



SHEEP MOUNTAIN ALLIANCE

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June 16, 2015

USDA Forest Service
Norwood Ranger District
Judy Schutza, District Ranger
P.O. Box 388
Norwood, CO 81423

Dear Ms. Schutza:

Here are Sheep Mountain Alliance's comments to your letter of May 26, 2015 regarding the proposal to add and reconfigure ski trails in the Matterhorn and Trout Lake Nordic ski trail areas. We basically agree with San Miguel County's comments; specifically:

SMA supports the creation of the 1.0 kilometer New Hidden Valley Trail and expanded parking at the Priest Lake area now referred to as the Matterhorn Nordic area.

SMA supports the proposed 1.9 kilometer groomed trail in the Lizard Head Meadow area of Trout Lake Nordic ski trail area.

SMA does not support elimination of groomed Nordic trails at the top of Lizard Head Pass as a way of addressing potential skier vs. snowmobile conflict since the entire Trout Lake Rio Grande Southern railroad grade Nordic groomed trail is open to snowmobiles.

SMA does not support the elimination of grooming on the Upper Railroad Grade, Trout Lake Nordic ski trail area due to avalanche hazard. The stated avalanche hazard can be mitigated and has been managed by the Telluride Nordic Association for the past 20 years.

SMA questions your stated reason for closing the top of Lizard Head Pass to a groomed Nordic ski trail as a way of mitigating impacts to the Canada lynx. In a recent conversation with a biologist from the Grand Junction U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office, the biologist stated that groomed Nordic ski trails shouldn't pose any more of a problem to Canada lynx than snowmobile trails, and snowmobiles and their trails could be more detrimental to lynx.

This proposal fails to address or acknowledge the fact that when the Nordic groomed trail to the top of Lizard Head Pass is eliminated, the Trout Lake Trestle area will become the

only parking area for Nordic skiing on the Trout RGS RR grade. Parking at Lizard Head for Nordic skiers will become a moot point, especially for skate skiers. The result will be a large increase in traffic down a rural-residential one-lane road to a dead end turn around with very limited parking at Trout Lake Trestle in frequent heavy-snow conditions. The portion of the Trout Lake Road in question is only plowed if there are more than four new inches of snow Monday – Friday or eight inches on weekends and then only when the snow maintenance contractor completes whatever other priorities come first.

SMA does not support the Norwood Ranger District's larger vision to focus and encourage use of the Matterhorn Nordic area if that larger vision ultimately results in phasing out Nordic grooming in the Trout Lake area. Matterhorn and Trout Lake offer different ski experiences. Matterhorn does not have the scenic views or the wilderness characteristics of Trout Lake, but more importantly Matterhorn does not have the snow.

In order for this proposal to work, the FS must provide for/allow the following

- 1) a groomed Nordic trail to the top of Lizard Head Pass, and
- 2) additional parking at the top of Lizard Head Pass.

Otherwise the proposal will create more problems than solutions and leave the expense of the problem solving to others.

Thank you for your consideration of these scoping comments.

Sincerely,



Leigh Robertson,
Executive Director
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