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Organization:
Title:
Comments: As a Colorado resident and avid steward for wildlife conservation in the state, I am reaching out to you about the very concerning draft decision notice from the U.S. Forest Service of "finding of no significant impact" for the Mad Rabbit Trails Project.

The Mad Rabbit Trail proposal is to develop a high-volume mountain bike and hiking trails in the Routt National Forest near Steamboat. As I'm sure you are aware, the current state of recreation in Colorado is so overwhelmed by people, which we're seeing the impacts of in real time. The amount of wildlife that are struggling to maintain historical population levels and successful recruitment continues to increase due to a multitude of factors. However, it is apparent that one of the most significant changes in the last 10 years is obviously climate change impacts, but also increased population in Colorado, which is sending more people, cars, ATV's, dirt bikes and overall disturbances into the outdoors. Not only is the overwhelming amount of outdoor recreation impacting our wildlife, it's also impacting people's overall satisfaction with outdoor recreation experiences. The idea of creating 50 miles of new trails, many of which are in designated High Priority Habitat areas and identified elk calving grounds is so discouraging. I realize that there is a proposed elk calving closure in the EIS, but it's been proven through the expansion of Eagle county ski resorts, that elk calving closures do not provide enough solitude for elk and deer to remove the impact of the land use. This calving closure theoretically is a positive attempt, but I didn't see any other discussion in the EIS about the impacts on other native animals, plants , and water. In addition, unfortunately, the Forest Service based its environmental assessment (EA) on a 25-year-old resource management plan and even older 1983 Elk Habitat Effectiveness model and did not fully assess the cumulative impacts of the other trail developments in the area.

Lastly, the Forest Service has set forth so many rules and regulations in the EIS document, which in a perfect world would be a positive backstop for this project, but from my experience, the USFS has so few people and resources enforcing rules across the state, I find it very unlikely some if any of these rules would be enforced in reality.

If this organization holds itself as a conservation minded and pro wildlife government leadership team, it cannot turn a blind eye to this proposal when it has such a high likelihood of potential negative impact to all wildlife. The USFS needs to put forth more effort and resources to acquire other properties to satisfy the outdoor recreation impacts in the Steamboat area without negatively impacting our already struggling wildlife.

Thank you, Tom