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Title:

Comments: Dear District Ranger and Planning Team:

We are writing in response to the Blue Lakes Visitor Use Management Plan Draft Proposal. We are very glad that steps are being taken to manage and protect this wonderful resource, and would like to offer some feedback on the proposed management strategies.

1. We strongly support the proposed camping permits and hardened campsites in the Blue Lakes Basin.
2. We would like you to consider an alternative to the per-person permit system for the Blue Lakes Basin, and instead limit parking at the Blue Lakes trailhead using a permit system. Our reasoning for this is as follows: 1st, the parking is already tenuous. Tying a permit to a parking spot will help to prevent illegal parking and resource damage. 2nd, limiting parking will make it so that overall usage of the drainages - Blue Lakes, Blaine Basin and others is managed. It would be a shame to just shift the usage to other drainages in the same zone. 3rd the proposal suggests 64 total permits; assuming that there are 2-4 people in each party, that would require between 16 and 32 parking spots just for the people accessing Blue Lakes. People who have valid permits will want to be able to park, but may not have a spot to park, incentivizing illegal parking.

3. We would also like you to consider some sort of mechanism that will release a permit to the public if it is not picked up. Over the past few years, we have heard stories of reservations, usually in campgrounds, being filled months in advance, but never being occupied. The money is paid, so there is no incentive to release the unused permits. Requiring local pickup will help alleviate this problem.

4. We also strongly advocate for a limited number of "walkup permits" available every day for the Blue Lakes Zone. This is especially important because the summer weather can be extremely variable, and people will want to plan their hiking trips around the weather forecasts.

5. We welcome the proposed action plans in the wilderness zone, however are concerned about unintended consequences such as pushing use outside of the area covered by the proposed action plan. We welcome continuous monitoring of the effects of the proposed actions in the draft management plan and proactive corrective actions. We STRONGLY encourage the USFS to increase ranger monitoring of parking and backcountry contacts in the Sneffels zone in advance of the management plan, as we anticipate that usage will increase impending access changes.

We thank you for this opportunity to comment and for comprehensive proposal to manage the Blue Lakes Area. Over the past few years, usage has skyrocketed, and steps need to be taken swiftly to address resource damage and degradation.

Ouray Backcountry Alliance