

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 6/14/2024 9:05:36 PM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Subject: Rio Grande National Forest Over-Snow Travel Management Plan - Prioritizing Conservation and Non-Motorized Use

Dear Rio Grande National Forest Service Team,

I am writing to express my strong support for conservation and responsible management of the Rio Grande National Forest. With the current and future increase in tourism comes a heightened responsibility to protect this magnificent ecosystem. Unregulated motorized use can significantly harm the delicate balance of the forest, impacting wildlife habitats, vegetation, and overall ecological health. I urge the Forest Service to prioritize safeguarding a majority of the land during the Over-Snow Travel Management Plan evaluation.

**Regulating Motorized Use:**

While I recognize the appeal of motorized over-snow recreation, I believe strict regulations are essential. Unrestricted motorized use can significantly harm the delicate forest ecosystem. Soil compaction, disruption of wildlife habitats, and air and noise pollution are just some of the detrimental impacts. Managing motorized use will help ensure the long-term health of the forest and provide a more peaceful experience for all visitors, including those seeking non-motorized activities like snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Limiting motorized use to designated areas and limiting access by not expanding parking spaces helps limit access and mitigate damage to the ecosystem and wildlife habitats. This approach allows for responsible motorized recreation while prioritizing conservation efforts. Exceptions to motorized use rules and restrictions should be granted for emergency services like SAR.

**Prioritizing Non-Motorized Use:**

Non-motorized winter recreation offers a low-impact way to enjoy the beauty of the forest. These activities have minimal ecological footprint and allow locals and visitors to connect with nature in a quieter, more immersive way. While there are some areas designated for non-motorized use only, most of the current forest service roads are multi-use which makes it unenjoyable to non-motorized recreationalists. Prioritizing and expanding non-motorized use will not only protect the environment but also enhance the overall experience for those seeking a more peaceful connection with nature. Encouraging non-motorized use fosters a more sustainable form of winter recreation, preserving the pristine beauty of the forest for generations to come.

By prioritizing conservation and regulating motorized use, the Forest Service can ensure the Rio Grande National Forest thrives for generations to come. A balanced approach that protects the ecosystem while offering a variety of recreational opportunities will benefit both the environment and the local economy. A well-defined plan can strike a balance between motorized and non-motorized winter recreation, ensuring a positive experience for all while safeguarding the sensitive forest environment.

Thank you for considering my comments and your efforts in caring for our public lands.

Sincerely,  
Iris Devlin