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First name: Jason

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Forest Service,

As a Durango resident and homeowner along Junction Creek Road (County Road 204) I am writing about both my support and concerns about the proposed J-FIRM project. My first concern is about the public comment period. The dates of the existing public comments suggest that nobody knew about this project and comment period until just this week. There was only one comment before October 10th. Please consider extending the public comment period.

I am a regular user of all of the trails in this proposal including the Colorado trail section along Junction Creek, the Log Chutes trail system, and the trails and climbing in Falls Creek. I ride my mountain bike throughout the trail network, including existing downhill trails, ride my gravel bike up the dirt road, walk my dogs at falls creek, Junction Creek, and Log Chutes, cross country ski up the road in winter, and I also drive and bike daily back and forth to Durango.

I'm in favor of improved recreation resources in the area including improved downhill mountain bike trails and winter grooming along the road. As a local homeowner I also support fire mitigation efforts in the area that don't negatively affect the recreation resources and the ecology. It's wonderful (and sometimes scary) to see bears, mountain lions and moose in these forests.

I do have a few concerns about aspects of the proposal. These concerns include:

1. Paving of the dirt road to Animas Overlook. The gravel section of the road is steep and narrow and is frequented by bikers, hikers, trail runners, and wildlife. Currently, the switch to dirt slows down and limits vehicle traffic and makes it safe enough to use the road to connect different trails in the system. Earlier this week my son and I rode up the road on mountain bikes to access existing logchutes downhill trails. We were passed by slow moving vehicles who often stopped or slowed down in order to keep dust down and pass safely. The gravel slows traffic and makes things safer.

Every now and then I am confronted by a driver who is going very fast on this road and it is a much scarier situation. Paving of the road would lead to faster vehicle traffic, faster downhill road bike traffic, and an overall more dangerous mix of traffic and recreation. Furthermore, I don't think paving of the road matches well with the proposed winter trail grooming. The paved surface would lead to faster melting of the snow which is already an issue during cross country ski season. There are a few sections on the road that melt quickly and sometimes require removal of skis to cross. This would only be worse with paving. Furthermore skiing falls on the paved surface could lead to more injuries. Going downhill on Junction Creek Rd on cross country skis leads to the occasional stumble and fall, and thus far I've been fortunate to never be injured in these falls. I believe the paving of the road should be removed from the proposal. If paving must be included, I suggest paving only to the campground.

2. I have concerns about the proposed ADA compliant trail along the Colorado trail riparian area. I am fully supportive of efforts to make our recreation areas more inclusive. This section of trail, however, would need more study on users and the possible challenges of constructing and maintaining a compliant trail. The current trail is very heavily used by families, bikes, dogs, and long-haul backpacker and bike packers either starting or completing their Colorado trail through hike/bike trips. Fast moving bikes (including me) are already a hazard and I fear that an ADA compliant paved trail would result in faster speeds. If the proposal is to divert bike traffic from this trail so that the Colorado trail ends at the upper trailhead, then that would force bikes onto the proposed

paved road or possibly onto the proposed groomed winter trails. I believe that the construction along this trail would also negatively affect one of the most beautiful stream hikes in the area. It is one of the few places that stays cool in the summer and I fear that a paved trail would require vegetation clearing, trail diversions, and infrastructure that is not compatible with the existing ecology of the trail. Furthermore, this area already gets quite icy in the winter making for some challenging winter hiking and trail running conditions. Would the ADA compliant trail be cleared in the winter or would the paving just make for even more icing? The ADA trails at Animas Overlook have been neglected and are in disrepair and I question whether we would be heading down a similar path by modifying this important terminus of the Colorado Trail. I recommend that more study and thought be put into the feasibility of this aspect of the proposal and recommend that the forest service first rehabilitate the Animas Overlook trails for ADA compliance.

3. As a homeowner along county road 204, I urge the forest service to consider the traffic implications of the proposed larger parking lots and improved recreation resources in the Junction Creek, Falls Creek, and Log Chutes trail system. I am in favor of these improvements but I also believe that these improvements will bring more users into the area. There are probably tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of biker and car trips already up and down Junction Creek Rd. to connect to Durango. My teenage son regularly rides up and down the road to get to Durango Devo Practice, but I don't yet let my middle school daughter ride the road due to the dangerous bike/car interactions. I ride the road to connect to other trail systems and dozens of riders pass my house every day to get up to the trails. Bike/car interactions will only increase with this proposed project. I recommend that this project be developed in conjunction with the long proposed continuation of the bike lane from the Durango city line along county road 204 to the Colorado Trail. Proceeding without a traffic study and bike lane improvements to the existing county road is irresponsible and only invites future conflicts and accidents.

Many thanks for considering my comments, and I look forward to participating in future discussions of the J-Firm project.