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**DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHIEF**

**THROUGH:** Christopher B. French Date:  
Deputy Chief  
National Forest System

**FROM:** David Neely Date:  
Acting Director  
Ecosystem Management Coordination

**SUBJECT:** Colorado Roadless Area, Valle Seco Boundary Line Modification, Final

**FILE CODE:** 1230

**ISSUE / RECOMMENDATION:**

Provide a final decision for boundary line modifications within the Colorado Roadless Areas (CRAs) associated with the Valle Seco 2019 Land Exchange. The proposal is located on the San Juan National Forest, Pagosa Ranger District.

The Colorado Roadless Rule (CRR) allows for modifications to boundaries based on changed circumstances (§294.47(a)). CRR decision-making responsibilities are outlined in the Chief’s memo “Boundary Modifications and Administrative Corrections Process, Idaho and Colorado Roadless Rules” dated May 24, 2016 (enclosure one).

**BACKGROUND:**

The changed circumstance justifying this proposed boundary line modification is the current opportunity to obtain a key inholding through land exchange and the subsequent change in ownership should the land exchange be implemented. The San Juan National Forest has been trying to acquire this inholding since the 1980’s but it has only recently become available.

On February 4, 2020, the Chief signed initial approval for a proposed CRA boundary line modification within the Valle Seco 2019 land exchange (enclosure two). During the 90-day public comment period 347 letters were provided which included 336 form letters. In response to the comments the Chief signed a revised initial approval on April 9, 2021 (enclosure three). During the 90-day public comment period on the revised memo 118 comments were received. A majority of the comments received pertained to the land exchange with only a few specific to the roadless area boundary modification.

Commenters opposed to the roadless boundary line modification have three main points: the changed circumstances must be present in the specific portion of the CRA that will be modified; they are opposed to the loss of any acres within a CRA and state that any acres added should be within the same CRA that is losing acres; and non-contiguous acres cannot be added to an existing CRA through a boundary modification.



The Colorado Department of Natural Resources and supporting commenters were in favor of adding areas around Parcel A in the Valle Seco area to the existing Winter Hills/Serviceberry Mountain CRA to protect valuable wildlife habitat that they strongly value.

**PROPOSED ROADLESS MODIFICATIONS:**

**Alternative #3 Modified as described in the Draft Decision Notice**

- Proposed exchange of 880 acres of non-federal land “Parcel A” for 380 acres of federal land in nine separate parcels.
- The 380 acres of federal land includes disposal of approximately 176 acres of CRA to include 175.2 acres within the South San Juan Adjacent Colorado Roadless Area (parcel one, 0.5 percent of the CRA), and 0.66 acres of within the Turkey Creek Colorado Roadless Area (parcel two, 0.003 percent of the CRA).
- Expand the Winter Hills/Serviceberry Mountain CRA by 4,623 acres; 529 of these acres are contiguous to the existing CRA and 4,094 acres are non-contiguous to the existing CRA. This is 581 fewer acres to be added to the CRA than what was analyzed in Alternative #3 in the environmental assessment. The 581 acres removed from the proposal are adjacent to private property and are in Management Area 5, Active Management or on ground suitable for mechanical vegetation management operations. Removing these areas from the proposed CRA addition will maximize options for future vegetation management activities adjacent to private property.
- No Upper Tier Roadless Areas are included in the boundary modification.

This modified alternative provides for the long-term protection of crucial winter range and a critical corridor for elk and mule deer migrating from the San Juan Mountains to and from lower elevation winter range on a combination of NFS, Southern Ute Indian Reservation, Jicarilla Apache Reservation, and private lands. Acquisition of Parcel A would also secure jurisdiction on NFS Road 653. In addition, the acquisition of the non-federal inholding within the San Juan National Forest will prevent its potential development and impact on surrounding NFS lands in the future. This alternative is displayed on the Overview Map and Parcels 1-3, San Juan River Area Map (enclosures four and five).

This modified alternative also proposes expanding the Winter Hills/Serviceberry Mountain CRA by 4,623 acres, 529 of which are contiguous to the existing CRA and 4,094 acres are non-contiguous to the existing CRA. The additional non-contiguous CRA land is located southwest of the Winter Hills/Serviceberry Mountain CRA and is displayed on Alternative 3 Modified Map (enclosure six).

NOTE: The CRA modification will go into effect immediately upon transfer of ownership of the parcels in the land exchange. If the Responsible Official does not authorize the land exchange, then the CRA modification will not go into effect.

**DECISION BY THE CHIEF:**

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Disapproved: \_\_\_\_\_

Discuss with Me: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosure (6)