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First name: Jessy

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To whom it may concern,

I would like to firstly say that I fully support all the very specific points that Share the Slate made in their letter, every single one of them.

My name is Jessy Hill, and I am a semi-new business owner in this valley. My livelihood depends on the backcountry access that this draft forest plan has the potential to eliminate. My husband and I have been living, working and recreating in Crested Butte and the Gunnison National Forest for 5+ years. After losing our jobs during the pandemic layoffs, we decided to open Uphill Motorworks in CB. Our main source of income is snowmobile repairs, and we are fortunate enough to live in a place that is able to sustain our business due to the wonderful motorized backcountry access we live and work near. These new draft changes have the potential to directly affect our business and others, for the worse. I am concerned that if motorized backcountry access becomes so restricted, like in plan "D", that people will choose to recreate elsewhere and thus bring their snowmobiles to businesses closer to where they recreate. Currently, we are the only snowmobile repair shop at the north end of the valley.

In addition to the way these changes could affect our personal economic freedom, they would also affect ours and our neighbors' backcountry freedom, enjoyment and safety. The restriction of motorized users to small swaths of land will lead to recreational activities becoming congested and unsafe for all users. Collisions, avalanche activity and potential user conflict are all greater possibilities if you move forward with some of the intended draft changes. Additionally, non motorized users will not be able to enjoy the few areas that are open to snowmobiling because of the added congestion. Backcountry users need to be able to spread out in order to avoid these issues and conflicts. Using snowmobiles, backcountry skiers can travel to access safer and more remote terrain. Plans B&D would limit the ability to spread out, keep safe and enjoy the backcountry experience in the Gunnison National Forest. I would like to see GMUG limit concepts from these two plans into the final Forest Plan.

Preserving our public lands is of the utmost importance, and an appreciation for nature starts with access to these beautiful places. Many of us choose to live here, amidst the struggle it can bring, because of this wonderful access. OSV users can positively impact local economies, and losing them will have negative effects on small businesses. Many people recreate in these areas from out of town, supporting our local economy (restaurants, shops, gas stations, small businesses like mine) with their presence. I believe that taking this access away will have many unintended negative consequences. Connection to nature is needed to preserve our public lands, Plan D makes this connection so much harder to attain.

The best way to preserve public land is to foster connectivity between people and the land. OSV usage does that. I will never forget my first time snowmobiling here in Crested Butte, leaving the Kebler pass trailhead behind me and getting to see/ski all the wonderful places I knew so well during the summer. It has deeply changed my life and my connection to nature, specifically the West Elks. I want to protect them for myself and our community's future. Please do not take this connection away by limiting my access to the back country I have grown to know and love.

Access to public lands improves public health, option D makes accessing public lands limiting and difficult which will adversely affect many people who rely on access to the outdoors to improve their mental health and quality of life.

Snowmobiles have very minimal impact on wildlife. For those who think that snowmobiling is impacting wildlife detrimentally, I encourage you to open your mind to the idea that it's not as bad as you think. Large game, such as deer and elk, do not over-winter in places that OSV users want to recreate. There are studies that support this. See the Share the Slate letter for some great resources to support this.

Specific areas of concern to me echo the concerns of the organization Share the Slate. Here are my comments regarding the specifics.

Poverty Gulch

Plan D does not allow snowmobiles to access Baxter Basin, a favorite hybrid use area for users to enjoy "sled laps" safely. This is such a unique area and experience for backcountry users that will be effectively eliminated by plan D. The boundary proposed will relegate snowmobilers to an avalanche prone slope and closes a safe access point for this recreation area. Also worth mentioning is that the creek used to define the western boundary of the northern edge can be difficult to define during winter.

Brush Creek, and the mistake in representation

Brush creek currently allows OSV use but plan A does not accurately represent that. Plan A needs to be revised to show the current available use and address the discrepancy. Plan A needs to be very clear on this designation, and so do plans B, C and D. Accessing Teocalli mountain for skiing relies on this important access point.

Pearl Pass

On the rare occasions that this amazingly unique terrain is safely accessible, the current draft plan would require backcountry users from CB to drive over 4 hours to Ashcroft for entry. This is a motorized area in the summer, and is a traditionally motorized path used by many in CB. Please do not take this OSV use away.

East Brush Creek

Plan D completely eliminates our access to public lands in Upper Brush Creek. Please keep this access area open.

Crystal Pass/Tilton Pass

OSV users have been traveling back and forth to Aspen for ages, and plan D would eliminate this possibility. It also prevents us from being able to access/ski Star and Taylor peaks from Crested Butte, please keep this access to our Public Lands open. Please keep in mind that this would prevent the only wintertime motorized recreation to Aspen, a long standing tradition between these two towns.

The Beckwiths and Oh-Be-Joyful

Current draft Plan A contradicts the current OSV usage in this area and needs to be corrected; this area currently allows OSV access. Please correct plan A to reflect this. Additionally, plan D would close this area to OSV, and I would like to see this remain open as it currently is.

I strongly oppose Plan D's sweeping changes, and I ask: why such a massive change? With all the uncertainty circulating around the last year plus, why make sure a drastic change to something that is seemingly working okay? I do not believe most of the changes proposed in plan D are needed. Semi-primitive motorized designations/land would decrease by 47%, from 53% to just 6%! I'd like to quote the Share the Slate letter, since they put it so well: "The Draft Plan cites on p. 71 that one of the goals of the GMUG National Forest is to "encourage visitors to recreate in a variety of settings throughout the national forests, not just in currently popular or concentrated areas". Closing nearly half of our winter motorized terrain in the Gunnison Basin would

essentially do the opposite of this by concentrating motorized users to more confined, and thus crowded, spaces."

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, I look forward to seeing some of the necessary revisions needed to Plan A. Plan C is my preferred alternative but please consider all user groups when enacting this plan, and the fallout some of the drafts and their tenets could cause.

Jessy Moore
Owner, Uphill Motorworks in Crested Butte