

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/29/2021 9:35:55 PM

First name: Kirsten

Last name: Lear

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your Draft For the Manti-La Sal forest. My whole family drives from New Mexico every year to hike, camp and explore this magnificent area.

The diversity, history, trees, canyons and wildlife are amazing!

The Manti-La Sal is important to me, and I'd like the forest plan to analyze the Conservation Alternative, in full, in the upcoming Draft Environmental Impact Statement. In addition, I'd also like the forest to include Old growth.

A history of logging and tree removal has meant the erasure of centuries-old ponderosa, pinyon, and juniper trees. I would like to see old-growth trees (over 150 years old) protected and younger forests allowed to develop into old-growth stands in the future.

Wildlife

The pinyon jay, a fascinating bird dependent on pinyon and juniper forests, is in trouble. Pinyon jay populations have declined by about 85% since 1970, with continued loss predicted. In light of these challenges for pinyon jays, please adopt the pinyon jay as an official Species of Conservation Concern.

Grazing

Livestock grazing is permitted on nearly the entire Manti-La Sal National Forest at a level of 60% utilization. Reducing the amount of grasses, wildflowers, and shrubs that are consumed would have far-reaching benefits for native plants, wildlife, and fragile water sources. The best available science shows that 30% utilization is not only better for the health of the land, but also is better for the economics of grazing.

Special designations

The Conservation Alternative includes a robust wilderness proposal that would ensure a broad range of ecosystems and habitats are protected for future generations of people and wildlife alike. These proposed protected areas use roads, mountain bike trails, and off-road vehicle routes as boundaries, meaning that a variety of recreation experiences would remain available for use as well.

Please adopt the Conservation Alternatives wilderness proposal and establish the following protected areas: Left Fork Huntington Creek Research Natural Area, Sinbad Ridge Research Natural Area, Red Towers Botanical Area, and Heliotrope Botanical Area.

Cultural sites and tribal interests

The entirety of the Manti-La Sal National Forest (and much more) is ancestral lands for multiple Native nations. Tribes have thousands of years of locally relevant experience managing natural resources.

The forest plan should place the highest priority on preservation of cultural sites and expand the definition of cultural sites beyond the Western constructs of archeology. The forest should include cultural resources as defined by Native nations, including culturally significant plants, waters, gathering places, and more.

Please encourage better partnerships with Native nations in your final plan for the Manti-La Sal National Forest.

Bears Ears National Monument

While the this draft of the forest plan laudably tries to increase protections for Manti-La Sal National Forest lands that were slashed from Bears Ears National Monument in 2017, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland has recommended that full protection be returned to Bears Ears National Monument. President Biden is widely expected to sign a proclamation restoring Bears Ears soon. Planning for a renewed Bears Ears National Monument belongs in a revised monument management plan, not this forest plan, and it should be written in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management and with shared governance from Native nations. So Please do not include planning for Bears Ears National Monument in this forest plan.