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Organization:

Title:

Comments: TO: San Juan National Forest

FROM: Susan Smith

DATE: 11/26/19

SUBJECT: Valle Seco 2019 Land Exchange with Bootjack Ranch, LLC

The proposed Valle Seco land exchange is in the public interest and would benefit the surrounding environment by providing the following:

Public Access

Conveying the Valle Seco land to the Forest Service would secure legal public access on National Forest System Road (NFSR) 653 providing motorized access to Forest Service land south of the parcel. Access on NFSR 653 would also provide better administrative access for wildland fire suppression and forest hazardous fuels reduction projects on National Forest land, providing opportunities for increased forest management on Forest Service lands south of the Valle Seco property.

Wildlife

The Valle Seco land (880 acres) is currently an inholding surrounded by National Forest land. This land is important severe winter range and a crucial migration corridor for elk and mule deer. Over 1000 elk and mule deer migrate into the Valle Seco area during the fall. Many of these animals reside in the area through winter, with additional animals migrating through the area into northern New Mexico, and onto the Southern Ute and Jicarilla Apache Indian Reservations.

Conveying this land to the Forest Service would help maintain wildlife habitat capability and effectiveness in the Valle Seco area, and habitat connectivity for spring and fall annual big game migrations. It will also prevent future development that could negatively impact wildlife habitat on surrounding National Forest land.

Boundary Consolidation

Consolidation of land ownership would create a more logical boundary and enhance contiguity of ownership and management for both the Forest Service and the private landowners, particularly in the Valle Seco, Middle Fork Piedra, and Blanco Basin areas. Federal ownership would be consolidated along the Suitable Wild and Scenic River Corridor on the Middle Fork of the Piedra, thus improving Forest Service management efficiencies.

Conveying the National Forest land to the private landowners would eliminate the need for the Forest Service to administer seven special use authorizations and one on-off grazing permit.

Colorado Roadless Areas and Suitable Wild and Scenic River Corridors

Some small portions of the Forest Service land that would be conveyed to private ownership are currently included in Colorado Roadless Areas (South San Juan Adjacent and Turkey Creek). This is not upper[shy]tier. These 176 contain both authorized and unauthorized roads, ditches, and fences that impact the roadless character of these parcels.

In addition, although 26 acres within Suitable Wild and Scenic River Corridors would be conveyed out of public ownership, the Forest Service would acquire 20 acres within the same corridor (middle Fork, Piedra River).

Thank you for the consideration,

Susan Smith