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Title:

Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this new travel plan. It will be nice to have areas specifically designated as non-motorized after years of almost all areas (aside from wilderness, etc.) being open to motorized vehicles.

I am a member of all three nordic clubs in the San Luis Valley and help groom trails for the San Juan Nordic Club. I've enjoyed trails groomed by all three clubs and also enjoy skiing ungroomed areas both on cross country skis and for back-country skiing. I've been skiing since I was a little kid and I love that this form of recreation allows me access to the wilderness in the winter for exercise, but also for the joy of being outside. I love looking for animal tracks and the wildlife encounters are wonderful, though rare, in the winter.

As groomers of the nordic trails, we use snowmachines that pull implements to compact the snow. I understand that snow compaction and its affect on wildlife, flora and water quality is something that you'll be considering. I would urge you to consider a lesser snow depth than 12" or greater for the grooming of trails (at the very least on roads) by the smaller equipment, like snowmachines and tracked utvs. None of us that groom (for snowmobile trails or nordic trails) want to damage our expensive equipment. I think 8" of snow depth before grooming would be optimal for us and still allow us to groom for a decent amount of time. As you know our snow is much more unreliable these days and not being like regions with wetter, higher quantities of snow, we have to take what we can get. I also think you might consider requiring different amounts of snow for OHV use based on whether it's a road or not, but I understand that making rules complicated can cause headaches.

There really are a limited number of ski/snowshoe trails in the area and all are snow dependent. For the San Juan Nordic Club, there have been years where Rock Creek cannot be groomed, due to lack of snow and it's often a very short ski season. Being closer to Monte Vista and Alamosa, it gets a lot of use when it is groomed. South Fork Nordic and Upper Rio Grande nordic also have this issue on specific trails and (in the case of South Fork) parts of their trails. If there is an opportunity to increase the number of trails groomed by the nordic clubs, or use another area when the snow is low for existing nordic areas, that would be a great opportunity for people. Having a variety of locations, not only gives us options when snow is low, but also makes getting out more interesting to the users of the trail.

Like so much recreation (OHV use included), I'm guessing nordic skiing and snowshoeing saw a boom since Covid. I know the San Juan Nordic Club membership has been increasing every year, to 132 members this year from 104 last season. And we do see people use the trails, from outside of our area. Nordic trails can be a fairly easy and cost effective way of getting outside for people. They can rent equipment if they don't own it. At least one recreation study has been done recently for the San Luis Valley and affordable recreation is important in a place where much of the community does not have expendable income.

Some people suggest that there are plenty of wilderness areas for non-motorized users of the forest may ski, but these areas are all miles into the Forest and inaccessible for most people without the use of machines. Access to quiet winter recreation should be available to anyone and so groomed non-motorized trails, close to roads should be a priority. I also enjoy backcountry skiing and I do enjoy the ungroomed trails but understand that many people cannot or do not want to slog through the snow. It's also a very different intention with which I choose to backcountry ski than nordic ski. It's usually more for fitness that I choose to do that and also as more of an opportunity to be away from people in the woods.

On regards to backcountry skiing, I support the idea others have suggest, of making the road up to Lobo as a non-motorized area. I understand that people like to snowmobile up and ski or snowboard down, but since that

road is ungroomed, it causes it to be hard to use for people on skis and snowshoes after a snowmobile has been on it in deep snow. We ran into that issue last year, coming down the road after someone had driven up. I see a lot of snowshoers on that road as it offers a great opportunity for non-motorized users to get up high in a safe, avalanche-free area that is easily accessed from the highway. Being near the ski area, I assume it gets used by visitors as well as locals. That area by Lobo is also used a lot by sledders, which is cool, because I'm not aware of many sledding hills for kids in the area. I would think that keeping OHVs out of that parking lot would make more a more pleasant and healthier experience for those users. I did one year see snowmobiles park at that lot in order to access the riding across the highway, because the parking was full, so I understand that parking for OHVs is going to be an issue you'll have to consider.

Lastly, I do hope there continues to be non-motorized areas around the yurts in the area. I've used the yurts near Cumbres Pass and that is such a great experience, not least because they feel further removed from the road than they are. Having also used the Tenth Mountain huts, I would think an envelope around the yurts would be the very least we could do. But a larger non-motorized area, separating the OHV use from the non-motorized would be easier to manage I think, since a lot of that area is wide open. I think some have suggested making one side of the highway open to motorized and one side non? I understand that enforcement of all of this is going to be an issue and the discussions about signage and education that we had were great. I think someone said that is was used successfully in the Sierras!

Thank you for your time and all your hard work on this. It is a daunting task but this plan is long overdue.
Laura