

As I've been involved with technical documents many times during my career, I know all too well that descriptions that are intended to be precise are sometimes ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations. While the team putting the forest plan together may know their own intentions and what they had in mind when writing the plan, they need to keep in mind that the plan will be in effect for a long time. The writing team may have all moved on to other Ntl Forest locations, other careers or retirement. They won't be around to answer questions of intent when future GMUG Ntl Forest staff attempt to implement the plan. Thus precise and detailed descriptions are crucial where precise management is intended. There is a conflict between providing enough information to be clear on intent and concern that the plan is too large. Further I am concerned that at some point during the forest plan development that staff time will be wasted repeatedly editing the plan to reduce its size. Clarity should win over brevity.

I am an avid hiker and average over 100 hikes a year, either by myself or with friends. It is my experience that hikers prefer loop hikes though an occasional out-and-back hike can be fun too.

Interesting flora, fauna, and stellar views are what make a hike appealing and draw hikers back for return visits. It is for the preservation of wonderful "untouched" landscapes views and the biodiversity enhanced by protected areas that I support the Citizens Proposal as set out on gmugrevision.com/maps. If I think back over this past year I recall stellar moments like this one where a friend is soaking up the serenity and beauty of Mailbox Branch. She and I are both members of the GJ chapter of Great Old Broads for Wilderness. We both derive inspiration from such vistas.



The hike lasted 4 ½ hours and we hiked a 7 ½ mile lollipop loop. We saw no one else and only heard one motorized visitor. During lunch we were all transfixed as a mamma bear and cubs tramped about in the valley below us. It was a very special outing made possible by the low density of routes (motorized and non-motorized) and low frequency of usage. I am concerned that the pressure to provide more recreation opportunities or develop other resources will eliminate the golden moments we experienced on that hike: the near perfect vistas, the challenge of route-finding and off-trail travel, the solitude, the wildlife-viewing and the lasting glow from a sense of discovery. I see it is a tough conflict for GMUG to resolve between the pressures from increased visitors, the pressures to increase revenue from extracting resources and the importance of preserving large swaths of forest for the experiences like the ones I list here but also for the health of the flora and fauna.

Further I'm concerned about the conflict between with the pressure on GMUG to increase the number of competitive/recreation events, especially large ones or ones covering large areas and the expectation of many visitors that the forest is a place to get away from the crowds of city life, a place of tranquility and solitude. If a competitive event with a large number of participants had been taking place in the immediate area of our hike above Mailbox Branch than we would have likely have cut-short our hike and left the Uncompahgre with a bitter memory instead of the joyous ones that we did leave with. I believe the answer lies in judicious permitting of large competitive/recreation events with emphasis on avoiding more than one such event in a given month in a 100 square mile radius. Warning notices of the location and timing of the event should be highly visible on the GMUG website and at the event location well in advance of the event so that visitors can properly plan to avoid the area if that is not the experience they are seeking.

I worry about the damage that large events can have on the condition of the flora and on the recreation infrastructure (trailheads, outhouses, routes/trails and signage). I see the issue as a conflict between the pressure on GMUG to allow for large events and the impacts those events can have. Large events should cover the cost of GMUG staff (or approved contractors) photo documenting the conditions near the event site, the staging areas, along the routes and near any planned way-stations. The photo documenting should take place before and after the event so that they can be compared. The organizers should be prepared to do or pay for restoration efforts to fix any damage caused by the event. Whether an organization can repeat an event should be judged on the extent of damage that occurred even if they were willing to fix the damage after the event. Further, it is too easy for an organization to focus on the number of competitors and not anticipate the number of spectators that might show up. A huge number of spectators can damage a large section of vegetation with haphazard parking and trampling. Competitive permits should specify a maximum number of spectators, and maximum number of vehicles along with the more obvious maximum number of competitors. The permits should include steps that the organizers must take during the event to turn away spectators and vehicles once those maximum numbers are reached. The forest plan needs to address all of these issues in detail to give proper guidance for the life of the plan.

The forest plan should address the possibility of events focused on drones. With the far ranging nature of drones, a small number of participants can still impact a wide area and a large number of other

visitors. Already I have been places (not in GMUG) where drones have hovered overhead interfering with my outdoor experience, invading my privacy, spoiling my enjoyment of natural sounds.

Telluride's large events are held outside of the forest but have impacts on the forest because of the large number of people using dispersed and developed campsites. Perhaps a reservation system is needed for dispersed campsites during Telluride's big summer events?

If alcohol will be consumed during a permitted recreation event on GMUG, will the forest plan give guidance as to what extra rules need to be included in the permit (such as if the crowd will include children how will the organizers prevent underage drinking? What size of a crowd would require the hiring of security?)

I was surprised this ski season to read that Snowmass Ski resort was hosting beer drinking games on the ski resort during the middle of the ski day. It made me wonder if other ski resorts on Ntl Forests such as GMUG were holding similar events. I see this as wrong on many levels. First there is the understanding of the dangers of alcohol poisoning; second there is the potential of accidents from a drunk skier/snowboarder returning to the slopes or opting to skip the rest of the ski day and drive home; third it is the perception that beer drinking games are legitimate fun on National Forest land. If an accident could at all be tied to the drinking game then no doubt the National Forest would be facing a lawsuit along with the ski resort. Do GMUG contracts with its ski resorts permit or exclude such drinking events?

As I explore more of GMUG, I continue to appreciate the beauty of the land and the challenges of managing its many resources and resource uses. I have stood on the summits of Chalk Mtn (Delta County), Hightower, Hubbard (on the way up Electric), Leon, Lamborn and Eureka and been awed by the vistas. Preservation of the visual landscape is crucial to the experience that I enjoy.

There seems to be an increase in the number of endurance events involving sloggng through mud. I worry that the popularity of such events and thus the pressure to hold such events on GMUG is in conflict with treating water as a precious resource. As we have just endured a winter with very low snowfall, wasting water to create mud and to later wash the mud off the competitors just doesn't seem like the correct use of water when down in California farmers who rely of the Colorado River are being told to use less water. It just sends the wrong message.

Sincerely,

Janice Shepherd

Member GJ chapter of Great Old Broads for Wilderness.