



Thank you to our colleagues with the USFS- Jennifer, Kendra, Sam and Olivia.

I want to begin by naming something important - this Board shares the concerns we've heard repeatedly from the community - the attacks on public lands and our country's environmental protections are unacceptable. In just the past twenty months since I began serving, Pitkin County has continually met with and penned letters to our legislators - defending public lands. The board and staff's advocacy has included support for LWCF capital for land acquisition- not for deferred maintenance, Opposition to the (CEQ, Council on Environmental Quality) Interim Final Rule Removing NEPA Implementing Regulation, support for the GORP act, (strong) support for the Public Lands Integrity Act, and support for BLM rulemaking for e-bikes. The Board continues to engage with our legislators and vociferously defend public lands - this is our priority because it's our community's priority. And, it's our responsibility.

Today's decision is just one example of how Pitkin County can act on behalf of the incredible ecosystems in our backyard to care for the manmade and natural systems at our headwaters. Nature does not carry a party card; deferred maintenance continues through administrations, budgets and congressional priorities.

In the Maroon Bells Comprehensive Recreation Management Plan, our community and users shared they wanted:

- Improvements to the waste and trash disposal - this special use permit will allow us to do that
- Better restroom facilities - this permit will allow us to do that
- Stronger wayfinding - this permit will allow us to do that
- Improving the visitor experience - this permit will allow us to do that. And much more.

This special use permit issued and annual operating plan are under the authority of the Granger-Thye Act through the authorized officer, in accordance with environmental laws; continuing our partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to safeguard our public lands.

This week and throughout this summer, we were reminded - we are in this together. From (natural disasters like) mudslides on Maroon Creek Road, to human tragedy at Maroon Peak, to keeping the Kittle Fire under 29 acres, to managing foot traffic and building world class trails and maintaining campsites.

Recently the board executed an agreement for a cooperative initiative between the Forest Service and Pitkin County aimed at enhancing and monitoring watershed health within the WRNF. The partnership focuses on critical environmental parameters, including wilderness conditions, air quality, water quality, and macroinvertebrate populations, to ensure ecosystem stability. The objectives include safeguarding municipal water sources through targeted environmental oversight through strategic watershed restoration and forest health initiatives across the county. This is a partnership for the land.

We know the attacks on our public lands will continue, and (I hope you know) - your Board will continue to advocate for the protection and funding of our public resources. We cannot afford to pause on that advocacy for a minute.

Before us today is the chance to take action - the public process that was led to develop the management plan demonstrates how Pitkin County cares and listens. We want to deliver the world class experience our valley and visitors deserve as they stroll to Crater Lake or enjoy well maintained trails West Maroon Pass. As elected officials, it is our responsibility to protect the awe and majesty of the Maroon Bells, and by approving the special use permit today, we once again accept that responsibility as a valued collaborator and fellow land steward.

Jeffrey H. Woodruff
23 September 2026