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Title:

Comments: Regarding the Rio Grande National Forest OSV Travel Management Plan: as an avid snowmobiler, I want to express my support for keeping over-snow access open. I believe through proper management and education, trails, roads, and areas can remain open without negative impacts, especially for over snow because there is little to no evidence of any people or machines having been there after just a few weeks, or even days in some cases.

I wholly support protecting wildlife, as well, but as an experienced rider with much time spent in winter playgrounds, I don't think OSVs are much of a threat. With the setting coated in white, spotting wildlife and movement from a distance is very easy; as such, responsible riders can avoid wildlife. Also, in my experience, the density of riders out recreating is small, there is a vast amount of area that wildlife and riders can coexist and never cross each other's paths. If studies indicate that OSV users in an area are detrimental to wildlife, I support restricting usage in small areas, but only once proven that wildlife is affected. Until then, I just cannot believe that the vast amounts of area and the relatively small number of users are a threat to animals.

Additionally, as the BRC alluded to, there is already very restrictive management in the areas bordering the forest. Forest Service lands should be managed for the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Restricting OSV use to specific dates is arbitrary, unless those dates are well before the typical start of winter and well after the end. Using randomly selected dates to control usage, outside of consideration of when winter storms might allow access, reduces availability for no good reason. This is also the case with minimum snow depth requirements. This is hard to gauge as snowfall can vary greatly within just a few miles. So when a trailhead might be barely covered, an adjacent area might provide some of the very best conditions. It should be left to the OSV riders to determine what coverage is enough, as rocks and stumps threaten our machines, we do not want to be out there without plenty of snow coverage anyway. Snow depth is not a reliable standard for motorized access.

Lastly, I am opposed to the USFS closing any areas to OSV use for alleged user conflict. USFS shouldn't be basing its decisions off of the subjective preferences of users who want to restrict the use of others. Areas that are currently closed to motorized users for cross country skiing should be analyzed to be opened to OSV use. It is clear in other areas these uses can co-exist. Public lands are not very public when only certain users can access these areas.