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First name: John

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Organization: Town of Ridgway

Title: Mayor

Comments: U.S. Forest Service Planning team,

The citizens of the Town of Ridgway share a deep connection with the outdoor environment and public lands. A major economic driving force for our area includes recreation tourism and relies heavily on public land uses, including our National Forest. The Town of Ridgway is committed to supporting, sustaining, and improving its recreation-based economy for all to enjoy. Please accept these comments to the Forest Plan Revision resource area assessments.

These comments specifically address what we feel was missed in the Draft Forest Assessment titled Recreation, published November 2017 and found on the link the United States Forest Service provided on its web page for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests.

1. Appendix A is a major concern for the Town of Ridgway. In Appendix A, the GMUG has outlined Geographic Areas, including the San Juan mountains. While there are discussions of Telluride, Ouray, and other areas, there is no mention of Ridgway. More importantly, there is little mention of the desire for non-motorized trails or how they impact the economy of Ridgway. In fact, the discussion is directed at motorized uses, specifically emphasizing the Ouray area. This simply does not match the fabric of who we are. While we recognize that the Ouray area is well-known for its many miles of jeep roads, mountain biking, trail running and hiking are ever-increasing major uses that draw people to the Town of Ridgway. The Town feels that the lack of attention to this type of use, puts us at a strong disadvantage to the other communities you have mentioned in the assessment. There are many trail systems in the immediate area surrounding our town and we would like to see more non-motorized trails developed in the future. In short, non-motorized trails that include mountain biking and hiking are a "key feature" the assessment clearly missed for the community of Ridgway.

The Town of Ridgway would like to see an addition to Appendix A specifically outlining the importance of non-motorized uses for Ridgway, how those uses are increasing and how those uses are vital to the economic engine in our area.

2. The Town of Ridgway would like to be included at the end of Chapter Three, page 24, as an addition to the list of other towns mentioned under "Recreation Opportunities on Other Federal and State Lands", in the assessment. We are well known for having some of the best mountain biking, hiking, trail running, backpacking, ice & rock climbing, as well as backcountry access for hunting & fishing, in the entire state. Again, the Town of Ridgway feels that being excluded threatens to put us at a major disadvantage, both economically and otherwise.

3. The need for "High-density looped single-track" should be a Key Issue in Chapter One of the draft Recreation Assessment, on page 3, under "Trails". Challenge loops, as listed, are not the same thing, but are also desired and should remain as a key issue. Most destination trail systems for the Western Slope of Colorado do not travel from point A to B. While some users desire this type of trail network, and the Town of Ridgway feels these too are very important, it has been shown that high-density looped single track trail systems offer a much more variable experience to the user. These types of trails offer an overall broader economic driving force, as users have choice of difficulty and length. Finally, high-density looped single-track trails are less costly to maintain to a sustainable standard over time. This is due to their close proximity to their trailheads and ease of access for maintenance, not to mention the inherent nature by which these trails usually become adopted by the very people that use them. Examples of destination, high-density, single-track trail systems are our own Ridgway Area Trails, Phil's World outside of Cortez, Boggy Draw outside of Dolores, 18 Road outside of Fruita, Lunch Loops in

Grand Junction and Buzzard Gulch outside of Montrose.

The assessment missed the importance of these types of trail systems both to users as well as our local economies. They differ in experience from other destination trails that travel from a trailhead to a location, such as Blue Lakes on the Ouray Ranger District. In general, there is a lack of the high-density looped single-track type of experience on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest, and it should be highlighted in the assessment as a "Key Issue".

4. We agree with the assessment that trail maintenance needs are high, especially for non-motorized trail systems. However, we feel that the assessment understates how poorly maintained the trail systems are. Claiming that we have the most trail miles in the Rocky Mountain Region is misleading. Many trails in our region are simply not accessible until they are opened with specific maintenance, such as clearing deadfall trees, and others remain in extremely poor condition all year. Many of the trails mentioned are unfit for the uses they are designated for, due to poor design, lack of maintenance, and general lack of sustainability. The Dallas trail system is an excellent example of this. We believe that usable trail mileage is much smaller than what is reported in the assessment.

Questions that we feel need to be addressed:

How many miles of trail are unsustainable?

How many miles of trail are not viable, too hard to find or unusable due to lack of maintenance?

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the assessment phase of the Forest Plan Revision. We hope that the information we have provided helps fill the gaps of what was missed in the initial draft.

Sincerely,

John I. Clark
Mayor
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