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First name: Western

Last name: Conservation Center

Organization:

Title:

Comments: [CAUTION: Suspicious Link]GMUG Forest Plan Working Draft Comments

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NameJohn Willis MitchellAddress18325 Coyote Run Road

Cedaredge, CO 81413

United StatesEmailjohnwillismitchell@gmail.comPhone9705897468IntroductionThank you for the opportunity to comment on the preliminary Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest management plan. I am glad the USFS is considering ways to protect important natural resources like wildlife habitat, domestic and irrigation water, wild and scenic rivers, air quality, and recreation. In particular, I support the designation of recommended Wilderness areas and special recreation management areas as mentioned in the Community Conservation Proposal, as well as the Lamborn/Landsend area. These will preserve habitat connectivity, wildlife corridors, undeveloped open space, and recreation opportunities within our region.

I urge the USFS to consider including the Community Conservation Proposal as its preferred alternative in its Draft Forest Management Plan. The Community Conservation Proposal includes protections for wildlife, recreation, wilderness-quality lands, air, and water. It would preserve scenic viewsheds that local communities and economies depend upon. I have a vision for the future that embraces our natural resources instead of exploiting them, and I recommend the USFS consider when drafting a Forest Management Plan. The USFS must adopt a final plan that makes important wildlife habitat, recreation areas, and sensitive air, water, and viewsheds off-limits to energy development. CommentsGas and oil leasing is a short-term gain that will have significant longterm negative impacts on the unique wilderness areas of the Western slope. this includes The Grand Mesa, The Uncompahgre Plateau and the North Fork valley. The tourism generated by these outstanding wilderness areas is an important part of the longterm economy, unlike gas and oil extraction which is transitory. Case in point: the town of DeBeque on the south slope of The Grand Mesa almost went out of existence when extraction taxes abruptly ended. If not for their conversion to a legal marijuana economy,, combined with tourism related to the adjoining wilderness area and Colorado River, the place would be a ghost town. Also, The Western Slope has some of the cleanest, best quality water in the state of Colorado. Oil and gas extraction pose a grave threat to our water quality, as well as increased air pollution to some of the cleanest skies in the state. I end wth a photo of Whitewater Falls I took on a hike this week to illustrate the sacred beauty of these wilderness areas.ConclusionIn conclusion, I want to thank the GMUG Forest Planning team for releasing a Working Draft of the Forest Plan revision, however some changes are needed. Most importantly, more management area protections are needed for the incredible wildlife, wilderness, water quality, and recreation values the GMUG National Forests provide surrounding the North Fork Valley. Our community survives based on the values encompassed within the National Forests that surround us, and our ability to access those public lands. I would like those values to be protected in the GMUG Forest Plan.File Uploadhttp://westernslopeconservation.org/wp-content/uploads/formidable/33/GM_Whitewater_Falls_7_2019.jpg