Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/24/2021 6:13:15 AM
First name: Pamela
Last name: Benton
Organization:
Title:
Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Forest Plan for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest.

I am pleased to see that U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has increased the size and scale of Wildlife Management Areas and provided a robust level of detail and attention to the impacts that recreation has across the forest. It is critical that we endeavor to protect Colorados wildlife at a time where they are seeing unprecedented pressure from climate change, recreation use and continued habitat fragmentation.

However, there are also a number of aspects of the plan that require improvement. Foremost among them is the paltry level of acreage of recommended wilderness in the plan. In 2007, under the Bush Administration, USFS recommended 125,000 acres as wilderness. Just 14 years later, in Alternative B, or the preferred alternative, USFS is proposing to recommend just 34,000 acres in the over three million acre GMUG National Forest as wilderness. It is clear that as time goes on, lands that are untrammeled by man become all the more valuable and irreplaceable and I urge USFS to recommend an increased and more suitable acreage figure for recommended wilderness.

Similarly, the massive increase of timber that you deem suitable for logging is concerning. Alternative B, the clear preferred alternative, nearly doubles the acreage of timber suitable for harvest from 468,000 acres to 948,200 acres. Designating nearly one third of the forest for timber harvest while deeming just one tenth of the forest suitable for wilderness protection isnt aligned with Colorados values. We must know the potential impacts of logging at such a scale on the climate and the watersheds we depend on.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to provide my comment on the draft plan and look forward to continuing to engage in the planning process.