

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/12/2024 12:00:00 AM

First name: Steve

Last name: Whittingham

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to share scoping feedback regarding the Rio Grande National Forest OSV Travel Management Plan. I enjoy recreating on public land and want to express my support for keeping access open in the Rio Grande Forest for all types of recreation uses, including OSV use. I believe through proper management and education, trails, roads, and areas can remain open without negative impacts. Proper access will help mitigate damage by preventing concentration of use and impacts.

These forests include wilderness areas and other restrictive designations. In other words, there is already very restrictive management in the areas bordering the forest and Forest Service lands should be managed for the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Restricting OSV use to specific dates is arbitrary and capricious. The USFS should develop an alternative that allows the date-restricted areas to be managed when motorized access standards are met. This is also the case with minimum snow depth requirements. This is hard to gauge as different areas and snow drifts will show different measurements. Users are best aware of their machines and what is compatible to not injure themselves, damage the landscape or their machines. Snow depth isn't a reliable standard for motorized access. Managers should have discretion to allow OSV use if the use won't result in meaningful environmental impacts.

The USFS should finally begin to reverse its decades-long systematic discrimination against those with mobility impairment-related disabilities. Travel management policies focused on "minimizing" the environmental impacts of motorized recreation have resulted in a dramatic increase of lands that are closed to those who can only access public lands with motorized assistance. OSV access allows those with mobility impairment disabilities to enjoy winter recreation on USFS lands. The scoping document shows proposes areas that are only available to non-motorized users. There are no areas proposed restricted to non-motorized users. This shows a bias towards motorized users.

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.

USFS needs to be following the Winter ROS protocol with these designations. The area near Crestone should not be closed to motorized users. There are many areas being proposed as semi-primitive non-motorized that I do not believe area greater than 2,500 acres. This is not in compliance with the USFS protocol. These designations should not be used as a tool to close areas to motorized users but as an analysis to see where winter recreation is historically occurring in order to meet the growing demands of outdoor recreation.

In conclusion, I believe in shared use and that there is enough public land for all to enjoy as long as agencies use best practices. Please refrain from closures as roads and trails are critical to the forest.