Date: December 7, 2017

To: GMUG Forest

Fr: Gunnison Crested Butte Tourism Association

Tourism is the largest economic driver in the Gunnison Valley and the GCBTA is charged with keeping our tourism strong in a sustainable manner.

We focus almost all our monies and efforts on mountain biking during the non-snow months, and we also focus increasingly on fat biking in the winter, including efforts towards making the Fat Bike Worlds more successful than it has already been.

This approach to tourism has been successful and we expect to continue with our mountain biking trails focus. Our commercial lodging occupancies are among the highest in our 19 mountain valley competitive set, and we have been growing faster in the non-snow months than the average.

The Gunnison Valley’s Mountain bike trails are our treasure, and we are recognized around the world as having maybe the best trail network anywhere.

We met with a member of Arkansas’ Walton Family Foundation this fall at Outerbike in Mt. Crested Butte. The Foundation was present at Outerbike principally to recruit Outerbike to NW Arkansas, and it was successful. When asked about the Foundation’s interest in mountain biking, we were told of three reasons for the extraordinary focus:

1. For the physical health of citizens
2. For attracting businesses (other than Walmart) to NW Arkansas
3. For tourism

Besides our efforts in tourism, we are also charged with supporting economic development in the Gunnison Valley. It was eye-opening to us (if not surprising) that the Foundation saw a superior mountain bike trail network as an important attractor when pursuing business relocation to the area, an arena which we, in conjunction with elected officials, are now active in.

On page 57 of the USFS Draft, we read that **“Mountain Biking, born in Crested Butte, is slowly losing ground in popularity to dirt bike use (where such use is allowed).”**

We support the Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association comments on the Draft, and will not repeat its key points here. As heavy trail users ourselves, and also armed with mountain biking research as cited in CBMBA’s comment, we find that claim not to be true.

We will point to Tables 12 and 17 in the Draft.

Table 17: Mountain biking has grown from 1% of GMUG activity to 6% of activity comparing 2009 to 2014. During that same time period, OHV use has remained level at 3%. Mountain biking grew significantly faster than any other activity on the GMUG.

Table 12: Mountain biking Outfitter/Guide days grew to 3829 in 2016, an 83% increase in two years. Motorcycle Outfitter/Guide days remained flat at 50.

More and more communities are finding ways to support mountain biking because it is good for its citizens and good for tourism. Trails are being built, literally, everywhere.

We ask that the Forest Plan support CBMBA, Gunnison Trails, and the new Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee’s efforts to build and maintain mountain bike trails and build appropriate trailhead amenities.

GCBTA independent research illustrates the importance of mountain biking to tourism in the valley. It is the #2 driver, at 29%, of tourist visitations. (Hiking and backpacking is #1, also, of course, pointing to the importance of our trails).

We ask that the plan acknowledge, in whatever appropriate way, the extraordinary mountain bike culture of our citizens, the importance of mountain biking to our future, and the need to continually improve our trail system.

As the Draft reports, mountain biking was born here. It’s imperative to keep the 50-year old sport robust and healthy in our valley!

Switching gears…

Fishing is our #4 driver for visitation and so watershed health is very important to not only our citizens but to many of our visitors.

And finally…

Our extraordinary support for mountain biking does not imply a lack of support for motorcycles and other off road vehicles. Mountain biking is simply much more popular than OHV.

Thank you.

John Norton

Executive Director

Gunnison Crested Butte Tourism Association