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Comments:

Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails #44918

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.

I have hiked these trails and enjoyed this area since I was 8 years in the early 1960's. We stayed in the cabins of Dunton (then called "Rancho Dolores") owned by the Roscio family. We fished the West Fork and Fish Creek, hiked the Fall Creek (East and West) trails, Johnny Bull trail, as well as the Mount Wilson and Navajo Trails, and just generally enjoyed the incredible beauty and serenity of the West Fork of the Dolores. In those days, the trails were quiet and undisturbed --- only the sounds of nature --- and were not rutted out and eroded due to motorcycles/dirt bikes. Family members and I have also hunted elk in the area for many years, though not as often in recent years. These days we have a small cabin on the West Fork --- my parents built in the 1970's because of the magnificent beauty of the area. The last few years we have tried to hike the Fall Creek Trails it was a difficult task --- ruts, erosion, and the noise of dirt bikes flying around the mountain. We see much less game than we used to. This is not why most people want to come and enjoy the peace and solitude of the mountains. I ask you to take action to protect and preserve the natural habitat from destruction and misuse.

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.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Mack McCollum

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