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Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails #44918

I have been a regular visitor to the San Juan National Forest for over 40 years. As a biologist and as a recreational visitor, I have watched with dismay as the impact of motorized use has increased degradation of the land, its wildlife, and vegetation. The impact of motorized use is vastly disproportionate to the number of motorized users and that impact should be limited by containing it both geographically and seasonally.

I am writing to urge the San Juan National Forest to protect the Rico/West Dolores (RWD) area from excessive motorized trail use by selecting Alternative E in their Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). It is imperative we safeguard the 245,000 acres of the Dolores River watershed for wildlife habitat, watershed health and quiet-use recreation activities including hiking, biking, horseback riding, fishing, foraging, hunting and more.

The majority of trails in the area should be designated for quiet use only. Non-motorized users have been increasingly displaced from the single-track trails in the RWD area by motorized dirt bikers - it's accurate to note that user conflicts exist! Motorcycles are inappropriate on our public use trails in backcountry roadless areas with alpine tundra, wetlands, meadows, streams and other pristine features. While dirtbikers are a small percentage of trail users, their negative impacts are disproportionately greater including the displacement of quiet trail users, harm to wildlife habitat, the elimination of potential for wildlife viewing, trail erosion, and the fouling of streams and wetlands. Motorized users have access to plenty of trails elsewhere in the Dolores District and quiet users deserve an area reserved primarily for their use.

Motorized use should be open from July 1 to September 8 at a maximum to protect elk and deer in the early summer. Secure and ample wildlife habitat is imperative for an array of species in the area and also important to me as a forest visitor with an interest in wildlife viewing, sightseeing, hunting and quietly enjoying our forested public lands. Volumes of research indicate that motorized use of trails is harmful to wildlife habitat and inhibits wildlife viewing as well as hunting experiences. Hunters are the largest user group in the RWD area and they deserve a quiet hunt annually from September 9 onward. As well, elk and deer would welcome a quiet spring season for rearing their young.

Please implement Alternative E, as it is the only option for protecting quiet users and wildlife from the noise, smell and hazards of motorized trail traffic.

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