

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/24/2021 8:40:19 PM

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Comments: My comment concerns the proposed Kelso Mesa wilderness area. I believe that it should be included in the final plan decision because it is the best representation of old ponderosa pine forest remaining on the Plateau.

I worked as district silviculturist on the Ouray and Norwood ranger districts for a number of years and I have spent quite a bit of time on the Uncompahgre Plateau. I visited Kelso Mesa in 2007 and was struck by the unique condition of its ponderosa stands. They were the best examples of old-growth structure that I had seen anywhere on the Plateau and displayed very little evidence of alteration in past timber harvest. I had previously participated in two historical stand-reconstruction efforts with Colorado State University personnel, and the historical conditions suggested by these studies are in evidence on Kelso Mesa. It appears to me that Kelso Mesa represents the best of what's left of the ponderosa pine ecosystem that was once common on the Plateau. The area should be managed for its value as an ecological reference condition, either as wilderness or in a land use classification that maintains its unique ecological values above all else.