To the GMUG Plan Revision Team,

I am writing today to comment on the GMUG Plan Revision Scoping Stage. My name is Koli Rossi. My husband and I own a cow/calf operation in Mack, Colorado. We are young producers working towards growing our operation. I have grown up on the Uncompahgre Plateau working cattle with producers that own private land and public land permits.

American and Colorado Cattle Producers who graze on public lands also serve as stewards for the land. Rancher’s commitment to effective stewardship includes ongoing efforts to preserve clean waterways, control invasive plants and non-native grasses, and protect endangered species. They also maintain feeding areas used by native species and serve as first responders during disasters like forest fires. Livestock grazing can be used as a tool to lower wildfire risk be controlling the amount of height and distribution of grasses and forage that fuels wildfires.

According to the Department of the Interior, grazing on public lands contributes a minimum of $1.5 billion annually to the economy. Ranchers pay the federal government approximately $12 million for grazing fees. Grazing public lands is a more affordable option than buying private ground. As a young cattle producer, just starting out operation, this makes our growing goals feasible. Ranchers also pay taxes on the public lands permits they hold.

I would also like to comment on the key needs for change. I strongly believe the GMUG must be a good neighbor to adjacent landowners. Where impacts drift onto private and state grounds, the Forest Service has a responsibility to address and remediate these impacts. GMUG Wilderness Areas and Wildlife Study areas must continue to be managed in context of historic uses…such as grazing, improvement construction and maintenance, mechanized vehicle use, etc. The 100-year-plus history of livestock grazing be ranching families in the region has contributed to a specialized rural agriculture society with a strong interest in and capacity for public stewardship.

Lastly I would like to address the Management and Framework. I support the consistent approach across the forest at a planning level. Implementation should be granted some degree of flexibility so long there is strict adherence to plan direction. As each year differs due to weather, flexibility in management is key to being an exceptional steward of the land. I would like to make a point to address areas with high conflict between public recreation/access, grazing allotments, timber production, and private lands. All area of multi-use on the forest are important and need to be able to work together.

The GMUG forests’ grazing program substantially influences the economic feasibility of ranching in a six-county area. As a young cattle producer this is vital. One of our biggest struggles in growing our operation, is purchasing enough private land to produce cattle on. Although we do not currently have a public land permit, we have found that grazing on public land is the most feasible option for our growing operation. Ranchers are the best advocates for the land. Unlike other public land uses, the land gives back to the rancher making it vital to be the best stewards they can be. The benefits of multi-use on the forest include, water, timber production, livestock grazing, recreation, energy resources, and additional multiple uses.

With my growing family, it is our vision to keep ranching a family affair. Public forest lands are such a great resource for young ranchers to keep American beef production going strong. I’d like to thank the Planning Team for the opportunity to comment on the GMUG National Forests Plan Revision Process.

Sincerely, Koli Rossi