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First name: John

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Organization: ID Sculpture

Title: Project Manager

Comments: Dear Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests Plan Revision Team:

The undersigned business would like to commend the GMUG National Forests Plan Revision Team for including the public in the Preliminary Draft Plan and wanting the public's feedback at this stage in the process. While we appreciate the recognition of high volume use and associated planning for areas like the Divide Road and Highway 65 there are some other areas of the Plan that could use improvement. Our local Forest Service lands are vital to the health of our economy and communities. As you know this comes directly from proper management.

First, we would like to see more qualifying lands formally recommended as Wilderness in the Forest Plan. As our population and impacts from recreation increase it is vital that we set aside parcels of the forest to maintain the integrity of these wild places. Outdoor recreation is an important economic driver in Western Colorado and providing a broad spectrum of recreational opportunities is critical to not just economic development, but our Colorado way of life. The Community Conservation Proposal proposes necessary protections for deserving areas containing wilderness character. Areas like Kelso Mesa and Unaweep Canyon deserve to be managed for their wild character and recommended to Congress for permanent designation.

Second, the conservation of wildlife habitat should be a priority for this Forest Plan. Colorado's wildlife continues to face increased challenges from habitat loss and fragmentation brought on by increased use of our public lands. Protecting key intact habitat through the use of special designation, including the use of the Colorado Roadless Rule, is critical for ensuring that all species have the opportunity to not just survive, but thrive. We fully expect that this plan will include improved and strong protections for wildlife habitat.

Third, we would like to see more robust protections for municipal watersheds in the plan. Water is the West's most precious resource, and with the current Administration's focus on "Energy Dominance" it is imperative that the most stringent watershed protections are in place throughout the forest, especially those that are municipal watersheds. These areas are not only vital riparian habitat and critical to our ecosystems, but are also necessary as drinking water supplies to many communities. Watersheds like Kannah Creek need to be protected from development, timber harvest, and all types of mineral extraction to ensure we are doing all we can to protect our drinking water and the places that will provide drinking water to our future generations.

Fourth, we want to be vocal about the importance of stringent cultural resource protections in this Forest Plan. This land was inhabited for many thousands of years before the creation of the National Forest and it is important that this history is recognized and preserved. We would like to see that the Forest Service recognizes this fact and ensure the strongest policies are in place and utilized so there is no damage or destruction of the important cultural resources found in these places.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our appreciation that you, the Plan Revision Team, wanted the involvement of the public at this stage in the planning process. We encourage you to consider a wide range of alternatives as part of your analysis to ensure that a wide array of perspectives may be analyzed as part of the process. We hope you take these particular recommendations into your consideration and look forward to being involved in future steps of the process to ensure we are properly managing the forest for future generations.

Sincerely,

John Ryan on behalf of the team at ID Sculpture.

Gunnison, CO

