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Comments: Forrest Service,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Land Management Plan.

I would like to comment on the possible restrictions, or ban on the use of pack goats in the National Forrest. This is a very important issue for me since I have been an avid pack goat owner for 10 years. This may be a lengthy comment, but I believe it's important for the reader to understand what a pack goat is, how they are used, their health, and what they mean to their owners.

Pack goats are typically raised from a very young age. Their owners bottle raise them so that the goats bonds with their owners. These goats get so attached to their owners that they will go everywhere that the owners go, step for step. In the back country they will follow or sometimes lead the way up a trail and never stray from their owners. Goats are light footed animals and do not impact the trails like horses. There is no need for food. Goats will browse on whatever they can find and will drink from running water. At night the goats are high tied so that they don't wonder. A lot of hunters use pack goats like myself and will take them out with them on there hunt so that they don't stay in camp tied up. Game do not seem to be spooked by goats.

Pack goat owners treat there goats like the common house dog. Pack goats are given annual vaccinations and wormed regularly. They are fed minerals, vitamins and supplements that help with growth and fight off illnesses. Some owners will also have annual health check performed by their veterinarian.

Pack goat owners typically have the larger breeds. These breeds, when fully grown can weigh up to 200 pounds. These large goats can carry approximately a third of their body weight. One can see that with only two of these wonderful companions they can enjoying the back country and have them carry all the gear. This is particularly important as we age and are not able to carry that 50 pound pack for great distances. This is also important to hunters helping them get out harvested meat quickly before it spoils.

I understand that this issue was brought up because of the concern of goats coming in contact with wild sheep. Its true that goats can carry a disease that could be transmitted to wild sheep. I'll be it the chances of a pack goat coming into contact with a wild sheep is a very very low percentage. Also not all areas that pack goat are used in the National Forrest even have wild sheep populations. It is my opinion that pack goat owners can " maintain effective separation" from wild sheep. It is also my opinion that the real issue with wild sheep getting sick is from hundreds of domestic sheep that are being grazed on National Forrest that are not "maintaining effective separation".

If you have a problem better have a solution. Goats can be tested for this strain of pneumonia that is causing the wild sheep to be infected. Mine have all tested negative for the virus. Have pack goat owners that are using their goats in CPW game units that have wild sheep have a certification of health. If you are not in an area that has a population of wild sheep there should be no reason to carry this certification.

In my opinion there is no issue with pack goats and wild sheep. The real issue is with the domesticated sheep grazing. I would encourage the biologist of the National Forrest to look at the research on this topic and see for themselves that there is really no issue between the pack goats and wild sheep. I thank you for your time and consideration in this matter and again letting me comment on this topic.

Mike