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Comments: On behalf of the Montrose Economic Development Corporation, (MEDC), our Board of Directors, and Investors, we are writing to share our comments on the Draft Revised Land Management Plan (PLAN) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forest.

The Mission of MEDC is to strengthen Montrose County's economic base and increase the standard of living for all of its residents through the retention, expansion, attraction and development of primary jobs and capital investments. This Mission included the promotion of workforce enhancement, agricultural advancement and other business development that provides economic diversification and stabilization.

Forest Health is a vital element to the economic sustainability of our community and region. Food & Agriculture and Tourism & Recreation are ranked as the top two key industries in our region. It is through tourism activities that 90% of our primary employers have located to our area creating over 2,000 jobs. Our Food and Agriculture industry requires quality water. Our water quality will be threatened if we do not protect our forests. These two industries are instrumental in maintaining our open space. It is the open space combined with the beauty of the Rocky Mountains that make this area a desirable place to relocate businesses to.

Of the three action Alternatives, we strongly support Alternative C as we feel it is the best alternative in terms of actively managing the forest, protecting local jobs, and ensuring there is a forest in the future.

Alternative C has the most flexibility to treat areas when necessary to prevent catastrophic wildfire and insects and disease, while at the same time providing sustained volume to existing mills and treating more acres of hazardous fuels. Alternative C shows the greatest movement toward achieving desired conditions and Alternative C has the greatest economic impact of the three Alternatives, as well as the highest number of associated jobs. Given this, we recommend Alternative C, as modified by the comments below:

*The Annual Projected Timber Sale Quantity (PTSQ) should be higher than the proposed 55,000 ccf. Ideally, we would like to see a PTSQ of 70,000 ccf per year. Furthermore, the Plan should include language that any PTSQ is an average harvest level, not a ceiling or maximum cap.

As written, we do not support Alternative D and feel it will cause irreversible harm if chosen. Alternative D adds a lot of restrictions that make active forest management more difficult to implement and, in some cases, prohibits it altogether. It prohibits salvage, reduces the PTSQ and treats fewer acres of hazardous fuels. This direction, along with the added restrictions, will significantly reduce the ability of the Forest Service to achieve the desired conditions and objectives of the revised plan. For instance, almost every plant/tree species with the GMUG is departed/at risk regarding the distribution of structural stages. Not being able to manage the species across the entire landscape will make it hard to achieve the desired structural stages.

Thank you for your consideration.