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First name: Heather

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear RGNF Staff,

I am writing to share comments regarding the RGNF Over Snow Travel Management Project. I submitted a separate letter in my role as the Manager of the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District. The following comments are my personal sentiments.

I am an avid snowmobiler and have enjoyed snowmobiling on the RGNF for over 28 years with my friends and family. I feel the draft maps that were released strike a good balance for the different users. I also enjoy backcountry skiing, so I understand and respect the closures at Lobo and the Pass Creek Yurt. I was pleased to see the primary areas I enjoy visiting to snowmobile remained designated as such in the maps. These areas include Fox Mountain, Elwood Pass, Beaver Creek, Willow Park, Upper Rio Grande, Cumbres Pass, Tucker Ponds, and Pinos Creek.

Regarding the minimum snow depths, I agree it is logical to set a minimum snow depth for travel off roads and trails. It is not logical to establish a minimum snow depth on roads and trails.

Please provide an explanation of why there is a proposed minimum snow depth for travel on roads and trails, and before grooming can occur. My experience is that roads, trails, and groomed routes are designed and located to minimize effects from all types of travel. Over the snow vehicles are designed for floatation and therefore minimize compaction and impacts to soil, especially on existing hardened surfaces that are already designed for wheeled travel.

How is it appropriate to allow wheeled travel during a myriad of conditions during the spring, summer, and fall months, but not allow over the snow travel on the same routes when ground is frozen and covered with snow? I do not agree that a minimum snow depth is appropriate for roads and trails. Resource damage to frozen hardened routes is non-existent and there should be no minimum depth for travel on roads and trails.

Further, please provide more information about the use of the questions included in the Minimization Criteria. RGNF staff shared in the South Fork public meeting that the questions would likely be weighted and used to assess future over the snow travel. While I appreciate the desire for flexibility, I think more detail about how the answers to the questions will influence the decisions made by USFS staff is important for the public to consider in this process.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Heather Dutton
Del Norte, CO