To: Forest Management Plan Revision Team

From: Laura Beshilas

Subject: GMUG Scoping Phase

I am a master’s student at the University of Colorado Boulder in the Masters of the Environment Program. In addition to moving to Colorado for school, I was drawn to the West for the recreation opportunities and the **abundance of wilderness**.

I am writing today to **support the proposal set forth by the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative** (GPLI). The proposal recommends the designation of land as wilderness. Though the USFS cannot designate the land as wilderness, the USFS can suggest the wilderness designations and manage the land as such. Please see the following link for the GPLI map: <https://www.gmugrevision.com/maps/>

The **expansion of wilderness designations** within GMUG is important for many reasons.

* Habitat protection: designating and managing land as wilderness protects endangered species and species of concern. The GPLI plan has suggested different areas of the Gunnison area to be designated as wilderness for the protection of habitats for species including Greenback cutthroat trout, boreal owl, and the American three-toed woodpecker (Coal Mountain and Chalk Mountain Recommended Wilderness Areas)
  + Connectivity: Connectivity of protected habitat is important for species protection because connectivity enables migrations and range expansion. Certain wilderness designations suggested by GPLI act as corridors (Unaweep Recommended Wilderness Area).
* Ecosystem protection: GMUG has a large variety of ecosystems. The GPLI plan designates certain areas of wilderness that would protect types of ecosystems that are not well represented. For example, the Unaweep Recommended Wilderness area protects gambled oak woodlands, which are not well represented in GMUG.
* Recreation opportunities: Wilderness provides non-motorized recreation opportunities. Every type of recreation in the United States is projected to increase by 2060.[[1]](#footnote-1) This puts a lot of pressure on the land that is already available for recreation. Opening up more land to low-impact, non-motorized recreation can distribute the impact across larger swaths.

Thank you for your time,

Laura Beshilas

1. Cordell, Ken. “Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures.” *USDA Forest Service,* 2012. https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/gtr/gtr\_srs150.pdf. Accessed 10 March 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)