

January 12, 2018

Objection Reviewing Officer
Regional Forester
U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region
1617 Cole Blvd., Building 17
Golden, CO 80401

Submitted via email to: r02admin_review@fs.fed.us
Also sent via email to D. Padilla, D. Kill, K. Chadwick

Re: OBJECTION - Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel management) Project Forest Plan Amendment

To the Reviewing Officer:

The purpose of this letter is to submit an Objection to the Draft Record of Decision (DROD) for the Rico-West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project Forest Plan Amendment dated November, 2017. I am a Habitat Watchman for Colorado Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (CBHA). I am submitting these comments as a representative of CBHA and as an individual.

As required by 36 C.F.R. § 219.54(c), the lead objector's name, address, and telephone number:

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Interests and participation of objecting party.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) is the sportsmen's voice for our wild public lands, waters and wildlife and we seek to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting through education and work on behalf of fish, wildlife, and wild places. With over 16,000 members spread out across all 50 states and Canada and more than 1,000 active members in the Colorado Chapter, sportsmen and sportswomen are increasingly looking to BHA as the leading voice on public land management issues. We represent the challenge, solitude, and adventure that only the backcountry can provide and we

are working hard to bring an authentic, informed boots on the ground voice at all levels to ensure that our roadless areas and backcountry are protected for the fish and wildlife that thrive there.

We submitted the following timely comments on the Rico-West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project. These comment letters will be referred to in this letter as they are indicated below – Comment 1, Comment 2, etc:

Comment 1- 1/24/15 (Scoping) Comments on your document titled “Proposed Action -Travel Management for the Rico-West Dolores Roads and Trails” dated December, 2014. (14 pages)

This is available at:

<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/Letter/775181?project=44918>

Comment 2- 6/23/15 Comments in response to the Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS dated 5/29/15 which initiated a supplementary scoping process for your document titled “Proposed Action -Travel Management for the Rico-West Dolores Roads and Trails” dated December, 2014. (20 pages)

This is available at:

<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/Letter/1302095?project=44918>

Comment 3- 6/6/16 Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Rico-West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project dated May, 2016. (60 pages)

This is available at:

<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/Letter/1212516?project=44918>

Comment 4- 7/15/16 Addendum to Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Rico-West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project dated May, 2016 (17 pages text with 15 pgs of attachments)

This is available at:

<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/Letter/1248547?project=44918>

Comment 5- 8/8/17 Comments on the Supplement to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the Rico-West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project dated July, 2017 (50 pages of text and 16 pgs of attachments)

This is available at:

<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/Letter/1425214?project=44918>

In addition to the above listed comment letters, we participated in the pre-NEPA workshops and ECR Assessment, submitted many reference articles in the pre-

NEPA activities, gave presentations to Mr. Padilla and staff, had multiple meetings with Mr. Padilla and staff, etc.

FP Objection #1 – Forest Service failed to identify numerous modifications to the current ROS map and carried these modifications forward in the ROS map for Alternative B Modified. Map revision is needed.

The Forest Service failed to identify numerous modifications to the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Map for the current condition (Alternative A) in its proposal, much less explain the need for these changes. The modifications result in a ROS map that is very different from the ROS map in Figure 2.14.2 of the 2013 SJNF Forest Plan. These modifications were carried forward into the ROS map for the proposed Forest Plan amendment (Map 1 in the Draft Record of Decision (DROD)). Both of these maps need to be revised.

In the section entitled ROS on p.4 of the Draft Record of Decision (DROD) for the Rico-West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project Forest Plan Amendment dated November, 2017 it states – “My decision adds 4,464 acres of SPNM recreation setting in the Ryman trail area, and the Willow Creek area.” As discussed below this statement is incorrect – there are many additional changes to the ROS that were not identified and the net SPNM area is decreased in the proposed map compared to the existing ROS map in the Forest Plan.

On p. 187 of the FEIS there is a short discussion of the methodology used for the changes that were made in the ROS map for the current condition, Alternative A – but no specific site related information. Examples of some of the changes that occurred but are not discussed are:

- 1- The Johnny Bull drainage (an area exceeding 4000 acres) was changed from Semi-primitive Nonmotorized (SPNM) to Semi-primitive motorized (SPM). We presume this is due to the motorized Johnny Bull trail in this drainage – but in the 2013 Forest Plan ROS map only a narrow strip adjacent to the trail is SPM. This drainage has many sub-valleys with ridges in-between – and extreme remoteness in areas in the drainage removed from the trail. Areas that were changed to SPM are more than 2 miles from the motorized Johnny Bull trail. This makes no sense.
- 2- The areas adjacent to the Priest Gulch trail and the southern part of Calico trail were changed from SPNM to SPM.
- 3- The area on both sides of the Wildcat trail was changed from SPNM to SPM.
- 4- The net result is that a lot of area was changed from SPNM to SPM. These changes result in a major change from the Alternative A ROS map from the 2013 SJNF LRMP.

You state on p.187 in the FEIS that “The Forest Plan Summer ROS map was redrawn for this project, in order to more closely match ROS protocol and allow for a comparison between the alternatives”. This change does not meet ROS protocol. On p.187 in the FEIS it states: - “semiprimitive nonmotorized areas were generally drawn ½ mile from ML2 or ML3 roads and ½ mile from trails currently managed for motorcycle use”. This is NOT TRUE for the Johnny Bull area and the other areas discussed in the previous paragraph (areas that were changed to SPM are more than 1/2 mile from the motorized Johnny Bull trail). Furthermore, we do not understand how this change will “allow for a comparison between the alternatives”. The change makes the difference in the number of acres in SPNM in Table 3-45 on p. 209 in the FEIS titled “Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Settings by Alternative” much larger for Alternative E (or Alt D) vs Alternative A or the other alternatives. How is this better for comparing? It seems to us that it is not correct because it misrepresents the real change. It must be noted that it is acceptable to have a motorized trail as a designated route in a SPNM area.

The above information regarding the problems with the ROS Map were presented in section 9 of Comment 5. None of the corrections needed to address these issues were addressed in the FEIS.

The changes in the ROS Map for Alternative A (changes from the ROS Map in the 2013 SJNF LRMP) result in a substantial decrease in the SPNM acres. Table 2-15 on p.47 of the FEIS states that there are 104,165 acres of SPM in the redrawn ROS Map. On p.47 there is an incomplete footnote 7 which states that “prior to the re-draw there were 114949 acres of SPM”. This can not be correct based on a visual comparison of the two maps and the fact that substantial SPNM was converted to SPM in the redraw – areas nearby to Johnny Bull, Priest Gulch, Calico South, Wildcat, etc.

By failing to identify the current Forest Plan ROS in Alternative A, the Forest Service has in fact skewed the analysis, preventing meaningful public comment, and bypassing the required analysis to make modifications to the ROS. ROS are not meant to be a depiction of current conditions. Rather, ROS “show broad *desired* setting conditions.” 2013 San Juan Forest Plan at 112. *See also* DROD at 4 (“The ROS offers a framework to establish the *desired setting conditions* of access, remoteness, naturalness, built environment, social encounters, visitor impacts, and management.”) (emphasis added). Any changes from the 2013 San Juan Forest Plan must be disclosed and assessed in this proposal.

An additional problem with this incorrect conversion of SPNM to SPM areas on the ROS Map for Alternative A is that this methodology is carried forward into the Amendment to the Forest Plan ROS Map. As stated on p.208 of the FEIS –

“Each Alternative would result in an amendment to the Forest Plan’s ROS Map for the RWD area. These changes will set conditions relative to ROS for the RWD area to be applied now and in the future.” That is, you have improperly eliminated a lot of SPNM area with the “waving of your wand” – without the required analysis, documentation, etc.

A further problem caused by this error is discussed in FP Objection #2 where the definition of travel suitability areas was based on the incorrect ROS Map – see below.

Suggestion for Resolution of this Objection:

Correct/Revise the ROS Map for Alternative A and revise the FEIS and DROD to eliminate the skewed analysis provided by the inaccurate ROS map. Disclose and explain the need for all changes between the current 2013 San Juan Forest Plan ROS and the proposed Modified Alternative B ROS in Map 1 of the DROD. The ROS map for Alternative B Modified should not use a new methodology to make a map that is different from the methodology used for the rest of the SJNF – and result in a substantial loss of SPNM area for the RWD area.

FP Objection #2 - Forest Service failed to identify numerous modifications to the Over Ground Travel Suitability Map for Alternative B Modified. Map revision is needed.

The Over Ground Travel Suitability (OGTS) map for Alternative B Modified (Map 2) has numerous modifications from the OGTS map in the 2013 Forest Plan. The Forest Service failed to identify many of these modifications to the OGTS in its proposal, much less explain the need for these changes.

The FEIS on p.48 states: - “For Alternative B (modified), Unsuitable areas generally follow areas of semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation settings on the ROS map (see map 20 in Appendix A).” As discussed above in FP Objection #1, the ROS map needs revision, and this revision needs to be carried forward in the new OGTS map.

The Over Ground Travel Suitability Map for Alternative B Modified that is given in the Forest Plan Amendment Draft ROD (Map 2), and as Map 20 in Appendix A of the FEIS, has the following modifications/changes that are not discussed and analyzed. By failing to identify these changes, the Forest Service has in fact skewed the analysis, preventing meaningful public comment, and bypassing the

required analysis to make modifications to the OGTS. The following areas should be designated as Unsuitable on the OGTS Map:

a- The Johnny Bull drainage area should be designated as Unsuitable in the OGTS Map for Alternative B Modified except for a narrow strip adjacent to the Johnny Bull trail that can be designated Suitable (has designated trail). This would make the Alternative B modified map the same for the Johnny Bull area as it is for Alternative A on Map 14 in Appendix A of the FEIS.

b- The area to the east and west of Priest Gulch trail and Calico South trail should be designated as Unsuitable in the OGTS Map for Alternative B Modified except for a narrow strip adjacent to the two trails that can be designated Suitable (has designated trail).

c- The Ryman Creek unsuitable area should be much larger than that displayed on the proposed OGTS Map 2. It should appear as in the DROD ROS Map 1 - to include the Salt Creek trail and the area south of Salt Creek trail.

d- The Rio Lado area should be designated as Unsuitable in the same manner that it is designated on Map 1 DROD ROS Map.

The modifications/change you have done for the OGTS Map for Alternative B Modified results in more area suitable for motorized travel. This change is new in the FEIS – not present in the previous DEIS/SDEIS – and the public has no opportunity to comment. Isn't this a violation of NEPA?

Note: A correction of the Map requires a correction of Table 2-16 on p.48 in the FEIS.

Suggestion for Resolution of this Objection:

Correct/Revise the OGTS Map for Alternative B Modified and revise the FEIS and DROD to eliminate the skewed analysis provided by the inaccurate OGTS map. Disclose and explain the need for all changes between the current 2013 San Juan Forest Plan OGTS Map and the proposed Modified Alternative B Map for OGTS.

Conclusion

Colorado Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and I appreciate your consideration of the information and concerns addressed in this Objection. Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 219.57, we respectfully request to meet in person with the reviewing officer to discuss these concerns and suggested resolutions.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

signed by Robert H Marion

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