

December 16, 2024

Dear Commissioners Nauer, Niece and Padgett,

I write to express my unequivocal support for maintaining winter county road closures that currently exist and afford over the snow use. I am vehemently opposed to any additional plowing of county roads by the county or issuance of any new winter maintenance agreements that permit private landowners to plow. I specifically am writing in opposition to a request by a landowner to plow a 2.5 mile section of CR 62X that lies within Ouray County.

My strong opposition to this request is based on two factors: 1) Important winter and reproduction wildlife habitat and 2.) recreation use.

It's common knowledge that winter is a stressful time for most wildlife species. Creating additional pressures beyond the existing food scarcity, drought and cold temperatures of the season is detrimental to our wildlife and not in alignment with our Ouray County's Master Plan under the Wildlife and Plant Habitat goals. I have biked and cross country skied 62X since 2009 and have witnessed a decrease in wildlife sightings with the building of additional residences along the road and a moderate increase in motorized over the snow use. I used to see a large herd of elk during winter that I haven't observed in several years. When I biked Telluride to Moab back in June 2011, I delighted in witnessing the newborn elk calves with their moms on this section of CR62X. My observations indicate this landscape is an elk production area as well as winter habitat. I have also seen a family of coyotes, deer, rabbits and lots of sign of black bear in the area (especially in the spring) indicating the latter may den in the region. With our shifting climate, we never know where species might find refugia. Maintaining the restricted access to this landscape during winter is significant to wildlife survivability.

Ouray County's unplowed roads are magnificent cross country ski routes in winter especially for novice and intermediate skiers and those of us who seek opportunities to observe wildlife. In my 15 years living and recreating in the county, I have seen winter plowing encroach on country roads 5, 9, 10 and 12. In addition, during years of less snowpack, these roads (as well as CR 7) often experience use by motorized wheeled vehicles (in addition to the permitted snow machines) which detracts from the recreation experience. Though I am grateful for the compromise reached and generosity of landowners in constructing the Miller Mesa Trail, the existence of a plowed road adjacent to a more narrow trail has meant less wildlife observations and a more challenging ski trail. I oppose the loss of any more miles of winter recreation on any county roads to accommodate development. I specifically cherish CR 62X for its solitude and wide open landscape. Given this public discourse, I fear that tranquility will be lost as this winter route gains public attention. Perhaps that is price we pay for protecting it from the plow. It was devastating when San Miguel County granted a landowner authority to plow the first 0.6 miles of CR 62X. Please do not accept the current request to plow an additional 2.5 miles.

Thank you for your attention to and consideration of my comments. I am grateful for your service to our county!

Robyn Cascade  
Ridgway