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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Forest Service

I would like to recommend that you consider how majestic and beautiful the Uinta Mountains are and what a hidden treasure your forest is. But instead of providing an amazing place for the American people to enjoy, you are bogged down in managing your Forest that same ineffective way you have in the past. I have a couple of suggestions to improve the Forest management - or in the parlance of NEPA, I would like to suggest you have a recreation and scenery focused alternative.

This alternative should emphasize recreation scenic views as one of the primary uses of the Forest, especially within the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area and within the new Ashley Karst National Recreation and Geologic Area. Instead of spending money to cut down trees for livestock grazing and sagegrouse habitat, spend the money on building and improving trails for biking and hiking. Spend some money on signs to direct people to some of your great places. Spend money on making maps that actually make sense and that people can use. The travel maps on white paper background are useless.

When I go into the Uinta Mountains, I love to visit places that are unique. But for some reason, your Forest doesn't even have basic signs (or even useable trails) leading to the following amazing places: Big Brush Cave, Little Brush Creek Cave, Ashley Gorge, Brush Creek Gorge, Kings Peak. I am also amazed that you have such a poor trail system along the Red Canyon, which is a world class scenic wonder. Your short trail from the Red Canyon Overlook to Green's Lake is nice, but the majority of the Canyon, which is miles long, has no trail or easy access.

The recreation alternative should focus on providing, maintaining, and improving outdoor opportunities for people a broad range of people from across the country. If you build it they will come. There are already thousands of people who are traveling through the area as they visit National Parks and National Forests, but there is so little information about the Ashley NF that people often say, wow, I never knew this existed. The new generation of millennials especially love to visit amazing places with wonderful views.

The Alternative should also focus on the view shed. Stop scarring the land with ugly timber clear cuts. At least try to blend timber cuts into the natural landscape instead of abrupt lines of tall trees and timber cut areas. The timber cuts from the 1980s were especially ugly and have taken years to finally grow back. And let trees grow back into areas where they want to grow. There are whole ridges on the Forest that had wildfires four or five hundred years ago that are finally growing back and you are cutting down the trees to increase cattle livestock or sage grouse habitat. Just remember that on Forest Service lands - "Trees are Good." Ponderosa, Douglas Fir, Pinyon Pine, Spruce, Cedar, Aspen, Cottonwood, lodgepole trees are all good! They beautify the forest and help the watersheds.

I understand the need to thin out trees to make the remaining trees more healthy and to reduce the fire danger, but please stop removing trees to make more open spaces. Let the BLM have the open spaces, let the Forest have the trees.

So using my NEPA parlance - I recommend having the recreation alternative focus on a healthy forest and remove all language that emphasizes removing trees in order to create or expand non-forested areas. I think there are sections that talk about improving non-forested vegetation or removing encroaching conifers. Take this language out of the alternative and instead emphasize the need to increase forestation of non-forested areas where trees are naturally trying to grow. I am not suggesting we try to grow trees in alpine environments above tree line, but I am recommending that the face of Taylor Mountain and the Dutch Charles Draw area would probably be covered in trees if the Forest Service stopped cutting them down.

The last time I took my college age daughter up into the Uinta Mountains, she wanted to stop and get a photograph taken in front of the Forest Service sign going up 191 just above the phosphate mine. When she showed the picture to friends, they thought it was funny that the sign said "Entering Ashley National Forest," yet there is not a single tree in the photo. They said, "what kind of National Forest doesn't have trees?" That area would be forested except that the Forest Service keeps cutting down the trees for livestock or some other unknown purpose. You can even see hundreds of young tree sapling that have been cut down in that area to keep it open. I say, let the trees grow where they want to grow. They improve the scenery, views, and value of the Forest.