



Office of the Mayor  
Sean Murphy, Mayor

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Thank you for this opportunity to submit comments to the Assessment phase of the GMUG planning process.

Public lands in Western Colorado are a cornerstone of our lives. A healthy Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest (GMUG) is critical for sustaining our strong economy, quality of life, abundant wildlife, clean air and water, incredible views, intact landscapes, heritage, and excellent recreational opportunities.

As part of the GMUG's effort to revise its 1983 Forest Plan, the Town of Telluride supports Sheep Mountain Alliance's wilderness and special management recommendations, and urges the Forest Service to adopt them in the revised Forest Plan. Sheep Mountain Alliance's designations proposal is based on community involvement, on-the-ground fieldwork, the best available science, and the requirements in the 2012 U.S. Forest Service Planning Rule. These landscape-level conservation recommendations are integral to sustaining a healthy and wild GMUG now and into the future.

Wilderness and other conservation designations on the GMUG safeguard public lands, protect our communities' heritage, sustain healthy wildlife and habitat, support a strong and sustainable economy, and preserve our quality of life for generations to come. These areas provide essential wildlife habitat and attract hikers, hunters, anglers, skiers, and others seeking an unspoiled backcountry recreation experience. They also satisfy the Forest Service's substantive obligations under the 2012 planning rule to provide for ecological integrity, species diversity, and social, economic, and ecological sustainability.

Establishing these designated areas in the revised Forest Plan will help address ecological needs relevant to biodiversity, connectivity, and climate change adaptation. In addition, adoption of Sheep Mountain Alliance's recommendations would ensure the revised Forest Plan reflects the GMUG's distinctive wilderness and backcountry recreation heritage.

There is a need and opportunity for wilderness and other landscape-level conservation designations on the GMUG. As such, Telluride supports Sheep Mountain Alliance's proposal, and urges the GMUG to adopt and incorporate the proposal's area recommendations in the revised GMUG Forest Plan.

In particular, in the immediate Telluride area, the Town of Ophir supports the designation of the Hope Lake (Sheep Mountain) Special Interest Area, including significant areas on the South side of the Ophir Valley and West side of Ophir Pass that encompass Yellow Mountain and large swathes of Waterfall and Swamp Canyons.

Recommended designation of these areas is important for multiple reasons and represents a collaborative process between local stakeholders. Significantly, the boundary of the recommendations has been modified to accommodate present and future expansion of Ophir's drinking water infrastructure. Protection of the upper watershed of Waterfall Creek would further secure the safety of Ophir's water supply into the future. Heli-skiing operations would be allowed to continue in this special interest area, but preventing motorized travel throughout this landscape would meet the desires of the Ophir community, while also improving safety and access for hiking, camping, and backcountry skiing.

We also ask the Forest Service to protect non-motorized recreation opportunities in our area by enforcing the existing travel management plan throughout our area, repairing and maintaining gates on non-motorized roads, and enforcing motorized closures. Additionally, Ophir would like to see recreational motorized traffic prohibited in the Ophir Valley on a year round basis outside of the Ophir Pass Road.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. Please let us know if you need any further information on any of the areas mentioned. We look forward to working with the Forest Service throughout the Forest Planning process.

Sincerely,



Mayor Sean Murphy  
Town of Telluride