August 30, 2017

Scott Armentrout, Forest Supervisor

GMUG Plan Revision Team

GMUG National Forest

2250 South Main Street

Delta, CO 81416

Dear Scott Armentrout and the entire GMUG Forest Plan Revision Team,

I would like to first extend a thank-you for taking the time to visit Gunnison, as well as many other communities throughout the Western slope, as you begin the Forest Plan Revision. The feedback I have received from individuals that attended the meeting locally has been very positive, and we appreciate you all taking the time to explain a somewhat complicated process. We are excited to take part in this historic process, and look forward to working together to shape the management direction of our public resources.

I am the executive director of Gunnison Trails, a non-profit trail advocacy group located in Gunnison, CO. While much of our work is focused on BLM lands that surround the City of Gunnison, we have begun to focus more on trails located on USFS lands to our north and south. Our mission is to assist land managers and stakeholders in maintaining existing trails, educating users on proper trail etiquette and environmental stewardship and pursuing new opportunities for sustainable trail-based recreation.

While many of the assessments from the 2007 proposed forest plan remain relevant today, we have seen further pressure placed upon our public lands here in Gunnison County. We have seen a tremendous increase from all areas of recreation, be it motorized, mechanized or visitors coming to camp and hike. Our GMUG National Forest lands are relatively pristine and undeveloped. They offer a recreational experience not found in many places today, and more and more people are coming here to share in the experience. This increased use has presented many challenges. Drainages in the north end of the Gunnison Valley were so overrun that they were closed to dispersed campers for the months of June, July, and much of August, putting more pressure on those areas without restrictions. We have problems with overcrowding at trailheads and on certain trails, new route proliferation from individuals looking to camp or simply driving off the road, human waste issues and a constant increase in user created campsites. These issues show no signs of abating without a change in the amenities offered in certain areas.

Hartman Rocks, a recreation area here in Gunnison managed by the BLM is a great example of the increase in use we have seen here in the valley. While it doesn’t see the same influx of individuals during the summer months as Crested Butte does to our north, many of the campsites at Hartman Rocks remained full throughout the summer. This was not the case 10 years ago. I bring this up not to say enough is enough, but rather showcase the growth we have seen here from visitation, and the need to adapt our management strategies for a growing population.

We encourage plan revision consider the increased pressure and provide for more opportunities for trail connectivity and trail construction close to population centers. Greater trail access close to town allows community members quick access to the national forest and public lands, and leads to less car traffic on some of our already congested roads. We also propose the creation of more sustainable backcountry routes that disperse and separate trail users to avoid the crowding issues seen in many areas. We have an amazing network of trails here in the Gunnison Valley, and connecting those trails via single track provides for greater recreational opportunity while separating users.

Even before the 2012 Planning Rule requiring responsible officials to provide opportunities for public participation, we have enjoyed a strong partnership with our local USFS and BLM staff. We have shown the massive amount of work that can be accomplished utilizing enthusiastic volunteers. More and more, individuals want to volunteer to work on our national forests and public lands. This personal contact with the land will ultimately create better stewards, and it is encouraging to see a strong focus on public participation during this plan revision. We are excited by the work we have accomplished thus far, and look forward to working together to shape and implement the newest Forest Plan Revision. Best regards,

Tim Kugler

Executive Director, Gunnison Trails

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