



Mark Reavis
Town Hall
1360 Greene St
PO Box 250
Silverton, CO 81433

RE: Proposed Motorcoach Development Impact on Nordic Center Trail Network

Dear Mr. Reavis,

I write as President of the Durango Nordic Ski Club (DNSC). DNSC respectfully submits these comments to the San Juan County Planning Board and County Commissioners regarding the proposed high density Motorcoach development. The Motorcoach development as proposed will completely supplant the North Loop of the Nordic Center at Purgatory.

The North Loop is an essential component to the long-term vitality and viability of the Nordic skiing trail network that has operated at Purgatory since 1954. The North Loop has long been our "flagship" trail because its rolling terrain makes it suitable for all levels of skiers and because it holds snow in marginal conditions. Most of the tourists who come and ski here are not capable of skiing to the lower elevation trails because of steep hills and difficult terrain, making the North Loop essential to the Nordic Center visitor experience.

Our request involves securing the ability to maintain in perpetuity the essential function of our current North Loop which critically extends and connects the trail network that straddles San Juan and La Plata Counties. In considering the approval of the Motorcoach development, DNSC requests this Commission and the Board to consider measures and limitations that would preserve the current North Loop trail network. Preserving this trail benefits San Juan County, the Motorcoach development, local residents, visitors, and DNSC.

History and Overview DNSC and the Nordic Center

Founded in 1954, DNSC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that operates the Nordic Center at Purgatory. Our mission is to help young athletes achieve great things as individuals and as competitors by providing financial, developmental, and organizational support to the athletes and their coaches. To support our youth program, we operate the Nordic Center and offer individuals of all ages and abilities the opportunity to learn and enjoy the sports of cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and fat tire biking.

The Nordic Center benefits San Juan and La Plata Counties by offering our many visitors a unique experience consistent with the region's economic interest in access to diverse recreational resources. With over 5000 unique skier visits the Nordic Center contributes to the attractiveness of this region as a tourist destination and our overall economic vitality.



Containing 23k of groomed trails, the Nordic Center is the largest Nordic facility in La Plata and San Juan Counties and the only location that offers its residents and visitors with reliable winter conditions and essential services to maintain and access these trails, including grooming, on-site rental equipment, lessons, and a lodge with bathrooms and other amenities. These essential services make the Nordic Center an attractive destination for local residents and tourists visiting San Juan and La Plata Counties. The northern portion of the terrain maintained by the Center is located in San Juan County and is one of the lowest elevation points in San Juan County and it comprises roughly 25 to 30% of our entire trail network. It also provides the only recreational opportunity in South Juan County south of the major passes.

We have a rich history. The Nordic Center hosted the United States National Nordic Championships in 1971 and the NCAA Championships in 1975. The Nordic Team maintains a long history of engaging area youth from both San Juan and La Plata Counties in a healthy and active outdoor lifestyle. Each winter, we serve hundreds of youth and, over the years, thousands of youth have participated in our programs leading to positive outcomes. Examples are competing and coaching in the Winter Olympic Games, World Championships, National Championships, and National US Ski Team. For some, this experience has helped them gain scholarships and enrollment in top US colleges and universities. Former local Olympians that trained with DNSC include Mike Elliott, A.P. Small, Ronnie Yeager, and Tracy and Lanny Barnes. Our area youth desiring to compete on a local, regional and national scale rely on the Nordic Center for training and hosting competitions; its existence is essential to the viability of a youth program.

Concerns for the Future of the Nordic Center

The Motorcoach development presents significant concerns for the future sustainability of the Nordic Center including:

- The Center's beginner and intermediate terrain is limited to trails located on the private land adjacent to Highway 550, including the North Loop, all of which are slated for development. The beginner and intermediate terrain is essential for novice and intermediate skiers which comprises most all tourists, area youth, and a large percentage of our daily users. Losing this terrain makes the Nordic Center much less attractive to local skiers and tourists.
- A significant portion of our operating income comes from tourists. Without the North Loop and the other similar type trails, we will lose essential income devastating the economic viability of the Nordic Center. Without these trails, the Nordic Center and DNSC must begin considering options for another trail system. Closure of the Nordic Center would leave a devastating void at this location and would have a negative impact on the future of the development.



- While we may have the ability to develop trails on adjacent Forest Service land, we have no option to add beginner and intermediate terrain on those lands. The potential locations for new trails are on benches hundreds of feet below existing trails making it extremely advanced terrain and potentially impossible to groom. The descent down and climb back up to from these areas would challenge even the fittest and most talented of skiers, and would be nearly impossible for the average skier.

Benefits of Nordic Trails to Key Stakeholders

While we acknowledge the rights of private landowner to develop the property, a major concern with this project is the proposed density and the opportunity to best serve key stakeholders, the future Motorcoach residents, San Juan County, area residents, visitors, and DNSC. The layout of the proposed project ignores the goals of the Master Plan to include a trail network that would benefit the entire Planned Unit Development. The open space at the Motorcoach development is planned for steep, wooded areas, not useful as open space. On the other hand, if the development provided for less homes, open space suitable for Nordic trails and access to existing and future trails, this would enhance the project as a whole, benefitting all involved.

The master plan contemplates a trail network connecting all of the proposed developments along the east side of Highway 550 to the year round Metro District Community Center. The developments to the south of the Motorcoach development includes provision for its trails to connect to its northern neighbor and to the Community Center at the heart of these developments. Residents of all the developments benefit by having year-round trails that support connection among the neighborhood's amenities. Future residents of the Motorcoach development will desire trail connectivity.

Trails also serve as a resource attracting tourists and potential second home buyers wishing to live a Colorado lifestyle. Trails increase property values. In 2002, Telluride Nordic commissioned a study illustrating a 9% to 11% increase in home values for homes that have access to trails. Twin Buttes, Edgemont Highlands and Edgemont Ranch offer successful examples of local neighborhoods that allow for development, density, and access to a large network of trails.

San Juan County's land use code provides a vision consistent with outdoor recreation and trail development. "Recreationists benefit from the diverse terrain, scenery and nature in the canyons, mountains, and on the rivers of San Juan county and Silverton. Developed recreation enhances the natural assets and provides alternatives to outdoor recreation... An integrated and well-connected network of roads, trails, and trailheads are present to support mixed motorized / non-motorized outdoor recreation and geographically separate opportunities for non-motorized experiences." The following goals and strategies that support this vision are promoted:



- “Goal R-1: Maintain historic trails and roads and other legal public access through private property.”
- “Strategies: R-1.1 Continue to require that public access is ensured as private property is developed in the town and county.”
- “Goal R-2: Expand and enhance opportunities for outdoor recreation in and near Silverton.”
- “Strategies: R-2.2: Support efforts to obtain ownership, leases, or permission to use rights-of-way for trail construction.”
- “Goal R-3: Continue to expand and diversify winter recreation opportunities in and near Silverton.”
- “Strategies: R-3.2 Partner with regional organized recreation groups to develop non-motorized groomed Nordic ski trails in and near town.”

Additionally, the code provides the youth vision: “Opportunities for recreation are greatly improved and expanded to offer a wide variety of outdoor and indoor activities geared toward kids, teens, and their families.”

This project does not fit these visions, goals, and strategies. The density is extremely high bringing economic benefit to the County and to the developer. But this economic benefit does not need to be at the expense of the public benefit nor the benefit of the future homeowners at this development. San Juan County's economy and benefit largely is based on recreation and access to trails. As such, it is the benefit of this project and the overall public interest for the County to stand up for recreation and trail preservation as part of this development. They logically go hand in hand.

DNSC would like to work with San Juan County to create partnership opportunities to preserve recreation and trails, while accommodating private land ownership. DNSC and the Center host multiple large scale events during the winter season, including events that bring in thousands of competitors from all over the State and the southwest. The San Juan County Tourist organization could set up tents and otherwise market San Juan County during these events and at other times throughout the season. In addition, DNSC could commit a portion of trail fees to San Juan County for its support of the preservation of recreation.

Another concern with this project is the risk of failure. The project requires high end expensive Motorcoaches to cross mountain passes from any direction. In addition, if the project is built to its current plan, the decimation of beginner and intermediate trails would be a detriment to sale. If the development displaces the Nordic Center, then fails, everyone loses. It is a benefit to San Juan County, La Plata County, the developer and the future of Nordic skiing in the area to preserve the recreational opportunities provided by DNSC.



DNSC would also ask the Commission and the Board to consider limiting the development to seasonal access. Even if these high-end motorcoaches were to use the land in the summer, it is highly unlikely that they would risk driving them over mountain passes in the winter. Perhaps there should be a limitation that roads could not be plowed during the winter to provide for trails to utilize the road space. The development may need to be reconfigured to provide for the trail system.

DNSC wants to partner with San Juan County and the Motorcoach development to conceive a plan that benefits all stakeholders today and into the future. As stated, our request involves securing the ability to maintain in perpetuity the essential function of our current North Loop which critically extends and connects the trail network that straddles San Juan and La Plata Counties. DNSC requests this Commission and the Board to consider measures and limitations that would preserve the current North Loop trail network. Preserving this trail benefits San Juan County, the Motorcoach development, local residents, visitors and DNSC. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tom Holcomb
President
Durango Nordic Ski Club