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Organization:

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Dear GMUG Forest Service Officials:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison Forest Plan Revision #51806. My family has hiked, fished, rafted and camped in the GMUG since 1953, when my grandmother purchased a miner's cabin in Crested Butte, CO. Through the decades, I have witnessed the loss of open space for conservation, recreation and preservation.

While I appreciate the Forest Service's multiple-use mission, I am disappointed to see that Alternative B, the agency's preferred or "blended" alternative, recommends only 34,000 acres of new wilderness across the entire 3.16 million-acre GMUG. This proposal appears to be regressive in contrast to the 125,000 acres that the Forest Service recommended during the Bush administration in a 2007 planning effort.

Further, the draft revised forest plan and draft environmental impact statement prioritize logging over conservation. Alternative B identifies 948,200 acres of land as "suitable" for timber production, compared to 468,000 acres in the current plan. This is a huge increase at a time of shrinking wildlife habitat coupled with increasing forest fires and mudslides.

Moreover, the draft plan does not adequately protect the diversity of imperiled species that occupy the GMUG, including bighorn sheep, the American marten, northern goshawk, boreal owl, Lewis's woodpecker, flammulated owl and imperiled bats. Considering the alarming loss of biodiversity worldwide, I believe it is critical that an agency like the Forest Service leads the charge for stewardship of public lands, species survival and wilderness protection.

Finally, I would like to comment on the Wild and Scenic Rivers Draft Eligibility Evaluation. I cannot overstate the recreational value of the Taylor River to our family. For five generations, it has been our "go to place" for fishing, rafting and camping. Both the headwaters above Taylor reservoir and the Lower Taylor River-Canyon segment meet the definition of "free-flowing" for wild and scenic purposes. The Upper Taylor is a "pocketwater paradise" with excellent dry-fly fishing. One of the things that makes the Lower Taylor River Canyon reach so unique is that it provides a range of whitewater experiences for everyone from the novice to the expert during peak flows. Nothing can replace the thrill of paddling through white water or hooking a trout for the first time! Please include both the Upper and Lower Taylor River segments for wild and scenic status in the final eligibility evaluation.

In conclusion, I urge you to protect more wilderness and wild & scenic rivers in the GMUG Forest Service final plan. As Henry David Thoreau prophetically wrote, "In wildness is the preservation of the world."

Sincerely,

Heidi Hinton Hornaday