Dear Sam,

I know you and your staff are working hard on the DEIS for the GMUG Forest Plan revision, and I know it is not a formal comment period. Nevertheless, I have taken additional hikes on and off trail in both the Hayden Mountain and Bear Creek polygons (put FS numbers here) that have been submitted to you as part of the the Community Conservation Proposal and I want to highlight further the values in these landscapes worthy of protection.

Our Northern San Juan chapter of Great Old Broads for Wilderness is now participating in the Bighorn Sheep monitoring stewardship project coordinated by Mountain Studies Institute. As I learn more about the range of Rocky Mountain Bighorn, I now know that nearly all of our proposed Bear Creek polygon from Engineer Pass Road to Baldy Mountain is important habitat for the Tier 1 RBS-21 herd. As you may know, Tier 1 herds have the purest genetics with little to no introduction of sheep from elsewhere and there are only two Tier 1 herds on Colorado’s western slope - the other being in the Weminuche Wilderness. The grazing of domestic sheep in and adjacent to known BH habitat causes great concern regarding the transmission of respiratory disease to which the BH have no immunity. No doubt you are well aware of the risks to the Tier 1 herd, so any additional habitat we can protect for the herd to move and rams to foray is critical even though grazing will continue in wilderness. As we have stated before, the Bear Creek addition to the Uncompahgre Wilderness with its wildlife, scenic, riparian, historic/cultural and recreation values would be so beneficial to ecosystem integrity as well as human interests.

The southern region of our proposed Hayden Mountain polygon in the area of Senator Beck Basin and Commodore Gulch is also BH habitat and also overlaps with domestic sheep grazing. Our coalition has submitted in previous narratives and comments that this large landscape of over 10,000 acres possesses so many wildlife, geological, botanical and scenic values. It is a critical corridor between the San Juan Forest and the Sneffels Range. As you know, due to avalanche mitigation and helitrax operations, our coalition has revised our initial designation for Hayden from recommended wilderness to Special Interest Area.

I just want to reiterate that our coalition and particularly our Great Old Broads membership who live in and near Ouray County and recreate in the Uncompahgre Forest are prioritizing these two landscapes for protection in the revised forest plan. You may also recall that along with the Abram Mountain polygon, Hayden and Bear Creek were part of the Uncompahgre Primitive Area and therefore not reviewed during the Roadless Rule analysis. When the Primitive Area was rescinded, these landscapes “fell through the cracks.” I am convinced that this forest plan revision maybe our last chance to designate these areas for further protection. I cannot emphasize enough our desire that you seriously consider our proposal for these areas and include them in as many alternatives as possible and ultimately in your preferred alternative.

Respectfully,

Robyn Cascade

I would be happy to discuss this matter further Sam if you have questions, a desire to examine boundaries or offer your thoughts at this stage in the revision process.

These are challenging times on so many levels - environmental, social, medical, political, etc - and I hope the DEIS will reflect a vision to promote ecological health which in turn benefits human health.

Thank you for consideration of these comments outside any formal comment period.

Robyn Cascade