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Organization:

Title:

Comments: GMUG Forest Plan Comment

Dear GMUG Forest Planning Team:

Thank you for your work in preparing the preliminary draft. Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests are near and dear to the hearts of our customers; the proper management of local Forest Service lands is imperative to our success as an outdoor recreation business. We at 4Corners Riversports commend you for recognizing the importance of planning for high volume use areas like the Divide Road and Highway 65, though there is still much to be done - other parts of the plan deserve closer attention. We are speaking for ourselves, as well as our customers, to whom the rivers, creeks, and waterways of Western Colorado are held in high regard.

As an industry built around river recreation, watershed health is of paramount concern. But so too must we consider places like and Kannah Creek and municipal watersheds that are valued for both recreational purposes as well as for drinking water and agricultural production. Creating a sustainable future for GMUG National Forest must make the health and safety of boaters and community members a priority. We urge you to take that next step and withdraw critical watersheds from development, timber harvest, and all forms of mineral extraction.

Wilderness areas also hold a central piece in our recreation landscape, and there are places like Kelso Mesa and Unaweep Canyon that merit elevated recognition. Wilderness is a central feature tied to our identity as Coloradans and outdoors enthusiasts. Neglecting the potential of lands with high wilderness character would leave the plan incomplete. It is our view that these areas and others should be recommended for full wilderness status.

Moreover, a healthy recreation landscape is dependent on our wildlife. As we see increased pressure from habitat loss and fragmentation, we implore you to take the lead on imposing strong protections that help maintain the balance of wildlife and recreation. The Colorado Roadless Rule would be a good starting point, though we need to take our stance even further - we recommend you focus on wildlife protection and the establishment of essential wildlife corridors as more central features of the plan.

Finally, we need to consider the cultural history of many of the lands on which we recreate. Indigenous peoples have known our public lands as home since time immemorial and their presence is still felt in the landscape. The Ute peoples, Apache, Cheyenne, Arapaho and others are living peoples whose role in their ancestral lands needs to be given further recognition. It is critical that Forest Service implement more comprehensive procedures for mitigating damage to cultural resources and employ rigorous standards that solidify Tribal Consultation as a priority in the GMUG Forest Plan.

Thank you so much for your time in considering the outlook of the public. We at 4Corners Riversports deeply appreciate the opportunity to be heard at this stage of the process. We hope you take our recommendations into account and we look forward to participating in future rounds of public comment.

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