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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Re: Support for the consideration of Alternative D for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) forest draft plan.

Dear Forest Service Planners,

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison forests are vital to the North Fork Valley and surrounding areas on the Western Slope. Thank you for this opportunity to voice my thoughts for the revision of this forest management plan. A lot has changed in the last 40 years. There is much to consider when managing and caring for such a beautiful forest area, working with the new challenges brought on by climate change.

We chose to live here due in large part to the surrounding forests and all of the beauty and recreation available within them. Of the many opportunities, my husband and I primarily hike, fish and ski. (We were especially thankful these past 2 years during COVID protocols). We most often frequent the Grand Mesa area, Kebler Pass, Anthracite Creek and other general areas in the West Elks, including BLM and Wilderness. I have come to love the forests all around from the Grand Mesa to the West Elks and around the Uncompahgre. This is a large area to maintain and manage. Thank you for all your hard work on this revision.

Besides recreation, these forests are a vital part of our economy. Our ranches and farms rely upon the irrigation waters which begin in the GMUG watersheds. The economy is boosted by hunting, fishing, birding, riding, camping and other recreation and tourism dollars.

Our drinking water, especially here in Paonia, is exclusively from GMUG watersheds. The quality and continued flow of these waters is of special concern to our families. Locally, we have seen how the flow of our drinking water springs can affect the amount of water available. If those springs are compromised or contaminated it would be detrimental to the quality of our drinking water. Any number of changes to the use of the surrounding forest and wilderness would compromise this lifeblood. Increase in use, additional roads, motorized traffic, logging, drilling as well as climate challenges can all affect the quality and conservation of our precious water.

In reading the suggested alternatives, I support Alternative D. This alternative seems to most closely address my main concerns; water quality and conservation, wilderness and wildlife protection and maintenance of our forests. To add to this, I would like to see specific standards and guidelines enhanced for each of these areas. I would like to see wilderness designations increased and wildlife managed carefully to enhance big game habitat and migration. These concerns are also addressed in the Community Conservation Proposal and Outdoor Alliance Vision. Timber harvesting should be controlled with specific guidelines, ensuring restoration and keeping in mind the changing climate.

I realize that I have not been very specific about certain areas. I am a Colorado resident who appreciates the impact of our forests and other public lands. I wish to see them managed for all Coloradoans to enjoy and for the forests to provide many years of continued enjoyment for our children. I do not wish to see the public lands exploited but rather, managed carefully.

Again, thank you for allowing our input and for your hard work in this matter.