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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you to the Dispersed Camping Management Team for your attention and the opportunity to discuss options and ideas that concern a place many of us call home.

Last year when the topic of dispersed camping gave me the opportunity to comment via email on the BLM website I did so. This year I address again the traffic situation and vehicle parking on County Road 371 through the old Midland rail tunnels where there exists essentially a one lane road and few wider spots between the tunnels for a vehicle to pull over and permit room for passage of oncoming traffic. Passage is hampered by recreators who park and sometimes overnight camp in the "pull out" areas. Signage has been posted at either end of the tunnels indicating that parking or camping is prohibited between the signs. The signs are often ignored. Several times I have contacted the Sheriff's Department when there were more than 7 cars parked between the tunnels and been informed by the deputies that they are not willing to ask people to move either cars or tents from the area. Last year large rocks were rolled into some of the pull out areas negating any pull over option for cars and actually creating a new problem by causing oncoming vehicles to back up rather than pull over. Keep in mind, there are rafting buses pulling trailers also sharing this one lane road.

For your information I spoke with Mr. Mark Stacy, Superintendent of Bridges and Roads in Chaffee County, once last year and again this year. He informed me the actual road through the tunnels is a county road and comes under his responsibility even as the BLM claims jurisdiction beside the road through the tunnels. Evidently the Historical Society is involved now and does not want anything done to the tunnels, thus there is a discussion going on between the society and the county which prevents Mr. Stacy from performing any kind of safety inspection. I have been given to understand there is a 30 foot wide right of way (deeded or prescriptive) either side of the center line on county roads. If that is correct then anywhere between the tunnels should be fair game for county law enforcement. If for some reason there is jurisdictional confusion over whether BLM, Forest Service or county law enforcement has traffic control responsibility, the county sheriff and public land officials need to come to some agreement regarding control of dangerous congestion in this area. There are ample designated parking and camping areas within a hundred yards of either end of the tunnels where the no parking or camping signs are posted. Tourism and recreation must be controlled.

In the high flow tourist season, especially weekends and holidays, the bottle-neck in the tunnels is terrible and frankly sometimes dangerous. My hope is that the various public land officials will engage in a dialogue to find a safe solution for this problem. This should be a warning that either confrontations or life threatening events are likely to occur between the tunnels and along the most heavily trafficked county road in Chaffee County if situations mentioned above are not addressed.

I implore the Dispersed Camping Management Team to address the tunnels and the county road through the tunnels as part of their platform.

Respectfully submitted,

Concerned and full time resident of Chaffee County  
March 12, 2023