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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I wanted to take time and comment on the proposed development. I am a lifelong resident of Mena, and consider myself an outdoor enthusiast. My wife and I love hiking in the region, and we take several long trips each year to hike in different parts of the nation. We actually look for areas and plan most of our trips based upon the hiking opportunities - Grand Junction, Durango, Breckenridge, Steamboat, Estes Park, Moab, Zion, Salt Lake City, western North Carolina, Tennessee, Asheville, just to name a few. We have hiked the Rich Mountain Trail and Earth Quake Ridge Trail numerous times. I also consider myself skewed to the left on the environment concerns in that I have a strong desire to protect it and minimize climate change because we love the outdoors so much. I say all of this to give you a perspective in who is making comments for the proposed development.

I took the time to read the environmental assessment and I appreciate the time and effort it takes in preparing one, however, it is a good resource for the community to review and to take into consideration in its support.

It is undeniable that there will be an impact on the natural environment in the development, but I don't see this different than anywhere that develops trail systems. It is because of trails that I am nature lover. I realize this will be a more intensive development due to the proposed ski lifts, but in the areas we have traveled that do have lifts, they do not seriously detract from the beauty and they open up new areas for people to explore.

I also see this as an opportunity for more people to get out and see the natural beauty of our area. I have hiked different sections of the Rich Mountain Trail numerous times, and to my recollection, have not seen anyone on the sections of trail beyond the first vista lookout. I see this as a way for more people to enjoy the forest on Rich Mountain. I already know multiple locals who have purchased bikes (even some who have not ridden in decades) in anticipation of the project and just for getting in shape now.

Also, as the City Attorney for Mena and a local business owner, I am excited about the economic activities it will bring to the area. I understand that no one likes change, but reading the economic impacts section of the assessment was eye opening. The potential number of new FTEs and visitor spending would be a game changer for our area. As I stated at the beginning, I was born and raised in the area, and I can't think of anything else that has happened that would have the potential positive impact on our community than full implementation. The one thing that I do think is underestimated is visitor expenditures. This is based on our extensive travels, so I believe that the impact would be even greater than what is estimated.

In summation, while I know there were be negatives with the project, I think it is very clear that the positives will far outweigh any negatives. I hope that my comments have been helpful and I would like to reiterate that I fully support full implementation of the plan.