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Carlos Gonzales,

I enjoy recreating and accessing public lands. I believe our public lands are crucial to our American culture and preserving access is important as a nation. Responsible access to public lands is important to me and many others in our community. I appreciate

the opportunity to comment on the Rio Grande National Forest Over-Snow Travel Management Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

I strongly support selecting Alternative 3 as the foundation for the Final Environmental Impact Statement, while incorporating select provisions from Alternative 4 where they improve connectivity and recreational opportunity without unnecessarily reducing access.

Alternative 3 provides the best balance between complying with the Forest Service's Over-Snow Travel Management Rule and maintaining meaningful over-snow vehicle recreation across the Rio Grande National Forest. By designating approximately 1.2 million acres

for cross-country over-snow vehicle use and approximately 738 miles of designated routes, Alternative 3 preserves the type of winter recreation opportunities that have existed on the Rio Grande National Forest for generations.

I also support incorporating portions of Alternative 4 that improve route connectivity and access where those changes are supported by site-specific resource analysis. However, I do not support adopting Alternative 4's additional widespread closures that substantially reduce available riding opportunities.

I encourage the Forest Service to reject any proposal that creates de facto buffer zones around congressionally designated wilderness. Congress has repeatedly stated in wilderness legislation that wilderness designations do not establish protective buffer zones

on adjacent lands. Recreation occurring outside designated wilderness should continue however Alternative 2 clearly creates buffer zones.

Likewise, I ask the Forest Service not to establish unnecessary restrictions surrounding the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. The National Trails System Act protects the trail itself but does not create a mandatory motorized-free corridor on surrounding

National Forest lands. Any additional restrictions adjacent to the trail should be supported by documented, site-specific resource concerns rather than assumptions that motorized recreation is incompatible with lands surrounding the trail.

I also encourage the Forest Service to continue allowing over-snow vehicle use within appropriate Special Interest Areas and Research Natural Areas where that use has historically occurred and where it is compatible with the purposes for which those areas were

designated. Alternative 3 appropriately recognizes that many of these designations were established to protect unique historic, geologic, or scientific features?not to prohibit responsible winter motorized recreation.

The Draft EIS also places significant emphasis on minimizing user conflicts between recreation groups. While the Travel Management Rule directs the agency to consider conflicts during planning, National Forests are managed under the principles of multiple use.

Restrictions on public access should be based on measurable resource impacts, public safety, or statutory requirements?not simply because different recreation users prefer different experiences.

Thank you for considering my comments. I respectfully ask the Forest Service to select Alternative 3 as the basis for the final decision, incorporate beneficial elements of Alternative 4 where appropriate, reject unsupported wilderness and Continental Divide

Trail buffer zones, maintain access through appropriate Special Interest Areas and Research Natural Areas, remove arbitrary snow depth requirements, and continue providing meaningful over-snow vehicle recreation opportunities on the Rio Grande National Forest for future generations.

Sincerely,
Conor Lathrop

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