



December 8, 2020

Dear Recreation Trails Committee,

Great Old Broads for Wilderness (Broads) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the 2020 non-motorized grant applications. Our Northern San Juan and Grand Junction chapters enjoy membership from Delta, Mesa, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel Counties all within the Grand Mesa Uncompahgre National Forest (GMUG.) We strongly support the GMUG Snow Rangers Planning/Support grant application.

Our chapters work closely with the USFS, BLM, NPS and CPW on stewardship projects, and we are acutely aware of agencies' limited resources to put boots on the ground during the winter months. Broads also regularly collaborates with Colorado Mountain Club on stewardship and advocacy projects, and we know Julie Mach personally. Julie is an excellent program manager, talented educator, skilled communicator and resourceful collaborator. In fact, our member volunteers were trained by Julie to utilize CMC's application entitled Recreation Inventory Management System (RIMS) (whose design and implementation was funded by CPW) to conduct many of our USFS surveys.

In addition to our volunteer work with agencies, our members are active outdoorsmen and women in all seasons, and we are particularly aware of increased winter recreation use in our region. Ouray District has been fortunate to enjoy the contributions of two snow rangers in the past. We personally know Chris Snell and Cricket Scheerer (mentioned in the application) and can attest to their dedication, reliability, physical stamina, communication skills, friendly disposition, and capacity to educate while also holding users accountable to Leave No Trace ethics. We unconditionally support the expansion of the Snow Ranger program to encompass the vast area that is the GMUG Forest. We are acutely aware that the USFS has neither the human nor financial resources to support this essential program that improves winter recreation management through public education, partnership development, youth outreach, and visitor engagement. These Snow Rangers will share critical information related to human safety and avalanche hazards; backcountry etiquette; travel restrictions and trail closures; and winter ecology and resource protection. Having these trained rangers on the ground will greatly benefit human safety, compliance, protection of natural resources, potential user conflicts, and trailhead congestion or parking issue.

In addition Rangers will collect visitor use data during winter which, to date, is quite limited. Such data will be beneficial to the GMUG's forest plan revision process that is currently underway. Finally, winter recreation in our region contributes significantly to our local economies, and these Rangers will aid in creating positive backcountry experiences for residents and visitors alike ensuring revenue dollars keep supporting our businesses.

Broads offers the following suggestions to make this program highly effective and collaborative while prioritizing the personal safety of the Snow Rangers:

- Advance and periodic notification and explanation to the public (through printed media, email distribution, posters, and/or social media) of the existence and purpose of the Snow Ranger program, so users are aware of Rangers on the ground and their roles, responsibilities, and authority
- Some form of obvious identification for each Ranger to elevate their presence
- Clear protocols regarding when and how Ranger will communicate with state and federal agency personnel; What support can they count on and what information will they be expected to transfer to agencies?
- Specifically, what kind of support from agency personnel can Rangers rely upon if conflicts or safety issues arise beyond the scope of their responsibilities
- Training for Rangers in conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques.

Some of these recommendations may be addressed in pre-season training and/or the Ranger Summit, but such details are not described in the grant application. We want the program to ensure the safety of Rangers specifically in these current times of social unrest and political divisiveness in communities.

In summary, Great Old Broads for Wilderness wholeheartedly supports this grant application and the Snow Ranger Program. For several years, our organization has been advocating for the Trails Program to prioritize and fund trail maintenance, education and enforcement, support services, and habitat restoration over new trail construction. The Ranger program is just the kind of project we enthusiastically endorse. We believe such educational approaches encouraging Leave No Trace ethics, and compliance creates a more positive outdoor experience for diverse users and aids in the protection of the natural resources we value. Thank you for your consideration of our comments and do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or desire more information.

Sincerely,

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