

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/9/2021 11:03:21 PM

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Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Forest Plan for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest (GMUG NF). This forest plan revision is a key element in shaping the future and long-term health of not only our forests, but also of our state.

As written, however, the alternatives in this plan fall short of the best we could do. I ask that you reexamine them through the lens of what would do the most good to ensure the long-term health of the forest, as opposed to the current short-sighted commercial exploitation of these public lands.

As a result of climate change, increased recreation, and a multitude of other factors, GMUG NF is facing tremendous pressure. It is imperative that we protect all of Kelso Mesa--as it is recommended for Wilderness designation--and assign other areas across the forest the title of Wildlife Management Area. Not only would such designations capture the actual ecological functioning of these areas now, they would ensure that they are managed for their best use in the future and will ensure continued public access.

In addition to robust land designations, it is important to examine the water sources in the forest and protect them for the surrounding communities. Waterways like Kannah Creek are crucial for local municipal water supplies, as well as for agriculture, recreation, and wildlife survival. Designating lands as Watershed Protections Areas and qualifying stream miles as Wild and Scenic waterways are two important steps in making sure that these features of the national forest are formally conserved.

While Alternative D may do the best job among all of the current on-offer alternatives of capturing the breadth of protections needed and warranted on the GMUG NF, it falls short in a number of ways. The absence of designations for specific forest lands as Recommended Wilderness, Wildlife Management Areas, and Special Management Areas, along with its proposed 50% increase in suitable timber-harvest acreage are examples of where Alternative D needs significant revision.

Your inclusion of comprehensive and enforceable protections for the landscapes mentioned above, as well as all other areas deserving of formal protection, is how the U.S. Forest Service can best fulfill its fundamental mission, support Western Slope, and leave a positive legacy for future generations of Coloradans. It is imperative that you make these commitments now to the public lands that we treasure and that make Colorado a natural joy to us all.