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Comments: Comments on GMUG Forest Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on you GMUG National Forest Draft Assessment. I was able to read all of your well-written and thorough documents. I'd like to comment here in this email, and will also send along separate emails with photos for different areas of the Grand Mesa and Gunnison National Forests where I was able get out and hike this summer/fall in order to provide details the Western Slopes Conservation Community (WSCC) - for their recommendations for Wilderness and Special Interest Areas. I hope these photos and the associated information helps provide you an idea of what I saw on the ground, and why these areas deserve some kind of protection - especially from oil, gas and coal extraction.

In reading each and every one of your areas of concentration in your documents, one thing that I noticed in everyone of them were the negative impacts that Climate Change has, and will continue to have in the future - on every aspect of these national forests.

To paraphrase your own findings in your report, some your goals or concerns:

- Maintain a healthy and vigorous ecosystem resistant to insects, diseases, and other natural and human causes. Ecosystem-related standards and guidelines are generally focused on maintaining habitat needs of wildlife indicator species, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. The currant plan does not include any guidance related to climate change. Consider direction for management in a changing climate while allowing for flexibility to respond to impacts of climate change..... Also, anticipate and prevent unwanted ecological impacts from increasing levels of recreational use on GMUG land

- You anticipate that one of the greatest threats to ecological integrity on GMUG will be climate change and associated ecosystem stressors. Strategic direction should consider reducing vulnerability and increase adaptation to climate change.

- And also stated, designated Wilderness, Roadless Areas, and other lands are most likely to sustain ecological integrity without intervention.

- Among the 2.9 million acres of GMUG- managed lands, there are about 553,800 acres of designated wilderness which provide for distinctive scenic landscape and unaltered, naturally evolving scenic character.

- Climate Change is a concern particularly with regard to oil, gas and coal development - concerns about production releases of methane and other hydrocarbons. And burning and use of fossil fuels that contribute greenhouse gases that further contribute to climate change.

- With respect to economic factors, you state that rural areas with natural resource amenities - like wilderness - experience higher regional economic growth rates than rural areas without wilderness qualities. Wilderness areas offer a competitive advantage in attracting employees to the regions. Proximity to Wilderness is important reason why many residents are transplants to the West.

With that in mind, it makes sense to consider some of the areas that are being recommended as Wilderness areas or Special Interest Areas by various groups. You stress how Climate Change is one of the greatest threats; and you also stress how important Wilderness-type lands are, and they are such a positive factor in so many ways - economic; ecological as well as combating Climate Change. With the increase in motorized recreation; oil and gas extraction; logging; over-grazing - all major stressors to the water and ecology of these forests, not to mention Climate Change - it just makes sense to protect some of the remaining areas that deserve Wilderness-type protection. At least until US Congress is able to designate these areas as official Wilderness Lands.

Here are some of the areas that I was able to provide feedback to the WSCC - with some insight on each. Each deserves some kind of protection. Also, due to concerns related to Climate Change, it is best to not allow Oil/Gas/Coal extraction in these areas.

1) Chalk Mountain Recommended Wilderness. I was able to hike west of Overland Reservoir along Elk Park Trail (FT 800); and Buzzard Park Trail (FT 519) and Monument Trail (FT 518). Also drove along the FR 705 east of Overland Resv. I was able to hike north of this road and cross Dyke Creek on the southern portion of this area. It all seemed to have Wilderness quality; and very minimal - if any- illegal intrusion into the heart of this area. In fact, it's mostly made up of dense trees within the area. And with its natural boundaries - Dyke Creek to the south; Buzzard and Bird Creek along the north; and Willow Creek to the west, there is very little chance for any motorized vehicles to drive into the area. It seems like an unlikely area to allow Oil or Gas extraction. This is truly wilderness land, with great opportunities for primitive recreation and hunting. I saw a family of 3 Moose, a bald eagle and a few hawks. A beautiful area for observing fall colors due to the dense aspen forest.

2) Currant Creek Recommended Wilderness. Grand Mesa currently has no designated Wilderness. The Currant Creek Recommended Wilderness is on the southern flank of Grand Mesa, and certainly should be considered by it's wilderness characteristics. It is bordered on the north by Green Mt Trail (FT 719) and Green Mountain. I hiked most of this trail on the northern portion. The south of this trail is made up of very dense forest (aspens, mixed forest and scrub oak forest) and rugged terrain. There are no trails into the heart of this recommended wilderness, so it presents great opportunity for primitive recreation and solitude - and occasionally with scenic views of the West Elk Mts and far off views of the San Juan Mts. It has good potential for wilderness management - and seems like an unlikely area for oil/gas extraction.

3) Coal Mt Recommended Wilderness. This area would be ideal addition to the current large West Elk Wilderness area that is adjacent to this Coal Mt. area. This area is headwaters to several streams. The only trail is basically the Inter-Ocean Trail that goes from Lone Cabin trailhead up to Inter-Ocean Pass and down Little Coal Creek. It is an important wintering area for elk - and also popular for hunters of elk, deer and bears. The Inter-Ocean Pass trail does allow Mt. Bikes, but from my observation there is very little (if any) sign of biking use - for one it is very rough terrain, especially from the Lone Cabin side of the pass up to the Inter-Ocean Pass. The area is not easily assessable for vehicles, and thus has great potential for wilderness - for one thing it would be a good addition to the West Elk Wilderness to it's east. There is no history of logging here, and due to absence of

trails it allows for loads of solitude.

In addition, to the west of Coal Mt Recommended Wilderness is Lamborn Special Interest Area. This would be a good compliment to the Coal Mt Recommended Wilderness. There are a few existing trails here, thus not eligible for wilderness. But it still shows little sign of usage due to dense vegetation and very rugged terrain. It also is not easily assessable for vehicles But it does provide for good solitude and hunting opportunities.

But both Coal Mt Recommended Wilderness and Lamborn Special Interest Area should be off limits for Oil/Gas drilling.

4) Munsey-Ruby Stock Trail Area. I have hiked this trail (FT 831) from the Erickson Springs TH which goes just outside of western portion of The Raggeds Wilderness. Why this piece of land was not included in the original Raggeds Wilderness when it was created, is beyond me. There are no motorized vehicles or mountain bikes allowed in this area, and it certainly has wilderness qualities. As you approach Lightning Ridge (still outside the wilderness), the views of The Ragged Mts and Ruby Range are outstanding. This deserves the wilderness protection.

When commenting on the areas above, in stating that oil/gas/coal extraction should not be allowed in any of these areas, it is in line with the emphasis in your Draft Assessment documents stating the importance of considering impacts of Climate Change in planning for the management of these public lands. It is not just due to greenhouse gas emissions that you feel this way - it is for economic, ecosystems, water factors, etc... The same applies to the negative impacts that increase motorized recreation and Timber harvesting, etc...have on these lands These activities only have negative impacts on the land - and that is why these areas should be protected as best they can. In reading your documents, that is the message I get from your findings. And I recommend as much protection for the areas that I mention above.

Thanks

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