

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/19/2024 6:00:00 AM

First name: Tara

Last name: Gray

Organization: Trout Lake Owners Association

Title: Dr.

Comments: Trout Lake Owners Association objects to the Telluride Mountain Club's proposed Sheep Mountain Traverse trail. Neither option A nor B are acceptable for the following reasons:

* Negative Impact on Wildlife: The proposed trail through the area above and south and east of the existing Galloping Goose trail/road would negatively impact and disturb habitat for lynx, snowshoe hare, bear, elk, ermine, etc. by drastically increasing human presence and thereby pressuring wildlife into a much smaller habitat area. The Club's assertion that Proposed Route A could be the boundary for the CORE Act Sheep Mountain Special Use Area is ludicrous as the already existing Galloping Goose trail should be that boundary so that the existing size of essentially undisturbed habitat is maintained rather than diminished.

* Another Trail Not Needed: An abundance of trails already exists in the area—Galloping Goose, Hope Lake, East Fork, Cross Mountain, Groundhog Stock Trail, Lizard Head, Blackface, Wilson Meadows, Bilk Basin, and San Bernardo—to name a few. The proposed trail is not necessary especially when a multi-use trail—the Galloping Goose—already exists and already provides all the things the proposal suggests are needed.

* Negative Impacts of Recreation on Trout Lake Community: The Trout Lake community is already impacted by a large amount of recreation including Trout Lake Boat Ramp, Hope Lake Trail, dispersed camping along the Galloping Goose and Hope Lake Road, Helitrax helicopter skiing, snowmobiling, and Nordic skiing. While some of these recreational opportunities are enjoyed by Trout Lake community members, the negative impacts of traffic, dust, pollution, trespassing, parking along narrow roadways, increased wildfire danger, trash and noise are difficult, and the proposed Sheep Mountain Traverse would increase these difficulties, especially with the proposal to use the Trestle area for parking.

* Inappropriate Terrain/Wetlands: Knowing the area where the Club is proposing this trail, their assertion that either route is appropriate terrain for a multi-use trail is incorrect and misguided. The topography does not lend itself to the proposal's claimed "beginner/intermediate" level trail. Also, the trail would be crossing numerous wetland areas and would have detrimental effects on these fragile environments. The amount of tree fall in the area would also make trail construction and maintenance prohibitive—the monies should be used to maintain existing, approved trails instead.

* Increased Scattered Recreation: The Club's assertion that "an established, legal trail in this area has the ability to keep scattered recreational use out of nearby sensitive and Wilderness areas" is incorrect and dangerous. Cutting a trail through this part of the Sheep Mountain Forest would do the exact opposite—the proposed trail would provide easier access into an area that now is difficult to access and that would logically increase, not decrease, scattered recreation in the sensitive and Wilderness areas with resultant negative consequences for the land and wildlife.

Alternative Solutions: Some of the Club's concerns which prompted the proposed Sheep Mountain Traverse can be addressed in other ways. Also, these alternative solutions will help mitigate some of the negative impacts of recreation on the Trout Lake community rather than increase them.

* Close the Galloping Goose to motorized traffic, except emergency egress, and dispersed camping to enhance the experience of hikers and bikers and decrease traffic, pollution, dust, and wildfire danger.

* Make the section of the Goose from Lizard Head pass to the Trestle a hiking and biking loop with parking at the Pass, not the Trestle.

* Create a single-track bike lane alongside the Galloping Goose where it is a road. (This would require working with Trout Lake Land Company for the stretches which cross TLLC land.)

* Work with SMART to create a shuttle to Lizard Head Pass from Telluride, Rico, etc. to decrease traffic and parking. (This shuttle could also provide service to Trout Lake Boat Ramp with similar benefits.)

* Stop dispersed camping along Hope Lake Road and provide a shuttle to Hope Lake Trailhead from Telluride and/or the parking area at Matterhorn.

Lastly, we are finding the Club's assertion of community involvement in their proposal mystifying as they did not consult any of the Trout Lake entities[mdash]Trout Lake Land Company, Lizard Head Land Company, nor Trout Lake Owners Association[mdash]in the development of their proposal when clearly, we are stakeholders. Not only did they not seek our input, but the Club's board also refused our request to meet and discuss their proposal. We are gratified to see that their past proposal of the Hidden Lakes downhill trail, which was built without USFS approval and crossed over the water source for some Trout Lake homes, is not in this go round, but we have yet to see the Club tell their membership to stop using and re-clearing that trail after the USFS ordered it decommissioned.

Thank you for this opportunity to be involved in the process of making choices about the uses of our forests.