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RE: Draft Preliminary Plan Comments

Dear Mr. Duran:

I appreciate this opportunity to comment on the Draft Preliminary Carson Forest Plan. The following recommendations supplement assessment comments that I submitted on June 19, 2015. In addition, the attached Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) Planning Handbook provides additional CDNST planning guidance and should be included in the administrative record.

Continental Divide National Scenic Trail

The following are recommendations that address CDNST plan components. The Forest Plan needs to establish and include a map that displays the extent of the CDNST Management Area to assure that the nature and purposes of the CDNST are promoted and protected. The Management Area direction needs to describe nature and purposes desired conditions that are supported by appropriate standards and guidelines.

The following *insertions* and deletions presents plan components that may result in providing for the nature and purposes of the CDNST.

Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (Draft Plan, pages 188-119)

Desired Conditions

- ~~The CDNST provides high quality scenic, primitive hiking, mountain biking, pack and saddle stock opportunities to conserve natural, historic, and cultural resources along the trail. Other activities and opportunities are allowed, when compatible with the nature and purposes of the CDNST.~~ *Consistent with the CDNST Comprehensive Plan, the MA provides high-quality scenic, primitive hiking and horseback riding opportunities and conserves natural, historic, and cultural resources (CDNST Comprehensive Plan, Chapter IV(A)). The corridor encompasses national trail resources, qualities, values, associated settings and the primary use or uses. This includes vistas, campsites, water sources, and other important resource values.*
- Viewsheds from the CDNST have high scenic values. The CDNST provides visitors with expansive views of Continental. The foreground of the CDNST ~~(up~~

~~to 0.5 mile on either side~~) appears natural and generally unaltered by human activities.

- The CDNST is consistent with a Primitive or Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized setting and may intermittently pass through more developed settings. The CDNST provides for a continuous route through predominately undeveloped settings. *ROS class inconsistencies are managed to protect CDNST values.*
- *Managers and Visitors* are aware of the CDNST and the nature and purpose of the trail designation.
- Conflicts among recreation users are rare.
- The CDNST has access points that provide various opportunities to select the type of terrain, scenery, and trail length (e.g., ranging from long-distance to day use) that best provide for compatible outdoor recreation experiences.
- ~~Wild and remote backcountry segments of the CDNST provides opportunities for solitude immersion in natural landscapes and primitive outdoor recreation; while easily accessible trail segments complement local community interests and needs.~~
- The national scenic, historic, and recreation trails on the forest and the nature and purposes of the trail designation are protected.
- Conflicts among recreation users are rare.
- Designated national scenic and recreation trails *travel routes* are well maintained, signed, and passable.
- ~~Views in the immediate foreground (0 to 300 feet) of national scenic and recreation trails include natural appearing landscapes.~~ The landscapes have high scenic values and generally appear unaltered by human activities.
- National scenic, historic, and recreation trails provide a nonmotorized trail opportunity, where visitors can experience the scenic *and desired recreation setting* qualities of the area.

Objectives

- *All segments of the CDNST that are currently located on motorized roads will be relocated to non-motorized trails within 5 years.*

Standards

- *Manage the CDNST route as a visual quality concern level 1 travel route. Resource management actions must meet a Scenic Integrity Level of Very High or High.*
- *Manage the CDNST to provide high-quality scenic, primitive hiking and pack and saddle stock opportunities. Backpacking, nature walking, day hiking, horseback riding, nature photography, mountain climbing, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing are compatible with the nature and purposes of the CDNST (CDNST*

Comprehensive Plan, Chapter IV(B)(5), FSM 2353.42 and FSM 2353.44b(8)). Forms of hiking include backpacking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and other similar walking activities.

- *Resource management actions and allowed uses must be compatible with maintaining or achieving Primitive or Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS class settings.*
- *Motorized use by the general public may only be allowed where such use is in accordance with guidance found in the NTSA Section 7(c).*
- ~~Management of the CDNST shall comply with the most recent version of the CDNST Comprehensive Plan. Best available science can be used in lieu of the Comprehensive Plan if plan is more than 15 years old.~~
- *No surface occupancy for geothermal energy leasing activities shall occur within 0.5 mile either side of the CDNST.*
- *No common variety mineral extraction (e.g., limestone, gravel, etc.) shall occur within the CDNST corridor.*
- *Motorized events and motorized special use permits shall not be permitted or authorized on the CDNST.*
- *Other uses that could conflict with the nature and purposes of the Continental National Scenic Trail may be allowed only where there is a determination that the other use would not substantially interfere with the nature and purposes of the CDNST (16 USC 1246(c)).*
- *Where the CDNST corridor overlaps with Wilderness designations the most restrictive measures control.*

Guidelines

- ~~To retain or promote the character for which the CDNST was designated, new or relocated trail segments should be located primarily within settings consistent with or complementing Primitive or Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classes. Road and motorized trail crossings and other signs of modern development should be avoided.~~
- ~~To protect or enhance the scenic qualities of the CDNST, management activities should be consistent with or make progress toward achieving Scenic Integrity Objectives of High or Very High within the visible foreground of the trail.~~
- ~~If management activities result in short term impacts to the scenic character along the CDNST, mitigation measures should be included (e.g., screening, feathering, and other scenery management techniques), to minimize visual impacts at key points (e.g., vistas), within 0.5 mile either side of the trail.~~
- *In order to promote a non-motorized setting, the CDNST should not be permanently re-located onto routes open to motor vehicle use.*

- Linear utilities and rights-of-way should be limited to a single crossing per special use authorization of the CDNST ~~unless additional crossings are documented as the only prudent and feasible alternative.~~
- ~~New temporary and permanent road or motorized trail construction across or adjacent to the CDNST should be avoided unless necessary for resource protection, access to private lands, or to protect public health and safety.~~
- ~~Using the CDNST for landings or as a temporary road should not be allowed. Hauling or skidding along the CDNST itself should be allowed only when design criteria are used to minimize impacts to the trail infrastructure and where the CDNST is currently located on an open road and no other haul route or skid trail options are available.~~
- Unplanned fires in the foreground (up to 0.5 mile) of the CDNST should be managed using minimum impact suppression tactics or other tactics appropriate for the protection of CDNST values. Prescribed fires in the foreground of the CDNST should be managed to protect health and safety but also incorporate the values of the CDNST. Heavy equipment fireline construction up to 0.5 mile of either side should not be allowed unless necessary for emergency protection of life and property.
- The minimum trail facilities necessary to accommodate the amount and types of use anticipated on any given segment should be provided in order to protect resource value and for health and safety (not for the purpose of promoting user comfort) in order to preserve or promote a naturally appearing setting.

Management Approaches

~~Potential management approaches may be used to inform future proposed and possible actions. These techniques and actions provide options for plan implementation, and represent possibilities, preferences, or opportunities, rather than obligatory actions. Not all plan components are addressed, only those for which additional information is warranted. They may illustrate suggestions as to how desired conditions and/or objectives could be met, convey a sense of priority among objectives, or indicate possible future course of change to a program.~~

- ~~To protect the CDNST's scenic values, consider special use authorizations for new communication sites, utility corridors, and renewable energy sites that would not be visually apparent within visible foreground (up to 0.5 mile) and middleground viewshed (up to four miles).~~
- ~~Consider e~~Coordinate trail management and activities across unit and jurisdictional boundaries, specifically with the Santa Fe and Rio Grande national forests and the Bureau of Land Management.

Sustainable Recreation Resources

I recommend that the planning team review the requirements of FSH 1909.12 23.23a – *Sustainable Recreation Resources and Opportunities to Connect People with Nature* to ensure that the Forest Plan is consistent with the Planning Handbook requirements. In the Draft EIS, please provide maps that display the proposed ROS class allocations to be established for each alternative, including making available to the public supporting geospatial data. I recommend that the following ROS class definitions be adopted for the Forest Plan and be addressed in the supporting NEPA documents:

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum: The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum planning framework is the recognized framework for stratifying and defining classes of outdoor recreation environments, activities, and experience opportunities through forest planning. The settings, activities, and opportunities for obtaining experiences have been arranged along a continuum or spectrum divided into six classes:

- **Primitive:** Primitive ROS settings encompass large, wild, remote, and predominately unmodified landscapes. Additional primitive ROS settings are scattered across the forest, often surrounded by SPNM settings. Primitive ROS settings contain no motorized and mechanized vehicles and there is little probability of seeing other people. They provide quiet solitude away from roads and people or other parties, are generally free of human development, and facilitate self-reliance and discovery. Signing, and other infrastructure is minimal and constructed of rustic, native materials. Ecological processes such as fire, insects, and disease exist. **Standard:** Motor and mechanized vehicles are not allowed in established Primitive settings. **Guidelines:** (1) No new permanent structures should be constructed in desired Primitive ROS settings to maintain the unmodified character of these landscapes; (2) Less than 6 parties per day encountered on trails and less than 3 parties visible at campsite; and (3) Setting should essentially be an unmodified natural environment. No roads, timber harvest, or mineral extraction are allowed. **Suitability:** (1) Motorized and mechanized recreation travel are not suitable; (2) The SIO of Very High is suitable; and (3) Lands are not suitable for timber production. (Inventory criteria: 3 miles from motorized use.)
- **Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized:** Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized settings provide opportunities for exploration, challenge, and self-reliance. Rustic structures such as signs and foot bridges are occasionally present to direct use and/or protect the setting's natural and cultural resources. These rustic constructed features are built from native materials or those that mimic native materials. Closed and revegetated roads may be present but do not dominate the landscape or detract from the SPNM experience of visitors. Ecological processes such as fire, insects, and disease exist. **Standard:** Motor vehicle use by the general public is not allowed. **Guidelines:** (1) The development scale of recreation facilities should be 0-1 to protect the

- undeveloped character of desired SPNM settings; (2) Less than 15 parties per day encountered on trails and less than 6 parties visible at campsite; and (3) Vegetative management may range from prescribed fire to very limited timber harvest for the purpose of maintaining a healthy, attractive semi-primitive setting. Suitability: (1) Motorized recreation travel is not suitable; (2) The SIO of High or Very High are suitable; and (3) Lands are not suitable for timber production. (Inventory criteria: ½ to 3 miles from all roads, trails, rivers, lakes and railroads with motorized use.)
- **Semi-Primitive Motorized:** Semi-Primitive Motorized settings provide motorized recreation opportunities in backcountry settings. Routes are designed for Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs) and high clearance vehicles that connect to local communities, access key destinations and vantage points, provide short day trips on scenic loops or facilitate longer and even overnight expeditions. Visitors challenge themselves as they explore vast, rugged landscapes. Mountain bikes and other mechanized equipment may also be present. Facilities are rustic and are used for the purpose of protecting the setting's natural and cultural resources. Bridges are sometimes present to accommodate foot, horse and ATV traffic but are built from native or natural appearing materials that blend with the surrounding landscape and maintain the semi-primitive character of the setting. There may also be nodes that function as portals for visitors to park their ATVs and explore adjacent Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized and Primitive settings. (Inventory criteria: ½ mile from primitive motorized roads and trails, not closer than ½ mile of better than primitive roads.)
 - **Roaded Natural:** I recommend that the proposed action and alternatives describe the following ROS subclasses:
 - **Roaded Natural** - Mostly equal opportunities to affiliate with other groups or be isolated from sights and sounds. The landscape is generally natural with modifications moderately evident. Concentration of users is low to moderate, but facilities for group activities may be present. Challenge and risk opportunities are generally not important in this class. Opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized activities are present. Construction standards and facility design incorporate conventional motorized uses.
 - **Roaded Modified** - Roaded Modified is defined as areas exhibiting evidence of forest management activities that are dominant on the landscape. Examples of RM include heavily logged areas, evidence of mining, oil/gas, or other minerals extraction activities.

National Scenic, Historic, and Recreation Trails (Page 291)

- USDI, Old Spanish National Historic Trail, Final Comprehensive Administrative Strategy
- 1985 2009 Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) Comprehensive Plan

Draft Environmental Impact Statement

The DEIS should discuss effects on scenic integrity, ROS class conditions, and carrying capacities and will generally be based on analysis of the effects of the allowable uses and conditions of use on National Scenic Trail values that are included in the proposed action and each alternative. Utilizing ROS and the Scenery Management System will help ensure that NEPA assessments are systematic and accurately describe the affected environment and expected outcomes from each alternative. The level of precision or certainty of the effects can be guided by the CEQ regulations regarding the use of “methodology and scientific accuracy” (40 CFR 1502.24) and the information needed to support a reasoned choice among alternatives (40 CFR 1502.22). The ROD must clearly document how the final decision is based on the best available science (36 CFR 219.3) or other relevant information needed to understand the reasonably foreseeable adverse effects of a choice between alternatives, the gaps in that information, and the rationale for why a reasoned choice between alternatives can be made at this time. In addition, substantial interference analyses and determinations need to be rigorous and be addressed as part of the cumulative impact analysis (40 CFR 1508.7).

The DEIS should recognize that management direction for Semi-Primitive Motorized, Roaded Natural, Rural, and Urban ROS classes allow uses that would substantially interfere with the nature and purposes of a National Scenic Trail if the allocation desired conditions are realized. Where the allowed non-motorized activities reflect the purposes for which the National Trail was established, the establishment of Primitive and Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS classes and high and very high scenic integrity allocations would normally protect the nature and purposes (values) of a National Scenic Trail.

It appears the NEPA analysis will disclose that the No Action and the proposed action alternatives fail to address the requirements of the National Trails System Act as implemented through the 2009 CDNST Comprehensive Plan, FSM 2353.4, FSH 1909.12, and Federal Register Notice dated October 5, 2009 (74 FR 51116). The draft preliminary plan fails to meet the integration requirements of the National Forest Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1604(f)(1)). As such, the action alternatives should be modified, or only considered but not developed in the DEIS.

The DEIS effects analysis should include cross-tabular tables that explore and disclose the relationship between (1) the proposed CDNST travel route location and management corridor/rights-of-way extent and (2) the intersection and overlap with the proposed ROS Classes and Scenic Integrity Objectives allocations.

For each alternative, the analysis of environmental consequences needs to address how the land management planning decisions will achieve:

- Providing for the nature and purposes of the National Trail, including protecting the National Trail resources, qualities, values, and associated settings;

- Identifying the National Trail primary users;
- Ensuring carrying capacity is not exceeded; and
- Preventing other uses from substantially interfering with the nature and purposes of the National Trails.

Please provided with the release of the DEIS the following geospatial data layers:

- Administrative Boundaries (FSH 1909.12 22.2)
- Land Ownership (FSH 1909.12 22.2)
- Designated Areas, including Recommended Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, Eligible Wild & Scenic Rivers, Inventoried Roadless Areas, and the extent of the CDNST management corridor/rights-of-way to be established (FSH 1909.12 22.2 and 24)
- Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes to be established – Summer and Winter (FSH 1909.12 22.2 and 23.23a)
- Scenic Integrity Objectives to be established (FSH 1909.12 22.2 and 23.23f)
- Lands that May be Suitable for Timber Production (FSH 1909.12 Chapter 60)
- CDNST travel route as an independent data layer (FSH 1909.12 23.23I)
- NFS roads and trails with attribute data, including existing road maintenance levels and trail travel route fundamentals such as Designed Use, Managed Use, and Trail Class (FSH 1909.12 23.23I)

The year 2018 is the 50th Anniversary of the National Trails System Act and the 40th Anniversary of the establishment and designation of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. The revised Carson National Forest Plan may establish a new standard for the management of National Scenic and Historic Trails on NFS lands, so 2018 will be a good time to reflect on past and current National Trail management practices and to establish appropriate forest plan direction for the future.

Thank you for considering these comments.

/s/ **Greg Warren**

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Attachment: Carson National Forest - CDNST Planning Handbook v.01192018