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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Forest Service Staff,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the trail system being planned and proposed at Jackson Mountain outside Pagosa Springs, Colorado on National Forest Service lands.

I am writing in support of the trail project, which I think will be a valued amenity for the local community, particularly in regard to the physical/mental health and economic benefits that trails provide. Trails are a much needed avenue to get people outdoors, especially young people. Additionally, the proposed trail offerings are not being offered elsewhere in the district.

However, I have serious concerns regarding the proposed open pit hard rock gravel mine at the same location.

The gravel mine is a very recent proposal (it pre-dates the trail plan, to my knowledge) and has the potential to cause significant noise and air quality issues, as well as safety concerns for the mountain bike trail system that it would overlap with. The "non-commercial" mine has potential to waste significant public tax dollars already invested in the proposed trail system by the City of Pagosa Springs, Archuleta County and the USFS, as well as local foundation grants that went into the trail planning. What a shame that would be, since these are residents' tax dollars and donations.

I am asking the USFS to thoroughly analyze the impacts of this proposed gravel pit to see if it needs to be located elsewhere. Some key questions that should be addressed include:

What will be the impact of the noise from the mine on trail users, local residents, and wildlife? What are immediate and long term impacts of mine activities for the lifespan of the mine on human and animal populations?

The Environmental Assessment should explore if and how a gravel mine might degrade the trail experience of all users and create safety concerns. What measures will be taken to ensure the safety of mountain bikers on the trail system in the vicinity of the mine and the Snowball access road leading to trailheads?

What measures will be taken to minimize air quality impacts from dust and other pollutants associated with mining operations? The EA should explore any potential negative impacts from the gravel mine such as fugitive dust and other inhalable particulate matter, carcinogenic gasses, toxic elements and minerals such as rock released radon, arsenic, etc., and the impact of land degradation, down slope erosion, as there is a trail proposed immediately downslope of the pit.

What will be the impact of the mine on the scenic value of the area and its potential as a tourist destination for outdoor recreation? The USFS needs to analyze the potential concerns around the short-term economic benefits of a mine vs. long-term economic and social benefits of sustainable outdoor recreation.

The USFS needs to analyze the destination of the gravel extracted for how this will affect truck traffic patterns for local residents. Will the pit location lead to increased heavy truck traffic through town or will the destination be reliably eastward? How will that affect other towns? The USFS needs to analyze for requiring stipulations of operations to be more conducive to local residents and multi-use trail users.

How will the use of public tax dollars and foundation grants that went into the trail planning to-date be addressed

if the mine is approved?

I strongly support the mountain bike trail plan and of course it too must be analyzed. I also believe the National Forest Service has a responsibility to protect the public investment in the trails project which has already been made. I encourage you to carefully consider the potential impacts of the mine and take all necessary steps to minimize the negative effects on the environment, local residents, and recreational users of the area.

Thank you very much for considering my comments. I look forward to hearing the outcome of your analysis.