

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/26/2020 4:20:07 AM

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Comments: March 25, 2020

Comment on USFS Rico Trails Project - Draft Environmental Assessment (EA).

Rico Trails Alliance (RTA) develops and promotes non-motorized trail systems in Colorado's San Juan Mountains surrounding the historic mining Town of Rico.

The Rico Trails Alliance is made up of a diverse group of volunteers who share genuine concern for the environment. The Draft EA conducted by the USFS is thorough and considers the unique location, terrain, and context of the Rico Trails Project area. The EA identified zones where the original scope of the Rico Trails Project could cause adverse impacts to wildlife, and amended the scope to offset any potential impacts.

The Rico Trails Project will actually reduce wildlife impacts in multiple ways. Signage and trail improvements will prevent users from getting lost and traveling off-trail. Fulfilling recreational needs with well-executed trails will deter unauthorized use of "bandit" trails. Official designation of the project trails will also allow administrative control over potential impacts, which may include seasonal closures or temporary closures in times of severe drought.

In the Rico area, several recent management changes implemented by the USFS will reduce the impacts of recreation on wildlife. With the updated travel management plan, motorized use of many trails in big game habitat was reduced or impacts mitigated through seasonal closures. Upper Ryman trail was closed to all use and is to be decommissioned.

The combination of these management changes and the Rico Trails Project as amended in the Draft EA will protect wildlife and is a measured approach to addressing recreational needs in the Rico area.