

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 6/13/2024 4:13:31 PM

First name: Mark

Last name: Mueller

Organization: Wolf Creek Backcountry LLC

Title: Owner/Operator

Comments: I am commenting on the Rio Grande National Forest Over Snow Travel Management Project. I am an avid backcountry skier and have skied in and around Wolf Creek Pass for 60-100 days each winter for more than 30 years. In addition, I am the co-owner and operator with my wife Sandy Kobrock of the Pass Creek Yurt doing business under a Special Use Permit for over 25 years in the Divide Ranger District as Wolf Creek Backcountry LLC, and the Wolf Creek Avalanche School.

I have seen both motorized (OSV) and non-motorized use and users increase significantly in my years here. With the arrival of increasingly powerful snow machines a natural separation that once existed between the two user groups has disappeared and resulted in increasing conflicts between the two groups. Conflicts that are mostly felt by non-motorized users. In order to create and maintain safe, enjoyable high quality experiences for both groups the designation of motorized and protected non-motorized areas is necessary. Shared use promotes neither safe nor enjoyable experiences for non-motorized users. In my experience, the ruts left by snow machines are a significant safety hazard to those on skis or on foot. The raucous noise and exhaust fumes left by snow machines detract from what is an opportunity to enjoy quiet, peaceful solitude in the forest and the high speeds often involved feel intimidating and potentially personally harmful.

I strongly urge the Rio Grande National Forest to designate and protect valued non-motorized terrain in following areas. Including, but not limited to:

The entire north side of Wolf Creek Pass extending north to Big Meadows and specifically the Lobo Overlook area including Alberta's Cousin/Thunder Mountain and the terrain descending to Highway 160 from there.

The terrain around the various backcountry huts and yurts; the Pass Creek Yurt and the Spruce Hole and Neff Mountain Yurts on Cumbres and La Manga Passes.

All groomed cross country trails within Forest. The Falls Creek groomed cross country trail on the west side of Wolf Creek Pass in the San Juan National Forest should be included and given protection as well in coordination with the SJNF.

As Special Use Permit holders for over 25 years on the Divide RD and owners of the Pass Creek Yurt doing business as Wolf Creek Backcountry LLC we urge permanent non-motorized recognition of the area around the the Pass Creek Yurt that is already in place. Order #: 02-09-04-22-08.

Designated OSV area boundaries need to follow obvious physical and topographical features such as ridgelines, drainages, or roads. Appropriate signage at trailheads and at areas of potential conflicts will be necessary.

Continue to collaborate with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to protect winter wildlife areas.

I look forward to continuing to contribute my thoughts and experiences to the OSV Project for the Rio Grande National Forest, an area I love and consider my second home.