

AGRICULTURE
NATURAL RESOURCES
SMALL BUSINESS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0603

December 12, 2012

Jim Pitts, District Ranger
Saguache District, Rio Grande National Forest
46525 State Highway 114
Saguache, CO 81149

John Murphy, District Ranger
Gunnison District, Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest
216 N. Colorado
Gunnison, CO 81230

Dear Mr. Pitts and Mr. Murphy:

The outdoor recreation economy is vital to the livelihoods and quality of life in southwestern Colorado. The recreation economy is dependent on public lands available to provide high quality recreation experiences. From habitat for fish and game to developed resorts, these resources all make substantial contributions to our lives. The Forest Service action to develop a new segment of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail shows that the Forest Service understands the importance of these high quality experiences, and I fully support the development of this single-track route. I have some concerns, however, about the preferred alternative to preclude mountain bikes from sharing in this experience.

I am primarily troubled by the Forest Service's preference to exclude bicycles on this new trail. Mountain biking is a very valuable component of the recreation economy – a bedrock of Colorado's 3rd Congressional District. This segment of trail, while remote, is close enough to Gunnison and Crested Butte, areas recognized as mountain biking destinations, that it could be a great addition to existing resources. For precisely the same reasons that this segment will improve the hiking and horseback riding experiences on the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, I see no reasonable justification in the Forest Service's Environmental Assessment that gives me reason to believe that excluding mountain bikers is necessary.

I am also concerned with the public notice and comment process. It is my understanding that there was an error in the original publication of the notice and it has been corrected to allow for additional input. While I appreciate the Forest Service taking a proactive approach to correcting the deficient notice process, I am further concerned that such notice could have been more thoroughly published. While the local citizens certainly will want to have considerable input and should drive the decision-making process, this is a nationally designated recreation asset. There are potential user groups across Colorado and around the country who would be greatly

interested in the planning process. To that end, I believe that the path the Forest Service takes will have regional impacts, if not national, and accordingly, it would have been helpful to publish the notice in additional publications such as *The Denver Post* or the *Federal Register*.

My office has and will continue to work closely with the Forest Service on public lands issues within Colorado's 3rd Congressional District. Our past cooperation has been grounded upon making public lands accessible to all user groups. In sum, I fully support allowing mountain bikes on this new segment of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail and encourage the Forest Service to engage with all stakeholders promptly to resolve any issues. This trail will provide an additional recreation resource to local, regional and national residents to recreate within Colorado's Third Congressional District, which will help drive additional tourism to the region, which supports local businesses.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my office if there is anything we can do to help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Tipton", with a large circular flourish above the name.

Scott Tipton
Member of Congress