

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 6/10/2024 1:40:45 PM

First name: Mary

Last name: Gallagher

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am a board member of the NM Cross Country Ski Club located in Albuquerque, NM. Our membership consists of 300 people living in and outside the state of NM. As an avid cross country skier since the mid 70s, I have participated in both back country skiing as well as track skiing over the years.

I did attend the Zoom June 6 presentation on June 6 with the USFS. I would like to address the following concerns related to the Rio Grande National Forest Over Snow Travel Management Project #65529.

Chama area cross country skiing:

1. The Chama Chili Ski Classic has been going strong for 51 seasons. I entered and skied the Wooden Ski Division in 2024 and 2023. Prior to those events, I entered and skied the 10 k races in the 70's which at the time were directed/managed by Tom Gonzales of Mountains & Rivers of Albuquerque. I have fond memories of all events and am always amazed of the dedication and hard physical work that it takes to create the ski race track which now includes skating lanes. This past year was no exception. The team spent long hours creating the course as a very recent heavy snowfall earlier in the week created challenging conditions for course layout. This provides a venue for many participants to enjoy the camaraderie of fellow skiers from ages 2 - mid 80's. It's fabulous and amazing to be out in the quiet, enjoy the light hearted fun and exercise at the same time. Plus, this group of people pays entry fees to the race, books nights at local motels/hotels, buys food at Lowe's, eat out at the local restaurants and purchase necessary gas for their transportation. This race course and the hard physical work it takes to maintain it, should be honored for the entire season of cross country skiing. This type of cross country set track is a boon to the area. Add in the back country ski opportunities and Chama has some of the best scenery and cross country ski conditions to be found in New Mexico. Please honor this race course area to be dedicated only to cross country skiing. There is plenty of Rio Grande National Forest for the motorized over snow travel enthusiasts.

I will also add that the 50th Anniversary Chama Chile Ski Classic was outstanding. The food and drink offered in the parking lot created and added festive atmosphere to the race. Local restaurants, local breweries and locally sourced foods were available for all to enjoy. It was fun and the high spirits of everyone were infectious. As a cross country skier, I was proud to have been part of this race since the 70s.

2. The Spruce Hole, Grouse and Neff Mountain yurts are highly used by the members of the NM Cross Country Ski Club. These yurts provide a special outdoor overnight experience by skiing in carrying the necessary provisions for a 3-4 day stay. The quiet, scenery and pristine ski conditions are valuable and many look forward to these outings in the winter months. Sharing access to the trails to these yurts would be counter productive to the cross country ski experience which promotes quiet and pristine snow conditions. Motorized over snow travel ruins the tracks set by cross country skiers creating icy, rutted tracks which are difficult to navigate by cross country skiers even with metal edged skis. The noise level also is intrusive to the environment and there is question of this noise pollution and how it affects the wildlife in the area such as lynx. These yurt trips provide skiers the opportunity to further explore the backcountry in/around the yurts. As a user of the yurt system, I would strongly encourage that a 10 mile Quiet perimeter be created around the yurt system in order to preserve the quiet beauty and untrammled ski tracks. Cross country skiers are under their own physical power and cannot compete with a motorized form of travel in the back country. Please consider this unique difference between the enjoyment of the backcountry by a cross country skier vs. a snowmobile enthusiast.

3. Parking pullouts are another concern to the membership of this cross country ski club. What happens if 3 trucks pulling snowmobile trailers has consumed the parking area for the Spruce Hole Yurt trail? Where do these skiers park their vehicle for the overnight stay? These are important logistics for both motorized and non motorized users. Parking on the highway is not a safe option nor is it allowed.

I respectfully submit these comments to the USFS for consideration regarding Project #65529.