

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/13/2023 9:05:19 PM

First name: Edie

Last name: Engstrom

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Web Address: <https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?Project=56913>

USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region

ATTN: Reviewing Officer

1617 Cole Blvd Building 17

Lakewood, CO 80401

Subject: Redstone to McClure Pass Trail Project Objection

To Whom It May Concern:

In February of 2022, I submitted comments on the White River National Forest Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) as it pertained to the Redstone to McClure Pass Trail Project. I was admittedly crushed upon reading the Draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) as released by the Forest Service on January 23, 2023. I remain steadfast with my original comments letter. The tactical and piecemeal trail approach by the applicant is not lost on the public, and many believe it to be the first step to irreparable harm to the Crystal Valley. The wildlife is getting pushed and shoved as valley visitors and residents alike increase exponentially. This same increase in human activity is impacting our precious river as well. An agenda that perhaps seemed reasonable 20 years ago is now glaringly reckless. There is so much to be forever lost.

To minimize trail impacts by pretending that this one small trail from Redstone to McClure is benign is dangerously myopic. Bandit trails are not likely - They are certain! And before we know it, trail aficionados that enjoy the "small" segment from Redstone to McClure, winding through Bear Gulch and the Old McClure area, will then connect to the trail that leads up to Huntsman's Ridge. Then they will follow the ridge. They will drop into Coal Basin to enjoy the newly developed bike park. And so on...

Further, while Pitkin County's Carbondale to Crested Butte Trail plan agenda is a known time bomb for the Crystal Valley and beyond, I had high hopes for a sensible response from the USFS. Instead, for suspect reasoning, the USFS has aligned with Pitkin County. This is not a stand-alone trail, and a FONSI is an unfair assessment both in light of the certain transgressions this one segment will encourage, as well as the true nature of this segment as part of a much bigger plan - 83 miles of trail from Carbondale to Crested Butte. The Forest Service should undertake an EIS analyzing the entire trail.

The WRNF should not be condoning a plan to further fragment our last remaining somewhat untouched spaces, but instead be staunchly defending any wildlife safe havens that remain. More restrictive management is imperative. To deduct that old wagon roads and existing trails have already compromised these areas is true, but also short sighted. Yes, the wild lands of America have been impacted by human activity over centuries. This is true for the Bear Gulch area as well as Old McClure. They aren't perfectly wild. But invite the public with a developed trail and parking areas and give it a name that flashes across the internet and the last vestiges of value these spaces lend to wildlife will be fully and forever lost.

Somehow this segmented application conveniently provided an opportunity for reasonable alternatives not viewed favorably by Pitkin County to magically disappear. The Forest Service must also revise its EA to consider all alternatives and in so doing be able to present best options for reduced environmental impact. This Redstone to McClure segment clearly overlooks best options.

Certainly wildlife numbers will continue to decrease commensurate to the increased human impact that will result

from the recreational trail as proposed. It is critical that the Forest Service step back and look at the Crystal Valley from the perspective of 2023 - an era of climate change amid a growing population and the onslaught of impacts. It is a daunting task for sure, but the importance of doing so is a non negotiable as part of an effort to protect dwindling numbers as they relate to elk, mule deer, bighorn sheep, songbirds, lynx, and more. We need a BEST plan no matter what that entails. The Forest Service should undertake an EIS analyzing the entire trail. These are fragile times requiring the most thoughtful of actions.

These comments are respectfully submitted. Thank you for the opportunity to voice my concerns.