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Date: MAY 25 2016

Dear Interested Parties:

I am pleased to release the enclosed Final Plan of Work (POW) for the San Juan National Forest Recreation Site Analysis (RSA) project. I'd like to thank the dozens of individuals, groups, and government entities that have actively participated in this effort and provided us with timely and useful feedback. I am confident that our outreach efforts have led to a better final product and more universal understanding of our challenges.

The RSA POW is an analytical and advisory document intended to inform recreation program investment and site management strategies for the next five years. The overall goal is to ensure long-term sustainability for our developed recreation program in light of changing fiscal realities, technologies, and visitor demands.

Over the last decade our Forest has undergone significant reductions in allocations for recreation programs, and the RSA project provides an opportunity to put our recreation site assets and liabilities in line with projected future funding and staffing levels. It is hoped that cost-reduction actions will not compromise a site's trail access, picnicking, scenic viewing, or other opportunities. Rather, our recommendations are intended to ensure each site's features are indeed integral to providing its primary recreation opportunity.

Public outreach for the RSA project began last spring with newspaper articles, news releases, contacts with local, federal, and state government, as well as personal contacts with key constituents. A public workshop held in May, 2015 focused on the complexities of managing a high-quality program and the pressing need for change to sustain our recreation program.

While feedback and discussions with external parties were ongoing throughout the project, a formal 60-day feedback period was used to capture any remaining issues/concerns arising out of the Draft POW, which was released on January 21, 2016.

#### **Highlights of the RSA Final Plan of Work:**

- Fifty-one of the Forest's 129 developed recreation sites will undergo no changes, 14 sites will see some degree of improvements, and 19 sites will be closed and/or removed from service. The remaining sites will undergo a variety of changes as summarized in the Action Summary Table.
- The toilets along the U.S. Highway 550 corridor on Molas and Coal Bank passes are expected to remain open under site-maintenance partnership(s) with local entities. However, if viable maintenance partnerships cannot be developed and implemented prior to January 1, 2018, the toilets would be removed.
- The free-use camping area at Little Molas Lake will remain free of charge, but its toilet will be removed. Campers will be able to use the nearby toilet at the Colorado Trailhead, which would remain open until mid-September as it has in the past. This toilet is about 600 feet in walking distance from the free-use camping area. (For reference, a typical design layout for a fully developed and hosted fee campground would include a toilet within 300' walking distance from



paid campsites, whereas these are free sites.)

- No significant changes will be made to the operating seasons for Little Molas Lake and Andrews Lake recreation sites. The spur road leading from U.S. Highway 550 to Little Molas Lake and the Colorado Trailhead will remain open to motor vehicles from May 1 - Nov 30. The spur road leading to Andrews Lake will remain open from June 1 – Nov 30. Toilets at these sites are typically opened in May after snowmelt, and are locked in mid-September as the summer season ends.
- A floodplain delineation and evaluation will be conducted in 2017 within the South Mineral drainage to determine if any of the five delineated free-camping areas are within the identified floodplain. Findings of that evaluation will help inform which specific actions should be taken at these popular summer camp areas.
- The toilet at the Junction Creek trailhead (Colorado Trail) will remain open in the near-term under continued care of long-term volunteers. If the volunteer effort ceases, the site would be added to the partnership effort described above. If the partnership model were to prove unviable, the toilet would be removed.
- The Lower Hermosa Campground will become a concession-operated fee campground with modestly improved services served by an on-site campground host.

If fully implemented, the RSA Final POW would result in nearly \$35,000 in annual cost savings, or about 15% in cost reductions within our developed recreation program. These savings will enable us to refocus resources on our facilities and services of highest value. The plan also recognizes the value of public/private partnerships in delivering services with greater efficiency and, perhaps, even better results. Finally, I believe our future investments in recreation facilities will be more thoughtful and effective as we focus on maintaining a smaller number of sites to a higher level of quality.

We expect to begin implementation of these recommendations in 2016, with completion expected during the five-year period covered by the Final RSA POW. Substantial ground-disturbing actions within the RSA POW are subject to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements and the applicable level of analysis will be conducted prior to implementation of those RSA recommendations. Other recommendations can be implemented immediately, as they are administrative in nature and not subject to NEPA requirements.

Please contact Brian White, Recreation Program Manager, at (970) 385-1246 or [brianwhite@fs.fed.us](mailto:brianwhite@fs.fed.us) if you have any questions or concerns about the RSA project.

Sincerely,



KARA L. CHADWICK  
Forest Supervisor