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Rico/ West Dolores proposal

To: Derek Padilla and Debbie Kill

I am an avid (68 year old) dirt biker that has been blessed enough to ride in Colorado almost every year (started with the Trail Riders of Houston) - for over 20 years! I have seen many changes in both Texas and in Colorado over these years - many for the better, a few for the detriment of us riders - and usually to the detriment of the general public as we tend to take excellent care of our riding areas. My Son and Daughter-in-law ride with me every year that I can make it - beyond description of the joy we have together. I keep up with the San Juan Trail Riders since I enjoy the riding so much in and around the Rico/West Dolores areas.

It appears the San Juan Trail Riders have done their homework with the attached comments - which I'm sure you have received from many! Please do consider very seriously their inputs for, IMO they are the most knowledgeable and caring group that the riding areas have in protection of these wonderful natural resources for generations to come.

Mark Claussen

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(1) There is no basis for a seasonal motorized travel closure

The Forest Service is claiming that a seasonal closure is appropriate for elk security and calving. This is unjustified and not supported by data. Colorado Parks and Wildlife has long managed the units in the RWD like it does others in Colorado, to maximize hunter opportunity. Elk herds are at or above management objectives. In fact, the Forest Service's own wildlife biologist testified in the lawsuit that there are abundant

security areas between the existing motorized routes in the RWD. Any concerns about elk populations or hunter experience are unrelated to motorized recreation.

(2) It is inappropriate to create a non-motorized buffer around Rico

The Forest Service is claiming that the Town of Rico has requested a 3 mile "motor free" zone around its borders. We question whether the Town has properly formalized this request, and if so it is at the urging of special interests like the Rico Alpine Society and a handful of local business owners hoping to expand or create their own markets catering to non-motorized devotees. Eliminating motorized access to Rico would create safety issues. The Forest Service is not known for its sensitivity to local communities and would set an awkward precedent here.

(3) Subjective user conflict is not a defensible basis for motorized closures

There is some indication the Forest Service is relying on subjective "user conflict" to justify certain trail closures. There is no basis in logic or the law to do this. Our organizations have spent decades fighting this issue, and we will do so here. "User conflict" is intentionally manufactured by anti-access advocates. The RWD generally contains well designed and long traveled trails that do not have public safety or other true conflicts between uses. The entire RWD is "open" to non-motorized travel, there is a simple answer for those who wish to avoid motorized traffic "stay away from the handful of motorized trails.

(4) These trails have had sustainable motorized travel for decades

The routes that remain for motorized access in the RWD have ALWAYS been open to motorized access. Many others have been closed. The Forest Service featured this fact in defending the lawsuit.

(5) Non-motorized recreation opportunities abound in the RWD and beyond

The RWD and Colorado are a mecca for Wilderness and non-motorized recreation opportunity. The remaining motorized trails in the RWD are the minimum backbone of a functional trail system.

(6) Capitulating to anti-access interests sends a horrible message

The closures in the Proposed Action would send a horrible message. The CBHA suit was brought by a single plaintiff and driven largely by a few individuals, who have been represented by publicly funded law school clinics. After successfully, even vigorously, defending this suit, the Forest Service is now proposing to turn around and hand them closures beyond what they ever could have realistically obtained in court. If the Forest Service wants to be sued more often, more aggressively, by all users, they could not take a better step than to adopt the Proposed Action.

(7) Specific route proposals should be modified

The project area is subdivided into 9 different areas. The proposals are acceptable for some areas. Through our local organizations we have identified the areas that need changes and proposed some comments to specific trail-by-trail proposals:

-Area 2- Winter Trail 202, West Fall 640 and East Fall 646 should remain open in their current motorized designation. The Winter Trail reroute should be non-motorized, and an additional non-motorized trail should be constructed between this reroute and the Burro Ridge Trailhead. This offers a "motor free" experience and access to the Lizard Head Wilderness.

-Area 3- Spring Creek 627, Morrison 610, and Loading Pen 738 should be designated as motorized single-track.

-Area 4- Wildcat 207 should not be eliminated but rather extended southward to the railroad right of way. One or both sections of the Ryman Trail should be single-track motorized and connect Calico South 211 and Priest Gulch 645. Burnett Creek 641 should be designated as motorized single-track.

-Area 5- Sockrider 6 should remain a motorized section of the Calico 208 trail. Any non-motorized re-designation of Horse Creek 626 should be offset by addition of replacement motorized trail miles somewhere in the system.

-Area 9- The lower Bear Creek Trail 145 should not be non-motorized, but we would accept this redesignation if a bypass or suitable replacement motorized trail miles could be added.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!!! Please consider donating to or joining our organizations, and your local clubs. Without our continued vigilance our sport will be lost to future generations.