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Organization:
Title:
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White River National Forest

Supervisor's Office

900 Grand Ave.

Glenwood Springs, CO 81601

Re: Opposition to the Southern Tenmile Recreation Access Plan (Project #68593)

Dear White River National Forest Supervisor and Project Team,

I am writing as a long-time resident of Summit County, where I have lived for over 25 years. As a local, who getting up in years, and who has enjoyed the natural beauty and trails of the southern Tenmile Range for decades, I am deeply dismayed by the increasing restrictions on public access to these areas in recent years. I strongly oppose the proposed Southern Tenmile Recreation Access Plan (STRAP) as outlined in the project materials, including the expansion of parking reservations, shuttle systems, and potential further limitations on vehicle access. These changes would further erode the ability of locals like myself to freely enjoy the lands we have cherished and stewarded for generations.

First, the current restricted access to McCullough Gulch is simply not working and has already severely impacted my ability to visit these trails. Since the implementation of the shuttle system and the outrageously expensive parking reservations at Quandary Peak in 2021, I have been unable to access the Upper McCullough Gulch Trail, which I used to hike several times a year. The requirement to either walk two miles along the road from Quandary Peak or rely on the limited shuttle schedule-followed by an additional 0.5-mile walk to the trail start-has made it impractical and physically challenging for me. This has resulted in a significant reduction in my enjoyment of the area, and the project's proposal to build a small parking lot for only ~12 cars at the current shuttle stop, while continuing the shuttle and restricting roadside parking, does little to address these barriers. If anything, integrating this into a broader reservation system would only compound the issue, making spontaneous or frequent visits even harder for locals.

I am not willing to give up my regular access to the Spruce Creek trails in the same way I had to relinquish my visits to McCullough Gulch. Spruce Creek has been my go-to area for years, with its high visitation already managed informally without the need for heavy-handed interventions. The proposal to create a new parking lot

with 78-110 spaces and integrate it into a reservation system, potentially adding a shuttle in the future, threatens to impose the same burdensome restrictions that have alienated me from other parts of the range. As someone who relies on driving to trailheads for shorter, more manageable hikes, I cannot support measures that prioritize crowd control over equitable access for long-time users.

Furthermore, any removal or further restriction of 4x4 access to higher elevation parking areas is highly problematic, especially for elderly trail users like myself who are physically unable to hike long distances from lower parking lots. I am particularly concerned about the existing blocks on upper access points, such as the parking spots by the diversion at the upper Mohawk Lakes trailhead and the upper parking spaces for the Mayflower Lakes Trail access. Why have these been blocked? These spots allowed me and others in my age group to drive closer to our desired destinations, enabling us to enjoy trails we would typically use several times a year without excessive strain. Removing or formalizing restrictions on these areas under the STRAP-through proposals like improving 3.5 miles of Spruce Creek Trail, closing user-created trails, or installing gates-would effectively exclude older locals from these experiences. The project's focus on decommissioning trails and rerouting paths seems geared toward limiting vehicle access beyond formalized lots, which disregards the needs of those with mobility limitations.

While I understand the project's stated goals of protecting natural resources, reducing congestion, and improving infrastructure, these proposals appear to favor tourism and high-volume visitation at the expense of local residents. The potential management scenarios, such as implementing fees under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act or issuing a special use permit to a private entity, would likely introduce even more costs and bureaucracy, further pricing out or complicating access for everyday users like me. Public lands should remain accessible to all, particularly those who live nearby and have a vested interest in their preservation, without turning them into pay-to-play attractions.

I urge you to reject or significantly revise the STRAP to prioritize unrestricted access for locals, restore upper vehicle access points where they have been blocked, and avoid expanding reservation or shuttle systems that have already proven detrimental. Please consider the voices of long-time residents in your decision-making process. I would appreciate a response outlining how my concerns will be addressed.

Sincerely,

Richard Mason