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Title:

Comments: I very much appreciate the opportunity to comment on the GMUG Forest Plan. I would like to express my disappointment in your plan to ban packgoats from the GMUG. My husband and I are in our 7th decade and have been lifelong hikers/backpackers. We now use goats to help us carry our gear into the backcountry. We also use packgoats to carry gear for our grandchildren and are exposing a new generation to the wonders of Colorado's backcountry..

We observe all Forest and Wilderness rules and believe strongly in the protection of wildlife and habitat. This is one of the reasons we choose to use packgoats instead of horses or llamas. They have far less impact on trails, stay close to their owners and browse much like deer so there is no need to bring hay on pack trips.

Packgoats are uniquely trained and suited to backcountry packing. They are hand-raised and bond with their owners. I am a photographer and often have a hard time getting photos of anything but my goats because they do not leave my side. Nevertheless, they always have on halters and leads and at night in camp they are picketed. I also string them together in horse country or on heavily traveled trails. My goats are trained to follow me off the trail when I say "come, come, come" and we always give dogs, horses and people wide berth (regardless of trail etiquette or rules).

I understand that risk of disease transmission to Bighorn Sheep is a concern. Last year I saw Bighorn Sheep in the Wilderness for the first time ever. Actually, Sam, my lead goat saw the Bighorns first. They were about 1/4 of a mile away on a slope just below the Continental Divide. and Sam stopped, put his tail in the air and ears straight up to let us know that the sheep were there. The Bighorns gave us wide berth and our goats stayed close at my side, remaining alert and concerned.

I cannot imagine either the sheep or the goats wanting to get closer to each other. Nevertheless, I have twice had my goats tested for mycobacterium ovipneumoniae (MOVI). Dr Maggie Highland enlisted the support of the USDA two years ago and conducted a study that found 95% of packgoats were MOVI negative. Considering the way goats are bonded to their humans and the low prevalence of MOVI, the risk for disease transmission is extremely low.

It takes 3+ years for a goat to be old enough to pack, thus there is a considerable investment of time and resources to raising packgoats. My husband and I hope to travel to the GMUG with our packgoats one day and I sincerely hope that you will reconsider your concerns about packgoats. The North American Packgoat Association has developed a list of best practices and you might find their website useful to learn more about goatpacking. There are also goatpackers in your region who would be happy to take USFS personnel out on a hike to demonstrate that packgoats are a low impact and valuable alternative to horse and llama packing.