

Response to Comments
Red Canyon Travel Management Project

<p>Keep all the trails open to motorized use – the Forest Service needs to consider other options than closing routes.</p>	<p>The decision on what roads and trails will remain open to the public, and what uses are permitted on those routes, was made in the 2002 Record Of Decision (ROD) for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan. This project-level decision is limited to how the 2002 ROD will be implemented within the Red Canyon project area. Changing the 2002 ROD is outside the scope of this project-level decision.</p>
<p>We support the need for single-track trails in the area. Unauthorized ATV use on single-track trails in the area needs to be controlled.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User maps are needed for Forest trails. • More signs are needed. • Use squeeze gates to prevent ATV and full-size vehicles from using single-track trails. 	<p>These comments are included in the Purpose and Need and Alternatives 2-4 in the Environmental Assessment (please refer to pages 5, 6, and 17-23 of the EA as well as the Project Design Criteria for Alternatives 3-4 listed on pages 24-25).</p>
<p>There are not enough ATV systems available on the Plateau. The Forest Service needs to develop additional trails for ATV’s within the project area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open the “bench road” (w5549.1) to ATV’s. • Open 512.1h to connect the “bench road” with the Hanks Valley road (FSR 512). • Open 512.2c and 540.1a across Red Canyon to connect old hwy 90 with Hanks Valley road. 	<p>The 2002 Record Of Decision recognizes each category of recreational use as valid and legitimate uses of the National Forest, and strives to provide a balance of opportunities for all interests (ROD pages 3 and 4). The current Travel Plan provides motorized and non-motorized trail systems throughout the Uncompahgre National Forest to reasonably accommodate all uses, while being consistent with our mandates under law, regulation, and policy (please refer to Recreation analysis – Chapter 3 - in the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan FEIS, and the Recreation System Tables and Maps for the Plateau Division, pages 3-34 through 3-75).</p> <p>Additional trails within the project area would constitute an amendment to the 2002 ROD that is beyond the scope of this project-level decision.</p>

<p>We want the Forest Service to work with the local motorized groups. We support the PAPA alternative (Pro-Access Alternative).</p>	<p>Public Access Preservation Association (PAPA) has provided comment on the Forest Service Proposed Action, and proposed an alternative that would expand motorized trails within the project area. Numerous comments were received in response to an internet bulletin soliciting comment to the Forest Service to change the existing Travel Plan and support the PAPA alternative. On January 23, 2007 the Forest Service met with members of PAPA, the Motorcycle Trail Riders Association, and Thunder Mountain Wheelers to review the PAPA alternative in context of the 2002 ROD for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan. Additional meetings and contacts with PAPA were made by the District Ranger on March 13, 2007 and April 16, 2007 to further discuss the project. The Forest Service is continuing to work collaboratively with local groups and will be inviting them to do so for future projects.</p>
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<p>We feel that the seasonal restriction on motorized use of the Red Canyon trail for elk is unnecessary.</p>	<p>The 2002 Record Of Decision (ROD) for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan includes the rationale for the seasonal closures for wildlife on page 9. The dates for the seasonal restriction are developed around the biological needs of elk and to alleviate conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation.</p> <p>The concept and analysis of Habitat Effectiveness is described in the Final EIS for the Uncompahgre NF Travel Plan on pages 3-112 through 3-153, as well as the Supplemental EIS for the Uncompahgre NF Travel Plan. The GMUG Forest Plan identifies elk as the Management Indicator Species for travel management activities on the Forest and includes management standards and guidelines for habitat effectiveness on pages II-76 through II-81. Project-level analysis of habitat effectiveness and the effects of the alternatives are described in Chapter 3 of this project EA on pages 38-42, and 44.</p>
<p>How will the State Parks OHV grant money be used for this project?</p>	<p>The grant referred to applies to several motorized trails on the Uncompahgre National Forest. A small portion of the State Parks OHV grant could be used for trail maintenance, relocation, or new construction within the Red Canyon project area. Cash Matching Funds may also be used to purchase and/or install trail fence crossings (cattleguards), squeeze gates, or informational and directional signing in accordance with the terms and conditions of the State Parks OHV grant. The remainder of the grant money will be used for maintenance on motorized trails on the Norwood and Ouray Ranger Districts.</p>
<p>We favor the existing location for the Red Canyon trail over the proposed relocation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocation to the “bench road” is unacceptable. • FS should manage for higher level of difficulty of single-track trail. 	<p>These comments have been utilized in the development of Alternative 4.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing location offers a more challenging ride. • Improve the steep section with switchbacks and drainage instead of relocating the trail. 	
<p>Access is needed by the livestock permittees for operations and maintenance.</p>	<p>The type of decommissioning utilized for the project will have various effects on motorized access for the livestock permittees. Project Design Criteria have been included in the Alternatives evaluated in detail to provide full-size vehicle access to sites used for sheep camps. Other permittee access for fence construction and maintenance can be authorized by the District Ranger on an individual basis through the Annual Operating Plan.</p>
<p>The Forest Service should revisit the 2002 Record Of Decision for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan.</p>	<p>As stated on page 28 of the 2002 ROD, “the decisions made here are the product of long study and will not be revisited for some time to come. Any consideration of an overall revision to the Travel Plan that is put in to place with this Decision would require a public involvement and environmental analysis process similar, though not the same as, this one”. This project-level decision is limited to how the 2002 ROD will be implemented within the Red Canyon project area. Changing the 2002 ROD is outside the scope of this project-level decision.</p>
<p>Existing trail systems do not provide loops within the project area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open 512.1h to connect the “bench road” with the Hanks Valley road (FSR 512). • Open 512.2c and 540.1a across Red Canyon to connect old hwy 90 with Hanks Valley road. • Keep the Aspen trail and Big Stump (Hornet) trail for single-track loops. • Keep the “States Draw” single track trail open for a loop. 	<p>As presently designed, the Aspen trail provides a single-track loop trail. The Hornet trail is a single-track trail that can be used to access the Aspen trail or Red Canyon trail, as well as the Parallel trail and those trails that connect to it. The portion of the Red Canyon trail within the project area connects to the Power Line trail and back to the Hornet trail or Parallel trail, forming a loop trail.</p> <p>The additional trails proposed are located within sensitive wildlife habitat areas and would create additional impact to elk and other wildlife. Additional loop trails within the project area would conflict with the</p>

	habitat effectiveness standards of the existing Forest Plan and Travel Plan.
Closing roads to full-size vehicles will limit dispersed camping.	Some reduction in campsite availability would occur. Many sites would still be available to meet the public demand.
What is the economic efficiency of this project?	A cost efficiency analysis was completed as part of the environmental analysis for this project that considers the costs and benefits of the Alternatives evaluated in detail. The comparison summary (EA page 49) indicates that Alternative 1 has the only positive value for all partners (Forest Service and livestock permittees).
<p>Recreation use is conflicting with management of livestock.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unauthorized trails being constructed into several areas, affecting livestock access and distribution. • Gates are left open, allowing livestock to cross fences. • Fences are being cut, allowing livestock to cross. • Add a squeeze gate to the fence near the intersection of Divide road and States Draw road. • Additional educational kiosks with travel management /trail use etiquette information is needed at trailheads. 	Project Design Criteria are incorporated into the Alternatives evaluated in detail to allow trail users to cross range fences without having to stop and open and close gates (EA page 24).
<p>Where are the specific areas closed for the winter to protect big game?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specify what areas are referred to in the scoping letter. Does the project area contain winter range? • Do elk winter where the snow is 6 to 10 feet deep? 	The overview section of the scoping letter referred to the two levels of decisions made in the 2002 ROD for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan, area-wide and route-specific. Big game winter range was presented as an example of an area restriction. The specific areas with seasonal motorized restrictions to protect big game are shown on the two Winter Travel maps in the back of the ROD. The project area does not include big game winter range. Snow conditions are normally too deep for winter use.

<p>Do not close the Antone Spring and Iron Spring campgrounds. Use the money planned for this project for trails instead.</p>	<p>A final decision has not been made on the decommissioning of the Iron Spring campground. The Antone Spring campground was partially decommissioned 6 years ago. The Ouray Ranger District is presently working with partners to explore options for managing both of these sites. These decisions, and the potential funding to implement them, are not linked to this project decision or the funds available for trail maintenance.</p>
<p>All Forest Service seasonal closures should be managed under the approach of the 2006 Modification of the Uncompahgre Travel Plan to Allow for Variable Seasonal Closure of Selected Forest Development Roads.</p>	<p>As directed in the 2002 ROD, the Red Canyon trail is seasonally restricted to motorized use to protect big game animals and alleviate conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users. The Modification referred to was completed to provide more flexibility in timing of road closures for roadbed protection based on annual moisture and road conditions. The timing of elk calving, the rut, and hunting seasons do not vary, and neither does the need for motorized restrictions to avoid sensitive biological periods or conflicts between hunters.</p>
<p>Who were the recreation user groups the Forest Service worked with to develop the existing trails in the area?</p>	<p>In the Purpose and Need section of the project scoping letter, it was stated the recreation managers with the Forest Service have worked with public recreational user groups to establish two of the three single-track trails in the area. The Forest Service primarily worked with the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Association on the design of the Aspen trail.</p>
<p>Additional unauthorized trails and problem areas exist in and adjacent to the project area that weren't identified in the scoping letter.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The short cutoff trail between Little Red spring and the Aspen trail is not on the system and needs to be decommissioned. • The cutoff trail north of the Divide road connecting to the Dry Creek and Buck trails needs finished. 	<p>The short cutoff trail between Little Red spring and the Aspen trail is within the project area and can be decommissioned as part of this project. The other cutoff trail north of the Divide road is outside the project area. If the actions necessary to complete the trail and prevent unauthorized use fall within the scope of the 2002 ROD, they can be implemented without further NEPA.</p>

<p>The cumulative loss of recreational opportunity for OHV users in the region has been significant and should be brought into the analysis and incorporated into the decision making.</p>	<p>As part of the analysis for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan, the Forest Service considered a 40 mile area adjacent to the Uncompahgre National Forest as the Area Of Influence for recreational opportunities and ROS (FEIS page 3-29). This project-level analysis is tiered to the FEIS and additional regional-level analysis is outside the scope of this project-level environmental assessment.</p>
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