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Comments: The Moab Area Watershed Partnership (MAWP) would like to thank the Manti La Sal National Forest for a thorough effort so far during the Forest Plan Revision process. The MAWP also appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on this draft plan particularly related to the proposed Moab Geographic Area. We would like to thank retired District Ranger Michael Diem for taking advantage of the new Forest Planning Rule[rsquo]s clause which allows for the creation of special management areas where one multiple use, or a slew of multiple uses, can be given management priority over other multiple uses.

The Moab Geographic Area as proposed includes both the Mill Creek and Pack Creek drainages, Moab[rsquo]s aquifer recharge area, and the Castle Creek and Placer Creek drainages, Castle Valley[rsquo]s aquifer recharge area. This is very farsighted thinking given the growth of the County and the reality of more dryness due to climate change. Municipal watershed protection is the first of three multiple uses singled out in the Moab Geographic Area. The second is view-shed protection for the public lands below with a particular emphasis to protect the view-shed of both Arches and Canyonlands National Parks. The third multiple use is recreation given the world class mountain biking, Whole Enchilada trail, and rock climbing, Mill Creek Canyon, going on in this area. The Moab Geographic Area as proposed is a large benefit to Grand County and our economy.

The MAWP agrees that trans-basin diversions of water and water rights on the western slope of the La Sal Mountains are no longer appropriate due to the basin[rsquo]s closure for new surface water rights allocation and recent publications indicate the majority of the groundwater used in Spanish Valley as culinary water is being recharged in the La Sal Mountains. Closer management of dispersed camping and stream crossing impacts are also important elements in preventing degradation of a watershed. Closer and stricter management of these activities is appropriate. The prohibition of logging and chaining in this area is also appropriate. Finally, the MAWP strongly supports the proposed Management Approaches particularly [ldquo]Prioritize protection of the single-source aquifer when considering management activities.[rdquo] Together, these elements will go a long ways towards protecting our aquifers into the uncertain future. The only question MAWP members had on your current efforts is how or what the Forest Service is planning for wildfire mitigation. We would request your planning include a far sighted approach to wildfire mitigation that would allow opportunities that fit the environmental situation.

On behalf of the diverse MAWP Membership, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the ongoing Forest Plan Revision. The MAWP would like to go on the record as strongly supporting the Moab Geographic Area as proposed.