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Comments: Thank you for initiating winter travel planning on the Rio Grande National Forest. The current Proposed Action, however, raises significant concerns:

1. The proposal does not align with the "closed unless designated open" requirement, designating nearly all (>74%) non-Wilderness lands for OSV use without adequate site-specific environmental review.

2. High-value areas for nordic skiing and snowshoeing, such as Big Meadows Ski Trail, Lobo, and Rock Creek Ski Trail, should not be designated for concurrent OSV use. OSV use in these areas can negatively impact snow quality, create noise, and pose serious safety risks. It is a fact that collisions involving snowmobiles and non-motorized users often result in serious injuries and have been proven in studies to be more likely to occur on multi-use trails without clear separation. I have personally heard harrowing stories of (thankfully) near-serious collisions with humans and animals alike with OSV's in Big Meadows particularly. It would be of the best interest for all parties that these use types be designated in clearly delineated areas with consideration given to the fact non-motorized users require easier access to their trails versus motorized vehicles that have the ability to reach less accessible areas with less effort.

In Colorado, Nordic skiing and snowshoeing are significant contributors to the state's tourism and outdoor recreation economy. Both activities attract numerous visitors each winter, generating substantial revenue through trail passes, equipment rentals, guided tours, lodging, and other related expenditures. A report by the Outdoor Industry Association found that winter sports, including Nordic skiing and snowshoeing, contribute billions to Colorado's economy annually. The winter sports sector supports thousands of jobs and generates significant tax revenue for local and state governments? (Colorado Cross Country Ski Association)?.

Although OSV use also provides large economic incentive, the substantial economic contributions specific to non-motorized winter activities like Nordic skiing and snowshoeing is crucial and should not be overlooked. Supporting both these sports with clearly designated and separate areas as well as with equality in amounts of use areas would help maximize the economic benefits while ensuring safety and preserving the natural experience that attracts so many visitors.

3. The Forest Service must follow Colorado Parks and Wildlife recommendations to minimize impacts on wildlife. The EIS should analyze a deeper minimum snow depth than 12" in order to protect subnivean habitats, soils, and vegetation; given the lighter, drier snow in the Rio Grande. Classes of OSV's should also be considered when examining minimum snow depths for OSV's.

I urge the Forest Service to consider these points carefully to ensure a sustainable, safe, and balanced winter travel plan.