

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/10/2021 11:00:14 PM

First name: Adrienne

Last name: Isaac

Organization:

Title:

Comments: December 13, 2021

Dillon Ranger District

White River National Forest

U.S. Forest Service

Re: Swan Mountain Project #60771

To whom it may concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Swan Mountain Project. I have been a full-time, year-round resident of Summit County for 10 years, and my partner, David, has lived here since 1992. We reside in Summit Cove, and are fortunate to have the trails within this project area in our neighborhood. They are the trails we, our friends and our neighbors most frequently use, and they are one of the best parts of living where we do.

We thank the USFS for allowing access to and maintaining the Swan Mountain and Soda Creek areas. We also appreciate the foresight of a long-term recreation and forest management plan to ensure that this area can be enjoyed by outdoor enthusiasts for decades to come.

The USFS has done tremendous work to mitigate the pine beetle epidemic, as well as hazard trees, while endeavoring to maintain some of the visual beauty of the forest. However, clear cutting is not a solution we want to see used along these trails in the Soda Creek area, as that will affect both the landscape and trail users for years. Thinning and hand-cutting seem like they will be more successful options for achieving the Forest Service goals while maintaining cover from the elements for users and natural forest aesthetics, and promoting a healthy forest.

Our most significant concern for this project is the design and rerouting of trails. Given how this has been handled in recent projects, we oppose any rerouting of Red Trail, Hay Trail and other existing trails in the Soda Creek and Swan Mountain areas by mechanical means. We also believe trail work should be managed, executed and supervised by Forest Service employees; if contractors, volunteers or affinity groups are called in to assist, USFS personnel should be on-site to provide directives for action.

For example, the Groovy Uvy trail was recently rerouted. While it now, in one place, avoids a small wetland area and, in another, is less prone to erosion, it is also steeply banked, meandering, unnaturally smooth and unnecessarily wide. Once used for multiple recreation purposes, the trail now appears specifically to be for the use of (low intermediate) mountain biking. The landscape is permanently marred by this design.

Additionally, access to local homes was closed and made dangerous by the digging up of the existing trail, piling of logs and other debris (these are standard backcountry ski routes in winter; no ski area on USFS land would be permitted to leave such piles of debris on its trails). We were told that a Forest Service contractor had misunderstood instructions, permanently damaging the area and functionally restricting historical trail access to residents who not only are among the most frequent users, but also contribute to the maintenance of the trail system.

Here are our comments on trail building and rerouting for this project:

*First, longer is not necessarily better; we frequently see recreational users cutting what have been deemed "unnecessary" switchbacks, leaving new desire paths through previously undisturbed areas.

*Second, the intentional banking of trail switchbacks is not conducive to hiking, skiing or any recreational uses other than biking - and most mountain bikers do not seek manicured flow trails in USFS areas, which are known to follow the natural landscape.

*Third, single track should remain single track; there is no practical need to mechanically widen or smooth the existing trails. Many recreational users, including mountain bikers, seek USFS trails because of how they follow the natural landscape. If folks are seeking perfectly smooth, machine-made flow trails, there are multiple County and town trail systems where these can be found, in addition to four world-class ski areas that offer that type of experience (and it's free to ride all of these trails as well).

We encourage the Forest Service to proceed with a light hand when mitigating hazard trees and rerouting trails in this area. The Swan Mountain area is one of the last places in the County that has retained its natural beauty and the inherent challenges of its landscape, and it means so much to those of us who most frequently use and help to maintain these areas.

Sincerely,
Adrienne Saia Isaac
David Reynolds