

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests
Attn: Plan Revision Team
2250 South Main Street
Delta, CO 81416

November 26th, 2021

Dear GMUG Planning Team,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the draft plan for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest. Your consideration of this plan presents the 135 or so farmers and ranchers who make up the Valley Organic Growers Association (VOGA) with an incredible opportunity to have our voices heard, as all of us depend on the many natural resources that our local National Forests provide.

In general, VOGA supports Alternative D in regard to management-area designations. We strongly support the *Community Conservation Proposal* and *Gunnison Public Lands Initiative* and request that the management-area designations in these two proposals be adopted in the final plan for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest.

Of major concern to us is water that flows from the National Forests that surround the communities of Paonia, Hotchkiss, and Crawford, through our irrigation ditches, and ultimately onto our farms and ranches. We need strong protections for water resources in the Forest Plan for VOGA members' farms and ranches to thrive. We encourage increased collaboration, communication, and coordination between the Forest Service and the local communities for activities that may affect our towns' drinking and irrigation water. We have found it increasingly difficult to learn about and understand the activities on our public lands that may harm our farms, including oil and gas development, spills, and timber sales. Increased communication will help farmers and ranchers in our communities become aware of these activities and improve trust between the communities and the US Forest Service.

Additionally, wildlife management in our forests is incredibly important to us. Farms and ranches that exist on the valley floor provide winter range for mule deer and elk, where the Forest lands provide summer range and migration corridors. We support the idea of Wildlife Management Areas on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest, and ask that these areas include additional protections for wildlife, like a standard or guideline that requires or encourages maintenance of habitat blocks of at least 500 acres, having no roads or other human intrusions in big-game habitat.

In conclusion, the proper management of our National Forests is of great concern for us. Please incorporate the above recommendations in your draft plan and alternatives moving forward in the revision process. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Thanks,

Molly Moore

President, Valley Organic Growers Association (VOGA) Board of Directors