Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/3/2021 10:47:49 PM
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Organization:
Title:
Comments:

My name is Jade Strapart and I am writing to express my concern and comments on the Revised Land Management Plan for the Manti La-Sal National Forest. I recently spent some time on the Manti-La Sal National Forest in the context of a college program focusing on public lands and environmental issues across the West. I was struck by the beauty of this forest and generally the state of Utah, being from Portland, Oregon I am used to dense, wet, green Fir forests. The fragility yet resilience of this beautiful arid, rocky, orange and textured landscape struck me. As an American citizen, I have an innate care for public lands, after all they belong to me and the rest of us. I feel proud to be an American when I think about our public lands system. I can wander into any state and camp, recreate, think and learn on designated public lands - how marvelous! This is precisely the reason I have decided to write to you, the stewards of my land.
I grew up in the rain, rivers, lakes and waterfalls in the pacific northwest: water has always been abundant in my world. It wasn't until I traveled around and took a few environmental studies classes that I understood the politics, and ecology of water in the West. And I'm sure we can all agree on one level or another that the climate is changing, and water is becoming an increasingly precious resource. In the dry southwest, riparian areas represent a key ecosystem full of rich biodiversity. Cold, nutrient rich waters, dense vegetated streambanks all play a role in supporting the life in these riparian areas. My attention to riparian areas, specifically in the Manti- la Sal forest is what prompted me to express a few changes I would hope to see implemented in the National Forest Plan. Livestock grazing, as culturally significant, and economically important as it may be, is damaging to riparian areas. When I picture a healthy riparian zone, I see cold, water flowing in a distinct channel, tall drooping grasses, willows, sedges, rushes. I do not expect, short vegetation barely holding together a trampled wide streambank. For these reasons, I would suggest changing the 4 inch hydric species standard. Some of these riparian plants can grow to 18 inches, so, the 4" standard does not seem to represent the desire for a healthy riparian zone.
Moreover, as I wandered around the National Forest, I noticed some broken fencing. Fences are an effective tool in keeping livestock away from ecologically significant riparian zones but if not managed properly, they are essentially useless. I would suggest a system be put in place, strict guidelines or preferably standards, to frequently monitor fences in the NF grazing allotment and create an incentive for permittees to do the same.
Lastly, I believe that as climate change continues to pose an increasing threat to our lives and our beloved lands, grazing should be significantly reduced on National Forest Lands. If permittees choose to put out only half of their herd of cattle, for environmental or other reasons, they should be allowed to do so and keep their given grazing allotment. I believe that more citizens, even ranchers, will become educated on the impacts of cattle grazing specifically on riparian areas, and the Forest Service should allow for leeway in that regard.
I want you to understand, that I am coming from a place of deep care for my public lands. I want these lands to continue exist and thrive for generations to come. I am putting my trust in you, the stewards of public lands, to make educated decisions and set necessary standards and guidelines for the fulfillment of that goal. Our public lands belong to future Americans as much as they do to us right now. I thank you for taking the time to read this comment and I hope you consider and implement some of the changes I have suggested.