

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/16/2026 4:45:41 AM

First name: Sheryl

Last name: Bower

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To: Sopris Ranger District - USDA Forest Service

Re: Comments on Proposed 2,600-acre Clearcut - Thompson Divide - EA #68876

Date: 2/15/2026

Dear Forest Service Decision Makers,

I am writing to formally oppose the proposed clearcut of approximately 2,600 acres within the Thompson Divide, including the 600-foot cut along Thompson Creek Road. This landscape has been the subject of decades of public effort to conserve its ecological, recreational, economic, and watershed values. I urge the Forest Service to reject this proposal based on strong scientific evidence and significant social and economic impacts. It's a slap in the face to all those that worked so hard to conserve this area that you folks would now come in and want to CLEAR CUT IT.

### 1) The Thompson Divide is an Ecological and Recreational Jewel

The Thompson Divide is recognized for its outstanding ecological values, intact watersheds, and high-value wildlife habitat. It supports species such as elk, bears, and native trout, and serves as a critical migration corridor for wide-ranging wildlife.

It is also one of the last large, undeveloped mid-elevation forest landscapes in the state, with roadless acreage that hundreds of residents and visitors use for hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, climbing, snowmobiling, and backcountry skiing.

These recreational uses support sustainable local jobs and economies and form the backbone of community quality of life.

### 2) Scientific Evidence: Clearcutting Harms Forest and Watershed Health

Clearcutting fundamentally alters forest ecosystems, soil stability, and hydrology. Scientific research shows:

- Increased erosion and sedimentation: Removing trees eliminates root systems that anchor soil, leading to increased sediment running into streams and rivers.
- Altered water cycles and streamflow: Clearcutting significantly increases peak and annual streamflow in affected watersheds, which can exacerbate erosion and destabilize downstream ecosystems.
- Higher water temperatures and nutrient loading: Without streamside trees for shade and soil stabilization, water bodies warm and become more prone to algal growth and nutrient disruption, stressing sensitive aquatic species.

These impacts are long-lasting. Soil nutrient levels may take decades to recover, and water quality effects can persist far downstream for many years post-cut.

### 3) Forest Health Misconception: Clearcutting Isn't Healthy Forest Management

Modern forest science generally views clearcutting as a blunt, last-resort tool, not a first choice for forest health:

\*It eliminates canopy and understory biodiversity.

\*It fragments habitat critical to wide-ranging species and sensitive ecological functions.

Forest health is better supported through practices that mimic natural disturbance regimes without eradicating entire stands, such as selective thinning, prescribed burning, and targeted fuel reduction in high-priority wildfire

corridors.

4. Social and economic Impacts:

a. Recreation and Tourism: Public use of this landscape for a wide range of activities directly supports local businesses and communities. Disrupting the forest setting with large clearcuts undermines the aesthetic and wilderness qualities that attract these users.

b. Local Economy & Jobs: Unlike extraction industries that generate short-term economic spikes, recreation and natural resource-based jobs are sustainable and diversified. Thompson Divide revenues help support year-round employment and local tax bases.

c. Community Identity: The Divide is core to the region's heritage , ranching, conservation, and public land traditions have coexisted for generations. A clearcut of this scale betrays decades of conservation efforts and public input.

5. Watershed Protection and Water Supply

Thompson Divide supports multiple watersheds supplying clean water for agricultural, domestic, and municipal uses. Clearcutting near headwaters and stream corridors increases the risk of soil and nutrient runoff, destabilizes water flow regimes, and undermines the natural filtration functions that forests provide. These impacts threaten both ecological health and human water use.

Given the significant scientific evidence of ecological harm, the recreational and economic value of undeveloped public lands, and the critical role of intact forests in watershed health, I respectfully urge the Forest Service to withdraw this clearcut proposal and adopt forest management practices that protect the long-term ecological, economic, and social values of the Thompson Divide.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,  
Sheryl Bower  
Glenwood Springs, CO