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First name: Bobbie

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Organization: Mesa County, Colorado

Title: Commissioner

Comments: Please see the attached letter from Mesa County, Colorado.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Notice of Intent ("NOI") for the preparation of and Environmental Impact Statement ("EIS") regarding Land Management Plan Direction for Old-Growth Forest Conditions Across the National Forest System as noticed in Vol. 88, No. 243 of the Federal Register on Wednesday, December 20, 2023. Mesa County values our collaborative partnership with the dedicated staff of the US Forest Service ("USFS") in the management of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests, as well as the Manti-La Sal National Forests. As mentioned in our comment letter for the Climate Resilience Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Mesa County is comprised of more than 1.5 million acres of public lands, including more than 550,000 acres of national forests. Management and policy decisions made for federal lands in Western Colorado exert a profound and direct influence on the well-being and interests of Mesa County and its residents. Mesa County has long advocated for the responsible and sustainable use of these public lands and resources. We acknowledge and emphasize the critical role of active forest management in sustained forest productivity, ecological resilience, as well as socio-economic development, mental and physical well-being of our citizens, and continued enjoyment for generations to come. We commend the NOI for recognizing the USFS's mandate to manage public forests for multiple uses and sustained yields, underscoring the pivotal role forests play in the social and economic fabric of adjacent communities. We urge the USFS to carefully consider the financial resources required for the implementation of these plan amendments. Prioritizing funding will be essential to enable active management strategies, particularly in addressing the escalating risk of wildfires. We acknowledge the necessity of nationwide guidelines for managing old-growth forests. However, we firmly advocate that the most effective land management practices emerge from the direct involvement of those with a deep connection to the land. A hands-on approach fosters a detailed and holistic understanding of the unique requirements and objectives of our local community, stakeholders, and government entities. This collaborative approach is critical in developing forest management strategies that cater specifically to the diverse environmental, social, and economic needs of Mesa County. We recommend that nation-wide management directives be coupled with localized, forest-specific flexibility, empowering land managers in each forest to make informed decisions tailored to the specific circumstances of each location. Again, Mesa County respectfully requests a thorough evaluation of the Mesa County Resource Management Plan to ensure alignment with any management prescriptions proposed within our county. This review is crucial to maintain consistency and coherence in the management of our resources within Mesa County. Also, Mesa County formally requests an opportunity to serve as a Cooperating Agency in the development of the EIS. We look forward to continuing our engagement as this important undertaking proceeds. Thank you for your consideration of our comments. Sincerely, ATTACHMENT: USFS_Old Growth_2024_Mesa County_1.19.2024.pdf is letter content.