

GUNNISON UPDATE

By Dennis Larratt

Gunnison Travel Plan Decision Completed. Good news and bad news for motorized.

It's time for an update on a major land use issue that affects many of us, the USFS Gunnison National Forest and BLM Gunnison Basin Travel Management Plan (TMP). The Record of Decision was signed off on June 28, 2010, with the appeal resolution occurring in early October. There is good and bad news for motorized enthusiasts.

The Forest Service started this process in 2006, and has followed the required steps of the NEPA process: Scoping (2007), public comments, Draft Env. Impact Statement (DEIS), more public comments, Final EIS (FEIS), the last round of public comments, the Record of Decision (ROD), and finally Appeal resolution. COHVCO has partnered with the Colorado Trails Preservation Alliance (TPA) and the RMEC (Rocky Mtn Enduro Circuit) from the start of the process. The efforts have been led by Don Riggle of TPA, myself, a former USFS employee (let's call him Fred), our legal counsel, and the COHVCO team. We also got help from people like Walt Blackburn, Jim Maucker, Jerry Guthals in Creede, Blue Ribbon Coalition, several Western Slope clubs, lots of locals from Gunnison, Crested Butte, Carbondale, and more. A true team effort.

Don, and I calculate that the two of us have had 15-20 face to face meetings with USFS and BLM personnel on this plan, mostly in Gunnison & Delta. Along with Fred, we've submitted extensive comments at each step of the way. I've been involved in these processes for nearly 25 years, and I'm proud to say that we've done a better job from the very start of this process than any other plan I'm aware of. Each step resulted in a book of comments from our team. And we've made a difference!

We've reported in the past that many of the trails were at risk. Most of the differences came between the DEIS and the FEIS, but we saved one additional trail between the FEIS and the ROD. The combined efforts have kept open the following key trails to motorized use: the Crest Trail from Monarch Pass South, along with Agate Creek, Lime Creek, and virtually all the trails South of Marshall Pass through Cochetopa Hills. We got back the Carbon trail, the Italian Creek Connector (aka Spring Creek), and Teocalli Ridge will be re-opened once trail improvements are completed. All of these routes were scheduled for closure in the DEIS preferred alternative. Walt Blackburn and the Thunder Mountain Wheelers, who are very knowledgeable about the Paonia District, assure us that the results there are equally positive. Good stuff!

The bad news comes in the form of Doctor Park to Northbank Campground and Matchless Mtn., due to the DOW's protection of bighorn sheep. We lose the Lowline and Highline trails, plus the Beaver Creek / April Gulch trails for what we consider weak resources issues. We lose Ferris Creek to mountain bikes. And we lost a few 4WD routes in the general vicinity of Pitkin that should be open.

Meanwhile, mountain bike trail mileage increases significantly. Over 1,000 miles of roads, including 750 miles of short spur roads will be closed. These spurs don't affect

riding much, but they affect everyone who enjoys dispersed camping away from the main roads. And there are significant flaws in the required analysis. While the USFS process doesn't allow a legal challenge (an Appeal) based on route decisions, it does on the processes by which the decisions were made. Don, Fred & I finalized our work with our attorney and an appeal was submitted on behalf of TPA, COHVCO, RMEC, & Blue Ribbon Coalition. If you are suffering from insomnia, you can read all the details in our comments and the appeal at the TPA website: www.coloradotpa.org. Unfortunately, we didn't gain anything in the appeal process, and the High Country Citizens Alliance did. What they gained was that the USFS will be required to re-assess the Crest Trail as part of a CDNST analysis. We believe that we have the data to support maintaining the Crest as motorized, but we can't let up our guard. If you, or anyone you know, rode the Crest trail prior to 1978, we need to talk to you. Please contact Dennis @ dlarratt@cohvco.org

While Don, Glenn Graham, and I don't get paid, even for travel, Fred and the attorney are expensive. So are the printing of the maps required to closely analyze each step's changes, the 1000's of pages of USFS documents, as well as publishing our comments for each key member of the USFS and BLM team involved in the process. COHVCO and the TPA have split all of the costs 50/50, and the RMEC is has been one of COHVCO's biggest supporters since our start in 1987. YOUR SUPPORT OF THESE ORGANIZATIONS IS ALSO NEEDED AND APPRECIATED!

**Please join COHVCO and make an additional donation.
Donations the TPA are also tax deductible. Ride
responsibly, and help us protect Colorado's great riding!**