

December 4, 2017

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests
GMUG Plan Revision Team
2250 South Main Street
Delta, CO 81416



Re: GMUG Forest Plan Revision Draft Assessment Comments

Thank you for a very organized, well planned, and easily accessible Draft Assessment Report. The outreach, and the visibility were much appreciated and have made this commenting process rather simple and enjoyable. Specifically, CBMBA is commenting on the Recreation report.

“CBMBA believes that recreation engenders authentic connections to the environment and seeks to use recreation as a tool for environmental awareness.” (*CBMBA Master Plan Guiding Principles* - <https://crestedbuttemountainbike.com/cbmba-master-plan/>)

While we don't have hard data or analytics to speak to economic impacts, it's hard to miss the pulse of Crested Butte. Barely a car makes its way through town without mountain bikes, cruisers, cross, fat bikes, or road bikes on it. Compound that in the summertime, and there's no denying that Crested Butte is a mountain bike destination among the most splendid on the planet. Backcountry recreation, mountain biking, and trail amenities in Crested Butte are in high demand. With that demand, CBMBA, in its 34 year history, hired an Executive Director in 2016 and started a full time trail care/stewardship crew, the Crested Butte Conservation Corps (CBCC) in 2017. Besides the full time CBCC crew, CBMBA volunteers account for over 2500 volunteer hours on public lands annually. Collectively, mountain bikers across the nation represent some of the best stewards and advocates of public lands and responsible recreation.

Page 57 of the Draft Assessment states:

“Mountain biking, born in Crested Butte, is slowly losing ground in popularity to dirt bike use (where such use is allowed). Mountain bikes and dirt bikes often seek similar trail experiences. The popularity of this area for dirt bike riding can be attributed to the numerous single-track trails that are available, particularly in the Cement Creek area.”

We don't feel this adequately represents the current situation on the ground in Crested Butte. Mountain biking, already world famous and a staple of the Town of Crested Butte's substance and livelihood, is distinctly on the rise. Although the numbers in the Draft Assessment are from 2014, they seem surprisingly small for the percentage of 'bicycling' users (*Table 17, p.31 - Participation Rates for the GMUG's top ten outdoor recreation activities, FY09 and FY14*). Granted, the percentage change from '09 - '14 is notable (1% - 6%). Recently, the Gunnison/Crested Butte Tourism Association (GCBTA) has collected user data on trails in the Crested Butte and Gunnison areas.

Cement Creek Trail (Lower) FS#636

- Up 53.90% based on corresponding weeks 2016 vs. 2017
- 1776 counts in 2017 vs. 1154 in 2016
- July 22nd - November 17th

Doctor Park Trail #424

- Up 25.56% 2016 vs. 2017
- 5360 counts in 2017 vs. 4269 in 2016
- June 10th - November 2nd

Teocalli Ridge Trail FS#557 (motorized and non-motorized use)

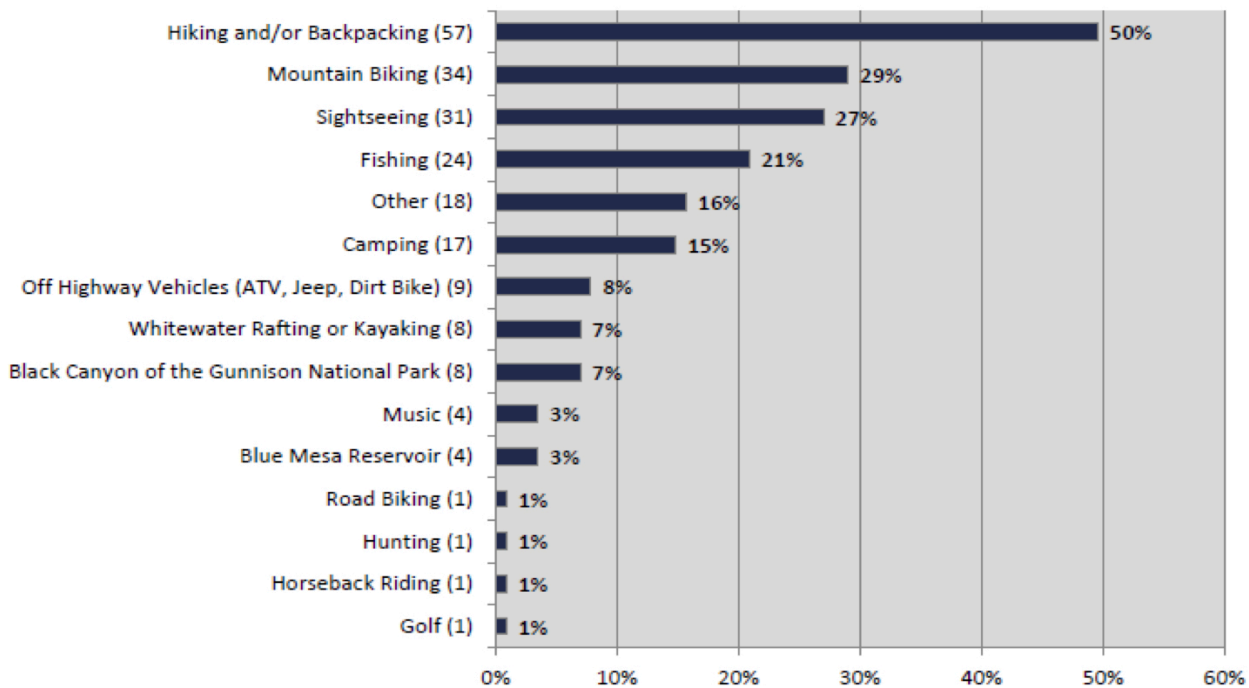
- Up 53.73% 2016 vs. 2017
- 2492 counts in 2017 vs. 1621 in 2016
- July 1st - October 13th

(source: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1YGkD3QbD710SjuZvzXjhoqsKxrN_aEeVB2FzFqrJbEl/edit#gid=351156671)

In addition, the GCBTA worked alongside Guest Research, Inc. to compile visitor data from May 1, 2016 until September 4, 2017.

Buying Process: Summer Decision to Visit

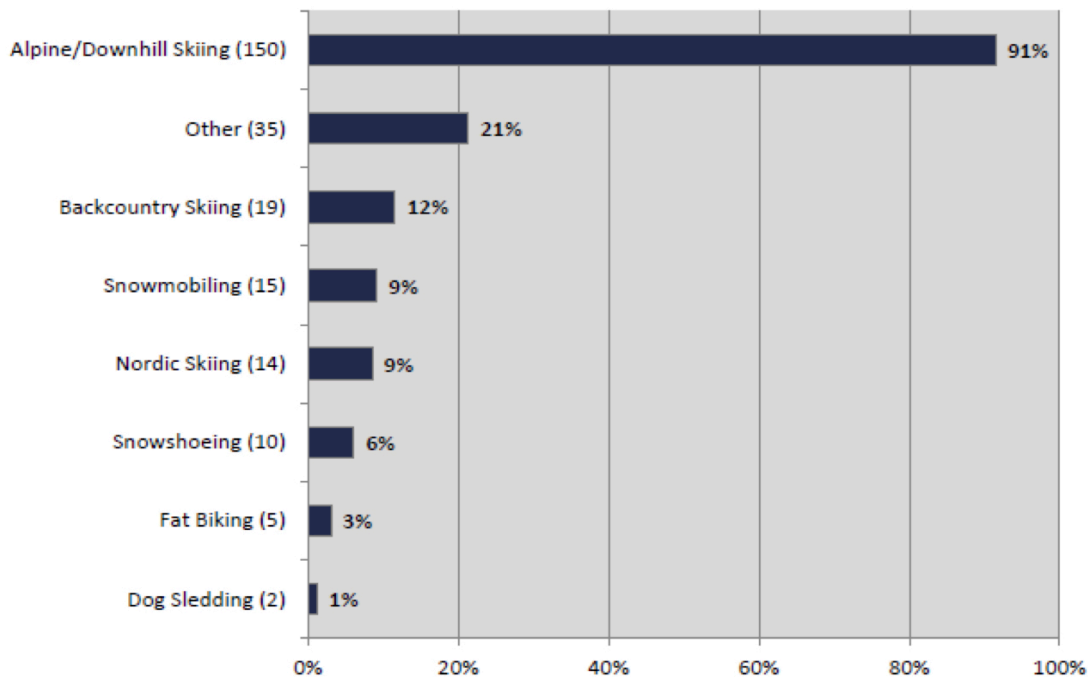
Which TWO of the following summer activities and venues were most important in your decision to visit Gunnison & Crested Butte?



The number in parenthesis is the number of respondents.
Whitewater Rafting (4), Sightseeing (3), and Ziplining were the primary "Other" activities.

Buying Process: Winter Decision to Visit

Which TWO of the following winter activities and venues were most important in your decision to visit Gunnison & Crested Butte?



The number in parenthesis is the number of respondents.
Snowboarding was the primary "Other" activity, with 10 respondents.

Mountain bikes and dirt bikes indeed often seek similar trail experiences, and the popularity of the Cement Creek area for mountain bikes has increased exponentially in recent years, noticeably after the 2010 Travel Management Plan. Connectivity with other non-motorized drainages and user areas was supplemented, sustainable trails and re-routes were created, and the Cement Creek drainage became a 'hot-spot' for non-motorized use alongside motorized use.

CBMBA is content to see the Draft report speak to the dispersed and developed recreation issues, specifically the dispersed camping demands and impacts, trailhead development, toilet facilities, trails, and infrastructure needs. For trails, CBMBA would like to see noted a strong desire for non-motorized trails that get riders/users off the roads, creating less user conflicts along with better user experiences. Connectivity, loops, and access via parallel trails and non-motorized routes are amongst the biggest demands of the CBMBA membership. CBMBA has noted this in the previous comment process and would like to see 'riders/users off the roads' as a staple of safe, progressive, and responsible trail use and access.

For example, Gothic Road in Mt. Crested Butte sees overwhelming summer use. Trail 401 is a world famous destination for mountain bikers and hikers, along with Trail 403. Wildflowers, scenery, hiking (Copper Creek/Judd Falls), alpine roads, and the renowned Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory create huge visitation and conflicts on the road

itself (access). A non-motorized parallel trail from Mt. Crested Butte to Gothic would greatly reduce the conflicts between various users on the road. It would also create a safer, more sustainable and responsible means of access with better user experiences overall.

CBMBA is also dedicated to not just summer trail experiences, but also winter trail experiences. In year two of our special use permit with the Gunnison Ranger District, CBMBA is committed to provide winter trail opportunities for non-motorized users (Gothic/North Village), along with motorized users (Cement/Brush Creek). We feel this winter amenity continues to increase our brand as a recreation destination, more so at a time when visitor numbers are lower compared to summer visitor numbers.

With increased population in the American West, commuting opportunities and connecting communities are a means to a more sustainable future. CBMBA would like to see these issues addressed in the Forest Plan as well as a means to make them happen. Considering population trends noted in Chapter 4 along with active lifestyle demands, better connectivity via trails will serve future needs on the GMUG (*“Trails facilitate the most dispersed recreation on the GMUG” – ch.3 p.17*). The Gunnison to Crested Butte Trail is an example of connecting communities via a backcountry experience and provides a means to join two well-used recreation areas. Like the Crested Butte to Carbondale Trail, joining communities via non-motorized parallel or backcountry trails will enhance not only user experience but also the health and sustainability of the Forest.

CBMBA is also glad to see the Draft Assessment focus on quality of experiences. As noted above, CBMBA believes quality experiences facilitate authentic connections to the environment. This quality experience helps create an aura and desire for conservation and naturally adds a stewardship element to user experiences. This progressive and proactive approach helps create a more aware, more educated user and naturally enables a more sustainable future for the GMUG.

CBMBA is also glad to see noted that despite partnerships with hiking, equestrian, and mountain bike groups, non-motorized trails in particular need increased attention and maintenance. CBMBA, along with the Crested Butte Conservation Corps (CBCC), an arm of CBMBA, is dedicated to working alongside the GMUG and specifically the Gunnison Ranger District to partner as much and as often as possible to help with the backlog of maintenance required. With proposed infrastructure decommissioning, length of season/climate change, reduced federal resources, and increased visitors/use, we hope the GMUG sees the opportunity to partner further with private entities and advocacy groups to realize shortfalls on the forest. Adaptive management tools to address changing and emerging recreation trends will play a key role in the future of the GMUG.

David Ochs – Executive Director
Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association
Since 1983
dave@cbmba.org
970.349.7324