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Organization: Montrose Uncompahgre Trails (MUT) chapter of CO Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association (COPMOBA)

Title: Chairperson of MUT, COPMOBA Board member

Comments: GMUG Forest Plan Revision comments:

Uncompahgre Legacy Trails Project: 2021

Focus:

The existing non-motorized trails on the Uncompahgre Plateau, which are open to mountain biking, need an upgrade. The area of focus would be the trails in the north and central sections of the Uncompahgre Plateau south of Unawep Canyon, mostly on U.S. Forest Service-managed land. Nearly 35 miles of trails are included. Montrose/Uncompahgre Trails would like to see them remain non-motorized.

Trails: North - Smith Point Trail (636), Bret Point (649), Little Creek (652), Corral Fork (655) and Blue Creek (620).

Central - Atkinson Bench (623), S. Bear Pen (124.1A), 25 Mesa (544.1A), 47 Trail (403), Paradox Trail (660 and 502).

Rationale/Current Status:

The trails in the project area, for the most part, have existed for many years, thus the name - legacy. Most are a product of ranching activity. Ranchers and their cows have maintained these trails. In the last 25 years increasing numbers of mountain bikers have used these trails, especially after travel management designated them as non-motorized. Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association (COPMOBA) volunteers have worked with the Forest Service at various levels to maintain the trails with the goal of making them more sustainable and rideable. The current effort isn't adequate over the long-term to keep the trails suitable for recreational use.

The demand for quality, multiple-use, non-motorized trails is only going to increase over the foreseeable future. Development of new trails is a lengthy, expensive process. Bringing existing trails up to standard could be done quickly and less expensively, making them more attractive to mountain bikers. This proposal is in no way suggesting that the existing trails be turned into bike park-style trails. Improvements can be made within line with the backcountry nature of the Uncompahgre Plateau. Challenging sections of the trails just need to be more obvious, sustainable, and clear of debris and obstacles. Providing quality trails would attract more riders, thus putting more tread on the trails. Regular use helps keep trails more obvious and makes maintenance less labor-intensive.

Partnerships and Funding:

The above-mentioned trails are located on the Uncompahgre Plateau but exist in three different Forest Service Ranger districts - Ouray, Norwood, and Grand Junction. They are in 2 different counties - Mesa and Montrose and are of interest to four different mountain bike chapters - Grand Valley, Montrose/Uncompahgre, Delta Area, and the West End Trails Alliance. All these entities could work together to maintain these trails but need all involved talking to each other. In addition, private trail construction entities could be tapped to provide design/trailbuilding/maintenance expertise. As a group these partners could seek public funds, raise private funds, and seek grant funding to bring these trails up to current trail standards.

What is initially needed is funding to finance a trail crew of 6-8 people for 6-8 weeks to perform the needed work. Going after GOCO non-motorized trail funds or Youth Corps. project funding would be the obvious starting point. Matching funds, services and materials would be sought through the partners.

Refurbishing old trails wouldn't make much sense if they wouldn't get used. The 2018 report by Maples and Bradley about the economic impact of mountain biking on the GMUG provides some solid data about how mountain biking supports the regional economy. Providing a quality trail experience would support the continued economic benefit of non-motorized trails open to mountain bikers.

Working with tourism boards in the surrounding cities of Grand Junction, Delta, Montrose, Ridgway, and Nucla/Naturita to spread the word about the Plateau trails and finance the development of information. Local bike shops could also help spread the word by being point of purchase entities. Use of the internet and social media could also spread the word.

Scope of Work:

Each trail would need to be evaluated by the Forest Service regarding what work needs to be done, and where. An estimated 50 % of the trails' mileage will need little to no improvements. Volunteers within mountain bike trail riders' ranks have a wealth of knowledge about the trails and could help with that process. Needed work includes tread work to define route, removal of deadfall trees, removal of brush within the trail corridor, and better signage. Volunteer work sessions would be organized to supplement the hired work crew's efforts and encourage local citizen support and awareness. COPMOBA has experienced crew leaders who could lead volunteer trail crews.

Expanded Scope.

Non-motorized trails open to mountain bikes in the Northern San Juans, Pinon Mesa and the Grand Mesa would benefit from a similar program. Those areas have COPMOBA chapters who have an interest in seeing the trails better maintained.

The intent of these comments is to encourage the U.S. Forest Service to take the needed steps to address a serious problem that hasn't been adequately addressed for years.

Best Regards,

Renata Raziano

Montrose Uncompahgre Trails chairperson

Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association (COPMOBA) board member.

November 7, 2021