

June 1, 2021

Shelly Grail
Recreation Manager, Aspen-Sopris District
sgrail@fs.fed.us
Kevin Warner
District Ranger, White River National Forest
kwarner@fs.fed.us

Dear Shelly Grail and Kevin Warner:

The Board of County Commissioners in Gunnison County would like to request the White River National Forest partner with us to address challenges related to parking and the volume of recreators attempting to access the Lead King Loop. Our interest in these challenges is related to County Road 3 (CR3), which connects the Town of Marble to the Lead King Loop trailhead.

When the Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners made an exemption for OHV's on CR3 in 2015, it was in response to vehicles blocking driveways and emergency access on CR3 due to a scarcity of parking options. Many vehicles with trailers would block driveways, attempting to get as close as possible to the trailhead, while others wishing to abide by the OHV restriction on CR3 would attempt to drive up to the trailhead; upon finding no place to park, some would get stuck or jackknife while trying to turn around. By allowing OHV use on CR3, some Lead King Loop users began parking vehicles and trailers in town and would access the trail from there. Despite this policy change, problems related to parking and access along CR3 have continued to steadily grow. The increasing volume of recreators has further stressed the limited infrastructure for those trying to access the Lead King Loop. At times, inhabitants on CR3 are prevented from being able to exit their residence due to the nearly constant flow of traffic and illegal parking restricting two-way traffic.

Although many of these impacts take place outside the boundaries of the White River National Forest, they are a direct result of the absence of suitable parking and policies that do not restrict the volume of motorized vehicles on the Lead King Loop in the travel management plan. In summer 2020, enthusiasm to socially distance by recreating in the backcountry resulted in increased impacts to public lands across the state, but the impacts in Marble have been exponential by comparison. The combination of limited infrastructure, narrow geographical boundaries and vehicle access to the iconic Crystal Mill and stunning scenery on the Lead King Loop outstripped capacity well before COVID-19, and it's much worse now. It is due to the severity of impacts felt outside the boundaries of the White River National Forest that we have decided to allow OHV access on CR3 to expire at the end of 2021.

For years, constituents in the Marble area have raised a number of concerns related to OHV's, safe access to residential properties, parking, noise and environmental pollution, and safe operation of unlicensed vehicles like ATV's. Much like the Town of Marble's recent discussions, we have long sought solutions to improve parking infrastructure and limit the volume of vehicles on the Lead King Loop, which spill over into the neighborhood adjacent to the trailhead. Therefore, we are asking the White River National Forest to partner with us to identify long term solutions, such as a suitable parking area near the trailhead and a permitting system. We would like to see concrete steps to plan for limiting motorized use and parking demand by 2022, with

implementation before summer 2023, and would appreciate guidance and feedback for the data required to implement such changes.

We realize that changes to travel management plans for national forests often entail years of data collection and analysis and stakeholder engagement. At the same time, the requests we are making for a joint parking and permitting solution are not premised on impacts within the White River National Forest, nor do they target particular user groups such as ATV's or motorized vehicles. Instead, they are rooted in a clearly identifiable lack of infrastructure necessary to support the travel management plan for the Lead King Loop. We seek a solution that scales the demand for access to the Lead King Loop to geographical constraints of the area and respectfully request that the White River National Forest consider any and all tools that would help expedite this process, including the possibility of reopening the travel management plan.

Gunnison County is pleased to continue our partnership and continued collaboration with the White River National Forest as we work to address the unique challenges attending access to the Lead King Loop.

Best Regards,

Jonathan Houck, Chairperson
Commissioner

Roland Mason, Commissioner

Liz Smith,