

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/24/2024 6:21:05 PM

First name: Jennifer

Last name: Cram

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Blue Lakes Management Plan Team and Objection Reviewing Officer:

I would like to object to the Final Environmental Assessment for the GMUG Blue Lakes Visitor Use Management Plan. I appreciate all the effort that went into the Final Plan and the detailed responses to the many raised issues and concerns. I understand that many aspects of the plan are as yet unknown (the specifics of the permit system) and will have to be worked out and probably adjusted over time.

The planning area is divided into 5 zones. My objection concerns access to the Blue Lakes Wilderness zone but away from the lakes; this concern was clearly part of my comments on the Draft EA.

The Wilderness zone in the Final EA Blue Lakes VUM Permit Area Map is a large area but the over-use problem is completely around and close-to the lakes themselves. There is currently significant interesting and beautiful and solitary off-trail Wilderness hiking up into the basins to the west of the Blue Lakes trail; I have never seen other people hiking in these areas. The problem is that you need to use the trail as high as 10,800 ft to access this Wilderness before you go off-trail. That trail and that huge part of the Wilderness area will now be off-limits unless the user gets one of the (anticipated very-hard-to-get) parking and hiking permits.

Below are two possibilities that I would like to be considered. In both cases the current Wilderness would need to be sub-divided into a "Blue Lakes zone" and "Other Wilderness zone". The subdivision could be similar to the one proposed in Objector MDavis's letter.

1) After sub-dividing the Wilderness zone the permits could apply to the Blue Lakes zone specifically but unpermitted trail access would still be allowed up to a certain point and unpermitted Wilderness off-trail hiking would be allowed in the "Other Wilderness zone"- you could hike on the trail up to below the lower lake (~10,800') and then go cross-country up to the west without a permit. I think that you can hike off-trail from the parking area to the Wilderness boundary without a permit in the current Final EA, but you still might not be able to park, and even then you are not allowed to hike further into the Wilderness area without a permit, even off-trail. In any case, I don't think that "off-trail from the TH" would be a reasonable way to get up to above 10,500 ft even if you were allowed to hike off-trail in the current proposed Wilderness zone without a permit.

2) After subdividing the zone, a small number of additional trail/parking permits could be available for use of the Blue Lakes Trail to access Wilderness away from the lakes. This would have to be clearly for use away from the lakes, and you would have to be careful that users did not abuse that permit to "sneak into" the Blue Lakes zone. Perhaps the applicants could be required to specify where they will be going. I expect that climbers may have some of the same concerns about access to non-lake parts of the current Wilderness area. I did see a reasonable proposed map in one of the other objector's comments (MDavis) about decreasing the permit-required zone, but that map still did not allow for unpermitted trail access.

I understand there are no easy answers here. Again, thank-you for the opportunity to participate in this process.

Jennifer Cram