August 2017

Attn: Forest Plan Revision Team

GMUG National Forest

2250 South Main St

Delta Co., 81416

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the GMUG Forest Plan Revision process:

# Background

The Thunder Mountain Wheelers ATV Club (TMW) represents approximately 350 people and businesses on the Western Slope of Colorado, mostly in the Delta and Montrose County areas who enjoy recreating on our public lands with off highway vehicles. TMW is a volunteer based non-profit environmental concerned organization that has focused on preserving and enhancing the opportunities of all OHV users in the local area since 1990. TMW enthusiasts provide not only thousands of volunteer hours, but have contributed 1.3 million dollars from the Colorado Parks & Wildlife OHV grant program to public lands preservation and restoration.

It is important to note that TMW doesn’t expend its energy opposing other forms of recreation or user group, or try to undermine other activities on public lands. We recognize the diverse interests and needs of all Colorado residents and applaud, rather than oppose them.

TMW acknowledges the challenges and complexities in preparing a Revision Plan in trying to balance the diverse interests of the public, while protecting our natural resources. The Forest Service is a leader in providing outstanding outdoor recreation to a broad range of visitors. TMW and its members respect the planning team and their efforts to provide the information necessary to allow the public an opportunity to comment and provide data to assist the decision making process.

TMW OHV organization believes that continued multiple-use access and motorized recreation within the GMUG National Forest is vitally importantTo the preservation and conservation of our public lands and the wellbeing of our citizens and organizations.

# User Demographics\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

It must be noted that ATV’s did not exist in significant numbers until about 1980. Likewise neither did the extreme 4WD vehicles. The advent of these vehicles has created a new recreational demand on public lands.

The OHV Registration Program in Colorado has grown from 55,000 registrations in 2000 to 170,000 registrations in 2016. This is a significant growth rate, yet it doesn’t include licensed 4WD vehicles, licensed motorcycles, and OHV’s used for agricultural. With figures like these it is paramount that the Forest Service in its Forest Plan Revision process recognizes this recreational demand on public lands and carefully plan for the increased use by providing access, camping opportunities and recreational loop trail for the OHV users. It is imperative in the Revision process that the USFS emphasis is on identifying and implementing a “minimum trail system” that includes many of the previously closed National Forest roads system into multiple use 50” OHV trails in an effort to accommodate the large and ever increasing OHV community.

With emphasis on loop trails, TMW has found that OHV users tend to fall into one of two categories. They are either primary or secondary users. Both groups prefer the 50” or less trail experience. Riders that are primary OHV users are looking for a quality loop trail experience that typically is a reasonably long mileage opportunity from 20-60 miles in length that does not require repeated back tracking. Our years of experience have shown us that if the Land Managers provide loop trails it will almost totally prevent and eliminate the tendency for OHV users to create bandit or unauthorized trails. Those that are secondary OHV users, tend to be using the OHV for transportation only in conjunction with another form of recreation, and are more likely to be satisfied with a dead end experience. The secondary user could be a hunter, angler, sightseer, firewood collector, camper, etc. Beginning OHV users and families also enjoy these short spurs, where they know that the difficulty level is low and there is little chance of a bad experience. Both user groups enjoy experiences that the “Middle Country” & “High Country” offers, in terms of scenic overviews, solitude, range of topography and geology. Both user groups are tolerant of encountering other trail users or like groups of fellow OHV users. Supporting the designated trail concept, both groups are content with traveling on designated trails, but neither group tolerates litter or resource damage.

The makeup of the members of the TMW ATV club is mostly primary riders. The average age of the membership is 55+ years and most ride ATV’s for the simple reason they still love the outdoors, but age and the lack of physical capability has caught up with them and the ATV is the only avenue they have to still enjoy their public lands.

It is a known fact that use of public land by all users has changed dramatically in the past couple decades. There are fewer overnight backpacking and camping trips. There are now more Cars, Pick-ups and RV camping, mostly on specific OHV outings of several days or more. This seems to be changing even faster with the Gen X and Gen Y folks. The Forest Plan Revision process has to enter this important land use into their final solution.

TMW asks that the Forest Service carefully analyze and proceed to integrate these demographics into their planning process in the GMUG Forest Revision plan. Please let us remind you, that user groups that are adamant about not sharing or recognizing multiple use of public lands and demand “quite use” areas such as WSA’s or wilderness are well provided for with literally hundreds of thousands of such areas already designated as such right around the GMUG area. Also be cognizant of the fact that acre for acre the non-motorized community has three (3) times as much area per individual user to recreate on.

SPECIFICALLY

The Forest Service lands of Western Colorado mostly consist of the higher geographical areas. These areas have been successfully managed by the Forest Service for years as multiple use area for all user groups. TMW major concern during the Revision Plan is that the process has the tendency of the current Federal agencies to stray from the multiple use concepts of public land management. Recent history has shown the acceleration of the land management agencies toward the more restrictive environmental concept that sometimes is factually questioned by science or past history or experience. TMW encourages the Forest Service to be cognizance of such concerns in the Revision process. We encourage the Revision Process to be cautious of being unduly influenced from the anti-motorized community in Protecting Significant Values and established OHV recreational areas. Management prescriptions are developed expressly to protect the important and relevant values of an area NOT from the undue influence from the environmental community.

There is a multitude of HISTORIC routes throughout the GMUG management area. TMW asks that the Revision Process be extremely cognizant of the existing travel routes and put significant protective measures toward these treasured travel pathways and pre-plan your final product to reflect such concerns. One of the most contentious OHV issues generally comes from the removal of a HISTORIC route from the designated OHV inventory. We acknowledge the fact that some areas of the GMUG possess significant historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish or wildlife resources, or natural hazards. That is why our organization has been active in preserving and protecting the resources and has worked tirelessly over the years to protect them.

TMW is well aware of the multitude of cultural resource sites within the GMUG. We would like too strongly point out that to enjoy along with preserving such sites does not always consist of boots on the ground in the immediate area of such sites. Many of these sites can remain preserved and still be viewed from a distance. TMW would entertain a collaborative effort in helping the Forest Service in signage and educational tools in and around such areas. For the most part our experience shows that vandalism of sites is much less likely to occur with proper education and information.

TMW and the entire OHV community remind you that the multiple-use concept and access to/by the motorized community is a major contributor to the socioeconomics of the local Western slope communities as well as the State of Colorado.

Please peruse the report below to help you identify the importance, the trends and the substantial economic contribution of off-Highway Vehicles Recreation in Colorado.

<http://www.coloradotpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2014-15Season-OHV_Study-ExecSummary.pdf>

Thank you,

Walt Blackburn

Government Liaison Officer

Thunder Mountain Wheelers ATV Club