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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on this proposed project.

I have lived in Durango for the last few years and love the outdoor lifestyle available here. I am an avid trail runner, hiker and mountain biker and use the areas covered by this proposed project at least once per week all year round.

While I recognize that many of the elements of this proposal are overdue and would largely be a positive impact to accommodate the growing needs of the community, I have several concerns.

The Junction Creek trailhead is very popular for many users, locals and travelers alike. As the start / end of the Colorado trail it is literally the gateway to the mountains, and a very special place. Expanding the parking lot would avoid the overflow parking that frequently occurs up the side of CR171 / Junction creek road, and is needed, along with the toilet facility upgrade. I support both elements. However, I do not support upgrading (paving?) the first 1.2 miles of the magical dirt trail along Junction creek. This is a beautiful entry to Durango as the last stretch of the Colorado trail, and is heavily used by mountain bikers, hikers, runners, dog walkers for day and multi-day excursions. It is quite narrow in places, and paving it would require significant widening, and also probably gradient changes in some steeper areas, which would really change the character of the trail. While I understand accessibility issues for some members of our community, we have a significant amount of paved trail available in town and with river and fishing access (along the Animas), so I do not understand why paving the gateway to the mountains is needed to promote access in the community. If there is a desire for additional ADA / paved trails as part of this project then they would be much more appropriate to consider for the Falls Creek / Hidden valley area, where the topography lends itself to easy development of flatter and wider trails.

Similarly, I am supportive of additional road resurfacing / repair on Junction Creek Road up to the Upper parking lot and / or the campground, which are quite heavily used. However, to pave beyond all the way to Animas overlook does not seem prudent or necessary. The entirety of CR171 (17+ miles) is heavily used by gravel and mountain bike riders to escape the downtown traffic, and many days I see far more bikes utilizing the road than I do cars. It is perfectly drivable by 2WD vehicles at low speed all the way to Animas overlook so the need for paving is not clear. This would only serve to encourage additional vehicle traffic at higher speed further into the mountains, whilst negatively impacting a recreation opportunity that is currently heavily utilized by the community (gravel / mountain biking). I am generally supportive of greater Winter use of the road through grooming of the initial section for fat biking, cross country skiing etc. as long as it does not interfere with winter wildlife areas.

The log chutes trail system is a wonderful, forested haven for trail users, particularly in the heat of the Summer. Given the fire danger in our area and the density of that forest, I am supportive of fire mitigation and mastication work up CR171 and in the log chutes system that would keep this area safe for users. The formal development of downhill mountain bike trails in this system would also be a wonderful addition to Durango's cycling community. The informal trails that exist now are heavily used by bikers AND mother nature (very deeply eroded and rutted causing more damage the more they are used) and could do with true development to be safer for downhill use and provide more controlled water and sediment flow down slope and into the watershed. Durango also does not have many downhill trails for public use that enable the biking community to develop those skills (which is one of the reasons these informal trails are used currently).

Lastly, Falls Creek / Hidden valley is a very special and easily accessible area, and one that is very popular with trail runners, walkers, and children, even though the trails are a bit of a maze and are not formally recognized by the SJNF. I am supportive of formalizing some of the trails and closing others if agreement can be reached with the tribes for whom this land has special significance. I would also like to see additional information on the potential impact on wildlife in this area (particularly elk) before this project progresses, to ensure that human communities are not the only consideration in this important area.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments, and I look forward to more information becoming available as the project scoping progresses.

