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Organization: Mountain Skillz

Title: Owner/Operator

Comments: I apologize if this was sent twice.... My original browser seemed to have frozen and the 'submit' tab went from blue to gray but never verified a sent document.

Thank you for the opportunity to be involved with this process and comment my experience and thoughts!

Born and raised in the western San Luis Valley, the Rio Grande National Forest has pretty much been my backyard for over 40 years now. All my life I have spent time responsibly recreating on the forest year around in just about every manner possible. But winter is my absolute favorite and I live to be on the snow on the mountain. As a permit holder, our business Mountain Skillz depends on snowmobiling access. I am on the mountain 100+ days every winter riding snowmobiles, teaching instructional snowmobiling, and teaching motorized avalanche safety courses. This also provides us with an opportunity to educate our clients firsthand. Our business is unique in the manner that the clients we bring in would not otherwise be in the area if they were not riding with us. This is unlike most businesses in the area that depend on the local tourism. Access to the forest is extremely important for our business to be successful and we are beyond grateful for the opportunity to be a partner with the Forest Service! I also have 2 daughters that love snowmobiling and that is our family's favorite activity to do together.

I have been involved with this process since the beginning. In addition to the Forest Plan Revision process from years ago. Our forest and it's uses are very important to me.

I oppose any additional non-motorized designations. We are already restricted from hundreds of thousands of acres of designated wilderness which is an absolute shame given the winter conditions in those areas with snow coverage and no big game presence that time of year. In addition to closures for the ski area, Pass Creek Yurt, and winter range (I am all for winter range for our big game wildlife to have a low stress area for feeding over the winter). I am all for equal access for all. In all of the meetings that I have attended over the years, I have never once heard of a single motorized user ask for exclusive access anywhere and try to prevent another user from accessing that same area. That is a selfish, entitled, grab for exclusivity that is unacceptable.

Being on the mountain literally every day throughout the winter, I encounter many other forest users of all different means of travel. I'm always happy to say hello and wish them a great day. I had an encounter last year that comes to mind that could have been thought of as 'confrontation' initially. I encountered people walking with their dog on the Big Meadows trail and they were quite disgusted with me being there on my snowmobile. I could tell by the looks on their faces and the fact that they didn't wave back or say hello as I passed by (very slowly and as quiet as possible). So I turned around and asked them if they were ok. They began yelling at me that I was not supposed to be there. I politely showed them the on the COTREX map that we were all on a legal snowmobile trail. I also politely informed them that the local nordic club groomed that trail earlier that morning with their snowmobile and that's why it was smooth and packed for them to walk on. Upon this conversation, they thanked me for the information and noted that they were from out of town and just thought snowmobiles weren't allowed there. Just a bad assumption. Point being, a little education and polite conversation can go a long ways. Neither of us interfered with the other in a negative manner and I hope that we all enjoyed a beautiful day on the mountain.

Overall from my experience over the past 25 years, there has been a good history with minimal conflict. We (motorized users) actually worked hand in hand and politely agreed with the Lobo and Pass Creek Yurt closures. Between those and the local designated wilderness, I feel like we can all share the remaining forest area. I also believe that almost all snowmobilers that use the area are thoughtful and considerate of the resources. As snowmobilers, we generate our own funds for grooming and often times that includes parking lot

plowing/improvement from the local snowmobile club. And we are happy to contribute to that program!

As a local citizen, father/husband of a family that loves to access the forest, local business owner, permit holder, volunteer, snowmobile club member, and ambassador of the sport of snowmobiling, thank you for this opportunity to comment and I appreciate your consideration!