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Dear Interested Party:

The enclosed scoping statement is a request for your input into winter recreation issues and opportunities on and adjacent to the Routt National Forest. This request is a multi-agency effort by the Forest Service, Routt County, and Colorado State Parks. You will find enclosed a request for information on three separate, yet equal components for consideration; 1) a **forest wide assessment** of opportunities and issues, 2) a **site-specific Winter Recreation Management Analysis**, and 3) an **addendum to the Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan – “Recreation Uses and Public Lands”** chapter.

1. **The forest wide assessment** is the first step in an inventory of winter recreation issues and opportunities on the Routt National Forest, and on connecting and adjacent lands. The results of this important step in the process will also be integral to future planning efforts by the Colorado State Parks and county planners.
2. **A site-specific Winter Recreation Management Analysis** and associated decisions is a set of Forest Service proposed actions to address user conflicts and issues in two specific analysis areas: Analysis Area A - Rabbit Ears, Buffalo Pass, and Analysis Area B - Columbine/Hahns Peak (see enclosed Maps).
3. **An addendum to the Routt County Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan – “Recreational Uses and Public Lands”** chapter to address winter users’ needs, not foreseen at the time the Community Plan was completed in 1999.

We are asking for your input into these three components of winter recreation by answering questions specific to each, and by evaluating the proposed actions. We ask that you provide site-specific comments that can be used to further refine and evaluate a range of alternatives. When commenting, please identify which component you are addressing.

In addition to this scoping letter, the Routt County Planning Department, the Forest Service, and Colorado State Parks will be holding open houses during January with the purpose of helping you to clarify the processes herein, and for our team to obtain input regarding winter recreation, and the enclosed proposed actions. The meetings will be held on the following dates in the following locations:

- January 26, 2004 – Olympian Hall, Howelsen Hill – 3 pm to 6 pm
- January 27, 2004 – Steamboat Lake State Park Conference Room - 3 pm to 6 pm
- January 29, 2004 – Yampa Town Hall, Yampa CO – 3 pm to 6 pm
- February 3, 2004 – Parks Ranger District, Walden CO – 3 pm to 6 pm

Sincerely,

//Mary Peterson//
MARY PETERSON
Forest Supervisor

//Doug Monger//
DOUG MONGER
Routt County Board of County Commissioners

//Ken Brink//
KEN BRINK
Steamboat Lake State Park Manager

Encl (2)

FOREST WIDE ASSESSMENT

The purpose of the forestwide assessment is to use public input to help determine immediate and future issues and opportunities for quality winter recreation experiences. There is a need to evaluate current uses of trailheads for overnight parking and camping, and to determine where those opportunities can be provided, based on need and issues. In addition, Routt County and State Park planners have proposed access from the Steamboat Lake State Park for all users, especially offering overnight parking.

A preliminary list of issues has been developed from visitor surveys, public comment, and Forest Service monitoring. They include:

- Parking lots become full because they weren't designed for the length of vehicle they're being used for, and because people don't have designated parking spots. Some people feel there's a need for more parking lots.
- Overnight parking and camping are interfering with snow plowing and day use parking. A vehicle parked in the middle of a lot can mean the entire lot doesn't get plowed. People complain if their vehicle gets plowed in, but the County and State plow these lots as a service to everyone.
- Sanitation at trailheads is a concern, especially at those used for overnight camping and individuals don't have self-contained toilets in vehicles.
- Some people feel there's a need to designate non-motorized use areas in order to ensure quality opportunities exist for that experience.

This is not a decision document; rather it will be used as background for current and future analyses of winter opportunities across the Forest, by Routt County to complete the winter recreation portion of the Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan and by Colorado State Parks for ongoing management and future planning opportunities.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Please comment on the following questions for the forest wide assessment:

- What types of winter recreation experiences are important to you?
- Where do you currently recreate in the winter?
- If the area in which you generally recreate became too crowded or otherwise unavailable for you, where would you choose to recreate on the Routt National Forest?
- What parking and trailhead facilities are meeting current demand?
- Where is there opportunity to increase parking, redesign existing parking, and/or increase access to the Forest from other roads?
- Where is there opportunity to designate overnight parking lots?
- Where would you like to see temporary or permanent bathrooms installed?
- If you feel there's a need to separate motorized areas from non-motorized areas, where would those areas be?

WINTER RECREATION MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS AREA A - RABBIT EARS PASS AND BUFFALO PASS –

Please use the enclosed map for Area A when reading the following proposed actions. Analysis Area A is bounded on the northern edge of Buffalo Pass from the southern boundary of Mt. Zirkel Wilderness east to the Forest boundary and Grizzly Winter Use Parking Lot; and from the southern boundary of Mt. Zirkel Wilderness west, including the backcountry skiing and snowcat operating area to the west boundary of the Forest near Dry Lake Parking Lot. It is bounded on the southern edge of the Hahns Peak Ranger District, to the northern edge of Sarvis Creek Wilderness, west to the boundary south of Lake Catamount, and east to the boundary south of Lake Agnes.

PURPOSE AND NEED

In the mid-1980s, winter users worked with the Forest Service to establish suggested motorized and non-motorized use areas on Rabbit Ears Pass. The suggested use system was expected to give users the personal responsibility of respect for other users' experiences. This agreement between users was beginning to break down when the 1998 Routt Forest Plan was developed. An increasing level of disregard for the suggested use areas and other winter issues were identified in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS, pp 3-165, 3-226, and Appendix K pp 255, 259, 260-264).

In 1999, a coalition of user groups was assembled as the "Routt Winter Task Force" to help reestablish these suggested use areas, and to look at a similar system on Buffalo Pass. The Task Force and the Forest Service were aware of the problems 'on the mountain'. Their stated mission was to help the Forest Service "...provide a balance of recreation opportunities including a variety of terrain with a system of easily identified trails and; 1) reliable quiet areas for non-motorized use and; 2) maintained motorized loop trails and snow play areas and; 3) designated motorized routes to access non-motorized areas.

The suggested use area was no longer being respected and conflicts between users were increasing. User conflicts in outdoor recreation arise when one individual's experiential goals can't be fulfilled as a result of another's actions (whether or not the other individual knows what they did). People wanting a quiet experience were complaining about the noise from snowmobiles.

Although the boundary has been signed identifying non-motorized use areas behind the signs, an increasing number of snowmobile users ride past the signs into the non-motorized areas. In addition, snowmobile riders generally report they perceive no conflicts with other users. As the trees screen all users, there is a safety concern that snowmobile riders may not know the skier's or snowshoer's whereabouts, until it's too late.

The suggested use area boundaries are no longer effective. Separating users would help ensure safety and minimize user conflicts. The Environmental Assessment will be used to determine the best way to maximize user experience opportunities by minimizing user conflicts and safety concerns.

FOREST SERVICE PROPOSED ACTIONS

In Analysis Area A, the Forest Service Proposes To:

1. Formally designate the areas and routes that currently provide opportunities for mixed use and non-motorized use. Mixed-use areas are open to both motorized and non-motorized recreation uses.
2. Designate routes in the area marked as “Backcountry Skiing and Snowcat Operating Area “ for “Motorized trail riding on groomed and marked routes only,” once these routes are established each season.
3. Designate the non-motorized trails on the east end of Buffalo Pass for non-motorized use, except for the section of mixed–use trail that follows the Grizzly Helena Road (FSR 615).

ANALYSIS AREA B – NORTH ROUTT COUNTY, INCLUDING COLUMBINE AND HAHNS PEAK

Please use the enclosed map for Area B when reading the following proposed actions. This area is centered north of Steamboat Lake State Park, west to Diamond Peak, north to Nipple Peak and Columbine Parking Lot, and the Hahns Peak area.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Use is increasing in north Routt County. Winter users have been concerned over the increased use and the lack of formally designated non-motorized areas. Because there is no legal public access from Steamboat Lake State Park or the village of Hahns Peak and the surrounding community to the National Forest, illegal parking and trespass problems have been increasing. There’s a need to designate a trail for access to the Forest.

In addition, the close proximity of Hahns Peak to the Columbine Parking Lot provides an opportunity for powder skiing not available on other parts of the Forest.

Issues in this area include the increasing demand for the powder snow on Hahns Peak, and thru traffic to the Forest by way of Steamboat Lake State Park and the surrounding community. The Forest Service is proposing to use the Environmental Analysis to determine the best way to maximize user experience opportunities. Please use the enclosed map for Area B when reading the following proposed actions.

FOREST SERVICE PROPOSED ACTIONS

In Analysis Area B, The Forest Service proposes to:

1. Designate a north-south thru-trail from the southern forest boundary near Hahns Peak Village, north to the Little Red Park area, utilizing FSR 410, FSR 490, FSR 418 and FSR 413.
2. Designate areas for non-motorized use on the north facing slopes of Hahns Peak, as shown on map, with access from Columbine, and west of CR129 to Nipple Peak along FSR 47, south to Diamond Peak. This non-motorized area extends to the Forest boundary north and west of Steamboat Lake State Park.

FOREST SERVICE DECISIONS NOT MADE THROUGH THIS ANALYSIS

This analysis will not consider discontinuing winter recreation (motorized or non-motorized), restricting non-motorized use in motorized areas, or outfitter and guide allocations.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Please comment on the following question for the Winter Recreation Management Analysis:

- Do the proposed areas and trails mapped for designated uses provide a reasonable mix of winter recreation opportunities? If not, what changes would you recommend?

FOREST SERVICE SCOPING AND ANALYSIS SCHEDULE

Scoping is an important part of the environmental analysis process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a Proposed Action (36 CFR 1501.7). For these reasons, you are encouraged to take the time to consider the questions for the forest wide assessment and for our proposed action, and to submit your comments by **February 9, 2004**. Again, please indicate the component on which you are commenting.

The NEPA analysis is required by 36 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 215, "Notice, Comment, and Appeal Procedures for National Forest System Projects and Activities." This letter and request for public comments has been mailed to other federal, state, and local agencies, adjacent landowners, and individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by decisions related to our proposal. Notice of this public involvement effort has also been given through the local news media.

Comments can be submitted on the Web at E-Mail: r2_mbr_vis@fs.fed.us. When submitting comments on the web, the **SUBJECT LINE** must be "**Winter Rec**" to ensure proper routing. All future documents and information on the winter recreation efforts will be posted at www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr/projects/rec and you are encouraged to utilize this site for all your participation in the analysis. Please let us know if you want to remain on the mailing list for hard copy information on winter recreation. When submitting your comments, please include your full name and address.

Written comments should be submitted to: Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, Attn: Mary Sanderson, 2468 Jackson Street, Laramie, Wyoming 82070. Telephone Number: (307) 745-2422. Fax Number: (307) 745-2398. After receiving your comments, the Forest Service will identify and analyze the issues raised, use the issues to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action, and issue a draft Environmental Assessment. Currently, plans are to complete a Final Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice for the analysis. Completion of these documents during the spring and summer of 2004 would allow implementation of the selected alternative during the fall of 2004.

IMPLEMENTATION

The final analysis and decision will be followed by issuing a Forest Supervisor Order and enforcement of the order. The final decision may result in an amendment to the Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. User fees are an administrative decision under the recreation fee demonstration project, and will be part of the management strategy in implementing any of the action decisions.

FOIA REQUIREMENTS

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who only submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.

ROUTT COUNTY

ADDENDUM TO THE UPPER ELK RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY PLAN **"RECREATIONAL USES AND PUBLIC LANDS" CHAPTER**

The primary purpose for the addendum to the Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan is to incorporate current recreation use into the land use goals and guidelines. The CDPOR will use the information to develop a management plan for winter use and parking.

In 1999, the County adopted the Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan. Shortly after the Community Plan was adopted, the North Routt area began to see an increase in the number of year-round recreational use, mainly snowmobile riding. Since this increase was not foreseen at the time the Community Plan was developed, the existing "Recreational Uses and Public Lands" Chapter does not include the goals, policies, and implementation elements to deal with the impacts of these additional recreational uses. The revised Community Plan will include the community's land use goals, and will be used as a guideline by the Routt County Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners for making land use decisions. An Addendum to the Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan "Recreational Uses and Public Lands" chapter amendments **will** include:

- Inventory of existing recreational amenities and operators,
- Mapping to depict destination areas on public and private lands
- Identification of problems and possible solutions for conflicts between residential, commercial, and recreational uses.
- Goals, Objectives, and Guidelines for future Routt County decisions

COLORADO DIVISION OF STATE PARKS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

The Colorado Division of State Parks and Outdoor Recreation is interested in determining the need for providing access from Steamboat and Pearl Lake State Parks to the surrounding National Forest lands for motorized and non-motorized recreation. The CDPOR proposed actions will evolve from information gathered through these efforts.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Please comment on the following questions for the Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan “Recreational Uses and Public Lands”:

- What is the effect of this increase in winter recreation on your quality of life?
- How can we mitigate a large increase in the number of outdoor recreation users so not to detract from the rural character of North Routt County?

DECISIONS NOT MADE THROUGH THIS ANALYSIS

Any county specific document resulting from this effort may not be enforced as county regulations unless corresponding regulations are approved in the Routt County Zoning and Subdivision regulations. If Routt County takes official action as a result of the analysis and public input in Area A, it will not be reflected in the Upper Elk River Community Plan. A separate document could be produced, but is not anticipated at this time.

If you are only commenting on the Routt County Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan you **may** send comments to: Chad Phillips, Routt County Planning Department, PO Box 773749, Steamboat Springs, CO 80477. Telephone # (970) 879-2704, fax # (970) 879-3992, email: cphillips@co.routt.co.us. All comments can sent to the Forest Service address above.

Thank you for your participation!