

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/6/2019 7:34:51 PM

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Comments: I am writing in support of the proposed Rico Trails project. I am a law professor in Texas, but I spend summers living in Rico and I support the package of proposed trail improvements. In particular, the proposed trail improvements for the Circle trail, Rio Grande Southern Trail, and Lower Ryman Trail would provide valuable trail connections between Rico and surrounding trail systems, such as the CT, and offer public safety and environmental benefits as well.

The proposed trail improvements would have public safety benefits by providing more clear trail designations to what are currently unofficial routes. For example, despite having hiked the Circle trail multiple times over the past few summers, and every summer, I always get somewhat lost because the trail is unofficial and essentially disappears as it approaches the Black Hawk section of the CT. Even if the trail remains a non-system trail, the proposed trail improvements could help avoid problems with trail users getting lost or disoriented or similar public safety concerns.

Similarly, as a runner, I regularly run on the mostly undesignated paths parallel to the Dolores River, but I have never been able to complete a longer run on these paths because of the lack of connectivity to the Salt Creek/Ryman trailheads. As a result, I have ended up running along Highway 145, which is not particularly safe for pedestrians. The proposed Rio Grande Southern Trail would thus not only provide a valuable trail connection but also be a safer access route between Rico and the Salt Creek area for non-motorized users.

I also support the proposed trail improvements because they would provide environmental benefits. For example, by providing more trail access from Rico to other trail systems, the proposed improvements also potentially reduce driving (and the associated carbon emissions) to and from trailheads by local residents of Rico. For example, to access the CT, I have chosen to drive to the trailheads near the Barlow Creek campground rather than risk getting lost on the undesignated Circle trail. But with improved trail access from Rico, no additional driving trip would be needed. Similarly, the Lower Ryman trail traverse some rather steep hillsides and gullies, and the last time I hiked it, there appeared to be erosion to areas of the trail; the proposed rerouting of the trail to a more sustainable route location would be valuable to protect the local ecology and habitat.