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First name: Natalie

Last name: Ehmsen

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To USFS personnel or designees reviewing comments on the Draft Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests:

I am an individual with a degree in the natural sciences (biology and chemistry), a 28 year resident of the State of Colorado, a mother, and a grandmother. The vast majority of my years in Colorado have been spent as a resident of Gunnison County, where I have enjoyed countless hours in the public lands out my back door. I have introduced my children, and more recently, my grandchild, to the wonders of nature. I have, because of my love for the outdoors, closely followed the lengthy process involved in updating the forest management plan for the GMUG National Forests. It was with some surprise and disappointment that I read the draft management plan released by the USFS in August 2021.

The Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI) spent years having conversations with diverse stakeholders to formulate a plan for the Gunnison area that could be agreed upon by all, which they subsequently shared with the USFS. It appears that much of said plan was included by the USFS as Alternative D, which from my reading of the draft plan is not the preferred plan (the plan preferred by the USFS seems to be the "blended" Alternative B). When a group as diverse as GPLI can compromise and reach agreement, and when such agreement is also supported by the local county commissioners, the USFS needs to appropriately weight such support, and respect the voices of the citizenry most directly impacted by the forest management plan.

Specifically, I highly encourage the USFS include the wilderness and special management area (SMA) recommendations found in Alternative D, including areas recommend by GPLI and the Community Conservation Proposal, in their final forest management plan. To drill down on the wilderness recommendations - the USFS in its 2007 GMUG draft plan recommended approximately 125,000 acres in 19 areas of additional wilderness, yet in the 2021 GMUG draft plan, Alternative B recommends just 34,000 acres. It is baffling that this number would be so significantly decreased. Again, I implore the USFS to recommend the 261,000 additional acres of wilderness and 246,000 of SMAs as proposed in Alternative D.

I also would like to voice my concerns with the proposed [excessive] future timber harvesting proposals found in all three Alternatives included in the draft plan. The GMUG National Forests should not be viewed primarily through the lens of potential timber harvest when it is much more valuable for biological diversity and recreation. During the webinar specific to the Gunnison area which I attended, the presenter noted that the USFS was required to calculate future timber harvests differently now than when the existing forest management plan was created. I have to say, the calculation that was used seems to put the "timber use" over all other uses of the forest; once the trees are harvested, the other uses of the forest are often not as feasible. For example, numerous studies have shown that when forested tracts are fragmented, by timber production or otherwise, animal habitat/ranges are negatively impacted. Further, the impact of the heavy machinery needed to implement such a staggering timber harvest would result in quite the carbon footprint (and in removal of trees which are counteracting some of the already existing human carbon footprint), in a time when humans' negative impact on the climate has become clear. I ask that the USFS significantly lower the proposed timber harvesting proposals in the final management plan, and recognize that our public lands are so much more than a potential source of revenue.

Additionally, I would like to encourage the USFS to find the following Crested Butte area streams as eligible for Wild & Scenic River protection:

*Slate River (Headwaters to Poverty Gulch, Poverty Gulch to Oh-Be-Joyful, and Oh-Be-Joyful to the Town of

Crested Butte);

*Daisy Creek (Headwaters to Slate River confluence);

*East River (Headwaters to Gothic Road Bridge, Gothic Road Bridge to Meanders);

*Upper Taylor River, Lower Taylor River (Taylor River Canyon);

*Upper Brush Creek and West Brush Creek tributary; and

*Cement Creek.

The updating of the forest management plan for the GMUG National Forests is happening at a time when it is possible to actually see climate change occurring across our world. Please keep this in mind when making the decisions that will guide the uses of our public land for the upcoming decades. I strongly support the adoption of Alternative D by the USFS, as it lessens the motorized impacts to our public lands and prioritizes wilderness and habitat protection for the plants and animals living there currently, and I ask that you appropriately consider my input in your final decision.

Thank you,
Natalie Ehmsen
Mt. Crested Butte, CO