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Organization: Town of Telluride

Title:

Comments: September 12, 2018

Dear GMUG Planning Team,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit comments on the Draft Wilderness Evaluation of the Grand Mesa Uncompahgre Gunnison National Forest. We have been keeping abreast of the developments in the latest draft, and commend the Forest Service for the reincorporation of 95,000 acres in the GMUG which should rightfully be considered for their Wilderness characteristics. We would like to provide our support for the comments and recommendations submitted by Sheep Mountain Alliance, and reaffirm our commitment to supporting wilderness protections for multiple lands in the Telluride Area.

We have been included in the process of crafting the San Juan Mountains Wilderness Bill (SJMWB) since the beginning, and as a consequence we have consistently supported it as it has evolved into a truly collaborative bill that accommodates multiple user and stakeholder groups. Thank you for including all of the lands in the SJMWB in your wilderness evaluation. However, given the extensive vetting process they have gone through to select for the places with high levels of "naturalness," "solitude," and/or "primitive recreation opportunities" we believe that these lands do possess a "high" level of wilderness characteristics-not merely the moderate rating they have received in the evaluation.

The Town of Telluride believes that in addition to the lands included in San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act, there are additional local wildlands that are worthy of administrative protection as the GMUG Forest Planning process moves forward. For example, the Lone Cone (N7), East Beaver Creek (N 12), and Hayden (04) polygons all contain lands that are worthy of wilderness protection, and the Bridal Veil Polygon (N3) certainly contains spectacular landscapes that merit some level of protection and a "low" or "moderate" wilderness characteristic rating.

As we have noted in previous letters, public lands are at the center of our lives and livelihoods here in Telluride. Not only do we value protected wildlands for their economic importance, but we also recognize that these places are critical for the invaluable ecosystem services they provide. Especially in drought years like this one, we are acutely aware of how important wildlands for clean air, clean water, and sustained snowpack. As tourism, population growth, and climate change puts increased pressures on our local environment, we think that protecting our wilderness areas is more important than ever.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. Please let us know if you need any further information on any of the areas mentioned. We look forward to working with the Forest Service throughout the Forest Planning process.

Sincerely,

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Mayor Sean Murphy