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First name: Tim

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Organization: Blue Mountain Ranch Summer Camp for Kids

Title: Director

Comments: My name is Tim Graf and for the last 78 years my family has operated a children's summer camp just outside of Florissant. We have lots of activities for our campers to choose from but some of our most popular are horseback riding and hiking. Both of which utilize Pike National Forest, which surrounds our property on three sides. We hold an outfitter license through the National Forest Service for our time spent in the forest. Unfortunately, due to the amount of recreational shooting in the forest around us we have been losing more and more days in the forest each year.

We are in an area deemed as wildland urban interface. This means we are in an area where the Nation Forest or "wildlands" meets private lands and/or residences or human developments. This should say enough about recreational shooting in this area, but I know that is not the case. I have seen evidence of all 8 of the National Forest Services regulations for recreational shooting violated in the forest out our back gate. Almost every forest service road sign, even off the county roads, have at least one bullet hole in them, I have found beer cans riddled with bullet holes, broken glass, we have witnessed a child shooting a camping chair with AR 15 in a camp site and signs of shooting standing living trees. I have personally cleaned areas like this up. Twice this past summer, once during drop-off and once on Parents' Day, there were people recreational shooting in the forest. In both cases parents were nervous about their children's safety at a summer camp. One parent at drop-off almost took their child home. I was able to talk them into staying but that is not something I should have to do. Parents should be able to confidently and comfortably drop their child off at summer camp.

We noticed an increase of forest usage after a major forest mitigation project was completed in 2007. During this project the main roads and jeep/4X4 roads were made so 18-wheelers could drive on them. There were also new roads for the project that opened more forest access. While we appreciate the forest mitigation because we all know how important it is, in this case it brought an influx of recreational shooting to our back gate. While working with the forest service most of the new access roads have been closed and most of the jeep roads are back to being jeep/4X4 roads. However the amount of recreational shooting still continues to grow each summer.

The Springer Fire in the summer of 2012 was started by people recreational shooting. Witnesses reported hearing repeated gunfire and then a loud explosion (The Gazette, June 21, 2012). While the fire was contained and did not reach my property, we were evacuated from our summer camp. This meant we had to get 52+ campers out, roughly 20 staff and 18 horses. We were displaced for three days. The fire was just far enough away that our insurance would not cover any business losses due to the evacuation. This could have been prevented.

In 2019 less than 100 yards from our fence line 4 men got out of a vehicle and fired high powered rifles into a riparian area. A riparian zone, or areas, are lands that occur along the edges of rivers, streams, lakes, and other water bodies and are considered by the Forest Service as a place where shooting is not allowed. This was done within eyesight of campers and staff. The shooters were about 75-80 yards from my horse barn which is surrounded by trees and not visible from the forest. At the time of the shooting, our horses were in the barn. While the shots fired scared the whole herd, two were so scared that they went through a fence and were severely injured. One cut an artery in her face that our camp nurse held shut for about 30 minutes while we waited for our vet to show up. The vet said our nurse saved that horses life. The 2nd horse needed multiple stitches on her legs and body. Both horses were unable to be used the rest of the summer and we even had to board them for the winter while they recovered from their injuries. After this incident I was put in touch with Nick Walters who was able to have a couple of no shooting signs installed in the area where this took place and near our barn. All of which have since been vandalized, two have been replaced with more sturdy posts. This too could have been prevented.

In conclusion, I am in support of the Integrated Management of Target Shooting Project, specifically alternative closure #2 figure 7. The Springer Fire and the incident in 2019 prove that recreation target shooting in this wildland urban interface is a danger to the people who call it home and those who recreate here. I fear, if nothing is done, something horrible is going to happen. The next time could be worse than a horse cutting an artery, next time the victims could be campers, staff, horses or all three. We are in favor of Figure 7, alternate closure #2, as it will benefit not just us but Sanborn Western Camps nearby. The other two options continue to put both our facilities, campers, employees and livestock in danger. There should not be recreational shooting near childcare facilities or in this wildland urban interface.

References: The Gazette, https://gazette.com/news/fire-update-springer-fire-57-percent-contained/article_2f246d5d-a0d9-5573-add6-643141e44585.html

Photographs attached are near where we have trails for hiking and horseback riding. Photograph credits, Tim Graf