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Comments: Megan Eno

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Dear Megan,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Telluride Mountain Club (TMtC) Trail Proposal 2023. I appreciate the work that the TMtC does in helping local governments and the US Forest Service to provide and maintain recreational access and trails for public enjoyment. I also appreciate the TMtC's consistent efforts to create and maintain a culture of stewardship of our public lands among trail users. TMtC's consistent efforts to educate and foster responsible trail etiquette is a very useful service of the organization.

This Telluride Area Trails proposal reflects TMtC's commitment to enhancing the recreational experience while importantly prioritizing resource protection. I appreciate the extensive outreach TMtC has done, engaging the public to gather meaningful feedback in designing these routes. It's no secret that the USFS and our local governments are severely underfunded and understaffed to adequately keep up with the vast demands on our public lands; TMtC plays a vital role in supporting these entities with volunteers, expertise, and sustained focus on responsible use.

As a private citizen who greatly enjoys wandering and riding around on our public lands, personally, I think almost all of the trails proposed here make sense.

My only real concern with this proposal is the Sheep Mountain Traverse. I encourage you to adopt Alternative 3 that eliminates the proposed Sheep Mountain Traverse alignment (both options A and B) from the proposed project. While the CORE Act is still a proposal, I hope and expect that the intent of that very lengthy, very collaborative process that involved extensive compromises, will be respected, and that lands directly adjacent to the CORE Act proposal will also be left as is. An equally strong argument for Alternative 3 is the December 2024, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed revised critical habitat map for Canada Lynx habitat, and Canada Lynx Final Recovery Plan. It includes 7,679 square miles of newly designated critical habitat for the Southwest Colorado Canada Lynx population. The proposed Critical Habitat designation overlaps with the whole proposed Sheep Mountain Traverse trail, so this trail should be eliminated. While the intention of moving bikes and hikers away from cars is understandable, the current routes for bikers and walkers is adequate; disturbing lynx habitat or proposed wilderness is not worth the benefit.

A South Side (Telluride) Perimeter Trail makes a lot of sense. I appreciate the effort to accommodate concerns brought up during scoping, by creating Option B. If private property easements are obtained, either alignment would provide a long-desired benefit and would help to get cars off the road and separate pedestrians and cyclists from cars, which is positive.

A Mountain Village to Valley Floor Connector Trail is a decades-long dream of regional leaders for obvious reasons (an alternative to Boomerang Road is needed between the population centers of Telluride and Mountain Village.) I ask that in this trail alignment you ensure that lynx habitat is not disturbed, and that protecting such habitat be the priority. I understand that this might mean that a completely different trail alignment might be needed here. (There are many social trails in this area, which I'm sure you have explored as alternatives.)

The other trails in the TMtC proposal provide a benefit to recreational users, without great disturbance to resources, and have the potential to provide enjoyable recreational access for trail users, including the Sheep Corrals connector. The Sunshine Trail seems to have major erosion problems and is too steep for most to enjoy, so an uphill, multi-purpose trail that creates a loop is a good idea.

The Ilium Flume Trail will be a fun addition to our trail system. I believe that it's an historic alignment and could have some cultural benefit of bringing awareness to the old flume of the mining era. I agree that this trail would improve connectivity between the existing Sunshine (T-35) Trail and the Ilium section of the Galloping Goose Trail, as well as between the existing Prospect Trail, Magic Meadows Trail, and the Alta Lakes camping area into Lawson Hill and the Town of Telluride.

I don't have a strong opinion about the East Side Wilson Mesa Trail or Morningstar Trail. In my experience these trails are rarely used. I agree that they are both steep, rutted, and not maintained. The North Side of NFST#5505-Lizard Head Trail is also underutilized for the same reasons. I hope and expect that the wilderness characteristics of this wilderness-adjacent trail will be respected in any improvements to this area.

My only other suggestion/request is that with all new trails, signage be included that clearly informs and educates the public that e-bikes are not allowed on these non-motorized trails (obviously with exception for the Wilson Mesa Trail, which allows motorized vehicles and therefore e-bikes), along with other basic trail etiquette and stewardship pointers.

Thank you for your hard work on behalf of our public lands and for taking public comments into consideration.

Sincerely,

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