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First name: Bill
Last name: Hamann
Organization:
Title:
Comments: GMUG NF Planning Team:

The purpose of this letter is to provide my comments on the GMUG draft management plan and

draft EIS which was released to the public for review on August 13, 2021. I am writing this letter as an individual whose favorite activities are hiking backcountry trails, climbing mountains and other non-[shy] motorized activities in the GMUG National Forest (FS) and who would like to see that the new management plan will allow for continuance of these activities. For the record, please note that I am a 40 year member of the Western Slope Group (WSG) of the Colorado Mountain Club (CMC) I also spent 25 years as Chairman of the WSG's Conservation committee. and I have prepared a number of comment letters to the FS and BLM on land use policies when I was in that position.

On another note, it is likely that this letter does not follow the GMUG draft plan format for presenting comments nor review all the significant topics prepared by the FS Planning Team. I did get some support and information from other environmental groups that are preparing comments, but it was simply impossible for one person to access all the information that was posted (particularly if one is in his upper 70' s(in age) and rather limited with using computers. My most valuable asset is the knowledge gained in 50+ years of exploring mountains and canyons in Colorado's public lands

Experience in National Forests and related knowledge. An information sheet that I received (source unknown) had a paragraph entitled ' Guideline for effective comment writing' and suggested I identify the "standing and interest in national forest lands I have that is related to how NF lands are managed." My story started in 1967, when I came to Colorado to study for a MS degree in Civil Engineering at the Boulder campus, In Sept, of that first year, after climbing Arapahoe Peak with the CU hiking club, I decided that this was the place I was going to spend the rest of my life (and I have!). When I graduated

, I found a job with a consulting firm in Boulder, where I lived for 10 years. In that period, I progressed from a beginning hiker to an experienced mountaineer with travels all over the West and traveled to several foreign countries for climbing. In 1978, my employer send me to Grand Junction on a 6 month stay; I decided the West Slope was a better place to fulfill my interests and decided to stay.. Whether Front Range or West Slope, most of my spare time has been in the mountains, redrock canyons and whitewater rivers, and I am glad to say I am still very active in those activities.

My specialty in my profession was 'water engineering' and I am well informed in water flow, water quality, hydrology, watersheds, stream flow, water law and similar fields. I have always had a considerable interest in the plants, wildlife, etc. that I encountered on my outings and while in Boulder, I took many classes in biology of alpine biota (enough to receive a MS in Biology). Also, I belong to about 10 environmental groups.

Area Evaluated in IUY Letter. The GMUG National Forests is comprised of several different geographical areas with differences in elevation, terrain, access and usage, covering almost 3 million acres.. I have spent time hiking, 'bagging summits', traveling access roads etc in all of the three former Forests that make up the GMUG since coming to Colorado. However, I've reduced my statewide 'peak bagging' interest in the last 25 years and most of my outings in that period have been in the alpine section of the Uncompahgre NF (I will call it the Northern San Juan Mountains). I retired from work in 2001, and in 2002, I built a seasonal cabin on Miller Mesa 7 years south of Ridgway Because I am more familiar with the Northern San Juan Mountain area of the GMUG, I will restrict the majority of my comments to that area.

Selection of a Preferred Alternative The GMUG Forest planning team has listed four Management Alternatives in the Draft Plan. The difference in the Alternatives appears to be based on the amount of acreage that is left in a more pristine and undisturbed manner, vs that acreage where extractive activities are predominant. .I recommend Alternative D, which has the most undisturbed land.. This management approach provides a forest which attracts visitors to see the scenery, enjoy the pleasant summer climate, fish in the streams and lakes, watch wildlife, enjoy the flowers, hike the trails, climb the mountains and similar activities and which in tum contribute more to the local community,(far more than extractive activities, like removing trees). Also, undisturbed areas are most helpful in protecting endangered plants, and animals, and animals which are not officially 'endangered, but whose populations have dropped (such as pika),a goal of mine. Also, they produce the greatest number of deer and elk for hunting,(which supports the local economy on it own!). Another plus for leaving trees in place is that runoff comes slower, and is least likely to create flooding (as occurred in Glenwood Canyon) .

.Designation of Wilderness Areas My maps show 10 separate areas as suitable for Wilderness classification in the Northern San Juan Range between Ouray and Telluride. Most are attachments to existing Wilderness Areas; the largest is Whitehouse Mountain at 24,314 acres. I am familiar with all of them and agree that wilderness designation is appropriate for every one.

I support the proposal made for Wilderness designation on Baldy Peak near Ridgway and the lands surrounding the canyon of Bear Creek plus its adjacent highlands (near the Engineer Pass road)

Special Interest Areas and Non -motorized Recreation Areas I am not sure if this is the proper name for these area, but they appear to be roadless lands where no types of motorized vehicles are allowed. This would include OHVs, Jeeps', dirt bikes and similar devices, and snowcats and similar tracked vehicles that travel over snow.. This is the land designation of most interest to me, and which I strongly support.. There are several locations either described in the narrative or on maps that I have. All are located in the North San Juans near Ouray and Telluride ,There are two Special Interest areas parallel to Hwy 550 and south of Ouray that are described in the Draft Plan that I am particularly supportive of. They are on the ridge between Abrams Mountain/ Brown Mountain, and on Hayden Mountain, which is also more a ridge with several summits.. I make several outings on their slopes every summer and early fall; they are easy to access, and most hiking is at high elevation which provides for a cool outing and great views..

I do not have a map available to show the boundaries of the Hayden Mountain Area, but it appears to end at Richmond Pass on the south end. I recommend that another Special Interest area be added south from Richmond Pass to Trico Peak: it would include several enjoyable basins for hiking.(Spirit Gulch, Commodore Gulch and the unnamed basin to the south (it has the Senator Beck Mine shown on the map, which is a good locator point) .

These 3 Special Interest area are probably the most popular that are accessible from Hwy 550 and the basins are the most vulnerable to receive pressure from the motorized users to have roadways constructed for both summertime and winter time users. One of the guides with the local climbing/skiing service has been quoted stating that they would like to open several of the basins just mentioned for winter guide businesses, using snow cats.(which I would oppose).

Special Interest Non-motorized Areas neat Telluride described in the Draft Plan include Hope Lake, East Beaver Creek and four Lizard Head Wilderness Additions; Lone Cone and parcels north of Telluride. I strongly support setting these areas for non-motorized use. I do not have descriptions, but they are shown on a map in the Plan.

.Special Interest Areas to limit Oyernight Camping., Backpackers tend to impact an area much more than when only day visitors are allowed. An example of this is the Blue Lakes area NW of Mt Sneffels. Impacts includes

disposing of human waste, damaging the vegetation, chasing the wildlife to less desirable grazing areas, and have a higher potential for wildfire. I suggest designating the basin around the Blue Lakes as a Special Interest Area with a limit on overnight visitors The FS should establish a permitting system for the Forest since many camping areas are more and more overused (as compared to my first visit with the CU Hiking Club in 1968).

Wildlife Protection-I intend to hike off-trail. I find that the farther I go from a trail (of all types) the likelihood of encountering elk and deer increases.. A good example are the basins in upper Blaine Basin.. Perhaps these basins could be off limits until a certain time in summer.(! don't mind being kept out of the high basins if it will help the wildlife)

Domestic Sheep Grazing I recommend that the tundra areas in the North San Juan Mountains be off limits to grazing to domestic sheep herds. These sheep can spread lung diseases to the wild (Bighorn) sheep, plus tend to over graze the tundra; in addition, the guard dogs may attack domestic dogs and frighten hikers. I would like to point out that I do not have a broad bias to grazing. I grew up working on the family ranch in western ND, grazing cattle; the problem is the sheep are too destructive in the mountain country.

Control_Motorized Vehicles The FS should make it a policy that no additional roadways for use by motorized vehicles will be built in future years. Also, some types of control should be placed on existing roads to limit speeds, driving off the road, driving in a reckless manners and perhaps even the number of vehicles on any one roadways. I recognize that most of the roads in the North San Juans are on right of ways owned by the local counties and controlling road use is often not feasible for the FS. However, FS should work to establish agreements with counties.

I recommend that the summer time ranger program be increased. Its the only way to enforce some of the regulations for camping, cutting firewood, polluting water etc. If money is a problem, I would suggest ending the 'snow ranger patrols' since they are really not needed (at least in the places I go)

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my comments and for accepting