



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

White River  
National  
Forest

Supervisor's Office  
900 Grand Avenue  
P.O. Box 948  
Glenwood Spgs., CO 81602-0948  
(970) 945-2521  
TTY (970) 945-3255  
FAX (970) 945-3266

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**Date:** October 24, 2006

Ottie Otterstein  
Chairman  
Colorado Backcountry Horseman Association  
172 Hogs Are Beautiful  
Bayfield, CO 81122

Dear Ottie:

The Draft White River National Forest Travel Management Plan was released in September of 2006. I have received numerous comments from equestrians believing that "There are people out there trying to keep horses out of all wilderness areas". I find this especially troubling since our Forest has a long and proud tradition of horse use in Wilderness.

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify what seems to be a great amount of misinformation and apprehension created by, best as we can tell, a single email full of misinformation that has been circulated widely in the equestrian community.

In our 2002 Revised Forest Plan, we were committed to continuing our tradition of providing for equestrian use and specifically made a decision to allow horses to travel anywhere on the White River National Forest. They, along with hikers, are the only uses on our Forest not restricted to designated routes. Certainly, there are a few trails such as Hanging Lake where we get around 80,000 hikers per year on a steep rocky trail, Maroon Lake accessible trail and Lake Charles where we have historically not allowed horses. However, other than Hanging Lake where it is physically impossible, we almost always have provided alternative routes for equestrian use to the same locations where safe and practical.

There are four alternatives being analyzed in our Draft Travel Management Plan. Each of these alternatives has components which will likely be in our final decision. We have been very clear that our preferred alternative in the Draft may be modified in the final based on public input and other factors.

Alternative B in our Draft shows our current condition on the Forest. Under Alternative B we currently have 2,300 miles of Forest Service trails open to equestrian use. The other alternatives in our Draft only add to the total of miles of trail open to equestrian use. Clearly, our intent is not to rid the Forest of horses or horse use as has been suggested by some.



My staff has been working with local riders in an effort to explain our Draft Travel Management Plan and how they can make comments which are both the best use of their time and most beneficial in helping us to make our decisions. My staff reports that once the misinformation is clarified, the equestrians generally have been positive about our planning process and proposed Travel Management. Unfortunately, as I'm sure you are aware, misinformation and negative messages travel much faster than positive or non-controversial information.

My staff and I are committed to providing outstanding equestrian opportunities on the White River National Forest. I would appreciate your help by sharing this information with your members. We are very willing to talk directly with anyone who has questions about our Draft Travel Management Plan.

We look forward to working with the Back Country Horseman Association in developing a trail system that improves the recreation opportunities for equestrians. If you have any questions or would be interested in more detailed presentations by my staff, please contact Wendy Haskins, Forest Planner, 970-945-3303 ([whaskins@fs.fed.us](mailto:whaskins@fs.fed.us)) or Beth Boyst, Wilderness Specialist (970)328-6388 ([bboyst@fs.fed.us](mailto:bboyst@fs.fed.us)).

Sincerely,

*/s/ <Wallace Westbrook>*  
MARIBETH GUSTAFSON  
Forest Supervisor

cc: Beth Boyst