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First name: David

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Attn: Ms. Becca Smith

Re: Proposed Valle Seco 2019 Land Exchange

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am writing in support of the proposed land exchange, as it clearly is in the public interest and benefits the surrounding environment and citizens of the San Juan area. In any exchange or trade, and in particular one adjusting lands that fall within the public domain, a "give and get", or "pro[shy] con" analysis is necessary.

The benefit and "get" from the perspective of the public

The Valle Seco land (880 acres) is currently a privately owned inholding surrounded by National Forest land that is accessible only by approximately 4.5 miles of unimproved road crossing National Forest lands. Valle Seco provides critical winter range and a crucial migration corridor for elk, mule deer, and other native species of wildlife. Many of these animals reside in the area throughout 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 would permit the Forest Service complete control of access to thousands of acres across public lands and provide for an active management of this precious wildlife resource. It would also prevent future development of the lands that could negatively impact wildlife habitat on surrounding National Forest land. The public would receive more lands than it loses, resulting in a net gain of lands to the public domain.

Conveying the Valle Seco land to the Forest Service would permit the control of access on National Forest System Road (NFSR) 653 and permit motorized access, at the discretion of the Forest Service, 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. There would no longer be the potential for further subdividing on the Valle Seco lands, no necessity to maintain and improve road access, no development of power line access, and no drilling of fresh water wells.

Consolidation of land ownership would create more logical boundaries 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. This exchange would dispense with numerous boundary line issues wherein private ownership conflicts with Federal ownership, resulting in present administrative burdens on the limited resources of the Forest Service. 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.

The detriment or "give" from the perspective of the public

A small portion of the present Forest Service land that is basically inaccessible, except by foot and classified as Roadless, would be conveyed to private ownership. This is technically a "give" but practically a moot point. The public would lose a net 6 acres of wild and scenic designation along two separate river corridors.

The analysis is overwhelmingly supportive of this exchange and it is clearly in the best interest of the public and

should be approved as soon as practicable.

Respectfully submitted,

David K. Skidmore