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Rico RWD EIS draft

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Derek Padilla/District Ranger

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To whom it may concern/ Ranger Padilla,

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion regarding the proposals put forth in the Draft EIS for the Rico-West Dolores Road and Trails Project. To start, thank you for the open house held in Dolores in early June to present the various alternatives for this project. I drove down from Telluride that afternoon and you took the time to discuss some of the changes at length. I appreciated that. I am a multi user of the trails in the area, since I spend time hiking, mountain biking and also riding motorcycles. I love the variety of activities and experiences that our region affords us, and I do applaud the efforts that the forest service gives to provide good experiences for the public. I admittedly do not agree with some of the choices/alternatives and directions, but I do still appreciate the effort given to serve the public.

For the record, my stated preference for Alternatives is to stick with Alternative A, but add a few more trails and connectors. Add the Rio Grande access to Rico, but still allow Barlow Creek as a viable option. Try putting more signage on either side of the residential section to stress low speed/low sound practices when passing through town. Let the local clubs like SJTR and PAPA, and maybe Stay the Trails to provide the signage and help "police" our own to see if changes are made. Allow Horse Creek to stay, add Tenderfoot and Wildcat. Do add the section at the top of Coral Draw to make that an easy viable connection. Make a proposal for minor mitigation that the OHV clubs can do to improve the downcutting on Ryman. All users contribute to the issue, but given some direction, I feel efforts will be volunteered to keep the trail off the chopping block. Do not eliminate Bear Creek as access to Gold Run. It is already a good connection, or open the Morrison Trail in addition, and reduce the already limited motorcycle activity on Bear Creek, but don't close it. More connections to the Mancos trail systems would be great and would also help spread out traffic even more. I agree to routing around the upper meadow on East Fork trail, because I think that would be a tough wetlands to work with, where going high and around the meadow seems like a simpler solution. I agree that the northern section of Calico needs more work. Maybe more timber to cross the marshy spots, or move the trail out of that area and connect it to Eagle Rd sooner if that is geographically possible. Keep Winter Trail, it provides a great loop, and the wetland/fens mitigation is easier there. There is no good reason why that trail should even be considered for elimination in all but 1 Alternative.

I do not like the direction that this proposal seems to be going in. I don't believe that the Alternatives really follow the direction given by the majority of the public when they have been asked for comments. I know some people are against motorized activities on trails, but I don't believe it to be the majority. A lot of the users in the area are multi sport users like myself, so I appreciate others being out there, no matter what method they use to travel. That is the general vibe I get when out on the trails, but I have been witness to grumpy hikers, etc. I

know when i ride, i try to smother everyone with kindness, good trail practices, and general good will, but I realize that there are some who fall short of that and are the example that people make when pointing to closures. From my experiences, those are rare occurrences from what i have seen in my 17 years of riding in this area. I know there are some people in the non motorized sector, mostly hikers, who wish for more "noiseless" areas. I wish to point out that more than 50% of the trails within the district are non motorized already, and those users can still access ANY of the other trails if they choose to, and when they do, generally their experience on the multi use trails is good. Admittedly, our trails see little use, due to our more remote locations and the physical intensity of our terrain, so the instances of negative interactions is bound to be limited. I wish you and anyone involved in the decision making process to understand that catering to the vocal minority, who is a group who already has the lionshare of trails, seems like an odd way to go about serving the general public's best interests.

I do not like that Winter Trail is slated for change in designation in all Alternatives but A. The owner of Dunton Hot Springs should not be given a higher priority to have the public trails changed to his preference. He wishes to have more noiseless experiences on his guided tours in the area, but he knew that the trail was historically a motorized trail when he purchased the Dunton property. To then try to change designations afterwards, to better serve his commercial interests bothers me, especially when he profits from snowmobile tours and helicopter skiing in the winter. Those are activities that are far from noiseless and also probably have the same negative effects that motorcycles do in the summer. This hypocrisy and the apparent catering to his strong preference to have Winter Trail redesignated appears that the Forest Service is preferring to serve one small user group instead of the general public. This is wrong.

As I stated earlier, basically i want more trails open. By spreading the motorized users out onto more trails and more connections so that there isn't as much back and forth going on (which would cut each hikers motorized experience in half because they wouldn't see the same groups twice) everyone wins. More inventory of motorized trails spreads out the users, so less traffic on each trail. I remember speaking with Ivan (Wildlife Biologist maybe?) at the open house. I was surprised to learn that the security areas are more than adequate for the size of the animal population in this region. That goes against the direction the EIS seems to be going. Why do a study then ignore the results? It is my understanding that not only are the security areas adequate for all Alternatives, but that they are almost double the size needed for the population. Given your own data, that would mean that opening a few more trails to create better loops and decrease traffic on individual trails, you would not be negatively impacting the wildlife. Also, it appears that since the security areas are more than adequate, there is really no justification for seasonal closures. By avoiding seasonal closures, you will also undoubtedly get more participation from the OHV community for the continued clearing of these trails. I would expect volunteer efforts to be less if a trail wasn't available until July 1, then the days spent to get it clear, to only have access for 2 months, doesn't seem like it would be worth the effort. The snow tends to create the seasonal closures of trails anyway, don't put additional limitations on the trails, especially since the studies show that there is no real basis to do so. Any other reason seems to be for other purposes.

I am concerned about closing Burnett to motorized users. It gives an easy out for Calico to the east since it is pretty central and it gets more people the opportunity to stop in Rico. I don't think you would find any businesses in Rico that would like to have less traffic. I am aware that the Board of Commissioners is in favor of closing Burnett, but i also know that they do not truly represent all of Rico. It is my understanding that the current planning commission does not wish to have less motorized access to the town and are more accepting/understanding of the OHV community and the role they serve for the area trails.

I support the NMOHVA and the letter they have sent to your office regarding many of the issues on how this project has proceeded. I am aware that it seems like things have not followed the process laid out in the Forest Service Handbook. I truly wish that everyone involved can take a step back and look at this whole project in a more reasonable fashion that better addresses the issues. The Alternatives seem too skewed in my opinion to allow those to be the only options. There are too many issues with lack of supporting data for the reasons for closure, especially when other user groups that create similar damage are still allowed. Please take the time to truly review the proposed options and think of how this could work better for ALL parties.

Despite my negativity in this letter, i do still appreciate the efforts given to serve the public and work through this process, the open houses where Alternatives were presented, and for taking public comments.

Have a nice day,
Trevor LaBorde

