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First name: Michael

Last name: Japhet

Organization:

Title:

Comments: November 21, 2019

TO: San Juan National Forest

Attn: Becca Smith

FROM: Mike Japhet

XXXXXXXXXX

Durango, CO

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am writing to provide comments about the proposed land exchange between property owners northeast of Pagosa Springs and the U.S. Forest Service that was announced in the Durango Herald on November 15, 2019. I am a retired Aquatic Biologist who worked for Colorado Parks and Wildlife for 30 years in the San Juan basin. During that time, I worked in close conjunction with the Forest Service on many cooperative fish habitat and conservation projects on the San Juan National Forest and adjacent private lands.

I am not opposed to the proposed land exchange, but urge the Forest Service and Mr. Kelcy Warren to expand upon it with either or both of two additional alternatives that could greatly improve the long term population viability of the San Juan lineage cutthroat trout found in Himes Creek on the Bootjack Ranch. The additional alternatives are found below:

1) Develop a long term (ten-year minimum) Cooperative Agreement between U.S. Forest Service and Mr. Kelcy Warren to allow access by Forest Service and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) fisheries work crews to an approximately 0.3 mile portion of Himes Creek located on the Bootjack Ranch, from the Forest boundary downstream to the first road crossing, where a manmade fish migration barrier (built by U.S. Forest Service) is currently situated. In exchange for this limited access to Himes Creek, the Forest Service would agree to maintain the existing fish migration barrier and construct new fish habitat improvement structures in Himes Creek, both on the Forest land portion and the Bootjack Ranch portion of Himes Creek, downstream as far as the fish migration barrier. In addition, once a year, a fishery work crew would be allowed to remove by electrofishing any cutthroat trout found in Himes Creek on the Bootjack Ranch that may have washed downstream below the fish migration barrier. Forest Service and CPW personnel would also conduct fish population monitoring and conservation activities on Himes Creek. The objective for improving fish habitat would be to increase pool habitat and spawning habitat in order to improve overwinter survival and to increase the population size of San Juan lineage cutthroat trout in Himes Creek to the point that 100 cutthroat trout could safely be removed by electrofishing and transplanted to a recipient stream located entirely on San Juan National Forest without adversely affecting the long-term viability of the Himes Creek population. By these means, a duplicate population San Juan lineage cutthroat trout carrying Himes Creek genes could be established, thus safeguarding the future of this rare trout lineage.

2. Expand the existing land exchange proposal to include the following parcel: about 6 acres of land presently owned by the Bootjack Ranch to be acquired by the Forest Service (following the stream course of Himes Creek, including 75 feet on either side of the high water line) from the Forest boundary downstream to the fish migration

barrier located approximately at UTM 13N, 331527, 4143575. Fish habitat improvement and fish conservation activities described in alternative 1 would also be part of this alternative. This land exchange would simplify and enhance protection efforts directed toward the San Juan lineage of cutthroat trout found in Himes Creek by placing ownership of the most critical habitat in federal hands and relieve Mr. Warren of ownership responsibility.

In conclusion, I urgently request the above two alternatives be included with the proposed land exchange in order to protect the long term viability of San Juan lineage cutthroat trout found in Himes Creek. This is a golden opportunity to improve the survival prospects for San Juan lineage cutthroat trout. Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Michael Japhet