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Comments: To Our Public Land Managers,

I have lived in the Gunnison Valley for over a decade, and helped build the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative for which I worked for 5 years. I talked to thousands of people in Gunnison County and surrounding areas (people in Paonia, Ridgway, etc), and a majority of those people wanted more protections for our public lands. I believe that community initiatives like GPLI and the Community Conservation Proposal are the best way to hear what the people of these areas want, and what they are saying is that we need more Wilderness and protected areas.

Alternative B, the agency's preferred or "blended" alternative, recommends just 34,000 acres for new wilderness across the entire 3.16-million acre GMUG. Compare that with the 125,000 acres that the Forest Service recommended during the Bush administration in their 2007 planning effort. The final plan must include significantly more wilderness recommendations.

The Forest Service does not adequately consider the designations in the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI) or Community Conservation Proposal. Takeaway: These must be better reflected - and incorporated - in the final plan.

Alternative B identifies 948,200 acres of land as "suitable" for timber production, compared to 468,000 acres in the current plan. Every alternative in the draft plan posits a significant increase in suitable timber, which is a designation that interferes with consideration of responsible management of the forests that allow uses other than timber production. The draft plan prioritizes logging over conservation, and this is not reflective of the community's desires or the dire state of our environment in which is becoming more fragmented and destabilized each year. This is not good for wildlife, nor is it good for the natural resources that make this place special - clean water, air, and resilient ecosystems.

Under the planning rule, the Forest Service is required to identify species of conservation concern (SCC) - species that are imperiled but not quite to the point where they need to be listed under the Endangered Species Act - and to provide ecological conditions and protective plan components to maintain their viability. However, the Forest Service failed to include as SCC several vulnerable species that deserve this designation, such as the American marten, bighorn sheep, northern goshawk, boreal owl, Lewis's woodpecker, flammulated owl, and imperiled bats. Also, plan components for protecting SCC are weak in many cases. Takeaway: The draft plan does not adequately protect the diversity of imperiled species that occupy the GMUG.

Thank you for your time and for listening, we appreciate you doing your best to reflect the local interests of people who live, work and thrive in the GMUG region.

Best,

Laura Yale