Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/20/2023 5:38:59 PM
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Comments: To the Pagosa Ranger District regarding the Jackson Mtn Landscape Project;

My feeling is that impacts to wildlife should be of paramount concern in designing any future projects for the Jackson Mtn area. CPW has identified critical wildlife range on Jackson Mtn, especially for elk and deer, which will surely be negatively impacted by many of these proposals. It is well understood that projects which result in habitat fragmentation have negative consequences that extend far beyond the footprint of the project. Current and predicted future human population growth in southwest Colorado, with its associated increase in public land use, by itself will stress wildlife populations, without adding additional planned development of the types proposed for Jackson Mtn.

I see several problems with the planned increase of trails for mountain bikes and other uses. In the Conceptual Plan produced by Trail Solutions, 66 miles of trails spread over 4230 acres of land with a tread construction area amounting to 16 acres is proposed. In comments from the USFS, it appears that the mileage being considered has been reduced to 40 miles, but even this amount is hard to comprehend. One could ride the distance to Bayfield without leaving this forest. Past experience has shown that the addition of illicit construction of trail connections, as has already occurred on Jackson Mtn and in other forests, will surely add to the footprint of planned trails here.

In the report prepared by Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, the avoidance of roads and trails by big game species, especially elk, and the negative consequences to the survival of these animals is well documented. New trails will mean more off-leash dogs chasing wildlife. Small animals including birds will be impacted also. Leash laws and seasonal closures simply will not work. Our local Ranger District and CPW does not have the staff to enforce compliance.

The increase in road traffic associated with more trail use is another concern. Anyone familiar with the current access on FS Rd 037 knows that there are already areas subject to degradation from traffic, blind curves and sections particularly hazardous when shared with logging trucks, campers and horse trailers. Improving a connector trail to Snowball Rd will surely add to the traffic there and increase road problems in that area of the forest and adjacent residential areas also.

Another area of concern in this project is the addition of new parking areas and a developed campsite. It seems that the Pagosa Ranger district does not have the resources to maintain these and in fact in the past has removed trailhead restrooms and developed campsites because of inadequate staff to take care of them. While I agree that trailhead restrooms are a help in keeping the area clean, they must come with the resources to take care of them.

The addition of these amenities will serve only a small segment of the population of the Pagosa Springs area. Our community is already experiencing housing problems resulting in the inability of businesses to attract enough employees to serve the tourist industry. We must take care not to destroy the very attributes of our area, including our wild places, which convinced current residents to make our homes here.

There are so many problems with locating a gravel pit here and so many arguments against it already expressed, that I will only say that I add my name to the list of those opposed to this idea. I do support the Forest Health treatments proposed and being carried out as long as they align with the desired outcomes of making our forests more resilient and healthy in a changing climate and retain the species diversity and complexity shown to support wildlife.

I am concerned whether an Environmental Analysis is rigorous enough to investigate all the potential impacts of the proposals identified in the Jackson Mountain Landscape Project. This is truly a special place for all life. Thank you.   Jean Zirnhelt