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Comments: "Scoping Comment."

This is to comment on the Scoping document that you have put out to the public. Thank you for your hard work in putting this process into motion, you have certainly put a lot of time and effort into this Forest Plan Revision. I had submitted comments back a few months ago on your first Assessment and Inventory, including many photos. And now I'd like to comment on your Scoping.

I agree with most of what your Scoping lays out and issues to address. I'd like to emphasize your main points:

The importance of wilderness, wildlife, air quality, water quality. You mention Climate Change, and to me this should be a, if not the, driving force in any decision making that the Forest Service comes up with. This affects everything, including the negative affect on the forest health caused by the spruce beetle infestation. You mention the importance of ensuring that all of the above factors are not degraded as a result of air and water pollution. The factors that mostly degrade the overall health of the forest happen to be factors that also have a negative affect of Climate Change.

The changing climate makes all past and even current plans outdated, which is one of the important considerations in your new comprehensive plan. And providing ecological sustainability is mentioned in your scoping; as well as the importance of science. This is of vital importance to make this a very high priority.

As mentioned in your scoping, the areas in the GMUG forest and the surrounding areas and communities benefit from a healthy forest - due to recreation, the scenic beauty, critical headwaters to the agricultural economy, hunting and tourism. These areas are what is driving our local economy. In fact, according to Delta County information provided in their draft master plan - 6% of the economy of Delta County is from Tourism alone. Agriculture is 17%, I believe.

On the other hand, this same Delta County draft master plan mentions mining is a mere 1.5% - mainly the coal mine you mentioned up near Somerset, CO. And their impact to the area's economy is without a doubt going to continue to decline in the years and decades to come. You mention that Coal provides for the local economy. But 1) it is very small % ; 2) it is declining and at best cyclical; and 3) the impact and hidden costs of coal to the area's environment and it's link to climate change. On the other hand, this area has the potential of becoming a leader in renewal energy, specifically Solar Energy (see Solar Energy International and the increase in commercial and residential solar installations in the North Fork Valley). In the long run, the overall health of the forests will be improved by realizing that coal - and other fossil fuels - are not enhancing the ecological sustainability to this region.

To be more specific, I'd like to recommend certain areas for certain protection:

Chalk Mountain Recommended Wilderness - the northern most section of the 55,000 acre Elk Park complex, I

have hiked and traversed along much of the northern boundary (along Buzzard Creek Trail); the western portion (Willow Creek on the Monument Trail) and the south just north of Forest Road 705 (including Chimney Rocks). I've also observed the area along the eastern portion from the road. From what I've seen on the ground and in the air in a small airplane, this is certainly wilderness quality land. Significant aspen groves, I've seen moose, and a bald eagle and hawks and deer. And absolutely no sign of human development. It has outstanding views of the West Elk Mountains and North Fork Valley.

Elk Park Recommended Wilderness - popular deer and elk hunting area. High elevation riparian, conifer and aspen habitats. Dependable water supply for the north fork valley. I have covered much of this area by ground and from above in a small aircraft and it is certainly of Wilderness quality. I have seen a moose family, bald eagle, hawks - and enjoyed solitude and quiet.

Priest Mountain Special Management Area - connected with the Elk Park Recommended Wilderness. Contributes to the ecosystem and is an important big game migration area. A few trails that allow motorized vehicles and mountain bikes cut through this area, or it would be of wilderness quality.

Currant Creek Recommended Wilderness - connected to the Priest Mountain area, it contributes to the landscape connectivity - so it has similar wilderness qualities as the Priest Mountain and the Elk Park areas. I've hiked along the northern boundary of this recommended wilderness - along the Green Mountain trail - and besides the big game and aspen and conifers that make this area wilderness quality, the views of the West Elk Mountains and the San Juans make it a prime spot for hiking and enjoying solitude.

Electric Mountain Recommended Wilderness - dominated by aspen ecosystem. Offers outstanding non-motorized hunting opportunities. It's a quick and easy trip up from the North Fork Valley, and once leaving the trailhead at Hubbard Park you are soon in a wilderness quality landscape, with solitude and quiet; and abundance of wildlife.

Coal Mountain Recommended Wilderness - this is of most importance to me since I live nearby on Lamborn Mesa, at the base of Mt. Lamborn. This is a well deserved addition to the current vast West Elk Wilderness to the east. Populations of Colorado River cutthroat trout including conservation populations. Winter range for elk. Migration corridors for mule deer. Black bear concentration area. Mapped lynx habitat. It is a popular hunting area in the fall, thanks in part to it's very rugged terrain.

I've hiked from Inter Ocean Pass Trailhead above Lone Cabin, from the Crawford side along Little Coal Creek, from Minnesota Pass, and from the west to the top of Mt. Lamborn. This is certainly wilderness quality environment, and a perfect addition to the West Elk Wilderness, in which a few trails are interconnected.

Munsey Ruby Stock Trail - from the trailhead at Dark Canyon, this trail takes you between the Ragged Trail (with its motorized vehicle and hiking uses) and The Raggeds Wilderness. In fact, much of the trail is adjacent to the wilderness area to the east and south and north. After the first 1 or so, it does not even allow motorized or mountain biking. Why this strip of land just outside of the current wilderness was left out of protection, I often wonder. But it deserves to be added.

Thanks

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