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Organization:
Title:
Comments: Subj: GMUG Draft Plan General Comments

To Whom it concerns,
I write this comment on behalf of myself and as a Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA) member.

I was born and raised in San Juan County Colorado and I have spent a major part of my life exploring, hiking, fishing, hunting, mountain biking, motorcycle riding, snowmobiling, rafting and simply "recharging my batteries" in the mountains within the the GMUG National Forests and beyond. I have made some of my best memories with some of my closet friends and family in this area, so saying it is a special place could be an understatement.

The GMUG is not only important to myself and many people within my circle but it is important to the thousands of people who come from all over to do the same things I do. These visitors come with the hope to see wildlife that they have seen in pictures or on TV as well. I know you understand what this means, but just to reiterate, they bring money and jobs as well, estimated to be over $114 million annually.

Perhaps most importantly, the GMUG is home to a large part of Colorado's wildlife populations. As stated before, large numbers of people travel to Colorado to view, fish, hunt, and/or photograph our wildlife. The GMUG wildlife habitat is extremely important to the animals living within it. Based on recent reports I have read the motorized and non-motorized roads and trails are eroding and fragmenting these critical habitats and are having negative impacts on the wildlife we want and need.

Things I support in the Draft Plan:

-The designation of Wildlife Management Areas with focused management. CO BHA and TRCP strongly support the Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) identified by the USFS in "Alternative B" and the plan components proposed for their management.

-Plan components proposed by the USFS that I support to provide the special management needed for WMAs and to enhance big game populations forest wide include:

*A Standard limiting the density of permanent motorized and non-motorized routes in WMAs to 1 linear mile per square mile (Standard MA-STND-WILDF-02). This standard requires maintaining a route density that is low enough to protect the existing habitat function and habitat connectivity within WMAs while allowing necessary access for temporary forest management and habitat improvement activities.

*Objectives (both within WMAs and forest-wide) that require improving habitat connectivity through vegetation management, removing unneeded structures, and eliminating redundant routes to reduce route densities.

*Desired Conditions (both within WMAs and forest-wide) that recognize the need to maintain large blocks of security habitat and undisturbed migration and movement corridors for big game (MA-DC-WLDF-01 and FW-DC-SPEC-12).

Areas for Improvement in the Draft Forest Plan

1)Big Game Population Objectives (This is one of my top priorities for the Forest Plan!) - Given the importance of hunting on the GMUG both regionally and nationally, the GMUG staff and CPW should continue to work closely

together to ensure that habitat management activities on the forest are consistent with CPW's herd management objectives. The USFS should add an additional Guideline regarding working collaboratively with CPW to achieve big game populations objectives and sustainable harvest that meets or exceeds average big game harvest success rates across Colorado.

2)Colorado Roadless Areas - We are also concerned about conserving the integrity of our remaining wild lands that are necessary for maintaining big populations, stream quality, and our heritage and privilege to hunt and fish in large intact and connected landscapes. Big game and other wildlife rely on functional, interconnect roadless habitats as they migrate across the landscape between seasonal ranges or migrate upstream. CO BHA and TRCP believe it is urgent to purposely direct management toward the conservation of our remaining Roadless Areas and to emphasize wildlife habitat management within the areas identified as Roadless. The lands included in the Colorado Roadless Act continue to be subject to unrestricted trail development that increasingly degrades their roadless values. The USFS should incorporate specific plan components consistent with the Colorado Roadless Rule (36 CFR 294 Subpart D) that protects the roadless values of these lands by setting limits on new trail development in these areas. Not doing so now will only preclude the opportunity for us and the next generations to maintain their roadless character in the future.

3)Connectivity - To maintain consistent landscape-level management across public and private administrative boundaries, habitat connectivity across the landscape, and the function of CPW-mapped high priority big game habitats consistent with state efforts, the USFS should incorporate plan components in the Connectivity section of the Draft Forest Plan that parallel CPW's recommendations with respect to limiting route density to 1 linear mile per square mile in migration corridors and the highest priority big game habitats.

3)Bighorn Sheep - We are concerned about the vulnerability of our bighorn sheep herds on the GMUG to disease transmission from contact with domestic sheep. Bighorn sheep have a limited population size and restricted range on the GMUG due to the number of grazing allotments allocated to domestic sheep grazing both on the GMUG and on surrounding lands. Bighorn sheep populations on the GMUG cannot expand geographically and are at risk of catastrophic disease related die offs from contact with domestic sheep when they do. For these reasons, bighorn sheep need to be identified and managed as Species of Conservation Concern on the GMUG.

I appreciate your time, patience and consideration throughout this process.

Best Regards,
Shawn Andreatta