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Comments: Pardon me for sending this in after August 31st. I was travelling during the summer months and was unable to attend any of the open houses or participate on the webinars. I hope you will still consider my comments. I am a former USFS employee - 33 years on various ranger districts in Idaho, Nevada and Colorado. For the last 20 years of my career I was the wildlife biologist for the Norwood & Ouray ranger districts of the GMUG. I also represent the Colorado chapter of backcountry hunters and anglers as the Regional Director for the central west slope. I also currently serve on the Adaptive Management Group for the SBEADMR project as the representative for wildlife and fish.

I reviewed your posters on the website and was disappointed to discover there is no reference to the many species of big game animals that inhabit the GMUG. The current forest plan at least recognizes our elk, mule deer, rocky mtn and desert bighorn sheep, and moose as species of interest and provides habitat capability and habitat effectiveness goals and management standards & guidelines to sustain populations. The same can be said for other small game species such as dusky grouse, merriam's turkey, and a variety of sport fish such as rainbow, brown, and cutthroat trout. The GMUG forest is known for it's healthy and robust populations of these animals, and the hunting and fishing opportunities that are available to all people to enjoy. It is critical to include a complete description and analysis of the current status of these species and their habitats in the assessment phase of the forest plan revision. Our new forest plan must provide clear goals and direction for fish and wildlife habitat management that is specific to vegetation condition, identification and retention and/or restoration of large blocks of security habitat and refugia, habitat connectivity, and protection of seasonal big game concentration areas from human disturbance.

Many of these principals have been implemented under the current forest plan and all of that collaborative planning and good habitat work with partnerships with the CPW and sportsman's groups must continue in the future. Improvements can be made to existing standards and guidelines in some areas while others have been proven effective for fish and wildlife. The new forest plan would ideally include management goals, objectives and specific management direction for fish and wildlife resources on equal footing with other forest resources, and not be reduced to mitigation measures or best management practices while conducting other resource projects and activities.

Since development and amendments to the current forest plan, extensive recreational trail development has occurred in many important wildlife habitats without full consideration of the impacts to those populations, or upon the quality of our hunting and fishing experiences. The GMUG should include a forest-wide assessment of the overlap and interaction of forest roads, OHV trails, and mountain bike trails with big game concentration areas, migration routes, and reproduction areas - ideally in consideration with adjacent BLM lands. The forest plan would then use this type of assessment to develop management goals & objectives for wildlife, including the designation of more semi-primitive non-motorized areas, reducing open road and trail densities, seasonal area closures for OHV's & bicycles, and direction for our remaining roadless areas. Wild animals need wild places, and so do hunters and anglers. Once those wild places are gone we cannot fully recover them for our future generations.

Another area of concern for us is current livestock grazing practices under the existing forest plan. Many areas of the forest continue to be overgrazed by cattle, apparently from overstocking and exceptionally long grazing seasons. This situation is impacting the long-term quality and capacity of our rangelands and is not providing enough annual residual cover and forage for wildlife on the forest. There also continues to be serious conflicts between domestic sheep grazing and bighorn sheep on the forest that are not being resolved by current allotment management plans. We would like to see the forest plan provide specific direction to resolve these

conflicts on a landscape scale based on current science instead of past uses and tradition.

Thanks again for the opportunity to comment on the assessment phase of the forest plan revision. I would be very happy to discuss this with any of the planning staff and we look forward to being active partners in development of the new forest plan.

Craig Grother  
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