

Blue Lakes Visitor Management Plan Environmental Assessment

Comments submitted by the Public Lands Committee of

**The Ridgway Ouray Community Council**

December 1, 2023

*Thanks to the United States Forest Service for carefully developing a plan for use of the Blue Lakes area.*

*Please consider the following comments:*

1. 1.2.5 Blaine Basin Zone.

*"Adaptive management actions would include compliance with solid waste containment and compliance with parking restrictions. Some of these triggers may result in limited use permits."*

Adaptive Management triggers for Blaine Basin should include criteria for determining overuse of the area. Short of requiring a permit for Blaine Basin (see below) at the onset, a quantified level of overuse of the area and a means of measurement should be added to the list of triggers causing limited use permits as part of the Adaptive Management program.

2. 1.7.15.2 Effects Analysis Considerations.

*"...a permit system may cause displacement/increases in use of other areas such as Blaine Basin and other areas of the Mount Sneffels Wilderness."*

Our committee recommends permits be required for Blaine Basin access. Members of our committee, and others, have experience as Ambassadors for the Blue Lakes trailhead. It is our belief that because Blaine Basin shares a trailhead with Blue Lakes, it will be subject to additional, displaced users who come to the trailhead intending to hike the Blue Lakes trail but who, perhaps unwittingly at the onset, do not have a permit.

3. 1.7.3.1 Staffing, Enforcement and Environmental Education.

*"Develop/continue programs using volunteers at the trailheads to talk about Leave No Trace and collect monitoring information. Several commentors have volunteered in the past and would be willing to occasionally do this."*

Based on our experience as trailhead ambassadors our committee believes that The Management Plan should state clearly that volunteers are not responsible for enforcing rules related to use of the trail or for the permits themselves to avoid awkward and potentially dangerous circumstances.

4. 1.2.5 Blaine Basin Zone

*"Proposed actions in this zone include...closing and rehabilitating redundant or unsustainable user-created social trails, rehabilitating closed areas, and installing signs and/or markers (as needed)."*

The rehabilitation of user-created trails and roads is a stated goal of the document for several of the areas. Requiring groups to stay together on designated trails will help achieve this goal. Each person in a group should be required to carry a permit, or a replica (photo) of one to facilitate enforcement.

5. 1.7.2 Funding and Fees

*"...Funds would pay for permit administration, enforcement, maintenance, resource protection and rehabilitation, cleaning, new infrastructure and/or other services, where appropriate."*

The Public Lands Committee of The Ridgway Ouray Community Council advocates for a fee adequate to pay for the above expenditures.

6. 1.7.3 Staffing, Enforcement and Environmental Education.

*"...volunteers at the trailheads <will> talk about Leave No Trace and collect monitoring information."*

The importance of the removal of solid waste from humans is emphasized throughout the document. Based on our experience as volunteers at the trailhead and as users of the trail we advocate for a steady supply of compostable bags be available at the trailhead.

In addition, based on the experience of our committee, we recommend a pit toilet strategically located near the lower lake.

7. 1.17.20.2 Permit Variations

*“Require a permit only for people spending the night at one of the Blue Lakes.*

*Response: National Forests are a nationwide resource. Most of the problems we are trying to address are because of increased visitor use trends and limited capacity resulting in biophysical impacts which local residents contribute to. All individuals would be treated equally under a permit system.”*

The Blue Lakes Trailhead provides access to the wilderness area, Yankee Boy Basin, Blaine Basin (see preceding comment), Mount Sneffels and other areas. Should a permit be required for users who are entering or leaving a not-permitted area? Presumably the honor system will be used for unpermitted users who are accessing areas other than Blue Lakes. An Adaptive Management strategy should be used to assess the efficacy of the honor system in this situation.

8. 1.7.1 Public Messaging

Our committee recommends a kiosk at the intersection of Hwy 62 and CR7 to let users know that permits are required for the Blue Lakes trail and, if possible, advising when the parking lot is full.

In addition to the media outlets (including social media), an information/education program should be initiated with the outdoor stores and grocery stores in the area.

9. 2.2.3.3 Management Actions: Wilderness Zone:

*“• Prohibit building, maintaining, attending, or using fire, campfire, or woodburning stoves*

*• Provide a hardened ford on the outlet of the lower lake*

*• Require removal of human solid waste and hygiene products or utilize designated human waste facilities (if available).”*

Our committee recommends establishing a threshold for human solid waste in the wilderness area which, if exceeded will trigger adaptive management procedures to mitigate the excess.

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