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First name: Allison

Last name: Melton

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for providing the public with the opportunity to comment on the draft forest plan and draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the GMUG National Forests. I also thank you for extending this important comment period.

As someone who lives in Gunnison County and values the surrounding public land resources as intact landscapes that not only are necessary to protect our water quality and quantity but also for our climate resiliency, I care deeply about the future of the GMUG National Forests and the wildlife, waters, and sustainable recreation resources that it provides. Accordingly I would like to provide the following comments and strongly urge the Forest Service to adopt a LRMP that is best suited to these goals, for which the Forest Service's draft plan falls short.

First, Alternative B's 34,000 acres of recommended wilderness fails to include many additional acres that should be recommended. I support the wilderness and special management area recommendations in Alternative D, and urge that those be included in the final plan. These wilderness and special management recommendations are lands that have high value wildlife habitat, water resources, and wilderness qualities. In a world where such resources are becoming scarcer and increasingly under threat, it is imperative that this plan is forward thinking by including these wilderness and special management areas.

Second, I strongly support limiting route density in Wildlife Management Areas and Special Management Areas. Each year, more and more studies and evidence comes out showing the significant effect that human recreation has on wildlife. Impacts range from invasive and noxious weed spread that can affect native vegetation wildlife depend on to energy expenditure and avoidance of habitat. We are in an extinction crisis that requires land managers to be proactive adopting provisions that help protect currently listed species from the fate of extinction and to prevent more species from ending up in need of critical Endangered Species Act protections. Limiting route density is a necessary and obvious way to protect wildlife and habitat.

Third, I am concerned that bighorn sheep have been left off the Species of Conservation Concern (SCC) list, given their vulnerability to disease passed from livestock and habitat fragmentation. The plan does not provide adequate justification for not designating this and other species as SCC. Indeed, when combined with grazing decisions recently issued within close proximity to GMUG boundaries, it seems that local land management offices are fine with allowing this species to be pushed indeed immediate need for ESA coverage and over the extinction edge. This is simply unacceptable and irresponsible management. Bighorns are an iconic native species that land managers need to be aggressively protecting -- not allowing them to fall by the wayside.

Fourth, the draft plan's analysis of timber suitability is unacceptable. The forest has been continuing to prioritize timber sales versus other types of management and I am greatly concerned that the LRMP will further set that blueprint. Timber use is merely one of multiple uses for forests, placing this use as a seeming top priority is highly concerning. The draft plan's timber suitability analysis appears to be designed to maximize the possibility of future timber harvest, even though the GMUG National Forests is much more valuable for conserving biological diversity and recreation than it ever could be for timber production. Given the pressing concerns of climate disruption and extinction crisis, the LRMP needs to get priorities straight - which is focusing on landscape-level conservation, such as wilderness and special management areas not timber sales. Landscape-level conservation contributes to climate change solutions by both reducing fossil fuel pollution while providing opportunities for species and habitat adaptation. As the climate continues to warm, species are likely to move, often to higher elevation, so identification and adequate protection of refugia is very important. The current proposal does not appear to do enough to ensure such protection.

While not an exhaustive list of the issues in the draft plan that I support or have concern with, the above are the issues that are most important to me, and ones that I hope are addressed by the GMUG in the final revised forest plan. Thank you for your consideration.