could contract with the county for grading since they will have its grader there.

Blaine Basin Zone Blaine Basin in located about 5 miles south east of the trail to the Blue Lakes It is my favorite basin on the north side of the Sneffels Range,in part because at has few visitors and solitude is possible. It has no lakes, but has a scenic stream flowing through it and a very high water fall (viewed from below)There is some evidence of human visitation, which could be cleaned up quickly . It has been included in a Congressional proposal of wilderness.,

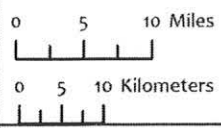
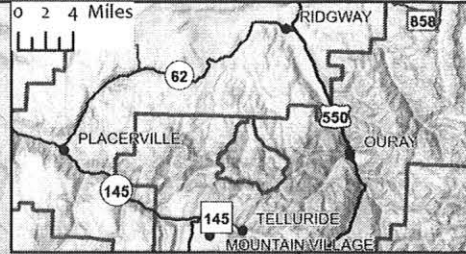
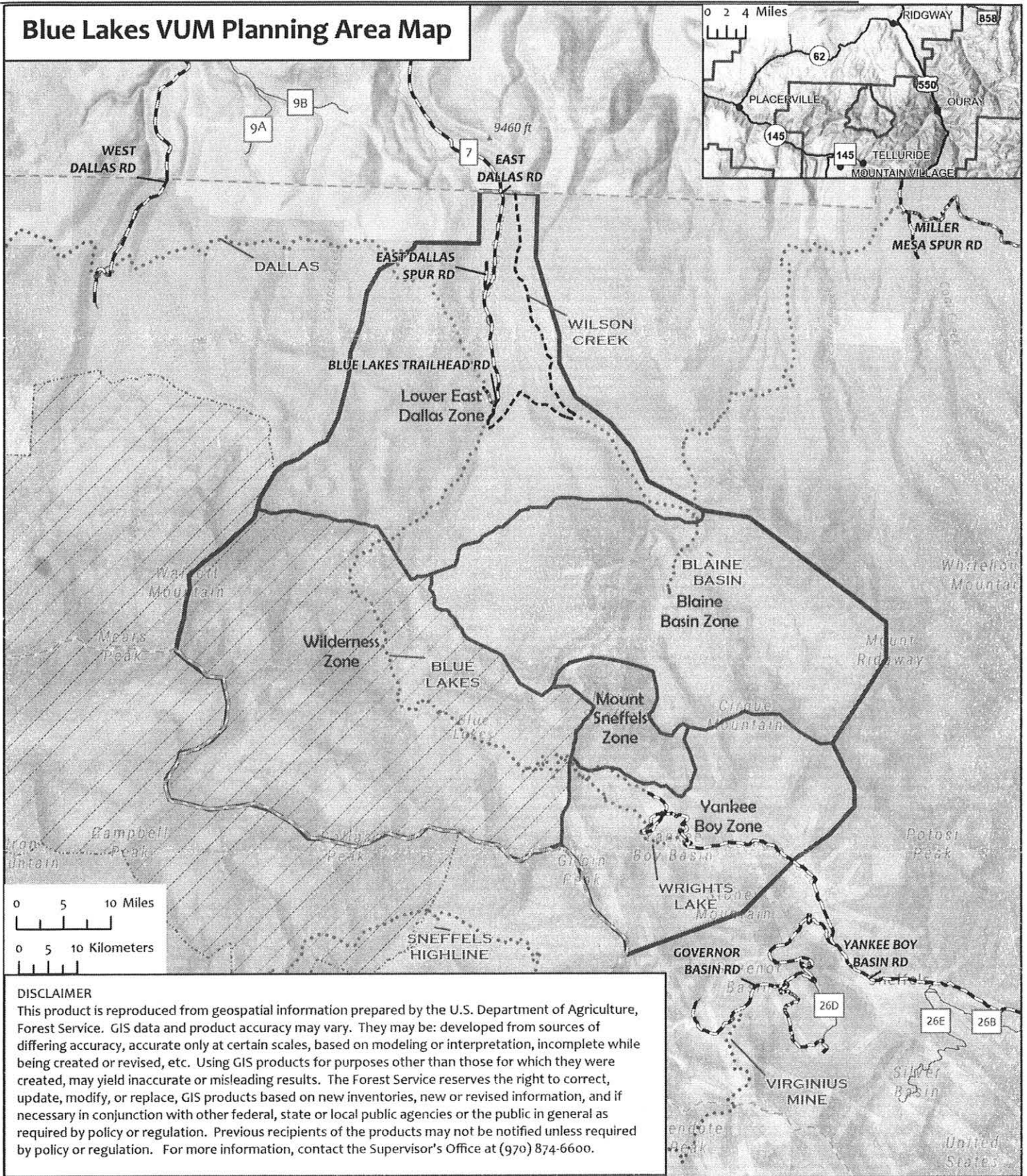
I would suggest creating a group of volunteers to watch over the Basin.

Sincerly,

Bill Hamann



Blue Lakes VUM Planning Area Map



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| Blue Lakes Draft Planning Boundary | County Roads | Trails Open to Pack Animals | Trails Open to Vehicles <= 50 inches wide | Mount Sneffels Wilderness |
| Blue Lakes Planning Area Zones | Trails | Trails Open to Mountain Bikes | Non-FS Land | Ranger District Boundaries |
| Roads Open to All Vehicles | Highest Allow Use | Trail Open to Foot Travel | US Forest Service Land | Forest Boundary |



Modified on
4/8/2022