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Comments: Hello, and thank you for hosting the webinar today. It was very helpful.

I am, along with the rest of the North American Packgoat Association, extremely concerned about the proposed forest wide ban on packgoats. Goat packing is a fast-growing recreational activity because goats are affordable, they are easy for anyone to manage, and they require few special skills in handling. They are willing and capable partners who can hike wherever people can hike (including deadfall and boulder fields) and who follow their human companions closely without requiring a lead or other restraint.

Goats are the most environmentally friendly pack animal in the U.S. for many reasons. They prefer to walk on solid terrain and will choose to avoid eroded, sandy, muddy, or otherwise unstable soil wherever possible. This means their hooves leave little impact. Their hoof shape also does not compact the soil like other types of pack stock. They can eat natural browse along the trail and rarely require hay to be brought in. They are far less of a vector for spreading noxious weeds than other species because their rumens destroy most weed seeds during the digestion process. Their tracks and manure can rarely be distinguished from that of deer or antelope.

A full grown packgoat can carry around 50 lbs. of gear, enabling older and disabled folks to access public lands even after the doctor has told them not to carry any more backpacks. In fact, I would say that at least half of NAPgA's members fall into this category. These folks are not physically capable of handling larger pack animals such as horses, mules, llamas, or donkeys, but they can easily handle goats, which are smaller and far more docile than other species.

To date there has not been one scientific study implicating pack goats in bighorn sheep die-offs. In fact, there has been very scant evidence that goats have caused any bighorn sheep die-offs at all, even in uncontrolled brush grazing situations. Unlike brush goats, pack goats stay under close human supervision at all times. The chances of a pack goat coming into contact with a bighorn sheep is around zero. Goats in general are much healthier than domestic sheep, and pack goats are an even healthier subgroup. They are closely monitored and given daily attention by their owners. They are not just livestock but are treated more like family pets and receive an elevated level of care.

I would like to have goat packing added to the list of recreational activities on page 8 of the forest plan. We are not a huge group, but we are a growing one, and the GMUG area is of particular interest. In 2017 the North American Packgoat Association held our annual Rendezvous in Lake City, CO in the Uncompahgre National Forest. This event attracted enthusiasts from all over the country and from as far away as Hawaii and Australia. We worked in collaboration with the Gunnison BLM/FS office and completed a work project on the Alpine Gulch trail. On the final day of the Rendezvous several of us and our packgoats climbed to the top of Uncompahgre Peak, including a woman from Australia. For her this was a lifetime event. The banner for the North American Packgoat Association's website (www.napga.org) is a photo of a packgoat standing on top of Uncompahgre Peak, so as you can see, this is a very important recreational area for us.

Clay Zimmerman of High Uinta Packgoats in Wyoming rents his packgoats to elk hunters who bring them down to Colorado every season. These hunters may be from out of state, but they are spending time and money here in Colorado with the aid of packgoats to facilitate their hunts.

One reason you may not have included us in your forest plan is because you don't see evidence that we are there. This goes back to the goat being a very eco-friendly pack animal who "leaves no trace." It could also be because NAPgA educates all of our members and other goat packers of our Best Management Practices. We

have recently printed these BMPs on waterproof cards for goat packers to take with them on every pack trip.

Here is a link to our BMPs:

<https://www.napga.org/resources/best-management-practices-psr/>

We have also recently made a BMPs video which can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTVEz04Hdl4>

Education, not banning is the key to effective separation between pack animals and wildlife. Packgoats are not a threat to bighorn sheep. Creating a ban only creates rogues who will bring their goats despite bans but who may not be educated in how to do it correctly and responsibly. Please strike the ban from the proposed draft and add goat packing to the list of recreational activities to be included in these areas. If the Forest Service needs to set ground rules for how to pack responsibly in core bighorn habitat, we can work together on that.

I grew up in Lake City and have had packgoats in the mountains there since 2003. The only place I ever encountered bighorn sheep was along the highways where the proposed ban does not apply.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

-Nan Hassey