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**File Code:** 2400  
**Date:** January 9, 2023

## Interested Party

The Pagosa Ranger District of the San Juan National Forest is conducting public scoping to gather input for several proposed projects in the Jackson Mountain area, northeast of Pagosa Springs and north of the San Juan River Village subdivision in Archuleta County. The initial proposals consider trail system development, fuels and vegetation management, and gravel pit development. We are inviting your input on the initial project proposals, which are described in more detail below.

### **Why are we looking at Jackson Mountain?**

Jackson Mountain is a hub of activity: multiple forms of recreation and active vegetation treatments point to a need for a broadscale, landscape level analysis to address future management goals and activities. The Forest Service engaged stakeholders, partners, the public, and internal resource specialists starting in the summer of 2021 to identify prominent issues, concerns, and opportunities in the Jackson Mountain area.

The need for a sustainably designed trail system was identified, as well as the need to improve forest health and resiliency, reduce fuels, restore ponderosa pine forest structure, increase age-class diversity of Gambel oak, enhance meadows, and regenerate aspen stands currently in decline. Archuleta County also expressed interest in opening a non-commercial gravel pit in the Jackson Mountain area to provide a local source of material for use on county and Forest Service Roads.

### **What is the initial proposal?**

Based on the preliminary input received, the Forest Service is considering a variety of possible actions in the Jackson Mountain area. These are discussed in more detail below.

#### *Trail System*

With input from partners, the public and the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA), the Forest Service reviewed a catalog of trail options and selected a subset of trails that would provide sustainable trail experiences, offering trails for a variety of skill sets that do not exist on the Pagosa Ranger District. This includes approximately 40 miles of mountain bike and multi-use trail options offering varying levels of difficulty. A well-designed, sustainable, multi-use trail system in the Jackson Mountain area can support and enhance landscape resilience and provide for recreation opportunities. The increase of mountain bike recreation in the Jackson Mountain area points to a recreation demand that is currently not being met on the Pagosa Ranger District. Unmanaged recreation use of non-system and user-created trails that were not established with a careful design can lead to trail erosion and water drainage issues as well as negative impacts to wildlife.



### *Recreation Facilities*

Options for recreation facilities include reconstructing and expanding the existing Turkey Creek Trailhead to better accommodate and increase space for horse and ATV trailer parking and turnaround, and the construction of two new parking area/trailheads along NFSR 037. Additional parking areas, trailheads, toilets, and signage are also being considered. These facilities will help minimize impacts from unmanaged use while contributing to the positive experience that users are seeking.

### *Fuels and Vegetation Treatment*

Fuels treatments such as mowing, mastication, chipping, and hand thinning are being proposed on up to 2,500 acres in the Jackson Mountain area. The purpose of the treatments would be to reduce the density of shrubs and small trees that act as ladder fuels which can transition a fire from the forest surface to the crowns of trees. Fuels treatments will also give fire managers more opportunities to safely manage fires in the area. Fuels adjacent to open roads and private land would be targeted to create buffers to allow for increased control options and public and firefighter safety in the event of a wildfire. This would have the additional benefit of increasing site distances for vehicles on highly trafficked roads. Slash from thinning operations may be piled, dispersed, or chipped and the boles of trees may be available to the public for fuelwood.

Vegetation treatments such as thinning in pine and mixed conifer stands as well as aspen coppice treatments to promote aspen regeneration are being considered on up to 1,000 acres. These treatments would be designed to build upon work that has been completed or is in progress. Objectives of vegetation treatments will vary depending on location but in general including the following: 1) provide a variety of vegetation conditions to support habitat diversity, 2) continue to manage Forest Service lands to provide forest products to local communities, 3) continue to provide conditions where fire can be part of the landscape and 4) provide conditions that help facilitate using prescribed fire as a management tool.

### *Gravel Pit*

Archuleta County has expressed interest in opening a non-commercial gravel pit in the Jackson Mountain area. This gravel pit would provide a local source of material for use on county and Forest Service roads. The proposed gravel pit will be analyzed in the same Environmental Analysis document as this project, but a separate decision will likely be written for the gravel pit. Effects of a potential gravel pit will be taken into consideration when addressing safety, recreation, and resource protection for the Jackson Mountain landscape area. Gravel pit operations will include excavation and crushing of material on site, road improvements and maintenance, hauling gravel to different locations utilizing Forest Roads 738 and 037, and reclamation activities.

An Interactive StoryMap showing the location of the proposed trail system, areas being considered for fuels and vegetation management, and the proposed gravel pit is available at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6501abb8bc454f9685f6d65803db78c5>. Maps and other information are also available on the project website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=61809>.

**How to Provide Comments**

The Forest Service is providing a 45-day scoping period that will begin on January 10, 2023 and end on February 23, 2023. Scoping comments must be submitted by no later than February 23, 2023. Comments received during scoping will be used to help identify issues and develop alternatives.

Electronic input is preferred and can be submitted via an on-line comment form at the link below. Look under the “Get Connected” heading on the right-hand side of the page and click on “Comment/Object on Project.”

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=61809>

Hardcopy input can be mailed via USPS or sent via courier (UPS/FedEx) to:

Pagosa Ranger District  
San Juan National Forest  
Attn: Jackson Mountain project  
P.O. Box 310  
Pagosa Springs, CO 81147

There will be further opportunities for public involvement during the analysis, but early participation during the scoping period is encouraged. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered a part of the public record and available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered, but those who submit anonymously will not be put on the project mailing list to receive future information.

**Public Open House**

An in-person public open house is planned for Thursday, February 2 from 5 – 7 pm at the Ross Aragon Community Center, South Conference Room, 451 Hot Springs Blvd in Pagosa Springs. The open house will provide the public opportunities to ask questions, look at maps and talk with Forest Service resource specialists about the project.

**To Request More Information**

For more information about this proposal, please contact the following:

*Recreation* – Paul Blackman, (970) 264-1505, or [paul.blackman@usda.gov](mailto:paul.blackman@usda.gov)

*Veg/Fuels Management* – Adam Tlachac, (970) 264-1513, or [adam.tlachac@usda.gov](mailto:adam.tlachac@usda.gov)

*Gravel Pit* – Jamie Blair, (970) 560-6630, or [james.blair2@usda.gov](mailto:james.blair2@usda.gov)

Sincerely,



JOSHUA PECK  
District Ranger