

September 12, 2023

Russell Bacon, Reviewing Officer
Attn: Objections, USDA Forest Service
Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland
2468 Jackson Street, Laramie, WY 82070-6535

Dear Mr. Bacon:

We are writing to share our comments on the Mad Rabbit Trails Project final Environmental Assessment (EA) that was released on August 10, 2023. More than 50% of Routt County's land is in public hands, and much of that land is within the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest boundary. We value these public lands and the many benefits they provide Routt County residents, visitors, and our nation.

Routt County has a longstanding tradition of working closely with area land managers, including the USDA Forest Service, to ensure that use and enjoyment of these lands does not compromise the ecosystem services they provide now, and into the future. We work diligently, year round, to be sure that access to these lands is universally available and that Routt County's roads, bridges and parking areas that serve the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest provide safe, high quality, access for all Forest users.

County roads that provide access to the Forest also serve as primary transportation routes for Routt County residents, including our agricultural producers. The increased recreational pressure these lands have experienced over the past decade, and most acutely over the past few years, has led to a corresponding increase in user conflicts, more frequent and rapid road degradation, and other challenges that become Routt County's problems to solve and taxpayer's expense to bear.

As we consider the Mad Rabbit Trails Project EA, we applaud the USDA Forest Service for its efforts, over multiple years, to engage the community in the project's development, and to make necessary adjustments to scale-down the project in areas that have been deemed environmentally sensitive. We participate in the Routt Recreation Roundtable, the coalition that was formed in response to the Mad Rabbit Trail proposal, and see a great deal of value in this continued collaboration as we all strive to strike an appropriate balance between recreation, conservation, and other Forest uses.

However, we would be remiss if we did not share our growing concern about the cumulative impacts of increased recreation on the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests in areas adjacent to, or within, Routt County. We question whether an Environmental Assessment, as opposed to an Environmental Impact Statement, for the Mad Rabbit Trails Project fully assesses those cumulative impacts.

In addition, it is unclear to us what the impact of increased vehicular traffic in the Rabbit Ears Pass area will be; an area where our County's emergency responders are frequently called to service. An increase in calls to the outlying areas of our County diminishes our responders' capacity to respond to calls closer in, thereby reducing the level of emergency response service that we afford all Routt County residents. Page 91 of the EA notes that the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) was consulted during the public outreach process. However, we can find no record of CDOT's specific comments on the safety and suitability of the proposed access to the Ferndale area from Highway 40 on Rabbit Ears Pass. It is important to Routt County to fully understand CDOT's position on access and any potential impacts that increased vehicular traffic may have on Routt County's emergency response system.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the Mad Rabbit Trails Project final EA. We value our longstanding collaborative, and productive, partnership with the USDA Forest Service. And we sincerely hope that you will give full consideration to the requests we outline in this letter:

- Please evaluate the cumulative impacts that may be triggered by Mad Rabbit through a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- Please provide us with specific comments from CDOT regarding the safety and suitability of the proposed access to the Ferndale area off of Highway 40.

Thank you, once again, for your thorough public outreach on this important project.

Sincerely,

Timothy V. Corrigan
District I

Tim Redmond
District II

Sonja Macys
District III

