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Organization:

Title:

Comments: [attachment is a separate comment letter]

Thank you for your time and consideration of the public comments when making the revisions to the forest plan.

My comments below are for Gunnison National Forest in the Crested Butte and Gunnison area. I have been a resident of the previously mentioned area for 20 years and will continue to live in the area for the foreseeable future.

I agree fully with the Share The Slate comments and statement regarding the forest revision plan. I support the current management plan and Alternative C revision plans. I also support much of Alternative B. I am against the suggestions within the Alternative D revision plan, specifically the aspects of reducing areas and access to over snow vehicles.

1.

I classify myself as a hybrid user (using a snowmobile to access ski/snowboard terrain, typically by skinning from the bottom). This passion brought me to the Crested Butte/Gunnison area, and is one of the main reasons I have chosen to live and raise my family here. As my life has transitioned from snowboard bum and outdoor educator, to having a family and working full time as a school counselor my time to recreate has lessened, but my passion has not. Being in the backcountry snowboarding is important to my personal wellbeing. It is how I decompress, reflect, and recharge; which energizes me to be a better father, husband, counselor, and person. The value I place on being able to access backcountry ski terrain by snowmobile has grown, as I no longer have the time to spend days approaching terrain. The reductions in plan D would essentially cut off my access and connection to most of the public land in the winter.

2.

The use of a snowmobile not only allows timely access, it is also a tool in many risk management plans. A snowmobile allows for carrying more equipment, and a quicker evac if needed. I have personally evacuated a number of human powered (and motorized) recreationalists who were not part of my party on my snowmobile, some were injured, others were exhausted, and some had inadequate equipment. A snowmobile also reduces the amount of time exposed to hazards (they do not replace critical thinking and good decision making, it is similar to wearing a beacon). They allow for avalanche forecasters to access more areas to collect more data, which leads to more accurate forecasting.

3.

I would like to address the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI) proposal. I commend them on their effort and time invested. I value their attempt to bring user groups together to help conserve the natural resources of the area. I agree with parts of their plan, however I believe it falls short on representing all user groups and their claim of user groups reaching a consensus is inaccurate. A winter hybrid user group (one of the fastest growing user groups) was not represented in their planning, despite this user group having a local organization (Share the Slate) and requesting to be included. While Share the Slate offered comments, concerns and recommended revisions; not a single one was adapted into the final GPLI proposal. The winter motorized user group which was included (SnoTrackers) opposes Plan D in their public comment for the forest service revision plan (see attached). Plan D is the most similar to the GPLI proposal and is what the GPLI is advocating for, despite one of their stakeholders publicly objecting to it.

The GPLI claims that their plan does not close any trails (routes) currently used by motorized or mechanical vehicles. This claim is inaccurate, there are snowmobile routes which are put in each year, so hybrid users can access ski terrain, which will be closed in the GPLI proposal. The routes and areas of concern are stated in detail in the Share the Slate comments (see attached). They include; Poverty Gulch, Brush Creek, Pearl Pass area, East Brush Creek, Upper East Brush Creek, Crystal Pass / Tilton Pass Areas, Oh-Be-Joyful and The Beckwith area. Some of the routes which would be closed by their plan would force snowmobilers to ride in terrain with higher exposure to avalanches. An example of this is their proposal of extending the raggeds wilderness into the poverty gulch area. It would force snowmobilers into avalanche terrain in order to access Baxter Basin.

4.

I am not opposed to the addition of Wilderness areas within the Gunnison National Forest; I am opposed to the following areas being designated as wilderness areas as a way to manage them: Poverty Gulch, Brush Creek, Pearl Pass area, East Brush Creek, Upper East Brush Creek, Crystal Pass / Tilton Pass Areas, Oh-Be-Joyful and The Beckwith area. I am in support of areas being designated as Roadless Areas, which would allow for over snow vehicles in the winter/spring and bikes in the summer/fall season, while still providing the protection against development or over extraction of natural resources.

If new Wilderness is going to be designated which would close access to over snow vehicles in the Crested Butte area I would like to see other areas that are currently closed to over snow vehicles but are not wilderness opened to over snow vehicles. The areas specifically I would like to see opened would be the upper east river drainage (Gothic valley), Middle Brush Creek and Lower East Brush Creek and the Pearl Pass road. All of these areas are currently closed to motorized vehicles in the winter but open to motorized vehicles in the summer.

5.

When developing a management plan please consider how future snowmobile technology could reduce the issues caused by current snowmobiles. There are already electric snowmobiles which greatly reduce pollution and noise pollution. Electric vehicles as a whole will continue to grow in popularity, eventually replacing combustion engine vehicles. Snowmobiles will likely follow this trend.

Thank you for considering my comments. I believe in conservation and protecting our public land for future generations, but would not want to prevent future generations from finding a connection to this land.