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Title:

Comments: Let me begin by stating that I have been a resident of the Trout Creek subdivision on Highway 67 N, in Douglas County Colorado for almost 28 years. When my husband and I purchased the property and built the house on it we were quite happy to have such a beautiful and peaceful place to call home. While the area remains beautiful, the peace and quiet of the forest area has been replaced with gun fire. And on so many days, it's like living next to a war zone.

I enjoy the serene landscape and the animals and habitat that come with being a part of a wilderness area, and I recognize the potential threats that come with living on the edge of a large wilderness area like Pike Forest. We (and our home) survived the Hayman wild fire of 2002, although we were a part of the evacuated population for three long weeks. Part of the reason that we came through that disaster is because we mitigated risk from the beginning of our time here, keeping the brush and vegetation on the acreage and around the house trimmed and controlled. We do everything we can to maintain the splendor that nature provides to this area. But there is nothing I can do to minimize risk from the Turkey Tracks Range.

From the beginning of our time living here, there was shooting in the forest, but it was an occasional occurrence and not a constant one as it is today. You could tell that someone was probably sighting in a gun, or doing a bit of target practice. The noise was definitely noticeable, but it wouldn't last more than 20 or 30 minutes at a time. But the last few years this has changed drastically. Hardly ever does a day go by that you don't hear shooting, and a lot of days the shooting is nonstop throughout the day. Back in the beginning you hardly ever heard gunfire after dark, but the shooting happening after dark has increased to unbelievable levels, and happens almost every night and can occur all night long when the weather is moderate and occasionally even if the temperatures are extreme.

Back in the beginning of our time here the shooting use to be limited to a shot gun or maybe a rifle. Today that has all changed, with automatic military type weapons shooting, reloading and shooting again for long periods of time. You also hear guns that sound like cannons going off. And then there is the night-time shooting. You can't leave your windows open at night during the summer months, because the noise will startle you awake most nights.

Those of us living in the Trout Creek subdivision have taken to contacting the Douglas County Sheriff's office when shooting is happening after dark. We appreciate the fact that they attempt to stop this from happening, but at times they are an hour or more away from this site, making it impossible to manage. And I don't understand why this is the Sheriff's Office's responsibility. This is land, under control of the US Forest Service. It would seem that there should be some enforcement of the USFS regulations.

I am incensed by the fact that the US Forest Service can close Manitou Lake to control utilization of the area but doesn't do the same for the Turkey Tracks Range. The US Forest Service has managed to make Manitou Lake a fee area, and yet they do not charge for access to the shooting range, even though utilization of the range is probably ten times what the lake draw is. I (and I know others as well) suggested back when this issue became a problem a few years ago that they consider charging for entrance, but nothing was ever done and no acknowledgement was even made. I believe that the individuals using the range have the finances to afford to pay to use the space, and should be doing so to cover costs related to maintain the space and mitigate the various risks to the forest and the private property. And those that can afford the ammunition to fire those military style automatic weapons can definitely afford to pay to play.

I'm furious that because this area is so heavily used and totally unsupervised that there have been countless fires

started at the range since (at least) 2018 (according to an online report from KOAA News). The fire call volume over a ten-year period shows that fires range from 20+ a year (in 2022) to 3 fires per year, with the use of exploding targets (tracer rounds) being noted as the biggest issue and concern in the past few years.

I am also outraged over the trash that has accumulated in this unsupervised area. During 2023, residents of our community went in with participants from the Douglas County Sheriff's Department and picked up 75 tons of trash, garbage, shell casings, dumped furniture, appliances, and junk vehicles, all of which had served as shooting targets. The amount of shell casings alone, that were left on the ground is also a huge hazard to the environment and humans and animals alike.

The danger related to fires in Colorado depends on a lot of things, weather being a substantial consideration. But the potential for a wildfire starting in this area continues to be a concern for residents, even after an event as severe as the Hayman Fire that totally took out such a large percent of the forest. For those of us that survived the Hayman, we still have anxiety around this risk. Twenty years later we're just seeing the forest recover. The aspens are abundant and have grown tall enough to be looking like real trees while the evergreens are currently more bush-like but are coming back as well, but the forest will not be the same in my life-time. And with this gun range literally in our back yard, with no management or supervision, the fire risk for our neighborhood is much higher than it is for other Colorado residents.

Besides the fire risk, the danger of lead leaching through the soil and into the natural water supply is another hazard that has been forced on us and it isn't being mitigated by the US Forest Service at all. The lead in just one bullet from a 22-caliber rifle could contaminate one day's worth of drinking water for the entire population of Salt Lake City with a level of lead deemed unsafe by the EPA. Outdoor firing ranges put more lead into the environment than nearly any other major industrial sector in the U.S., yet they remain almost entirely (or in our case totally) unregulated. (<https://static.ewg.org/reports/2001/LeadPollutionAtOutdoorFiringRanges.pdf>) Our waterways, groundwater, personal wells, and even our lives and the lives of our children and grandchildren are at risk of contamination and this is unconscionable. There is no amount of lead exposure known to be completely safe for a child. The fact that that water contamination also kills our wildlife, a vulnerable part of our eco system that relies on the forest lands for survival and quality of life is inexcusable.

That doesn't even take into consideration the lead contamination of soil that puts children for risk of lead poisoning. Children living near firing ranges can be exposed to lead through dust that blows off the range to contaminate the air and soil nearby. It's not uncommon in this area to see dust-devils (small particles of dirt & dust that become electrically charged through contact or friction and build into mini-tornado formations) that travel and last upwards of 20 minutes before dissipating. You have to wonder how many families have been exposed to lead poisoning through these experiences.

I proposed before in a letter contesting the use of the Turkey Tracks Range, that the US Forest Service initiate a fee to play gated area, with someone on site to manage, supervise and control the area. I still think this would be the most effective way to manage the area. With set hours of operation, and Forest Service oversight via an employee or outside-consultant or even a licensed and authorized outside entrepreneur in place to establish this shooting range as a business and supervise the comings and goings during specific hours it would eliminate the night-time shooting going on and give residents some peaceful recovery time. As tax paying citizens that live close to this range and are specifically impacted by the noise, I believe we deserve some consideration. I believe that there are enough people utilizing this site that it could be a serious revenue generator for the US Forest Service. I believe that the management and oversight would eliminate or at least minimize people coming in and dumping their trash, furniture and junk appliances or vehicles. On-site management could also discourage horse-play that ends up with someone being shot or injured and potentially provide assistance for times when an injury does occur or a fire is started, resulting in faster response time and potentially minimizing risks to the community and the forest.

There are realistic ways for this area and the activity it provides to be available to the general public while providing relief from the various pollutions generated from the activity. On top of that, sensible risk-management can be implemented to protect the lands, both public and private, as well as the life of area residents and the wildlife. I believe this is the perfect time for the USFS and the citizens to come together. To implement something the area can be proud of while protecting the rights of the citizens, their families and the forest at large.