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January 12, 2012

Mr. John Russell
Colorado River Valley RMP Project Manager
BLM CO Colorado River Valley Field Office
2300 River Frontage Road
Silt, CO 81652

Dear Mr. Russell:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) is a not-for-profit individual membership organization of more than 400,000 pilots. AOPA's mission is to effectively serve the interests and needs of its members as aircraft owners and pilots and establish, maintain, and articulate positions of leadership to promote the economy, safety, utility, and popularity of flight in general aviation aircraft.

We are submitting our comments to the Colorado River Valley Field Office Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). AOPA is disappointed that the BLM missed the aviation community when it was seeking input on the scope of the draft RMP/EIS. Aviation has long been a user of BLM managed lands at numerous back country airstrips.

AOPA continues to advocate on behalf of our members to keep access open to those back country airstrips and to actively consider them in the planning process. We recently participated in the US Forest Service National Planning Rule process and are pleased to note that they specifically recognized recreational aviation as a use on the National Forests. Not only do these airstrips provide an internal trailhead for pilots and their families to use to enjoy our nation's wilderness, they also allow mobility impaired recreationalists to experience wilderness areas formerly inaccessible to them.

Back country airstrips also offer a measure of safety for aircraft overflying the wilderness. Distances between airports can be great for those overflying the areas, and help is far away. But if needed, a backcountry strip can offer an emergency landing that is a lot safer than crashing in brush or seemingly open fields. These airstrips also provide a valuable function as staging areas and resupply points for forest management and wildfire fighting. And they serve as evacuation points for recreational users injured in the backcountry and unable to hike their way out.

Because of all the important roles back country recreational airstrips play, it is important that national land managers such as the BLM reach out to the general aviation community to advise them when field offices start to work on RMPs and Travel Management Plans. AOPA respectfully asks the BLM to notify national aviation organizations such as ourselves, the Recreational Aviation Foundation, and the appropriate State Aviation Divisions and state pilot associations like the Colorado Pilots Association when they are initiating planning actions. Many

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of the members of these organizations are the ones who volunteer to keep the airstrips maintained for safe use and they have a direct and vested interest in their continued use.

Specific to the Colorado River Valley RMP, we are aware of at least two airstrips within the planning area that are of importance to our members. They are the Roan Cliffs and Tepee Creek airstrips. We encourage the BLM to consider including them and any others that are usable and suitable for recreation in the final RMP.

With respect to these two airstrips, the draft plan on page 2-84 requires "all motorized aircraft, including but not limited to airplanes, helicopters, and ultralights, to have a use authorization for take-off and landing locations on BLM lands or waterways" under Alternatives B, C, and D. AOPA requests that language be removed and new language be inserted providing for unrestricted access to authorized BLM airstrips and waterways as identified in the final RMP. Additionally we request that provision be made to recognize future landing sites that may be authorized in the future.

It is important that recreational aviation be included in the travel management plans for the Colorado River Valley Field Office. We support the Recreational Aviation Foundation's suggested language for Chapter 3.3.4: *"Recreational aviation can be an integral part of a balanced recreational travel plan. Recreational airstrips serve as internal trailheads, providing a means of minimal impact access to many regions of BLM lands. Two airstrips are specifically authorized for public access without preauthorization: Roan Cliffs and Tepee Creek. Management criteria can be found in Appendix O of the final RMP."*

The aviation community appreciates the opportunity to come to the Colorado River Valley to enjoy nature and experience wilderness recreation. AOPA asks that you continue to provide for that experience to include access by aviation. Additionally, we request to be included in future planning actions within the Colorado River Valley and the state of Colorado. Thank you for your consideration of our views on this draft RMP. If we can be of further assistance please contact us at 301-695-2200.

Sincerely,



John L. Collins
Manager
Airport Policy

cc:

Joe Stout, Planning and NEPA Branch Chief, Washington, DC
Robert Perrin, BLM Travel Management Program National Contact