

Commentary...

FS wilderness restrictions are too severe

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Columnist

“No significant impact” or “negligible” is the repetitive mantra of the Forest Service in their perfunctory “analysis” of their draconian measures limiting access to virtually all of our local wilderness. Poised for adoption in 2020, these restrictions may not have significant impact from their point of view; but they sure as heck have plenty of impact on me.

Like many Sisters-area residents, the fact of my living here is not an accident; and access to our wonderful wilderness is a key part of what makes living here special. Apparently considered by the Forest Service to be a mere bureaucratic inconvenience, the proposed limited-access rules, in fact, constitute a catastrophic infringement of personal freedom that would fundamentally change my way of life.

The Forest Service’s 40-page decision document starts out with the scary proclamation that, “The most

effective way to reduce recreation-related resource impacts would be to completely prohibit recreation in the project area.” And, in fact, a careful analysis of the “analysis” lends the impression that this is exactly what the Forest Service would prefer. That way, the government would not have to be bothered with the troublesome burden of actually managing all those thousands of acres entrusted to them.

Unfortunately for that easy solution, the decision begrudgingly notes that “This approach would not be in alignment with the Wilderness Act,” or, for that matter, the Forest Plan, which states, “Wilderness shall be made available for maximum public recreation use and enjoyment, consistent with resource preservation and maintenance of the wilderness environment.”

So, faced with being denied the easiest option of just closing the forest, the Forest Service seems to have seized upon the next closest thing. The decision states, “Alternative 4 Modified

represents a restrained use of the management actions that were analyzed...” Selection of this option is nothing close to “restrained.” More honestly, it is a very slightly modified extreme that still carries the bureaucratic effect of limiting wilderness use to such an extent that its management is no longer a bothersome issue.

In truth, the Forest Service’s own policy actually requires “the minimum actions necessary to preserve and enhance wilderness character.”

So then, what might constitute the “minimum actions necessary” rather than what some of us are privately calling the “nuclear option” that has been selected?

First off, restricted entry should be limited ONLY to areas with demonstrable crowding and damage such as, for example, Green Lakes or Canyon Creek Meadows. The decision itself clearly concedes that many proposed closures include places that are “likely” to be affected or have “potential ... to become overrun in the future.” There



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

If a current Forest Service proposal for wilderness use is implemented, access to local wilderness areas will be severely restricted.

is no justifiable basis for restricting use of areas based on speculation. personal experience that many of the closures are in

Secondly, I know from See RESTRICTIONS on page 23

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