

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/17/2018 7:15:43 PM
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Comments: May 16, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Back Country Horsemen of Colorado, thank you for the opportunity to continue to provide comments regarding the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest, Forest Plan Revision. We have eight chapters statewide, with a ninth one forming. Our volunteers are committed to our mission of maintaining access for the historic use of our pack and saddle stock on our public lands. We have boots on the ground volunteers that contribute thousands of hours of volunteer service, assisting our agencies with trail work, trailhead design, packing projects, equestrian access, and so much more. In 2017 our Colorado volunteers contributed about 10,000 hours of volunteer service on our public lands.

We understand the need for this forest management plan. A few comments regarding the three drafts comprising the foundation for the plan.

*Partners will be crucial to the success of maintaining a healthy forest. We encourage our members to get out and recreate on our public lands, in addition to maintaining partnerships with management agencies. Therefore, equestrian use should be highlighted as a historic and principal use.

*We encourage the forest plan revision to fully address the topic of volunteers and partnerships. With passage of the 2016 National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act (PL 114-245), the effective use of volunteers and partners in stewardship has become all the more important. Some of our volunteers possess technical skills such as horse and mule packing, chainsaw and cross-cut saw certification, and serving as Leave No Trace educators. The plan revision should provide direction for ensuring such partnerships, consistent with our Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Forest Service to "develop and expand a framework for the Forest Service and BCHA to plan and implement mutually beneficial programs, projects, training, and other equestrian opportunities at the national, regional, and local levels" (FS Agreement No. 16-MU-11132424-223).

*Tourism, recreation and population have increased exponentially here in Colorado. While it's important to recognize and accommodate these interests, it's also important to recognize that more isn't always better.

*We support the protection of wilderness and wilderness study areas. Forest units must uphold the integrity of the Wilderness Act in these areas.

*We believe the agency's guidance for Forest Plan revisions must provide for a consistent strategy for protection of our nation's National Scenic and Historic Trails (NS&HTs).

*We understand the immense pressures on land managers to create and develop more opportunities for the increasing demand of new uses and technology. Budget cutbacks have severely limited the management that should be taking place on our public lands and issues such as beetle kill and wildfire should also be kept in mind. Sensitive areas, roadless areas, special recreation management areas, wilderness, wildlife, historic use and user conflicts all need to be balanced with maintaining proper management of our public lands.

*We support the agency's definition of sustainable recreation and its vision to promote quality, sustainable recreation opportunities for all forest visitors and an increasingly diverse population. We feel that Back Country Horsemen fit in nicely within the definition and the agency's guiding principles associated with sustainable recreation. We support recreational activities that are ecologically, socially and economically sustainable and we continue in our efforts to "raise the bar" on Leave No Trace and other methods in order to minimize conflicts with other recreational visitors and our collective impact on the land and resources that we share.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and stay engaged in this very important process.

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