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Comments: Growing up in Durango and now calling Pagosa Springs my home, I've always felt a shared responsibility to protect our forests. As a child, I recognized their uniqueness. Still, it was only as an adult, after exploring the world and returning, that I genuinely appreciated the rarity of having such easy access to a variety of outdoor activities throughout the year. The Rio Grande area is a shared paradise for outdoor enthusiasts, offering endless possibilities for non-motorized and motorized recreation during every season. It's our collective duty, as stewards of these natural spaces, to ensure that both types of recreation have designated, sanctioned areas to enjoy the forest in their own ways.

The Forest Service must urgently establish clear regulations to ensure a harmonious coexistence of all winter recreation activities. Thorough consideration of the impact of OSV (Over-Snow Vehicles) use on snow quality, noise levels, air quality, and public safety is of utmost importance. The final OSV plan must refrain from infringing on high-value, non-motorized recreation areas, such as Nordic ski trails and terrain around backcountry huts adjacent to the ski area. Clear boundaries are the cornerstone of a fair and balanced use of these spaces, and we need them now to protect our natural spaces.

As a fellow lover of Nordic skiing, snowshoeing, and backcountry skiing and a passionate advocate for preserving our natural spaces, I share a deep-rooted personal connection to the Rio Grande National Forest. It's not just a place I visit but a part of my identity, a sanctuary where I am committed to safeguarding our natural spaces. Many of you share this personal connection, and this shared love can drive us to protect and manage these spaces responsibly.

I wanted to express my love for winter outdoor recreation and the enjoyment of quiet, wild places. My biggest concern is with the OSV. The management plans to have OHV vehicles in or near Nordic and backcountry ski terrain. Not only are snowmobiles, Timbersleds, and snowcats noisy and produce noxious fumes, but they also create deep tracks in the snow, which creates hazards for non-motorized users. These deep tracks can not only ruin the hours of hard work that Nordic volunteers put into grooming the trails but also pose severe threats to Nordic skiers, snowshoers, and backcountry skiers alike. I have been out Nordic skiing and had a snowmobile come up on me quickly. I had to dive into a snow well to avoid getting hit. These two user groups are incompatible and need marked designated zones on maps and signage within the forest and at trailheads and parking areas.

Critical non-motorized winter recreation zones on the Rio Grande include, but are not limited to:

- Big Meadows Ski Trail
- Rock Creek Ski Trail
- Lime Creek Trail
- Neff Mountain
- Lobo Peak
- Terrain surrounding the Spruce Hole Yurt
- Terrain surrounding the Pass Creek Yurt
- The "Matchless" area adjacent to the Wolf Creek Ski Area
- Wolf Creek Ski Area boundaries
- Big Meadows Reservoir Area, south of Forest Road 410

My other concern is the minimum snow depth for HOV usage. I support increasing the suggested 12" minimum snow depth included in the Proposed Action to minimize some impacts on natural resources; EIS must also consider how OSV use will affect natural resources that a minimum snow depth, such as water quality and trees,

may not protect. The EIS should also analyze a deeper minimum snow depth in addition to the proposed 12" to determine if 12" is sufficient to preserve subnivean habitat, soils, and vegetation. However, the new tumble sleds cut such deep tracks that can harm the underlying matter of plants, soil, and animals. A deeper depth should be considered.

To minimize impacts on wildlife, the Forest Service should follow Colorado Parks and Wildlife recommendations about extensive game winter activity areas, winter wildlife areas, and riparian/wetland areas. The plan must also comply with the Southern Rockies Lynx Amendment. One of the many enjoyments of non-motorized winter recreation is coming upon signs of winter wildlife from tracks to scat, and sometimes, if you're lucky, you will see one of our many wintering wildlife.

I also wanted to highlight the need for a buffer zone near the Wolf Creek Ski Area. I have been enjoying a beautiful ski day, doing some of Wolf Creek's beginner training near the edge of the ski boundaries. On a few occasions, snowmobilers approached the ski area boundaries and got relatively close, posing a threat to me and other customers enjoying the mountain. Additionally, the noise and fumes they produce can dampen anyone enjoying skiing.

Although we are still in the early stages of planning, it is crucial to consider how this plan will be implemented and enforced for the two distinct user groups. Designated OSV (Over-Snow Vehicle) areas should have clear, enforceable boundaries that use natural features such as plowed roads, ridgelines, and waterways. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should outline how the Forest Service will carry out and enforce the final plan. There is enough space within the Rio Grande for everyone to enjoy and engage in recreational activities while considering the peaceful coexistence of all winter recreation pursuits. Therefore, the Forest Service needs to establish clear regulations. It is vital to thoroughly assess the impact of OSV use on snow quality, noise levels, air quality, and public safety.