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Organization:

Title:

Comments: GMUG Forest Planning Team,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the GMUG Forest Plan Revision. I really appreciate the things you have done to help make this process easier to understand including the webinar sessions.

In my professional role as a GIS mapping specialist supporting conservation organizations, I have had an opportunity to interact with many passionate activists with strong on-the-ground knowledge of the places they are advocating for. I also interact with conservation professionals who have a deep understanding of Forest Service management and regulations and insights based on working across multiple forests. I have contributed to and signed on to comments professionally from a number of organizations. In this document, I wanted to add my personal comments. I believe my combination of spending time in the GMUG forest and interaction with the activists puts gives my opinions a strong basis.

I live on the front range of Colorado. I moved to Colorado over 25 years ago. Opportunities to go hiking and camping in the mountains were a large part of my motivation to move to Colorado. Hiking in the GMUG forest when I visited in Ouray, camping in the forest near Telluride, and picnicking on the Grand Mesa are very special memories of my time here.

At the webinar I attended that discussed the scoping process, Samantha Staley discussed her concern about how it is difficult to manage a forest with a complicated map of management areas. I can understand the Forest Service's need for a plan that they can realistically manage against given the constraints of decreasing staff and budget. However, I also hope that the Forest Service recognizes the importance of managing the forest in a way that supports aspirations of local collaborative efforts and conservation-oriented visitors.

I have been very impressed by the large amount of effort, collaboration, and compromise that has gone into crafting the boundaries in the San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act, the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative proposal, and the Citizens' Wilderness and Designations Proposal. I have not been personally or professionally involved in the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative but I am extremely impressed with how it brought together very different local perspectives and created a proposal with strong local support. The Gunnison Public Lands Initiative inspires me to believe that Americans can have shared values and can find common ground.

I urge the Forest Service to analyze alternatives that include protecting the lands in these three proposals. I also request that the preferred alternative chosen manages these lands in to maintain the characteristics recognized in the proposals. That way those areas will be protected while the coalitions move forward with the lengthy process of securing more permanent congressional protections.

I know that the Forest Service will continue its evaluation of wilderness and strongly urge the Forest Service to base their wilderness recommendation on the wilderness recommendations in these proposals. In addition, all of these proposals include recommendations for areas to be protected as special interest areas or through other designations that are not wilderness recommendations. In order maintain the current conditions of those areas, I believe the Management Area Framework should include several management areas that focus on quiet human-powered recreation, areas that focus on the protection of wildlife, wildlife connectivity, watershed protection, etc. that match the types of protections recommended in those proposals.

I also want to thank the Forest Service for considering an Adaptive Management Framework to manage the GMUG. I believe that an Adaptive Management Framework can be a very powerful way to manage the forest in the face of population growth, changes in the ways people develop and recreate in the forest, and in the face of a changing climate. However, I also urge the forest to include strong science-based standards and guidelines that ensure the forest maintains its ecological integrity. I believe that the Adaptive Management Framework should provide the Forest Service with flexibility as to how it meets well-defined goals. The Adaptive Management Framework should not be used as an excuse to have weak standards and guidelines that might be ignored in the future in ways that harm the forest.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this very important process. I look forward to continuing to be involved in the future.

Sincerely,
Alison Gallensky