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Comments:

Dear Ranger Padilla,

I would like to take this opportunity to make another comment on the proposed closure of many of the single track trails in the Rico/West Dolores area. I own a house in Rico, CO and frequently access the trails surrounding town. Most frequently, I go up Burnett Creek and access the Calico National Trail and then various other trails that connect to Calico, including East and West Fall Creek and Winter Trails. Less frequently, but still often, I ride Horse Creek to access Calico and the other trails that connect to it.

Since I ride alone most of the time, I tend to stay in areas that I can readily walk out of in case something happens to me or my bike. To me, it is imperative that the Town of Rico have some direct connection to the Calico Trail and all the trails that connect to it. This is important for safety reasons and well as convenience.

One of the main attractions of the current trail system in this landscape is the ability to travel around the area on single track trails and experience all the variety and scenery as well as the challenge the trails present while not backtracking or getting stuck on the highway for extended duration. This is truly a world class resource and experience for the skilled motorcyclist and I know of no other place that is as rewarding or challenging.

Of the various possible justifications for closing some of the trails to motorcycle use, none of them seem very compelling. Noise is I suppose the chief complaint of most anti-motorcycle folks. I firmly believe that for a hiker or equestrian to go into this area with the expectation of never hearing a motor run is an unrealistic expectation. There are vast areas very nearby which are Wilderness that would meet this expectation and the non-motorized user is free to travel anywhere in the area, not just on the trails, while the motorcyclist is limited to the existing 14 or so trails. I would also note that technology (muffler end caps) to reduce sound levels down to around 90dB is readily available and would be enthusiastically implemented by the motorcycle community if given the choice between that and losing significant single track trails.

Adverse elk hunter impact has been asserted as another possible justification for closing some of the trails. From what I have read, including the recent testimony of USDA wildlife biologists and statements from Colorado Fish and Game managers, this has been roundly refuted. The elk herd is in very healthy condition and it has ample security area to thrive along side the current motorized use of the trail system in its current configuration. This justification is simply not supported by any objective evidence. Equally unconvincing is the need for seasonal restrictions on trail use by motorcycles. The trails require a very high amount of work and effort to clear and this effort does not usually begin until late June. It takes 2 or 3 weeks once the snow has melted sufficiently to access the trails for the motorcycling community to bring chain saws up and clear the deadfall. Requiring motorcyclists to wait until July to begin this work, and running them off 8 weeks later in early September, is not reasonable, fair, or necessary to assist elk hunters.

Soil erosion or down cutting is another possible justification I have read about. Certainly any use of trails, whether by hiker, bicyclist, equestrian, or motorcyclist will lead to considerable erosion. I come from a ranching background, and erosion of top soil is very big concern for any land manager. From what I have seen on the trails, the damage has already been done and is not going to get much worse, whether motorcycles are present or not. The correct way to fight erosion and damage to wet lands is to close the specific parts of trails to all use while conditions are not conducive to responsible use of the trail, not to single out motorcycles for exclusion from entire trails. Closing specific parts of trails to all users is being done now on the Upper Calico

and it is appropriate to protect the section of trail located in the wetlands while the area is too wet.

Addressing the complaints of private land owners is yet another possible justification for closing trails. It is, in my opinion, totally inappropriate to give a private landowner outsized influence over the management of public lands by catering to his personal preferences regarding motorcycle access to the trails. These trails were in use long before the chief complainer showed up on the scene and created his high end lodge in Dunton. Just because someone has an aversion to motorcycles and owns property near a trail, is not a justification for running off the motorcyclists.

I was on Winter Trail recently and it appears to be in very good condition, in spite of all the complaints from the Dunton people. The part that runs through the wetland is a tiny narrow strip with no braiding or big mud holes or other damage. It appears to be rarely used.

In conclusion, these trails represent a precious resource to the skilled trail rider. I know of no other area like it anywhere. The natural geographic isolation of the area keeps the trails from being over used and the seasonal snowfall and late spring melting naturally manage the amount of time during the year the trails are used. When i ride solo, I rarely see any other users, and when I do they are usually on a motorcycle. Closing these trails would inflict a severe blow to the trail riding community. The Forest Service would be taking the best areas for this activity with little or no justification other than to appease people who want the Rico/West Dolores to fit their personal preferences. I would urge the Forest Service to keep the current trail system intact and forego any seasonal restrictions.

Sincerely,  
James Ridge