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First name: Mel

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Town of Crested Butte--Draft Wild and Scenic Eligibility Evaluation Comments

Good morning Forest Planning Team,

I would like to submit the attached comment letter regarding the draft Wild and Scenic Eligibility Evaluation. Please let me know if I can provide you with any additional information.

Thank you,

Mel Yemma

Open Space/Creative District Coordinator

Town of Crested Butte

(970) 349-5338

Dear Acting Forest Supervisor Chad Stewart and the GMUG Forest Planning Team,

Thank you for releasing the Draft Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Report (Eligibility Report) as a component of the Forest Plan Revision process and for providing user-friendly components to encourage public feedback including the story map and webinars. The Town of Crested Butte (Town) appreciates your outreach efforts and we are pleased to be a cooperating agency in this process.

The Town is shaped in many ways by our surrounding environment. As a headwaters community, our surrounding rivers and streams provide the clean water, scenic views, recreational opportunities, and overall quality of life that the Town's residents and visitors value. All in all, the health and economic wellbeing of our Town is directly tied to our surrounding rivers and the Gunnison National Forest.

The Town supports all of the rivers that are included in the draft Eligibility Report for the Gunnison Ranger District, including Oh-Be-Joyful Creek and its tributaries, Copper Creek and its tributaries, West Elk Creek, and West Soap Creek. We believe that the eligibility report hits on the "Outstanding Remarkable Values" (ORVs) that

make each of these creeks and rivers worth protecting. Our remaining comments focus on rivers that are in close vicinity to the Town.

The Town would like to encourage your team to consider including the Slate River and the East River in the eligibility report. We believe that both of these rivers meet the eligibility requirements of being "free[shy] flowing" and having one or more ORVs. We find that the Slate River has the characteristics to qualify as having remarkable scenic and wildlife ORV s; and the East River contains unique characteristics that qualify it scenic, scientific and historical ORV s.

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The Slate River, from the headwaters to the confluence of Coal Creek (a section of which was considered as eligible in the past), is valued amongst our community for its incredible scenery and unique wildlife. The upper Slate River Valley's presence in the heart of Paradise Divide provides an unmatched view that distinguishes Crested Butte as an exceptional place to live and visit. The close proximity of downtown Crested Butte to a river valley with some of the state's highest-functioning wetlands, combined with scenic views, recreational opportunities and productive grazing lands, is unique. This is why the Town has partnered with the Crested Butte Land Trust (Land Trust) to facilitate the conservation of more than 1,000 acres located throughout the Upper Slate River Valley, including four miles of river corridor and 210 acres of high-functioning wetlands.

The Upper Slate River wetlands are home to one of the Nation's highest elevation Great Blue Heron rookeries, which the Town and the Land Trust are currently studying in partnership with Western Colorado University. The Slate River has also become a popular recreational destination in recent years, with the increase in usage of Stand Up Paddleboards (SUPs), which has presented a unique management challenge on this stretch of river. The Town, in partnership with the Land Trust, convened a stakeholder working group to develop adaptive river recreation management actions necessary for upholding the ecological integrity of the Slate River, as protecting this valley is synonymous with our community values. In general, the Slate River Valley not only contains unmatched views, unique wildlife, and recreational opportunities, but its presence and unique management situations are an embedded value in the Town, and we would ask that you consider its ORVs in the eligibility report.

Secondly, we would like to request the consideration of the East River, from Emerald Lake to Brush Creek, for eligibility for scenic, scientific and historical ORVs. A prominent section of the East River that meanders through the Trampe Ranch is an iconic symbol of the North Gunnison Valley. This section of the Trampe Ranch was recently conserved in 2018 in one of the most significant land preservation actions in Colorado, of which the Town contributed \$1 million to make happen. The Trampe Ranch conservation deal not only protected critical agricultural land, but it additionally conserved the unparalleled scenic views of the East River Valley in perpetuity.

The iconic river meanders are not the only aspect that makes the East River unique; the presence of the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory (RMBL) in this river corridor (upstream from the Trampe Ranch) is significant. RMBL has been studying the rich diversity of our local ecosystems since 1928 and has grown into an internationally renowned center for scientific research and education. RMBL attracts one of the largest annual migrations of field scientists to the Crested Butte region, while providing critical data about the East River and our surrounding ecosystems in this rapidly changing world. From the unmatched river

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meander views through the Trampe Ranch parcel, to the historical and critical presence of RMBL upstream, we believe that the East River should be considered for Wild and Scenic eligibility.

We continue to appreciate your dedicated effort to encourage public participation in the Forest Plan Revision, and we enjoyed reading and reflecting on the Eligibility Report. Overall, we are very supportive of your findings, but we ask for consideration of inclusion of the Slate River and East River in the report as these streams are vital to our Town's values and quality of life. We appreciate the opportunity to be a valued cooperator in this important process and look forward to continuing our participation in the future.

Sincerely,



1 The Town recognizes that the river corridors around the reaches recommended above do not exclusive!); consist of Forest Service lands. However, each segment does contain significant amounts of Forest Service lands. It is our understanding that the termini for eligible rivers may be extended beyond the National Forest boundary if a logical ending point is nearby, such as a confluence .