

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/16/2022 7:00:29 PM

First name: Kelly

Last name: Ryan

Organization: San Juan Huts

Title:

Comments: I have grown up visiting the Blue Lakes and spent a lot of time in the area. These are the primary concerns that I see today in the Blue Lakes / Sneffels Area and with the current proposal:

1. Camping and parking IN the meadows near the Blue Lakes trailhead. The current 300 foot rule from the road desperately needs to be changed and no parking and no camping signs and or fencing needs to be put up.
2. Motorized use on the Yankee boy side has increased and changed significantly in recent years with more side by sides / Razors. Speed limits need to be enforced on 361. Currently there is a dangerous situation with Razors going 30 plus miles an hour where in years past jeeps would have gone less than 10. The upper section of this road is particularly dangerous as there are often people hiking up the jeep road. Razors come speeding around blind corners and are often out of control. These new vehicles' expanded capabilities are also leading to significant resource degradation as they make new roads and reopen old mining roads that have not been driven on for years.
3. Degradation of the area immediately surrounding the lakes due to overuse. Camping within a ¼ mile of the lake should be in designated campsites.
4. In several areas the main trail is no longer obvious as there are so many "short cuts" and trail variations. Some of these are on steep eroding terrain and lead to nowhere. When people start out on them, they end up bushwhacking back to the main trail. The social trails that are mainly from people not knowing where to go should be closed and the main trail made more obvious. This is particularly true between the lowest and middle blue lakes and in the lower Yankee Boy basin area.
5. I am concerned that the current proposal is too restrictive in its permitting system. I think controlling parking and campsites and educating the public that there is limited space should be the first step. If a permit system is imposed, I would encourage one that has some spaces (parking or camping) that can be reserved ahead of time and others that are first come first serve. I recently visited several sites like this in Utah and this system seemed equitable and worked for a variety of types of users. I would start with limiting parking and overnight camping in the immediate area around the lakes. These would be realistic to enforce and would have the biggest effect on preserving the resource while allowing more people to enjoy the resource while minimizing their impact. It would also encourage carpooling and more compact camping. I would not start with limiting day traffic (as is in the proposal) as this would be hard to enforce and may not be necessary at this time. If permits are needed to climb Sneffels, I think they should be able to be used in a date range so that people do not end up climbing on days when the weather is not safe as that is their only option. Permits for the summit should not be in place during fall, winter, and summer. I think day use permits should not be imposed at this time but there could be something in the plan that would trigger their institution if use got to a certain point.
6. When it comes to human waste instead of trying to enforce a wag bag system and having all that waste go into plastic bags to become septic mess eventually hauled to a landfill, I would consider providing clean pit toilets and or composting toilets at all trailheads and composting toilets higher up. I think it would be wise to ban "cat holes" or similar methods of disposal in the immediate area around the lakes and streams with an emphasis on educating the public about alternatives and the negative effects.

Overall I think it appropriate and overdue to address some of the overuse problems in the Blue Lakes and Sneffels area. I think the plan should start with limiting parking and camping around the lakes. I think bathroom options should be improved and there should be more education on human waste. Speed limits should be enforced and vehicular use should be limited to existing roadways. I think these steps get the most resource protection while allowing the most enjoyment and use of the resource. I realize that it is a lot of work and a slow process to enact these sorts of plans. If the USFS deems these steps are not enough to protect in future years there should be some triggers that could impose further protections. But at this point, I think it would be wise to evaluate if it is enough to limit camping near the lakes, parking, motorized use to appropriate speeds and limited to existing roads.

Thank you for putting in the energy and time to protect this amazing area.

Sincerely,

Kelly Ryan