For the attention of: GMUG Plan Revision Team

My name is Howard VanWinkle, and I am a local cattle rancher and permittee holder, with permits on the Mudhole Allotment on the Uncompaghre National Forest. My family and I have owned and run cattle on this allotment for the past 11 years. I am writing to comment on the GMUG Plan Revision Scoping Stages. Please take into consideration the following comments:

Under the Vision and Distinctive Roles and Contributions Section

I’m glad to see the inclusion of a multiple use standard for Forest Service Lands. I believe our industry has been an advocate for this approach, and strongly believe that the intent of multiple use planning is not to place one use over another nor exclude planning considerations such as NEPA etc., unless overarching criteria is place such as Categorical Exclusions.

Ranchers who graze on public lands are also the people who care for that land. Included in these stewardship efforts are the cleaning of ponds, the development of waterlines from springs to tanks, which serve both livestock and wildlife species, preserving clean waterways which serve to protect native fish species and recreational interests, control invasive plants and non-native grasses, and protect endangered species, such as the sage grouse. Ranchers also maintain feeding areas used by native wildlife species and are usually the first on the scene to respond to natural disasters like forest fires.

Our livestock operation, and many others in the area, rely heavily on the use of grazing permits for the economic viability of our livelihoods. This in turn supports the local economy – and, in Mesa County, the beef industry is the largest economic exporter.

Under the Key Needs for Change Section

I support the need to consider recreational implications in the Forest plan. All other uses of forest lands are managed, and I believe that recreation should also be, as it impacts the functionality and health of the ecosystem. Therefore, a key element of any forest management plan should include monitoring recreational impacts.

As part of our stewardship of the land, we carefully monitor the plant communities for the best benefit of the land and our grazing purposes. However, in describing desired plant communities, it must be recognized that these are highly site-specific, and the potential of one site within a grazing permit may not be equal to another site. This must be taken into consideration with regard to stubble height, soil composition, plant species and the differing environmental conditions of the areas, particularly moisture.

We greatly value the grazing permits as an integral part of our livestock operation, and take great care in their management. Thank you so much for your consideration of my comments.

Howard VanWinkle