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Title:

Comments: Integrated Management of Target Shooting on the Pike National Forest

I am writing this comment letter to voice my thoughts on locating a shooting range on Forest Service Road 704 located at the bottom of Badger Mountain near Wilkerson Pass. This location is not ideal for a shooting range for many reasons which will be laid out in this response. While there is no specific top reason not to have a shooting range on 704, they are all equally important for not locating the range near Wilkerson Pass.

*Close proximately to subdivision (Wilkerson Pass Estates) very close to the ½ mile regulation of not allowing a shooting range. There are close to 13 year-round residents in the subdivision that value the peace and quite the community provides right now. With the Pulver Fuels Reduction Project work presently going on and the big reduction of trees from County Road 90 to Highway 24 the sound from 704 shooters has multiplied 8x. Currently the noise from the 704 unapproved makeshift shooting range travels for a couple of miles. (During the presentation the forest service stated that the builder of the shooting range would be able to limit the noise in the surrounding area). I doubt this would happen with the 704 project being set up against a mountain with surrounding flat areas for miles. I have downloaded the proposed diagram for the shooting range and can't believe what you are planning to do with over 107 shooting lanes (are you out of your mind)? This will destroy the property values in the local area.

*Impact on wildlife in the Wilkerson Pass area. Development of this site for a shooting range is going to negatively impact deer, elk, antelope and bighorn sheep year-round, not just seasonally. Mountain passes are important areas for wildlife and Wilkerson Pass is no exception. The elk in the area move through the area constantly throughout the year, making circuits that cross the pass and the highway in the area. This area is incredibly important for the deer herd throughout the year, not just in winter. Much like the elk herd, deer use in the area is not seasonally confined. Bighorn Sheep: The area is an important movement corridor connecting the portion of the Tarryall bighorn sheep population north of the highway with the portion south of the highway. Pronghorn use the area primarily as a seasonal migration corridor during extreme winters. Pronghorn need to be able to migrate out of South Park and into Badger Flats and further east during extreme winters. The placement of the shooting range sits right in the middle of the most important wildlife corridor for miles around. Why would you want to destroy this area in which you have designated to be crucial wildlife habitat?

The South Park Ranger District has committed funding and manpower to improve the Wildlife Migration corridor in the Badger Flats area at the base of Wilkerson Pass. As an agency you have already realized how important the area is to wildlife and landscape connectivity with working towards the Migration corridor. A shooting range would disrupt this area and change the migration pattern for all wildlife in the area.

*Safety concerns for shooters and general public along with wildlife is a big concern for such a proposal for a 704-shooting range. We live just south of highway 24 along County Road 90 and over the years we have been surprised that there haven't been any serious injuries or fatalities at the undeveloped shooting area on 704. We have witness's folks with small children and animals running around the shooting area unsupervised. Shooting at metal targets and wooden targets set up against rocks. The general public doesn't share the thought process of leave no trace. Without having a full-time employee manning the shooting range folks will not adhere to rules and regulations.

The entrance to the 704-forest service road has 2 access points right off of highway 24 close to mile marker 256.

These access points are close to a blind drop off in the highway with very limited sight heading west for on coming traffic. If a shooting range is built in the area of 704 and traffic increases the chance of major traffic accidents will increase.

Badger Mountain is a key communication spot with millions of dollars of communication towers on top to include Park County emergency services and several cell phone towers. Over the past several years there have been wildland fires started by illegal shooting on 704 that had the potential to put these towers at risk. The most recent fire needed air support called in right away due to the chance of the towers being at risk.

The diagram for the shooting range raises a lot of red flags as to the distance shooters can practice. Why would you need an 800-yard range? These folks who would use such a range wouldn't be shooting elk at 800 yards. The direction of the long range is parallel to Highway 24 and is aimed in the direction of County Road 31 and state land which is leased out to local ranchers which graze cattle in that location. This shooting range would be bigger than most front range shooting clubs which have paid staff monitoring shooters. The size and scope of the shooting range definitely puts it within the ½ mile radius from a subdivision.

With the safety issues listed above it can put a burden on first responders.

*Lack of Operational oversight; During the public presentation discussion of manning the shooting range and hours of operation were discussed briefly with no actual plan to have any type of personnel at the ranges during shooting hours. The forest service cannot provide the adequate personnel to make sure that these ranges are safe and kept cleaned up for the general public to use. We all know that an unsupervised public will not follow the regulations as they currently don't follow the rules on target shooting right now. With the limited number of LEO's for the forest service it is impossible for them to respond in a timely manner in order to deal with firearm and safety issues in the Badger flats area. We have called many times about shooting at metal targets and unsafe shooting with response time over 45 minutes and not able to locate public offenders.

I believe that the other 2 sites for a shooting range in the South Park Ranger District would be better suited than the 704 location for the reasons stated above. The 704-fs road would have to many impacts on the residents of the area, major wildlife importance and safety issues to the general public. The forest service has already designated the Wilkerson Pass area as a valuable wildlife migration corridor in which both USFS and CPW have focused resources to improve habitat enhancement and connectivity for wildlife travels.