

November 26, 2021

Attn: Chad Stewart, GMUG Forest Supervisor; Tammy Randall Parker, Public Services Staff Officer; Samantha Staley, Forest Planner; Jonathan Tucker, Asst. Forest Planner; GMUG Forest Plan Revision Team
2250 South Main St
Delta, CO 81416

Via electronic submission to GMUG Online Feedback Tool: [US Forest Service NEPA Projects Home \(ecosystem-management.org\)](https://ecosystem-management.org)

RE: Public Comments on the August 2021 DRLMP and DEIS Public Documents – Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison Forest Plan Revision #51806

Dear Responsible Official(s) and Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests Planning Team,

We have spent the last three decades living, working, and recreating in the gateway communities around the GMUG National Forest, including Crested Butte, Gunnison, Lake City, Ouray, Log Hill/Ridgway.

In the winter, we cross-country ski on Grand Mesa frequently, even multiple times per week. The high-quality skiing and relative solitude that we experience, especially at Ward Lake trail systems, once we get away from the trailheads is unsurpassed. Wayfinding is generally good, and the opportunity to recreate without motorized and non-motorized conflicts is why we travel 2 hours each way to Grand Mesa. We also invest in “stay-cations” at least once a season and buy gear at local and regional outdoor outfitters.

Please correct the Winter Travel Map and make sure that Winter Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) for the entire Ward, County Line, and Skyway trail systems should be non-motorized, with administrative use of motorized equipment for grooming and access to research facilities being the only exceptions. These trail systems should have the Winter ROS “Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized.” It appears that the Alternative D Winter ROS is most closely aligned with the existing conditions on these trail systems. Please do not change the desired conditions to motorized in the revised GMUG forest land management plan.

Not only are these trails essential to our quality of life, but they provide socio-economic benefits. The rolling terrain is varied enough, especially at the Ward trail system, for beginners to transition to intermediate skills. We often bring two pairs of skis – skate, and backcountry to do both in one trip. We have enjoyed bringing our kids and dogs since they were toddlers and puppies (they are now teenagers and young adults). There are trails for all skill levels, and we don’t have to ruin our ski day stressing about an accidental wayward kid or dog mixing with higher-speed motorized recreation. Likewise, motorized recreationists don’t have to worry about overcoming slow skiers or snowshoers. Our experience is elevated from being able to hear the snow sliding off the trees, the crunch of slabby slopes on Skinned Horse, and getting to breathe the crisp air without excessive motorized noise or stenchy exhaust.

There has been a lot of investment in these trails by the Grand Mesa Nordic Council (GMNC), and they bring in grants and partnerships to provide resources the GMUG would be unable to sustain otherwise. The partnership between GMUG and GMNC should be nationally recognized.

Without these winter Nordic trail systems and efforts from both GMUG and GMNC, we wouldn't have access to the type of Nordic skiing and distances that we can ski. These experiences don't exist anywhere else in the GMUG. The trail systems in Crested Butte, Telluride, and Ophir are fantastic but often more crowded and compact. Our beloved Ironton trails are closer to home, but they don't offer the varied terrain and solitude. Thank you for partnering with the Ouray Nordic Council to allow for administrative use of a snowmobile to groom. They are perfect for making loops during lunch or after work. Being able to bring kids and dogs for a half-to full-day ski is awesome. I encourage the GMUG to consider letting the Telluride Nordic Association groom the additional spurs between Trout Lake and Lizardhead Pass. It helps to alleviate crowding and to provide some extra distance to ski and snowshoe in this beautiful country. Mill Creek in Gunnison is a favorite, and the narrow contours require separating motorized and non-motorized.

There is nothing else like the Grand Mesa Nordic trail systems, and we especially appreciate being able to get off the groomed areas (with our dogs) and find incredible scenery and relative solitude at the Ward trails. Please keep the GMNC trail systems semi-primitive and non-motorized. Similarly, please also keep the other trail systems mentioned above non-motorized and as primitive as possible. We recommend the approach in Alternative D over the other alternatives.

Sincerely,

Jeff Litteral, Lynn Padgett, Cutler Connaughton, Anza Connaughton, Uno, and Koda