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Comments: Brendan Kelly, Hahns Peak Bears Ears Project Lead

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To Brendan Kelly and all others it may concern,

Routt County Riders has advocated tirelessly for the completion of the Mad Rabbit trails project, and we celebrate this latest step forward with the issuance of a FONSI. Overall, we are grateful for the hard work of the USFS and cooperating agencies to get us here, and we appreciate the progress made over years of studies and deliberation. That said, we have several objections to the recent Draft Decision Notice that relate directly to our feedback given during the last comment period.

First, we take issue with the fact that this version of the proposal adds about 40 miles of new trail to our network, but at the expense of closing 36 miles of trail. This is nearly a wash in terms of adding mileage, when the Trails Alliance Proposal was originally authored to provide expanding opportunities to recreational users. We worry that the removal of trail inventory is counterintuitive at best and chips away at our ability to spread out trail use across the forest.

We object to the removal of Trail 24 at Ferndale, a perimeter trail intended to diversify this zone. Trail 24 would have given users one more option in this area to disperse usage. With the effort that will be required to build out the trailhead and all trails in Ferndale, the removal of this specific trail comes across as arbitrary and unnecessary.

We urge the USFS to extend the corridor of Trail 23 (directional, downhill MTB-specific) to continue the directionality of travel all the way down to the trailhead itself versus sharing the bottom portion with trails 25/27 in a "Spring Creek"-like scenario.

We continue to object to the removal of trails in the Mad Creek zone, specifically MRP. Our comments during the last phase to this effect were extensive and relate to the historic use of the area - to reiterate, these are comments we made in the previous round that were not used to make updates to the proposal:

"We are concerned that the proposed complete closure of the non-system trails in this area will eliminate a connection between the Elk Park Road and Mad Creek, which will eliminate the opportunity for a looped ride. Eliminating this connection will significantly reduce the quality of experience cyclists can have in this area. We would ask that the USFS consider some alternate options for the MRP zone."

"One option would be to entirely systematize MRP trail and reconfigure it as required for resource protection. Another option would be to take a "no action" plan for the area until an opportunity to consider and discuss alternative plans comes about. A final option would be to eschew MRP in favor of constructing a connector from Elk Park Road to Mad Creek Trail outside the wilderness boundary to create a secondary loop option. Creation of this connector would then allow for closure of the non-system trails while maintaining connectivity and the opportunity for a challenging and remote experience."

We object to any removal of current existing trails around the Long Lake area. We believe that the short connector trail between the Divide and Mountain View on the south side of Long Lake should be removed from the list of non-system trails to be closed and included/inventoried as a system trail. Furthermore, we urge the USFS to both systematize this trail and keep the existing trail that connects Fish Creek to Mountain View on the north side of the lake, creating a triangle of connectivity for users.

We appreciate the opportunity to continue providing feedback on this ever-evolving project, which our community values deeply. We don't wish to lengthen the process by overcomplicating with objections, but rather to ensure that the finished product fulfills its intended purpose. Many thanks to everyone at the Hahns Peak-Bears Ears Ranger District and all cooperating agencies for bringing this project one step closer to fruition.

Sincerely,

Craig Frithsen

President, RCR Board of Directors

Laraine Martin

Executive Director, Routt County Riders