



**Sheep
Mountain
Alliance**

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To: Norwood District Ranger
Attn: Megan Eno
1150 Forest Street
Norwood, CO 81423
March 1, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Alta Lakes site improvement, and for conducting a scoping period on this scenic and popular site that serves as an important backcountry recreation zone.

We want to acknowledge the substantial commitment that the Forest Service has made to help maintain recreation within the Alta Lakes and Gold King Basin zones, as well as to develop a plan for continued improvements to the area. Given the growing popularity of this recreation area and the negative impacts of dispersed camping, Sheep Mountain Alliance is in support of the proposed Alta Lakes site improvements that the Forest Service outlined.

We advocate that non-system roads be closed, and rehabilitated, on the east end of Alta Lakes. The draft GMUG forest plan states: “GDL-REC-12 makes the prohibition of motorized use off of designated routes a guideline.” This must be a standard. It is required by the Travel Management Rule: “After these roads, trails, and areas are designated, motor vehicle use, including when the class of vehicle and time of year are not in accordance with these designations, is prohibited by 36 CFR 261.13.”¹ After designation of routes on a national forest: “it is prohibited to possess or operate a motor vehicle on National Forest System lands in that administrative unit or Ranger District other than in accordance with those designations...”² There are exemptions for administrative, law enforcement, authorized access, etc.,³ but not for general recreation use.

We strongly support the rehabilitation of riparian habitats that have suffered due to erosion and overuse, and urge the Forest Service to temporarily close these areas to foot traffic to ensure proper ecological restoration.

¹ 36 CFR 212.50.

² 36 CFR 261.13.

³ See 36 CFR 261.13 (a) through (i).

Additionally, SMA is in support of installing permanent bathroom units within range of the designated campsites. As per the draft GMUG Forest Plan, FW-GDL-REC-13: “To mitigate cumulative ecological and social impacts associated with human waste, when pertinent indicators for action in forest-wide standards REC-07 and REC-08 are identified, the Forest Service should require visitors to use self-contained waste solutions on a site-specific basis (i.e., WAG bags, portable toilet, etc.).” This should be a standard and should be implemented quickly.

In addition to site improvements including day-use parking areas, fire ring construction, preventing vehicle travel on the east end of Alta Lakes, and trail improvements, which we strongly support, we also urge the Forest Service to consider increased signage in the area. Ideally, users would be able to know whether or not there are dispersed camping sites available before they travel up the Alta Lakes Road. Signage that includes directional signs for foot trails, as well as instructional signage to prevent users from walking through regenerating wetland zones surrounding the lakes, would positively impact the user experience as well as protect fragile environments. Trail signage that is accessible in Spanish as well as in English would reflect the composition of Telluride’s community and ensure that public lands in our region are accessible to a wider range of users. We are in support of a user sign-in kiosk, or a comparable method, for informing visitors of camping availability at the designated sites. A low-maintenance but informative system such as this would limit the number of prospective campers traveling up Alta Lakes Road only to turn around if camping is not available.

Once again, we want to thank the Forest Service for continuing to advocate for the Alta Lakes zone, and we look forward to continuing to participate in the process.

Sincerely,

Mason Osgood, Executive Director
Ruthie Boyd, Program Coordinator
Sheep Mountain Alliance