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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I have lived in Montrose County for 34+ years. I enjoy hiking, birdwatching and backpacking in the GMUG. I am most interested in quiet, non mechanized recreation. This allows me to see birds and other wildlife, identify and appreciate wildflowers, recharge my mental health, and enjoy the outdoors with small groups of family and friends.

Kelso Mesa

As a long-time resident of Montrose County, I have mostly done my hiking, and birdwatching in the higher alpine areas of the GMUG. I recently heard reports from friends and fellow Audubon Society members (both Black Canyon Audubon - of which I am a member, and Grand Valley Audubon) about the beauty, relative quiet, and wildlife viewing opportunities in the Forest Service areas along and near the Gunnison River between Delta and Grand Junction. When you drive Highway 50 between the two towns, it seems to be mostly desert, with only occasional sightings of pronghorn. These sightings are always exciting. Now I realize a short drive off Highway 50 gets me into some spectacular terrain of canyons and riparian areas. I remember standing under a magnificent cottonwood tree as I gave a program for school groups through the Colorado Canyons Association. The students were surprised and happy to learn about these magnificent trees in their natural setting, and to learn how their survival (both the trees and the people!) is tied to the land and water. My friends through the Great Old Broads for Wilderness tell me that the Colorado Natural Heritage Program includes Kelso Mesa as part of the Escalante Creek Potential Conservation Area due to the variety of riparian and wetland plants. Who knew this was such a rich area for plants! It needs to be protected!! I can't say it any better than this quote from the Citizens Conservation Proposal "Kelso Mesa is uncommon on the Uncompahgre Plateau for being such a large, roadless tract of gentle, undulating forests and sagebrush meadows. Over 70 percent of Kelso Mesa consists of ecosystem types with less than five percent representation within existing designated wilderness at the federal level and at the forest level, primarily Rocky Mountain Gambel Oak-Mixed Montane Shrubland and Colorado Plateau Pinyon-Juniper Woodland."

Therefore, I urge the FS to designate Kelso Mesa as a recommended wilderness area. We need to protect untrammeled areas in all types of habitat. When I heard that one recent group of hikers saw a beaver in the Kelso area, I started to plan a hike there. Anywhere a beaver thrives is good habitat that needs to be protected.