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First name: Llyod
Last name: Athearn
Organization: Colorado Fourteeners Initiative
Title: Executive Director
Comments: Hi Sam and Daniel,

I had a few too many things to try to cram in over the weekend, so was unable to get to this in time to hit Monday's deadline, which saw me on Mount Lindsey in the southern Sangres. I was on Blanca Peak yesterday. I've been able to do a quick read of the proposal and maps, so wanted to pass along some thoughts.

1. Quandary Peak Use and Rank. CFI has been tracking hiking use on Quandary Peak dating back to 2014 as one of our first hiking use data collection sites statewide. While it may be splitting hairs, the assertion that Quandary "is historically the most visited 14,000-foot peak in Colorado" is no longer true. That was a true statement for a couple of years during the pandemic, but generally Quandary has been second to Mount Bierstadt in the years since (2022-24). The imposition of the parking regime in 2022, which may have had very beneficial impacts in other areas, dramatically cut hiking use on Quandary Peak. In 2024 was 46% lower than in 2020. As you look to manage these other popular Summit County trailheads, know that parking reservations, fees, shuttles, and similar management actions likely will result in reduced visitation. It also may have the effect of changing the demographic composition of those seeking out these unique places. My suspicion is that those who are wealthy and/or have more flexible schedules will still come, while those with fewer resources and less flexible schedules likely will be displaced elsewhere or will stay at home. At a time when greater attention has been focused in recent years on attracting a broader, more diverse demographic and getting less historically represented groups out participating in recreation on their public lands, actions like this likely will have the opposite effect. In comparison with #1 Mount Bierstadt, Quandary tends to have lower peak weekend use days, but higher midweek use. Said differently, most days climbing Quandary are seeing uniformly high hiking levels regardless of the day chosen[mdash]at least during the main hiking season.

1. Quandary-Area Trail Linkages to Trailheads. The linkage between the main Quandary trailhead and the start of the trail has always been a bit strange[mdash]more so after parking was eliminated along the road. The various kiosks[mdash]one at the parking lot erected by Summit County and the old CFI one now fenced off at the mini lot[mdash]are not at the actual start of the trail, which is awkward and they are often overlooked. The mini sign erected by a Boy Scout, which might cause people to think the Scouts built the trail, has limited messaging and has always seemed misplaced to me. Rerouting the trail and providing a better linkage to the trailhead should improve the visitor experience and the ability to educate people looking to set off on the Quandary Peak main summit trail. Additionally, the USFS should have a central role (hopefully in consultation with CFI) about the kiosk messaging. My recollection is that the current Summit County kiosk suggests that mountain biking is allowed, when my recollection is that USFS rules prohibit riding on that trail despite it being outside of wilderness, which would generally allow mountain biking.

1. New Start to the Quandary Peak Trail. As is noted above, the redesign of this trail is a great idea. CFI would like to be involved in discussions about the timing and construction of that trail, since we are uniquely positioned to tackle that effort.

1. Trail Linkage Between Main Quandary Trailhead and Blue Lakes Trailhead. People who climb the more challenging West Ridge of Quandary Peak generally park at the Blue Lakes trailhead, descend the standard East Ridge route (which is much safer than attempting to downclimb the West Ridge), but then must hike up the Blue Lakes Road to return to their vehicle. This is an unpleasant experience, one I have done before. It is characterized by sucking in dust and exhaust from passing vehicles. Building a trail in this area will significantly improve this hiking experience, as well as provide a new hiking trail for people who are not climbing the West Ridge.

1. Blue Lakes Trailhead Parking. The plan to improve and stripe the parking lot as a first step is wise, since it would seem to allow for more efficient utilization of the parking area while not yet moving to reserved/paid parking. While most of the people parking at the main Quandary lot likely are climbing the peak and will be out for many hours, only a relative handful of people using the Blue Lakes lot have the same profile (i.e. climbing Quandary's West Ridge or nearby 13ers Fletcher Mountain and Drift Peak. From past visits and confirmed by your data, most people at Blue Lakes spend less time and have a speedier turnaround.

1. Visitor Use Management, Hiker Displacement. This section describes how parking will largely set the capacity for accessing Quandary and other nearby trailheads. Since CFI works and monitors hiking use statewide, we are well aware that the 14ers have ranges of difficulty, use levels, ease of access, primitiveness, etc. As one person once commented on a 14ers.com forum, "Whatever the question, Quandary is the answer." It is one of the few 14ers accessed from a paved road. It is one of the few peaks reached by a formal trail to the actual summit (i.e. not even modest off-trail scrambling). It's topography and ease of winter access make it one of the safest 14ers to climb when snow covered. It is also located outside of Wilderness, so there is no agency preference for lower use to protect "solitude." And, due to CFI's years of intensive trail construction and maintenance work, it is one of the highest-rated trails in the state despite the consistently high use it sees. I hope agency leaders understand that Quandary is uniquely situated to be the best introductory 14er in Colorado, with use levels that are commensurate with this designation. Even the way the route lays on the mountain allows most of it to be hiked with minimal switchbacks and areas where people can cut the trail and cause proliferations of social trails. This is the perfect beginner 14er. One hopes that management efforts are designed to protect the natural environment consistent with high use, rather than as a tool to lower use absent any resource protection necessity.

1. Fees. The fee issue at the Quandary trailhead has been an odd one due to the various jurisdictions involved. Though people are going to access federal lands that have their own processes under FLREA, the parking fee and management system was imposed by Summit County without the same process designed to ensure that fees are imposed only where amenities dictate that fees are appropriate. It has been years since I dealt with FLREA issues, but from distant recall there was a bias against charging people for basic access to federal lands and that fees would be imposed when there were a multiplicity of developed amenities at a site. My sense was that the trailhead amenities were on the low end and might not justify a fee. The discussion of "free" options for use of the parking area is really rather undeveloped. My sense is that the library pass option only applies to Summit County residents, while touting free parking after 3 p.m. during the peak climbing season is borderline dangerous. During much of the June through September period, it is recommended for safety reasons that people be off of the summit by noon; recommending that poor people begin climbs after 3 p.m. to avoid paying the fee risks sending people into an unsafe environment and too late in the day merely to save money. Lost in

the dark and caught in a thunderstorm is not a great prescription for someone to save money.

1. Camping Regulation. There are few places in the immediate Quandary area for people to camp. The move to create designated campsites may be an important one to prevent a proliferation of damaging informal campsites. However, the move to a reservation system and potential closure of sites to avoid people using them to skirt parking regulations seem potentially problematic. CFI annually hosts volunteer stewardship projects, usually over weekends. These necessitate people camping overnight so that two full days of work can be performed. If these campsites are closed, where will people stay? Further, while unaddressed by the proposal, it is vital to stress that people climb Quandary all year long, while developed/managed campsites often are only open between Memorial Day and Labor Day. There is nothing quite so frustrating as the Forest Service designating and upgrading what traditionally have been informal campsites, then locking the gates during periods (early and late season) when people are regularly climbing 14ers and need a place to camp. Ideally any designated sites would still be available for use even if there eventually is a peak-season reservation system.

I look forward to seeing you on Friday and checking out CFI's work on the Blue Lakes trail, as well as exploring into the basin by Fletcher Mountain. I hope these thoughts are helpful in the eventual rollout of trail, trailhead and other protective measures in the Southern Tenmile Range area. Please do not hesitate to reach out should you have any questions or concerns about the perspectives I have shared.

Regards,

Lloyd