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Comments: Executive Summary

The Forest Service is seeking comments on the revised Integrated Management of Target Shooting on Pike National Forest project. The revised Integrated Management of Target Shooting proposed action addresses the need to provide opportunities for target shooting on National Forest System lands, to identify areas unsuitable for dispersed target shooting, to identify locations to be developed as shooting ranges and to establish a conditions-based adaptive management framework to manage of target shooting in the future.

The Forest Service has developed three alternatives which include:

Alternative 1: No action Alternative - target shooting would continue as is under existing laws, regulations and relevant forest orders.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action - with the development of at least one shooting range per district and the potential for three and up to nine shooting ranges developed this would channel shooters to these locations. In addition to this action approximately 68% of the forest would be closed to dispersed shooting. Following that would be an adaptive management approach to implement these changes.

Alternative 3: Reduced Closure Areas - With this approach developed shooting ranges would be constructed closer to metropolitan areas with the goal of reducing travel time for folks to access the shooting ranges. In addition, this proposal reduces the breadth and scope of the forest that is closed to dispersed shooting to a smaller area roughly 53% of the forest.

This papers author supports the adoption of Alternative 2: proposed action with closures at a minimum of 68% of the forest to recreational shooting and the development of supervised shooting ranges.

These comments are written under the provisions of 36 C.F.R section

218.5 to gain eligibility under 36 C.F.R section 218.8 to file objections to future actions. To gain objection eligibility the author has made every attempt to comment upon specific issues while confining research and documentation within the limits of the 30-day period as defined by NEPA regulations.

Gun Culture

In the United States we value our guns. America has become a nation with more guns than people, a condition unprecedented in world history. 1 given the numbers currently for every 100 people we have 120 guns and that rate continues to rise.

In addition to all these guns, our current cultural interpretation of the second amendment is expanding. The words keep and bear arms has become the right to purchase and buy and have more and more guns. Americans feel unconstrained with regards to where these guns are discharged, after all it's a right.

The project recognizes that all recreation target shooters must employ good judgement. Regulations and closures cannot completely protect public safety. Target shooters must apply a combination of firearms training, knowledge of surroundings (proximity to homes, high recreation areas, other people in the area), and situational awareness in order to shoot in a safe manner.

While the gun lobby purports that most shooting enthusiasts are responsible and always shoot conscientiously, I would contend that regarding shooting on public land in the Pike National Forest land managers need to respond to those who are the irresponsible shooters. It is my contention that the project needs to primarily address those users. It's not the attentive thoughtful users who need management oversight it's all the rest who shoot at whatever they please and without regard for others, those are the ones to be addressed by this project.

Dillinger Act

The John D Dillinger, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (Public Law - 116-9), Title IV - Sportsman's Access and Related Matters, Subtitle B - Sportsman's access to Federal Land, Section 4103 addresses closure of federal land to hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting.

This legislation; while structured to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting opportunities on Federal Land; is written to primarily expand the shooting experience on public land. This legislation does; however; have provisions which will allow for permanent closure to public land for recreational shooting.

These provisions under Section 4103 Closure of Federal Land to Hunting, Fishing, and Recreational Shooting allow closures for reasons of public safety, administration, or compliance with applicable laws.

The comments submitted here comply with Section 4103 as they address issues of Public Safety, administration, and compliance with applicable laws. My comments hereby are submitted in support of permanent closures to public land for recreational shooting.

Closure of Pike National Forest to Recreational Target Shooting - Safety Concerns, Environmental Concerns. I completely support closure of Pike National Forest to Recreational Target Shooting for the following Public Safety and Environmental Concerns.

Shooting Trees

Shooting trees is particularly egregious in a forest because as shooting moves up the hillside more and more trees fall over and eventually shots are going out of the drainage and into the next valley over. These sites are big enough to be seen from google earth.

Shooting Appliances, stuffed animals, trash et al.

Just one of the many examples of shooting appliances and then leaving them in the forest.

Shooting at signs

This is the Bulletin Board at the trailhead commonly known as the Monument Preserve Mount Herman Trailhead. While damage is insignificant the statement made carries more weight. First, they shot the sign informing the public about the Mastication Project. Second, they shot down a trail and over a hill where hikers come up into view. Third the discharged a firearm from the parking lot. Fourth they were across the road from a residence.

Shooting Boulders

This site is on the Mount Herman Road halfway between Monument and Forest Road 300. It just a sample of the damage done to Granite where shooting rocks is more of a rule rather than an exception.

Shooting Boulders after painting targets on them.

This site is also on Mount Herman Road and the only way to really access this site as a target would be from a rise across the road which would lead you to believe they are shooting across a road. The only other way would have been if they were standing in the road shooting at the rock.

Shooting in an unsafe manner in a closed area next to a road.

These folks were on top of a ridge shooting where there is no backdrop. I could not get a clear photo of them but this was taken during the shooting closure and after signs and a wire fence were up informing them of the closure. In the second image a road is off to the right.

Murder

The First image below is of Tim Watkins it was taken August 10th 2014 on a target shooting site cleanup sponsored by Friends of Monument Preserve. In cooperation with the Forest Service FOMP spent that summer cleaning up shooting areas up and down Mount Herman Road. This was possible after the first temporary closure order was put in place by the forest supervisor. This site was a few hundred yards up the road from where Tim was murdered in 2017.

The second Image is a newspaper clipping after Tim was murdered in September of 2017 while riding his mountain bike on a Forest Service system Trail 715. The perpetrator attempted to hide the act by burying Tim in a shallow grave under some brush. The Crime has never been solved. Tim was a passionate caring person and is deeply missed by his community.

Shooting across the road

This site shows the large granite boulder and an examination of it will show numerous pock marks where people have been shooting across the road at the rock. The tread of the road can be seen in the foreground. This is the Mount Herman Road.

Accidental Shooting

This is Glenn Martin age 60 from Monument Colorado. He was killed by a stray bullet July 3, 2015 while camping with his family in the Rainbow Falls area of Pike National Forest. He was sitting by the campfire roasting marshmallows with his daughter, son-in-law and grandsons when he said ow, and fell over dead. They heard shooting in the area but felt safe. Apparently, the bullet was fired from a considerable distance according to the sheriffs office and most likely a gun was fired into the air. The Douglas County Sheriffs office asked for shooters who were in the area to voluntarily come in and have their guns tested to see if the gun matched the bullet that killed Glenn but no one came forward with a positive match. The case remains unsolved.

The family said they heard shooting in the area all day and even reported it to the Forest Service employee who was in the area.

Designated Shooting Areas

Self-regulated shooting ranges have the potential to be abused and dangerous. I would advocate for a concessionaire to operate a shooting range as a fee area. While fees go against my nature, I believe that shooters need supervision and a moderator. This would be much the same logic as a concessionaire operated camp ground. I think we are beyond education with the egregious examples I have cited. As far as being close or not close to major metropolitan areas it should be driven more by site safety rather than the convenience of a short drive.

Conclusion

It is no longer acceptable to maintain the status quo and allow people to shoot their guns wherever they please. The rights of the shooter do not overrule the rights of the citizen to live their life without fear of being shot.

For too long we have turned a blind eye to the violence that happens all around us. Many people I know have had experiences of hearing gunfire around them and wondering if this is the day. Personally, I have been shot at three times. Once while hiking to the top of Mount Herman, once while on a trail run up to Forest Road 300 from Palmer Lake, and once while cross country skiing on a trail behind a campground on Guanella Pass. On that trip we crawled along the creek bank keeping some soil between us and the shooting. When we eventually got to the road and walked back to our car, they had no idea. With hearing protection on they did not hear our screams.

I simply do not go into the forest in areas where there is shooting going on. A walk in the woods is not worth dying for. I hope for common sense to prevail and close the forest to recreational shooting and manage areas where shooting is allowed.

footnote 1 Gun Country Gun Capitalism Culture and Control in Cold War America. The University of North Carolina Press, 2023