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Comments: This letter is in objection of Scott Fitzwilliams' decision to approve the Redstone to McClure Pass trail. His decision never addressed my original objection. A census of all wildlife, including birds, plants, reptiles and insects, not just a select few, needs to be taken before approval, to get a baseline on the health of all species that will be impacted. It is commonly known that the fragmentation of wildlife habitat impedes migration and produces inbreeding, resulting in defects that can lead to death. This will only further reduce our already dwindling deer, elk and bighorn sheep populations. We won't know what other populations will be impacted until all populations in the proposed trail route are counted and studied over a period of years.

The decision imposed a key condition of a seasonal closure of nearly 5 miles of the trail south of Hayes Creek Falls and below the underpass near the summit from Dec. 1 through Apr. 30 to protect elk in the winter. The Forest Service will also work with the CPW to monitor for elk calving activity in the Bear Creek and Old McClure Pass areas. If activity is detected the closure will extend to June 30. The problem with the condition of seasonal closures is that officials note a decline in compliance with closures. The White River National Forest originally implemented seasonal closures of Avalanche Creek in 1996. Phil Nyland, a wildlife biologist from the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District is quoted in an article from the Nov. 29, 2022 edition of the Aspen Daily News as follows: "Since we first implemented the closures in 1996, both the human population in the region and winter recreation in Avalanche Creek has grown, while big game populations have declined. There are a number of factors contributing to the decline of the region's big game herds, and disturbance in critical winter range is probably a significant reason. We are seeing big game in the area less frequently than would be expected given its high quality winter habitat. It's clear to me that the presence of dogs in the closed area contributes to the lower numbers of big game, as does the amount of people." The conclusion is that as more people use the area, compliance with the closures has decreased, particularly involving dogs.

Further, Mr. Fitzwilliams' decision states that long term management and enhancement projects aim to make areas "more useful for winter elk" and that "Increasing visitor use would be managed." The elk don't need management and enhancement projects. They need to be left alone! How would increasing visitor use be managed? This trail is a terrible idea and needs to be rejected.

Sincerely,

Melissa Waters