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Comments: One of my favorite areas to hike is around the Ouray and Ridgway area. As you are aware, this area, along with most of the GMUG, has in the last year had increasing use and abuse by recreational use of the trails, road and the many rogue trails. This makes it especially important that the FS carefully designate land use and recreational uses for existing trails and areas. I am especially concerned about the Bear Creek area. My husband and I have hiked that area and appreciated the diversity of landscape, scenic views and solitude. There are unusual geologic formations to be seen, that we have not encountered in other places. I recently heard that a Ft. Lewis College professor identified intriguing evidence of an Eocene (56 to 33.9 million years ago) paleocanyon cut into the area. As I understand it, these relatively rare findings of paleo canyons may teach us more about sea level rise and fall and perhaps climate change. This area needs the maximum possible protection. So I remain concerned that Bear Creek was not listed as a wilderness eligible area in the Forest Revision Plan. The Community Conservation Proposal did include this area as the Bear Creek addition to the Uncompahgre Wilderness. I urge the FS to inventory Bear Creek to elucidate the many attributes, and include it as a wilderness eligible area.

Gonzales et al. 2021. Evolution of the Cenozoic landscape in the western San Juan Mountains. The Mountain Geologist. Vol. 58, No. 4, p. 411-432.