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Title:

Comments: GMUG Forest Plan Revision 2017

I attended a GMUG Forest Management Plan Public Meeting in Ridgway, Colorado this evening. Thanks for the opportunity to participate. I understand this stage of the process focuses on assessing the current uses and user impression of what works, what does not and what is needed.

I am a hiker and a Mt. Biker. I have used single-track trails on FS land throughout Ouray County for hiking and biking for the past 25 years, approximately. I am a Board of Directors Member of Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association, Inc. (COPMOBA) and have been for over 20 years. I am a founding member of the Ridgway Chapter of COPMOBA, RAT (Ridgway Area Trails). Although my perspective has been shaped in part from association with COPMOBA and RAT, I offer with this letter only my own, personal impressions.

The GMUG currently offers relatively little in the way of accessible, single track MTB trails in Ouray County. In the many years since the last forest plan revision, the demand for bike trails has exploded. Ridgway and Ouray are no longer mining/ranching towns. They are recreation and tourist oriented. A very large percentage of local forest users seek high, alpine, non-motorized recreation. Bikes are the most popular mode of travel for many of these folks, and the local economy, culture and social structure would benefit greatly from their continuing presence in our community. Bike-friendly, single track will help make the happen.

If the FS does not plan for and make such opportunities available in the coming years, users will create their own opportunities, resulting in a proliferation of high-impact, unsustainable trails that will foment and exacerbate user conflicts, wildlife conflicts and erosion issues. It is imperative that FS get ahead of this burgeoning problem with its current forest management plan revisions. One way to do so would be to create accessible single-track trails as near in to population centers as possible. That would tend to focus user impact at certain areas, keep the impact closer to areas currently impacted by human use, and preserve other areas of the forest for wildlife management and more primitive, wilderness type experiences. The Dallas Trail corridor from Box Factory Park on the West, through to Ouray County Rd. 17 is a perfect example. The corridor already sees substantial human use of many kinds, is easily accessed from several county roads, yet features spectacular alpine terrain and scenery. Creating a few bike-friendly, single track loops at and near the trail's intersections with various county roads such as 5 and 7 and 8 would tend to draw bike use to those areas and all along Dallas trail. Similar opportunities exist on other high, alpine trails such as Nate Creek and Deer Creek Trails.

Ouray County land managers have partnered with the cities of Ouray, Colona and Ridgway with intergovernmental agreements designed to create high-density growth near the three communities and preserve the rural and alpine character of the outlying county. The GMUG could consider similar planning strategies to manage the increasing user growth we should expect for the foreseeable future. In fact, recently, GMUG managers have demonstrated a lot of foresight by working with people like COPMOBA to create bike trails systems on GMUG lands, such as Flowing Park on Grand Mesa and the recent cooperative effort to create the Palisade Plunge. Those two projects are great examples of the idea I have in mind.

The general idea is to create areas of density where impact can be managed effectively within relatively small areas, thus preventing proliferation of impact throughout the forest. When the Current Forest Plan was written, and later revised, there appear to have been limitations on density of trail within any particular tract of land. Based on the Environmental Analysis conducted for the Forest Plan, it appears that high density stacked loops

were not even discussed or analyzed in 1991. This resulted in severely limiting various types of trail experiences, in particular, high density stacked loops.

As noted above, several benefits can result from using higher density, stacked loop trail construction, primarily: ease of management within the trail system area, and relieving pressure on other low-density trail areas. RAT's experience cooperating with BLM and CPW on a stacked-loop trail system north of Ridgway has taught us that high-density, stacked-loop type trails draw great attention in the mountain biking community, keeping user visits on lower density trails at more remote locations down to a more sustainable level. Since opening the RAT system about three years ago, bike use on the subject lands has increased exponentially each year. We see more and more bikes in the Ridgway area, and most of them seem to congregate on the RAT system trails closest to Highway 550. I continue riding Dallas Trail and have not noted a similar increase in use there, although its popularity has grown. The more accessible the trail, the more users it will attract.

When designed correctly, stacked loop systems create more trail mileage in a small land area and spread the use across all that mileage, so that users within the system have an experience similar to a low-density trail system, but within a much smaller space, both enhancing experience for those within the system, and reducing load on more remote trails. Typical lower density trail users generally look for more solitude in that experience, but as use increases uniformly over the entire forest - particularly on long, point-to-point trails - opportunities for that experience diminish and users experience more face-to-face encounters. If the GMUG management plan fails to manage growth by encouraging it in certain areas, the entire forest will experience the same, gradual, increasing impact of growing, unmanaged, dispersed use.

While I expect to help RAT and COPMOBA to develop company-approved comments and suggestions, I hope you find my own, personal comments useful. Please keep me apprised of continuing developments with the management plan revision.

Thanks.

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