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Designated Opportunity to Comment on Hale Lake Area Management Project Draft EA - The Smokey Bear Ranger District of the Lincoln National Forest is seeking public comments on a draft environmental assessment (EA) for the Hale Lake Area Management Project. The proposed changes would improve the access to a variety of recreation uses within the Hale Lake area, while addressing known issues with travel management and recreation, and reducing environmental impacts from unauthorized motorized use in the area. The proposed action includes but is not limited to: The addition of five 4x4 motorized trails that will be designated for motorized use. The elimination and restoration of unauthorized roads. Restricting the use of administrative use only roads with gates and fencing. The future construction of two new single-track trail networks: One for non-motorized and class-1 pedal assist E-bike use, and another for non-motorized and motorcycle use. The construction of 3 parking areas. The construction of a short, non-motorized single-track trail from forest road 443 to the historic Tunstall murder site.

The roads that are currently designated open to passenger and high clearance vehicles would remain open and unchanged. One alternative was proposed and analyzed that includes these options plus an additional OHV trail loop in Hale Canyon.

The draft EA describing the proposed action and the alternative, with maps, is available online at https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56577 or by contacting Andrew Ellis, NEPA Planner, at Andrew.Ellis@usda.gov or at 575.257.4095

How to Comment and Timeframe - This project is subject to 36 CFR 218 subparts A and B. This solicitation serves as a designated opportunity for public comment. The Forest Service encourages your review of the draft EA. Comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and include supporting reasons for the responsible official (Smokey Bear District Ranger) to consider in preparing the final EA.

Specific written comments (36 CFR 218.2) on the proposed project will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of this official notice in the *Ruidoso News*. If the comment period ends on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, comments will be accepted until the end of the next Federal working day. The publication date in the Ruidoso News is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Failing to submit timely and specific comments can affect a reviewer's ability to participate in subsequent administrative or judicial review. All oral comments and any written comments submitted outside this or another designated opportunity for public comment will be considered but will not establish objection eligibility.

Other requirements to be eligible to submit an objection are defined by 36 CFR 218.25(a)(3) and include name, postal address, title of the project, and verification of identity of the individual or entity who authored the comments upon request. Individual members of an entity must submit their own individual comments in order to have eligibility to object as an individual. A timely submission will be determined as outlined in 36 CFR 218.25 (a)(4). It is the responsibility of the sender to ensure timely receipt of any comments submitted.

Anyone submitting comments are asked to provide their name and postal mailing address so that they can be added to the project mailing list. Input received in response to this solicitation, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets.

The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the requester is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requestor that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within seven days. Comments submitted anonymously will be considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the Agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents.

Specific written comments including attachments may be submitted by email in word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), hypertext markup language (.html), or portable document format (.pdf) to: comments-southwestern-lincoln-smokey-bear@usda.gov and include "Hale Lake Management Area Project" in the subject line. Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

Written comments may also be also be submitted by mail or by phone (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., excluding holidays) to: Jodie Canfield, District Ranger, c/o Andrew Ellis, 901 Mechem Dr., Ruidoso, NM 88345. Or faxed to 575.257.6174, (please call the number below to confirm prior to faxing). You may also obtain additional information about this project by calling Andrew Ellis, NEPA Planner, at 575.257.4095 or at Andrew.Ellis@USDA.gov

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