



THE TAOS NEWS

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Carson Forest seeks comments as it gauges outfitter and guide activity

By Matthew van Buren

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Carson National Forest is hoping the public will weigh in as it prepares a needs assessment for commercial recreation activities.

“In 2008 the Forest Service released directives to more effectively manage the outfitter and guide program,” a Monday (Aug. 5) announcement states. “The guidance includes a requirement for determining the public and agency need for outfitted and guided activities.”

A “capacity analysis” is also required to determine activities people are engaging in and gauge interactions with people who use outfitter and guide services.

Special-use permits are required for professional outfitters and guides on Forest Service lands. Permitted activities include ATV and snowmobile tours, guided hunting and fishing trips, and llama and horseback trips, according to the announcement.

“The needs assessment will consider input from the public, outfitters and guides, user groups and forest employees,” the announcement states. “The Forest Service will review information such as national and regional recreation trend data, usage numbers of existing outfitters and guides, and factors such as necessary expertise or skills needed, safety and risk concerns, economic benefit to local communities, customer costs or sensitivity of certain areas.”

The needs assessment process will help the Forest Service determine how best to manage the program long-term. “In some areas, there may be new opportunities for existing or potential outfitters,” the announcement states. “In other areas, the existing use may be sufficient to meet demands. Overall, this process will eliminate uncertainty about whether particular outfitter and guide activities should be allowed in an area and add a degree of stability to existing operations.”

Determining “true need and capacity” will help the Forest Service prevent overloading of such services and is intended to benefit permittees as well as the general public.

Comments can be submitted through the Forest Service website at www.fs.usda.gov/carson. Comments may also be emailed to kdelucas@fs.fed.us or mailed to Kathy DeLucas, Carson National Forest, 208 Cruz Alta Road, Taos, NM, 87571.

Carson National Forest is requesting comments be submitted by Aug. 31. Questions may be directed to DeLucas at (575) 758-6303.