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Organization:

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GMUG Forest Plan Revision Team

2250 S. Main Street

Delta, CO 81416

To the Revision Team:

Bob and Karen Risch, two past presidents of the Ouray Trail Group and longtime supporters of the Ouray County Nordic Council responsible for the Ironton Nordic Area, would like to add their commentary to OTG president Steve Boyle's letter on the Forest Revision Plan.

Bob Risch, born and raised in Ouray, chaired the Red Mountain Project from 1998-2004, which resulted in the preservation of the Ironton Valley and most of its mountainsides from commercial and roaded development. Bob was the Special Projects person for OTG and instrumental in reopening Ouray's Silvershield, Hayden, Sutton/Neosho and Horsethief/Goldbelt Trails. He was OTG president from 2014-2020 and currently serves as vice-president. He was mayor of Ouray from 2008-2013.

Karen Risch has explored, climbed and mapped the Ouray area since 1964. She has documented area trails since 2002, in Hiking Trails of Ouray County and the Uncompahgre Wilderness and Hiking Ouray With Kids - And Everyone Else! She was OTG president from 2004-2009 and has managed Publications and Sales for OTG since 2004. She founded and led a Women's hiking group from 2001-20012.

Bob and Karen were members of Ouray Mountain Rescue Team from 1996-2010. Karen trained and fielded a search dog for the team and is the author of No Individual Heroes: Ouray Mountain Rescue Team, published in 2018.

N.B. The following comments supersede previous ones sent to gmugforestplan@fs.fed.us

1. We unequivocally support Alternative D in the Draft Plan, with a few notations:

2. Forest slopes of 40% or steeper should not be considered for timber harvesting. In addition, special protection should be given to the forests of the Uncompahgre Gorge, the Ironton area and the north side of the Sneffels Range. These high altitude slopes in tight terrain are uneconomical for harvesting and these high watersheds might never recover from the subsequent degradation of soil, fauna and flora (re: the south face of Mt. Baldy). The Ouray Ranger District and Ouray County are noted for spectacular hiking, climbing and other recreational pursuits and any degradation of these forests would be harmful to wildlife, human inhabitants and the economy of this area.

3. The 20-mile Horsethief Trail from the Uncompahgre Valley north of Ouray to Lake City via the Bridge of Heaven is a UTE trail that predates white settlement in this region. Construction of the Ouray segment from town (Goldbelt/Horsethief) to the main trail was funded by Ouray County in 1889 and maintained and used by Ouray residents and the OTG. The USFS abandoned its 30 year maintenance of the trail in 1967 and created another entrance at the Wedge Mine on Dexter Creek. The Bridge of Heaven section connects with Bear Creek and the Uncompahgre Wilderness and deserves wilderness protection.

4. The 10,400 acre Hayden parcel, west of US550 and southeast of CR361, strongly deserves the protections of a Special Interest Area (SIA). It offers abundant wildlife protection in its current untimbered and unroaded state. Mountain lions, wolves, elk, deer, moose, lynx and snowshoe hare currently inhabit this rare intact ecosystem, accessed only by foot trails.

5. The 3,000 acre Mt. Abram parcel is also far better protected as a Special Interest Area (SIA). It's home to the Ironton Nordic System and should remain off limits to snowmobiles.

6. Turret Ridge, a wild and much appreciated landmark for area residents and an inspiration to hikers and climbers in the Uncompahgre Wilderness, should be preserved as wilderness.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Bob and Karen Risch