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Comments: Dear Supervisor Kuhnel,

Thank you so much for undertaking winter travel management planning on the Rio Grande National Forest. I've been skiing throughout the Rio Grande National Forest for thirty years. A few times each winter we stay in South Fork while nordic and backcountry skiing. We have nordic and backcountry skied across the entire Rio Grande National Forest from as far north as Spring Creek Pass, as far west as Wolf Creek Pass and to the south on Cumbres Pass and numerous locations in between. We try to avoid areas where snowmobiles are allowed since they are not compatible with backcountry skiing.

My initial reaction after looking at the ROS maps is just how much of the terrain is 'suitable' for motorized travel. This is a shock to me. Before the final decision is released, I hope that there will be a very thorough environmental analysis on the effects of OSV's on soil, wildlife habitat, non-motorized recreation, snow quality, noise impacts, air quality and public safety. Snow machines in the last decade have become much more powerful and are able to travel off trail through the woods or highmarking up open slopes and I'm not sure these impacts have been studied. My personal experience can vouch that all of the above issues are widespread throughout much of the Rio Grande National Forest. One only needs to stop at Wolf Creek Pass and see these impacts in full display.

The amount of acreage where motorized winter use is allowed is somewhat baffling when I look at your ROS maps, and I hope that this terrain is significantly reduced. My main concern is snow machines off road travel because this has the greatest negative impact on all the issues listed above as well as it being detrimental to the backcountry skier experience. It only takes one snowmobile to ruin the skiing for many.

Please understand that OSV and non-motorized use are just not compatible. Yes, it isn't as much of an issue for the OSV users, but as a skier, the last thing I want is to share a trail with snowmobiles. They destroy the snow surface for skiing and sometimes make skiing impossible. The noise is horrible. It is very dangerous to be skiing on a road and have snowmobiles pass at a high rate of speed. The amount of terrain in the Rio Grande National Forest should be more evenly distributed between the motorized and non-motorized community. Nordic skiers need a groomed surface or untracked powder where they can design a track. Skiing over snowmobile tracks is not a pleasant experience for the cross country skier.

In general, the non-motorized community needs easier access from the trailhead than the motorized community. So anytime you are close to the highway or a plowed road, and there is non-motorized use, please consider expanding the non-motorized borders. OSV can travel much further where we cannot. But at the same time deeper in the forest is wildlife habitat. Lynx are there. Snowshoe hares, Lynx food, needs to be fully protected. Ptarmigan, mountain goats, pika and marmots do not do well with motorized use. Please do a full analysis of wildlife winter habitat.

Briefly I hope there is some attention given to the new sport of Fat biking. Unfortunately Fat Bikers can do a lot of damage to a nordic skier track when they travel on soft snow and leave deep ruts from their tires. Please do not allow fat bikes on groomed nordic tracks and also post signs stating they must turn around if they are leaving a rut.

Below I will list concerns I have with non-motorized areas in the Rio Grande National Forest.. This is from the perspective of a backcountry skier (off trail) and a nordic skier (groomed and ungroomed trails).

WOLF CREEK PASS

The winter motorized use on Wolf Creek Pass has increased substantially. With the new powerful machines, it is disturbing to see how they are able to travel everywhere. Please look at these zones in the summer and see the impact on the tundra, grass, soil. In the winter, wildlife is unlikely to coexist with the intense off road motorized travel on this side of the pass. I do think there should be a reduction in acreage on this south side of the pass purely for the environmental and wildlife impacts.

Please close all motorized winter use on the Lobo Overlook side of the pass. This side of the pass is almost entirely used by backcountry skiers, nordic skiers and snowshoers. Allowing snow machines on the Lobo Road is

inviting trouble for them to travel off road and onto valuable, limited open bowls very popular with the backcountry skier crowd. The skiing on this side of the pass has been popular for decades. For the OSV to have permission to travel on such a short distance of a road can't offer them that much of a quality experience but it is the perfect distance for the non-motorized cross country skier. The noise from the other side of the pass is already annoying. The noise of a snow machine does not mix well with the peacefulness sought on skis.

Please prioritize plowing the parking lot on the non-motorized north side of the pass. Far too often this remains unplowed days after a storm and the parking is already limited at the top of the pass with the motorized community.

PASS CREEK YURT

I'm sure the hut owners will comment on this, but I know that snow machines do sometimes enter their terrain. With how much acreage they have on Wolf Creek Pass, this needs to stop. Please create a larger non-motorized boundary around the Yurt. Maybe we need fines for snow machines that illegally enter non-motorized areas.

BIG MEADOWS NORDIC

Again, I hope that the Nordic Groups comment on this. We love nordic skiing on this groomed system and I hope it could be expanded. Parking can be a bit limited when snow machine trailers park there. Please manage the parking so five to ten spots are available to non trailer vehicles.

PARK CREEK ROAD/SUMMITVILLE

In mid-March, when the road is plowed, we love to ski on the mellow slopes on both sides of North Mountain. There are very few alpine non-motorized areas in this area that are easily accessible. Can we please close this higher terrain to motorized use once the road is plowed? I'm not sure if OSV's can come from the Beaver Creek Road side to this elevation, but I would request that the north side of North Mountain and surrounding mini-peaks are closed to motorized when Pass Creek Road is plowed.

BEAVER CREEK ROAD

We love the groomed cross country ski trails at the bottom of the Beaver Creek Road. We also have skied up the Beaver Creek Road after a snowstorm and before it was plowed. Years ago we backcountry skied above the Cross Creek Campground. Please consider closing this area to off road travel by OSV. It is good access for skiers, and the OSV users have a ton of acreage to go play further up the road.

LIME CREEK TRAIL

Thanks again for this trail system. We love it.

BRISTOL HEAD

This has potential to be a wonderful cross country ski road. Please close it to motorized. There are also a few pitches where we like to backcountry ski. This would be a great way to have a little more balance in acreage between the non-motorized user and the motorized.

CREEDE/BACHELOR MOUNTAIN/BULLDOG MOUNTAIN

I know this is a mix of private property and public lands, but the backcountry skiing around there is phenomenal. The nordic skiing at the top of Bachelor Mountain is also a beautiful experience. Please make sure this whole area becomes winter non-motorized.

INSPIRATION POINT/CREEDE

This is another area popular with backcountry skiers. Please protect this zone and do not allow any off road travel by snow machines. Or even better, just close this off to OSV users since eventually it enters Wilderness. This would make a seamless non-motorized boundary.

MIDDLE CREEK ROAD(NORTHERN) /CREEDE

Some of the best backcountry skiing is above this road and is popular with locals. Please make this northern end winter non-motorized. The OSV have so much acreage further up this road. Non-motorized users need easier access.

SPRING CREEK PASS/JAROSA MESA

And I sound like a broken record, but here again is good access for the non-motorized user and with all the acreage the motorized community has in this area, these two zones, Spring Creek Pass and Jarosa Mesa, should be closed to motorized. Skiing on both sides of the highway here is very popular, and is even in ski guidebooks. I realize some of this terrain rolls over into the Gunnison NF, but please close your side to motorized. This is such a fun place to nordic ski or backcountry. The OSV community can access much of the

southern end of this area from the plethora of roads I see on the ROS map.

CUMBRES PASS/NEFF MOUNTAIN

We have only skied here a couple times, and I hope some of the locals will chime in, but it has so much potential for backcountry and nordic skiing. All that open terrain as you drive up the highway towards Cumbres Pass could be just amazing terrain for all types of skiing and snowshoeing and deserves protection. There is so much motorized acreage in this area, and the balance must be restored. Neff Mountain is known as a good ski destination. Please add a buffer of protection for the non-motorized user all around Cumbres Pass. I'm sure the Chama nordic club could offer some input. I hope they comment.

CONCLUSION

This is just the start of the planning process, and it is critical to think about how this plan will be implemented and enforced once it is complete. Designated OSV areas should have logical, enforceable boundaries following obvious features like plowed roads, ridgelines, and waterways and the EIS should describe how the Forest Service will implement and enforce the final plan.

When I look at the ROS maps, it is overwhelmingly blue. We need more balance. Not just for the non-motorized crowd but for wildlife habitat, for soil and water protection, and for simply keeping more acreage untouched by humans.

I want to thank you immensely for undertaking this process. It is long overdue for all of our National Forests especially with the substantial increase in winter travel by OSV's, backcountry and nordic skiers, and snowshoers and of course ski areas. I know this is going to be a difficult and time consuming effort and it is so much appreciated.