



August 22nd, 2020

BLM Taos Field Office
Attn: Horsethief Mesa TMP
226 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, NM, 87571

Submitted online at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/1505217/510>

RE: Access Fund and NM CRAG Comments on Horsethief Mesa TMP Scoping

Dear BLM Taos Field Office Travel Management Staff,

The Access Fund and NM CRAG appreciates this opportunity to provide comments on the BLM's scoping process for the Horsethief Mesa Travel Management Plan (TMP). Horsethief Mesa provides valuable recreational opportunities for local residents and also acts as a crucial access corridor to popular and high-quality climbing areas. We look forward to collaborating with the BLM on management strategies that protect both the integrity of the land and continued climbing opportunities.

NM CRAG

New Mexico Climbers Resource and Advocacy Group (NM CRAG) represents climbers in New Mexico. NM CRAG seeks to protect access to our climbing areas, while improving and preserving them for the future.

The Access Fund

The Access Fund is a national advocacy organization whose mission keeps climbing areas open and conserves the climbing environment. A 501c(3) nonprofit and accredited land trust representing millions of climbers nationwide in all forms of climbing—rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering, and bouldering—the Access Fund is a US climbing advocacy organization with over 20,000 members and over 123 local affiliates. Access Fund provides climbing management expertise, stewardship, project specific funding, and educational outreach. For more information about the Access Fund, visit www.accessfund.org.

Comments

Road Closures and Climbing Access

Horsethief Mesa provides opportunities for a diverse array of recreational opportunities in a scenic natural setting. Travel management is an essential aspect of maintaining resource values, and NM CRAG and Access Fund appreciate the BLM's efforts to find the right size for the road and trail system on Horsethief Mesa, including closing underused roads and expanding trails for human-powered recreation. Specific road closures proposed in all of the current action alternatives of the TMP, however, will inadvertently cut off long-standing access points to key climbing areas in John Dunn Bridge area¹. Specifically, all of the current proposals will eliminate top access to the New Buffalo and Solar Asylum climbing areas.

Mesa-top access to these areas is important for several reasons. Besides being the standard way for climbers to approach the area, these cliffs are one of the prime wintertime climbing areas in the Taos area due to their sunny aspect. The road to the John Dunn Bridge, which provides an alternate access point, can often become icy and hazardous during winter. As such, the proposed road closures have the potential to completely eliminate climbing access during the winter months. In addition to this, the Horsethief Mesa access routes to these areas help distribute climber traffic more evenly, and alleviate overcrowding at some of the other John Dunn Bridge area crags. Reducing access to the New Buffalo and Solar Asylum climbing areas will likely increase use at other cliffs that already have high use levels.

NM CRAG and Access Fund request that the BLM continue to keep roads open from the southern Tres Lomas/Tremontia Road access point through comment IDs 101, 100, 90, 88, 66, 2485, 2486, 58, 57 and 56. Parking is also needed at the junction of comment IDs 58, 57 and 56. Keeping roads open at these comment IDs will allow climbing access to these high-value areas to continue.

Support for Human-Powered Recreation

Access Fund supports the efforts currently underway by the Taos Mountain Bike Association (TMBA) and Enchanted Circle Trails Association (ECTA) to expand opportunities for human-powered recreation in the Horsethief Mesa area. Specifically, their proposal to create new trails for mountain biking and multiuse recreation would be a welcome addition to the opportunities currently available, and none of their proposed trail closures would have any negative impact on climbing access, to the best of our knowledge.

Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI)

Access Fund urges the BLM to work with the local community to advance inclusive and equitable access to the Horsethief Mesa area and its recreational opportunities. It is well documented that people of color often use outdoors spaces at lower rates than their white

¹ <https://www.mountainproject.com/area/106076750/john-dunn-bridge-area>

peers. In addition, people from other marginalized communities, such as the LGBTQ and differently abled communities, can face additional challenges to getting out on public lands. As an outstanding natural area located in a diverse community, as well as within a short drive of large urban centers like Santa Fe, Horsethief Mesa should be accessible to people from a true diversity of backgrounds. Access Fund has staff dedicated to JEDI issues, and is more than willing to offer our time and resources to assist the BLM in applying JEDI principles to their work in the Taos area.

Access Fund Assistance

The climbing community and the Access Fund are ready, willing, and able to help planners identify and improve the climbing related infrastructure, trail system, roads, and other management needs the BLM may require to provide for the climbing opportunities found in the Horsethief Mesa area. In addition, some aspects of this planning initiative may qualify for Access Fund Climbing Preservation Grant Program or assistance from our Conservation Team which helps maintain^{2,3} climbing areas throughout the United States by assessing climbing area conservation needs, working with locals to address those needs, and providing training on planning and stewardship best practices to keep those areas healthy.

* * *

Thank you for your consideration of these comments on the BLM's scoping process for the Horsethief Mesa TMP. Access Fund and NM CRAG have the experience, local contacts, and resources to help planners craft management strategies that encourage climbing while sustaining the health and integrity of the landscape and the recreation experience. Access Fund and NM CRAG look forward to continuing to work with the BLM. Please keep us informed as the planning process proceeds. Feel free to contact us via telephone at (303) 552-2843 or via email (katie@accessfund.org, bryan@stoneageclimbinggym.com, and taimur@accessfund.org) to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,



Katie Goodwin - Access Fund, Policy Analyst



Bryan Pletta - NM CRAG, President

² <https://www.accessfund.org/take-action/apply-for-funding/apply-for-a-climbing-conservation-grant>

³ <https://www.accessfund.org/pages/conservation-team>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Taimur Ahmad', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Taimur Ahmad - Access Fund, Policy Associate

Cc:

Chris Winter-Access Fund, Executive Director

Erik Murdock-Access Fund, Policy Director