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Organization:

Title:

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed GMUG Forest Plan. I am a member of the Colorado Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and have been fortunate enough to recreate within the GMUG on a handful of occasions.

The GMUG encompasses vast tracts of rugged land that offer sanctuary for various wildlife species and a landscape for sportsmen and women to truly feel a sense of wildness and test their mettle. I believe preserving and enhancing these attributes should be the focus of this forest plan revision. This requires an emphasis on landscape connectivity, roadless areas, and limiting new trail development in critical wildlife areas. With an ever increasing human presence in wildlife habitat, animals should be able to use the landscape free of major human disturbance.

In other areas of Colorado, mainly the Vail and Roaring Fork Valleys, we have seen alarming drops in population and reproductive rates for ungulates, mainly due to a massive influx of trail development and associated near constant human recreation. Due to high trail densities in some of these areas, wildlife habitat is effectively lost because animals will avoid these areas, which may be important habitat. The constant pressure also forces behavior changes such as fleeing which burns important calories. At critical times of the year this can be life and death for the animal. With the GMUG Forest Plan, we have an opportunity to get ahead of this trend of reduced wildlife populations that is happening in other parts of the state. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has mapped these critical areas for big game animals and these areas should be limited to one linear mile per square mile as recommended by CPW staff.

I would also like to see enhanced Roadless Area protections in the Forest Plan. Despite being identified as Roadless, many areas within the GMUG have seen route development inconsistent with the designation. This route development fragments habitat and dilutes the roadless character and wild nature of the forest.

I would like to voice my support for the Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) outlined in the Draft Forest Plan. These areas are vital for big game species and should be developed as little as possible while also being enhanced to support wildlife populations. Research shows that limiting motorized and non-motorized trail development to one linear mile per square mile offers enough security and habitat connectivity. I would also be happy to see active habitat restoration and enhancement projects on WMA's including removing unneeded structures and vegetation management to further boost habitat productivity.

I believe that wildlife and humans can exist on the landscape together in perpetuity. We do, however, need to actively make preserving wildlife populations a focus of our public lands. Through addressing recreation impacts to wildlife and working to maintain and enhance critical wildlife habitat, we can have healthy, sustainable wildlife populations for generations to come.