



File Code: 1300
Date: August 9, 2019

Vail Planning & Environmental Commission
75 South Frontage Road
Vail, CO 81657

Dear Vail PEC,

I was asked to attend your meeting on August 12, 2019 in order to discuss the US Forest Service's process for implementing trail closures and other human use restrictions on National Forest System (NFS) lands. I apologize that I wasn't able to make the meeting, but wanted to provide some response to help you better understand some of our processes.

Generally speaking, closures or use restrictions on National Forest are infrequent, very carefully considered, and are in response to either an emergency situation, or a very specific issue or management problem. Restricting the public's use of their land is often a last resort after we have exhausted all other management options. When faced with a management issue, resource degradation, or safety concern, it's imperative that we first ascertain what the problem we're trying to solve is, as the solution is often not a restriction or closure. For example, protecting deer and elk in a certain area during calving season might warrant a human-entry closure, whereas cleaning up pet waste might be best solved by installing a sign and a trash can.

A Special Order can be put into place to protect public safety, prevent resource damage, preserve a special biological community, protect wildlife populations, prohibit a specific activity, or to impose permit requirements.

Our current list of White River National Forest Special Orders can be found at the following website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/whiteriver/notices/?cid=stelprdb5176138>.

Of course, we have many Special Orders in place as a result of a variety of management challenges, but each of them went through a specific process to be put in place. If a closure or use restriction is determined to be the right tool to solve a particular challenge, the first step is to conduct an environmental analysis with a public engagement process and a formal decision. Like all our analysis projects, my staff will convene to assess the proposed action and analyze any environmental and social effects. Once the analysis process is complete, a formal decision is made by the District Ranger or Forest Supervisor and the Special Order process begins. A special order requires Forest Service Law Enforcement oversight, legal review by USDA Office of General Council, and Forest Supervisor signatory approval to implement and enforce. Each special order has an expiration date and is reviewed annually to determine if there is a continuing need for the prohibition(s) or exemptions listed in the order, and to ensure that there is no conflict with other orders.



Generally, the public understands and adheres to Special Order restrictions, but enforcement of Special Orders can still be a challenge. Law enforcement engagement is often needed, and we have also relied on volunteer efforts to help implement closures. A good example of a more successful Special Order closure is the new Everkrisp Trail. With partner support from the Adopt-A-Trail Wildlife Ambassadors, we have been able to help educate the public and increase compliance of the seasonal trail closure.

Again, I'm sorry I wasn't able to be there in person to answer any questions you might have, but I'm more than happy to attend a future PEC meeting to discuss anything further, or go into more detail regarding use restrictions and Special Orders. Thank you for reaching out, and I hope I was able to give you enough background on our process.

Sincerely,



AARON W. MAYVILLE
District Ranger