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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I live in Ridgway, Colorado and love hiking the Blue Lakes Trail, to Blue Lakes Pass, and also from YBB over and down to East Dallas Creek. In the summer of 2021 I volunteered with ROCC/SJMA to be at the East Dallas Creek Trailhead and provide info to visitors. On Friday July 3 I stood there and 194 people passed me in 5 hours (from 8am - 1 pm). It was only 5 hours, but the rate was very low at either end so I think that total is not too far off. On Saturday July 4 two people stood there for 8 hours and encountered 274 people. Obviously these numbers are too high, but I also think that day usage could be decreased to 50-80 permits (vs. 40) and the improvement would be significant.

1) Wilderness Zone Comments

a) Camping: I agree that no camping should be allowed above treeline. Along the trail above Lower Blue Lake, just below treeline there are a bunch of over-used areas between the trail and creek and under some trees - these areas should be clearly closed. The only camping should be designated areas in the area/elevation of Lower Blue Lake. I agree with 4 designated sites, max 6 people ea.

b) Day Use Hiking: I suggest that the day use limit be increased to 50 from 40.

c) Hard Ford: I agree that people need to be encouraged to stay on the trail where it crosses the outlet creek from the lower lake, and then above that; there are many social trails in that area. However, if there is thigh-deep fast running water, or significant rock-hopping, then people will still likely cross up near the outlet. I know that this is a Wilderness area and bridges are not desirable or easy to construct, but it might be the lesser of all evils in this situation.

d) Solid waste: I agree that solid waste should be packed out in the Wilderness zone

e) Permits: The overnight and day use permits in this zone should have non-refundable and non-trivial fees to discourage people from reserving up sites or usage and then not using them. I am concerned about the ability (or inability) for locals to access day use permits. As a local I hike this trail on weekdays, get there early, and pick good weather. It seems like some fraction of the day use permits (25-50%) should become available close to the particular day - i.e. maybe 2 days ahead of time. A fun "local" hike (or trail run) is to hike from YBB, over Blue Lakes Pass, and then down to the East Dallas Creek TH - I assume that people would have to get a day use permit ahead of time to do this?

f) Enforcement: I really don't see how day use permits can be enforced when the Wilderness boundary is several miles up from the TH on the Blue Lakes side and at Blue Lakes Pass from the YBB side - both of these adjacent areas are proposed non-restricted. I think that seeing (or assuming) people in the Wilderness zone that likely don't have permits only fosters resentment and disappointment with the system, and is not a good situation. I don't know the solution here.

2) Blaine Basin Issues: I am concerned that Blaine Basin usage and camping could increase significantly. Please emphasize Leave No Trace ethics in this zone. Perhaps group camping should be limited - a couple years ago I saw a large group with llamas camping up there.

3) Yankee Boy Zone: I don't think camping should be allowed in this zone at all - there are just too many people, and much of this zone is above treeline. If some camping is allowed it will then just spread when people arrive late or see other campers. If camping is allowed in this zone fires should be prohibited.

Thank-you,
Jennifer Cram