



SAGUACHE COUNTY

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August 28, 2019

Acting Forest Supervisor

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest

From: Saguache County Board of Commissioners

Re: Comments on 2019 Gunnison National Forest Plan

Saguache County Encompasses 3,170 sq. miles in south central Colorado. Of that 67% is comprised of Public lands of various designation. The Gunnison National forest accounts for 312,470 acres in Saguache County, accounting for 15% of overall county land.

Saguache County holds a unique intergovernmental relationship with the Gunnison National Forest. Services such as the upkeep of the roads that allows access to forestlands, Search and Rescue efforts on said lands, and when necessary law enforcement all, fall under the responsibility of the County resources. In exchange a payment is made yearly to the county by the Federal government for the tax revenue lost on these lands. At this time, it is noted an acre Gunnison National Forest in Saguache County averages \$0.54 in payments. With this Data in mind the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) would submit the following comments to the updated Gunnison Forest plan proposals.

- The Saguache County BOCC supports the original premise of national forests as a tool to protect watersheds and thus water quality both for user health and environmental protection.
- It is essential that the Forest plan recognize the economic impacts Saguache County's public lands have on our local communities and this region of the state. Through visitation, extraction, and quality of life choices that effect migration to the area the relations between local residents and our vast public lands.
- With a rapid population growth in the State of Colorado the BOCC believes the largest impact on forests in the future will be from recreational uses. An emphasis on recreational infrastructure and areas to address these impacts is encouraged. Also, a system of user funding is essential for growing population impacts, and to fulfill the public lands mission of access.
- Saguache County BOCC recognizes the effects of the extensive die-off of trees within the Gunnison National Forest. It is our strong opinion that all efforts should be made to mitigate the dead biomass for forest health, economic benefit, and future access. Of note; In 2015 Saguache County presented a resolution to the National Association of Counties that was accepted as a National platform resolution. (See attachment). Lumber salvage operations alone at this time account for 37 jobs locally (10,000 ccf. annually) and 123 jobs (92,000 ccf. annually) in the region. The Saguache BOCC supports comments from our local lumber producers that the forest plan needs to adjust the ccf. price to allow for the removal of forest products in order to maintain a healthy forest.

- The impact of catastrophic wildfire on public lands in the west is evident in every present fire-season. It is our opinion a more comprehensive method for both fire preparedness, response and funding is necessary.
- The Saguache County BOCC understands that special designations in our public lands have strong impacts on those communities that are near them, and the counties they are in. We hope other local governments speak to those areas it their counties that are affected, however Saguache will address those areas in our County.
- The proposed special interest areas for the recognition of unique characteristics and value as visitation points for the tourism economy is encouraged by the Saguache County BOCC. The BOCC supports special research areas also for their unique qualities while maintaining respect and working with the permittees.
- Although the recreational impacts on the Gunnison National Forest in Saguache County have not been of a large consequence, it is clear that those impacts need to managed for the growing use on the forest. With this in mind the Saguache county BOCC supports the proposal of 278,100 acres be designated as wildlife management areas in effort to balance healthy wildlife populations with recreational pressures.
- It is noted that present State and National Demographics show a trend toward an aging population. To support the mission of Public use we believe an emphasis on access for a less ambulatory population needs to be considered and accommodated.
- The Saguache County BOCC represents a great deal of farming and ranching. As a result, the Saguache County board of commissioners supports a continuation of grazing opportunities on our public lands and supports the forest service of not adding additional wilderness in Saguache County.
- The Saguache county BOCC strongly encourages our Public land agencies to look toward more inter-agency cooperation on planning and projects. An excellent example of this is State house Bill 16-1255 that allows for “good neighbor authority” in addressing watershed management and projects on public lands. With tighter budgets in the foreseeable future, collaboration efforts, much like the ones seen among neighboring counties in the San Luis valley will be advantageous.

The board of County Commissioners thanks the Rio Grande National Forest for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Ken Anderson
Chairman



Jason Anderson
Commissioner



Tim Lovato
Commissioner