November 5, 2020 – published in Ouray Plaindealer

I suspect many folks feel proud that an Englemann Spruce cut from the Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre-Gunnison National (GMUG) Forest will grace the West Lawn of the Capitol this holiday season. I have been pondering this tradition (celebrating its 50th anniversary) of harvesting a healthy, 55-foot tall tree from one of our National Forests while trees across our state and nation are dying and burning amidst drought, insect infestation and climate change. As we honor this tradition that celebrates our natural resources, I mourn the approximately 40 environmental laws – from the Clean Air Act to the Endangered Species Act - that have been waived for specific projects (like the Border Wall) or rolled back under this administration.

Great Old Broads for Wilderness, coalition partners, and diverse stakeholders (including businesses, ranchers, recreationists, and elected officials) are working on two initiatives to protect landscapes that 1.) Supply water for human consumption and agricultural use, 2.) Provide critical wildlife habitat and migration corridors, 3.) Sustain our tourist economy 4.) Provide varied recreational opportunities, 5.) Maintain ecosystem resilience and biodiversity and 6.) Mitigate global warming through carbon storage and soil production.

One initiative is a piece of federal legislation called the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act <coreact.org> championed by Senator Bennet and Representative Neguse and supported by Representatives Crow, DeGette, and Perlmutter. In addition to landscapes along the Continental Divide and on Thompson Divide, this bill would locally protected 61,000 acres of land and watersheds in the GMUG and San Juan Forests including (but not limited to) Ice Lakes Basin and Hope Lake as well as acreage in the Mount Sneffels Range.

The second effort is revision of the GMUG Forest Plan. Within an extensive Community Conservation Proposal, <gmugrevision.com> we are recommending five Ouray County landscapes for some level of protection: Abram Mountain Special Interest Area (SIA,) Baldy & Bear Creek additions to the Uncompahgre Wilderness, Hayden Mountain SIA, and the Whitehouse Addition to the Mount Sneffels Wilderness.

I encourage you as individuals and business owners to visit the websites above and support these efforts (via links) to manage and protect our forests so healthy trees can continue to appear at the Capitol. Thank you to the many Ouray County businesses, elected officials, and residents who have already endorsed these initiatives. Please contact me at northernsanjuanbroadband@gmail.com if you would like to engage in these projects, have questions, or seek information about our organization’s activities.

*Robyn Cascade, Volunteer leader*

*Northern San Juan chapter*

*Great Old Broads for Wilderness*

*Ridgway*