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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Custer-Gallatin Forest Plan 2020 (Final)

Page 93 states:

"f. Pack goats will only be allowed between June 20 and October 31 each year

g. Packers must carry a certificate of health for all pack goats

h. Pack goats are limited to no more than 4 goats per person or 12 goats per party"

I would like to object to the date restrictions listed here. There is no justifiable reason why packgoats should be restricted during any particular seasons. Packgoats, being castrated males, do not interfere with either lambing or rutting seasons and pose no threat to such wildlife activities. In particular, cutting the season off at October 31 will interfere with hunters. As packgoats are becoming increasingly popular for carrying out meat, any season (if one is imposed) should end only after the last hunting season is over.

What do you mean by "certificate of health"? Are you referring to the CVI that is routinely required for interstate travel or do you have something else in mind? I object to certificates being required for state resident packgoats because regularly obtaining a CVI for every goat throughout a hiking season will become prohibitively expensive for locals. Since CVIs are already required by the USDA for all out-of-state packgoats, the requirement is redundant. In short, the requirement is burdensome for local regular users and already in place for out-of-state users.

Finally, I object to limiting goats to 4/person. It usually takes at least six goats for one hunter to pack out an elk so it would only make sense to ensure that hunters are able to bring back their quarry in a single trip. Please expand this number to accommodate big game hunters.

Page 102 states:

"01 Use of pack goats under new special use permits may be considered for authorization in the Bridger, Bangtail, and Crazy Mountains; Ashland; and Sioux Geographic Areas until such time as an area becomes occupied by bighorn sheep. New special use permits may be permitted in these geographic areas only if a risk assessment indicates that spatial or temporal separation, or other mitigation can effectively minimize risk of disease transmission between livestock and bighorn sheep."

Why do special use permits need to be in place at all if the areas in question are NOT occupied by bighorn sheep? In areas unoccupied by bighorns, there should be NO packgoat restrictions and NO permits necessary. Once the areas are occupied by bighorns, permits may become something to consider in core bighorn habitat areas that are also popular with goat packers. Permits should only be considered when there is potential conflict, but in the absence of bighorns there is no conflict that would require special permits.

Further, this seems to indicate that packgoats may be excluded from these areas altogether if bighorns are introduced in the future. The North American Packgoat Association and goat packers in general support efforts to expand bighorn sheep territory and want to see bighorn sheep herds thrive throughout their historical range. Yet we do not wish to see goat packing curtailed because bighorns are thriving! We believe it is safe to pack with goats in bighorn sheep territory and that best management practices are effective at mitigating contact between packgoats and wild species.