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Organization: Great Old Broads for Wilderness- Northern San Juan Chapter

Title:

Comments: Thank you for accepting these scoping comments regarding the GMUG Forest Plan revision. I write as the leader of the local Northern San Juan chapter of Great Old Broads for Wilderness on behalf of over 300 supporters, members and donors from Delta, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel Counties.

Our chapter fully endorses the Citizens' Wilderness Designation Proposal (Citizens' Proposal.) Our members were (and still are) engaged in ground surveying and photographing the landscapes proposed in the Uncompahgre Forest. We assisted in the writing of the narratives and determining boundaries for maps that have been submitted to the GMUG Planning Team. As part of the coalition working on this proposal, we met with the GMUG Planning Team and participated in several USFS webinars as well as the Ridgway Open House last fall. We also met with District Rangers and Recreation staff from the Ouray and Norwood USFS Districts. In addition, our members presented to Ridgway Town Council and Ouray Board of County Commissioners.

Over the last year, we have spent hours on the ground in the proposed areas and conversed with numerous stakeholders including ranchers, businesses, and recreation users. The narratives and maps for Ouray County proposed areas have been reviewed by members of the Ouray Trails Group as well as by their member who updates the Ouray Trails hiking map. We have also co-hosted a comment-writing workshop for our members and the public in order to further disseminate information about the Citizens' Proposal. Recently, we have begun tabling at public events and conferences to broaden our efforts to inform residents and visitors about the proposal. We have attempted to be as thorough in our research and outreach as time allows and will continue with these efforts throughout the planning revision process.

In Ouray County, where we know the landscapes best, we are certain that the proposed areas - Baldy Mountain/Trail and Bear Creek additions to the Uncompahgre Wilderness, Hayden Mountain, Mount Abram & Brown Mountain Special Management Area and the White House addition to the Mount Sneffels Wilderness - all possess the required wilderness characteristics and warrant protection. Primarily these areas are critical wildlife habitat and they provide linkages to other wild landscapes. Most of them are elk and deer production areas. Many provide habitat for bighorn sheep and bear, while Canada Lynx occupy territory within or adjacent to Mount Abrams/Brown Mountain and the Hayden Mountain polygons. In these times of uncertain climate riddled with drought, wildfires, and superstorms, efforts to increase and maintain ecosystem resiliency and integrity are crucial. Unfragmented wildlife corridors are essential. Designating these parcels in Ouray County constitutes a step toward these goals.

Furthermore, these proposed landscapes are integral to the Uncompahgre watershed and the protection of water quality. All the proposed areas demonstrate naturalness, possess extraordinary scenic value, and offer solitude and opportunities for primitive recreation. Bear Creek and Senator Beck Basin (Hayden) attract history/mining enthusiasts to the historic Grizzly Bear and Yellow Jacket Mines and to the Senator Beck Mine, respectively. These mines do not detract from the wildness of the area and are similar to mines found in other designated wilderness such as the nearby Weminuche Wilderness. Many of the polygons possess extraordinary geologic features such as tidal ripple marks, waterfalls, and volcanic features. Alpine basins teeming with wildflowers abound. Several of these polygons also include ecosystem types underrepresented in the nation's Wilderness System.

Finally, these landscapes are integral to our region's economy as residents and tourists alike relish the scenic beauty, while outfitters, hunters, backpackers, birdwatchers, photographers, and other day users immerse themselves in these wild places. Last autumn while backpacking in the Uncompahgre Wilderness, I met three bow hunters from Pennsylvania who specifically select Congressionally-designated Wilderness Areas for their

annual hunting expeditions. Local outfitters advertise hunts in wilderness. Such landscapes are treasured, respected and celebrated.

Given our members' intimate knowledge of these proposed landscapes, we would be delighted to assist in any way possible with your planning efforts and are available to answer questions or address concerns. Please don't hesitate to contact us at northernsanjuanbroadband@gmail.com.

We appreciate your considering our endorsement of the Citizens' Wilderness Designation Proposal during your planning process and ask that you include it when designing your plan alternatives.

Sincerely,
Robyn Cascade, Leader
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Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Ridgway, CO