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Organization:

Title:

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Please accept this letter in support of the proposed Valle Seco Land Exchange. I was a District Wildlife Manager for the Colorado Division of Wildlife for 36 years until my retirement in 2018 and have been in the Pagosa Springs area since 1989 and am familiar with most of the parcels proposed for exchange. It is my belief that if this exchange goes through, the positive benefits to wildlife, especially mule deer and elk, will greatly exceed any costs to the public. The following are my comments regarding some of the parcels under consideration for exchange.

Parcel A- This private land tract in the middle of the Valle Seco has long been a concern to wildlife managers as we have watched other large ranch parcels become developed, changing from quality winter range for big game to small acre ranchettes that won't support nearly as many wildlife species and place barriers to migration. The acquisition of this parcel by the Forest Service will help to ensure the Valle Seco remains an important part of the area's most valuable big game winter range habitat. This will also improve public access to thousands of acres of National Forest lands. Big game hunting brings millions of dollars into the Pagosa Springs area and protecting the habitat that wildlife needs is important to the local economy.

Parcel B / Parcel 10- The existing land ownership pattern is a 40 acre parcel of public land surrounded on three sides by private land. During my years as a Wildlife Officer I had several occasions where trespass issues arose when public land hunters either got onto the private lands, or else had an injured animal cross the fence onto private land where they could not legally follow. Similar situations also occurred with fishermen on the Middle Fork of the Piedra River as it flows from public land, onto private, then back to public and then ending on private land again. This exchange should help alleviate these issues by widening the public land and decreasing it's depth, as well as making the the public fishing a contiguous section of river with little loss of overall length of public fishing waters.

Parcel 3- As I understand the map, this exchange will still provide for public fishing access on the northwest side of the river and does not significantly reduce public access to Forest Service lands since corner to corner ownership does not convey legal public access in Colorado.

Parcel 11- This exchange is needed to clear up past surveying errors which have led to roads and fences encroaching on public lands. This has led to a number of conflicts between public land hunters and the ranch managers. This will not impact the Piedra Stock Driveway trail which lies outside of the exchange.

The other numbered parcels are all contiguous with private lands and will not affect public access to public lands other than the parcels themselves. Since the public will gain acreage at nearly a two to one ratio there will be no net loss of overall public access. While Parcel 9 does apparently provide public access to a large tract of forest land, there are other public access points to the same tract nearby.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposed land exchange. If you have any questions regarding these comments, please feel free to contact me.

Mike Reid