Forest Plan Revision:

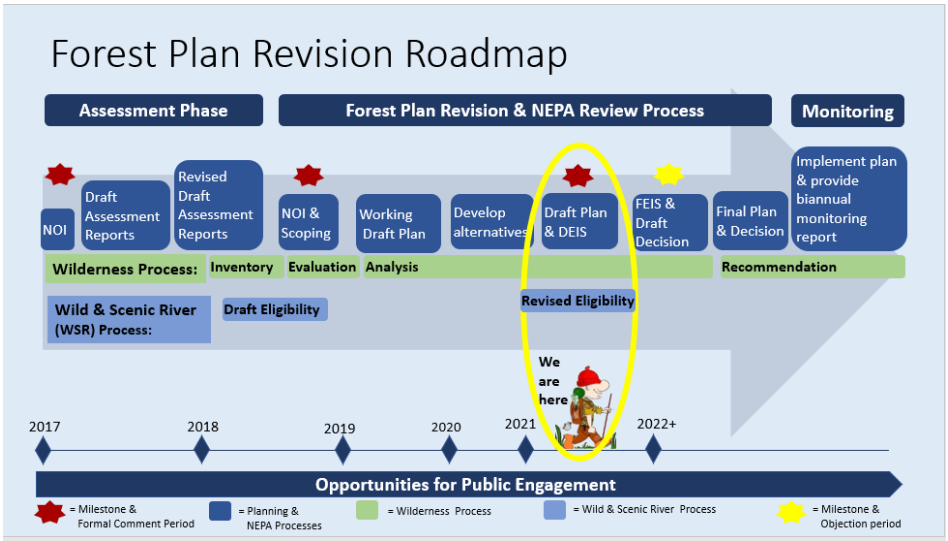
Quick Guide

Forest Plan Revision

In June 2017, the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG) initiated plan revision, a three-phase process to revise the Forest Plan, the overarching document guiding forest management for the long-term. This is an opportunity to update management direction, prioritize activities, and plan for the future. That's where you come in!

Throughout plan revision, you have provided incredible insight and feedback, helping to improve assessments (2017), to hone the key needs for change (2018) and to shape the working draft plan (2019). We've done our best to build on these foundational concepts, feedback, and best available scientific information to develop the draft forest plan. The draft plan includes forestwide direction, management areas and direction, and a monitoring plan. This quick start guide is designed to help you understand the structure of the document, as well as the strategic role of the draft plan itself.

Your comments on the draft plan will inform the final plan and final Environmental Impact Statement.



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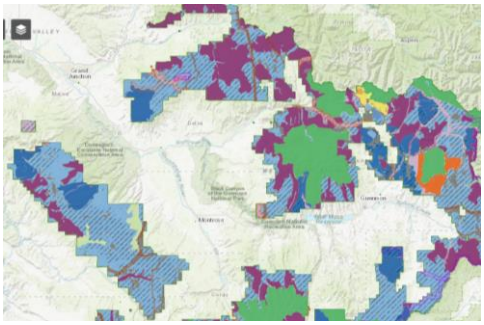
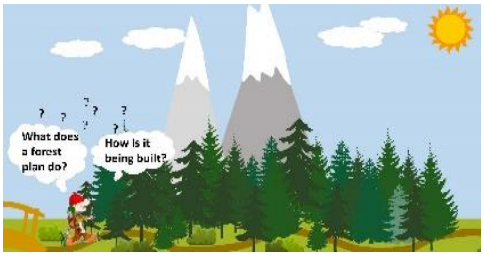


How to Use the Interactive Storymap

Find out how to use the interactive storymap, a helpful tool where you can zoom in on the areas you're interested in. Page 5



Frequently Asked Questions

Have you been wondering how the draft plan was built, or how it addresses things like wildlife, recreation, or wilderness? Please check out this section for answers to frequently asked questions! Page 6

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact us or visit our website for more helpful resources and information:
fs.usda.gov/goto/gmug/forestplan
gmugforestplan@fs.fed.us

Key Principles

Communication and coordination are key!

Community conversations, interagency coordination, and intergovernmental consultation are critical to moving forward and making progress, and that's why we're asking for your feedback on this draft plan make sure we're headed in the right direction.

Integrated

Please review the draft plan holistically! Just as the landscape and ecosystem services we rely upon are intricately interconnected, land management and plan guidance should reflect that integration.

Strategic

A revised Forest Plan would guide projects through strategic direction (providing the why, what, where, and how), while allowing for project-level community conversations and decision-making (to further specify the where and the how within the plan framework).

Streamlined

There are many existing sources of direction. These are not repeated within the draft forest plan, but they continue to apply. Existing law, regulation, and policy can be found in Appendix 5.

Adaptive

Because there's no one-size-fits-all solution, the draft plan identifies various adaptive management strategies to guide future management. These would provide some flexibility to actively manage towards desired conditions while using real-time, site-specific information and responding to community needs over the next 20+ years of the life of the plan.

What is the Draft Plan?

The Short and Sweet

The draft plan was developed to address the key planning issues identified for the GMUG and to continue to provide the critical ecosystem services which we all rely upon. Building on public engagement efforts since 2017, the draft plan revamps the existing 1983 GMUG Forest Plan, as amended, with more strategic, integrated and clear direction. The Management Areas are simplified to fewer categories, but retain emphasis areas for wildlife and for recreation, and a small addition is identified for analysis as potential wilderness. Updated direction provides for the long-term improvement and maintenance of resilient ecosystems, diverse recreation opportunities, scenic integrity, and the myriad other uses that contribute to local economies and quality of life.

As you review the draft plan, please let us know:

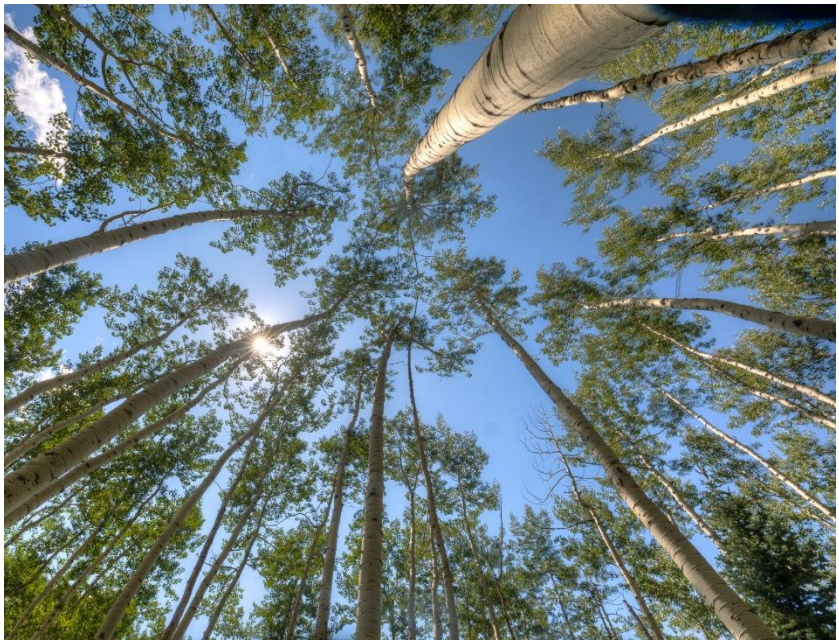
- Did we address the main topics that are of importance to you?
- What works and what can be improved in the draft plan?

Comments are due on **November 12, 2021**.

The Big Picture

In Chapter 1, you'll find the Vision and Distinctive Roles and Contributions (pg 8). These sections were drafted after hearing from you during the assessment phase, and have been improved based upon your input during the scoping period and feedback on the working draft plan. The GMUG's *Vision* broadly frames the Forest Plan, while the *Distinctive Roles and Contributions* section outlines the more specific significance and services that the GMUG delivers now and that the public desires into the future. By providing context for the importance of the GMUG within the larger landscape, the roles and contributions set the stage for the draft plan's *desired conditions*.

While there will be some negotiations as plan components are refined, and compromises that each of us will need to make, the *Vision* and *Distinctive Roles and Contributions* should remind us why we're doing this, what unites us, and what we're all working towards: a strategic and integrated forest plan that will maintain the resiliency and sustainability of the forests that we all love and depend upon.



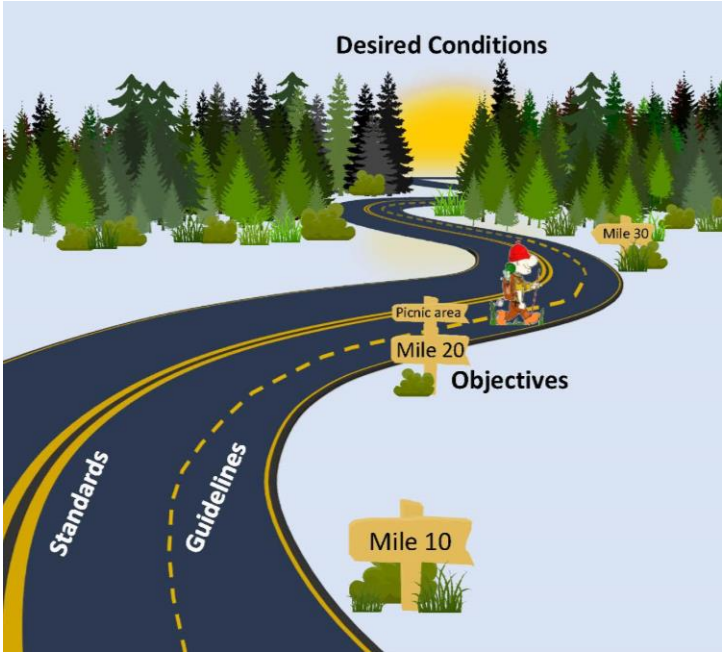
The Key Terms

Desired Conditions- Desired Conditions provide a vision of desired social, economic, and ecological characteristics, painting a picture of what we're working towards.

Objectives- Objectives are concise, measurable, and time-specific statements indicating a rate of progress towards desired conditions. Like mile markers, these help us measure progress en route to our destination. These are based on a reasonably foreseeable budget.

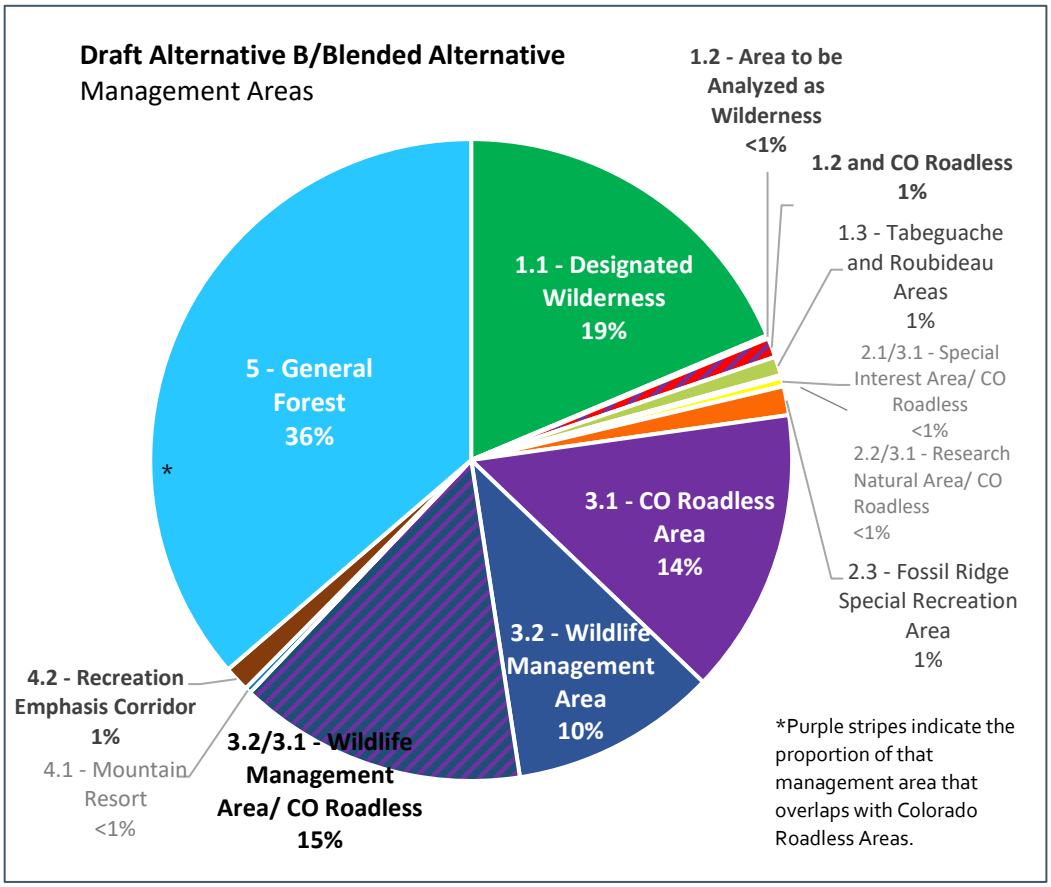
Standards- Standards are mandatory constraints to help achieve or maintain the desired condition(s) or to avoid or limit undesirable effects. These keep us heading in the right direction.

Guidelines- Guidelines are also mandatory constraints, but they allow flexibility so long as the purpose is met. For ease of identification, you'll see that the purpose is the **first** part of each guideline. Guidelines are important in allowing for site-specific, ground-level decision-making where situational nuances are important to take into account. Like dashed yellow roadlines, guidelines keep management moving in the right direction while allowing for needed adjustments in real-time.



Management Areas (MAs)- MAs are areas where there is a specific management emphasis which requires additional or different direction. Plan components for MAs do not repeat forestwide direction. Some MAs have been designated by Congress, such as Designated Wilderness. Other areas are identified by this draft plan, like Wildlife Management Areas. MAs have been organized by theme, and MA direction can be found in Chapter 3 of the draft plan.

Early plan revision comments suggested that the MAs in the current forest plan are too complicated and that we need a more streamlined framework. In 2018, we scoped a potential framework, which was then improved based on your feedback. For example, for Alternative B, the chart below indicates the amount of each MA as a proportion of the entire GMUG.



Comparing the Alternatives

The Draft Plan includes three action alternatives. For the Management Areas, Recreation Settings, Scenery Objectives, timber suitability,and some additional plan components, there are three different proposals. **Alternative B** is the "blended alternative", and it represents a balanced approach to each of the planning issues. **Alternative C** can be broadly described as the "active management emphasis" alternative, with fewer special area allocations, more active vegetation and fuels management, less restrictive recreation use management, more motorized settings, and more areas allocated as suitable for timber production. **Alternative D** can be broadly described as the "special area emphasis" alternative, with more special area allocations, a smaller vegetation and fuels management program, more active and restrictive recreation use management, more nonmotorized settings, and fewer areas allocated as suitable for timber production.

Areas suitable for timber production are increased in the action alternative due to a different approach used in the 2012 planning rule that was fundamentally more inclusive and did not exclude areas that may be less productive and less economical to harvest. The suitable area is likely 2-3 times larger than the probable operable area during the planning period. Site-specific resource concerns at the project-level would be used to narrow down the actual area of harvest, using both the forest plan standards and guidelines as well as professional judgment.

The table below indicates some of the key differences in alternatives.

	No Action / Current Forest Plan	**Draft Alt B / Blended Alternative**	**Draft Alt C / Active Management Emphasis**	**Draft Alt D / Special Area Emphasis**
Extent of recommended wilderness[1]	No new recommended wilderness	34,000 acres recommended wilderness. San Juan Wilderness additions in San Miguel County; West Elk and Raggeds Wilderness additions in Gunnison County	No new recommended wilderness	261,000 acres recommended wilderness. Same as B, with the addition of all Gunnison County-recommended areas; and areas GMUG evaluated as "high" which are also recommended by a citizen proposal
Extent of areas suitable for timber production	550,000 acres.	948,200 acres. Excludes Recreation Emphasis Corridors and Mountain Resorts; other areas are excluded by law/policy.	974,900 acres. In contrast to Alternative B, includes Recreation Emphasis Corridors.	757,800 acres. Same as B, but additionally excludes Scenic Byways; Designated Trails; all Special Management Areas; all eligible Wild and Scenic River segments; areas with slope > 40%.
Projected Timber Sale Program	35,900 CCF for the first 5 years. For years 6 through 20, 32,100 CCF.	55,000 ccf	55,000 ccf	30,000 ccf
Acres harvested per decade	2,300 – 2,400 acres	4,800 – 5,000 acres	4,800 – 5,000 acres	2,500 acres
Amount of fuels treatments per decade	90,500 acres	110,000 acres first decade; 150,000 acres second decade	130,000 acres	50,000 acres
Extent of Wildlife Management Areas	No corresponding category in current Forest Plan.	740,000 acres. Several, distributed across the Forests	36,000 acres. Few, limited in range.	621,000 acres. Maximum extent, with the exception of the Gunnison Basin (where largely replaced with recommended wilderness or Special Management Areas)

[1] [1] While forest plans include recommended wilderness, these federal lands can only become designated wilderness if they are designated by Congress through legislation. The wilderness designation process culminates when legislation is passed by Congress and is signed by the President. In the interim, any lands recommended as wilderness in the final forest plan would be managed consistently with designated wilderness.

Recreation Opportunity Settings (ROS), Summer and Winter	As currently inventoried.	Very close to existing inventory.	More motorized settings, fewer nonmotorized settings.	More nonmotorized settings, fewer motorized settings.
Citizen proposals for Special Management Areas	None	None	None	246,000 acres. Gunnison County and San Miguel County-recommended areas.

How would forestwide direction, Management Areas, and overlays Interact to Guide Projects?

Where would forestwide (FW) direction apply? Draft forestwide (FW) direction, found in Chapter 2, would apply across the Forest where that resource occurs. In some cases, the direction would apply to specific areas as designated on a map or as located by criteria. For example, direction to improve resiliency of sagebrush ecosystems would apply where sagebrush ecosystems occur. Direction for the Old Spanish National Historic Trail would apply only to that mapped area. And direction for riparian management zones would apply to specific areas as identified by specific criteria.

Why is some FW direction linked to maps while other sections are identified by criteria? Management for some resources should be more long-lasting over time for a given area. So, some FW direction, such as scenic integrity objectives and desired recreation settings (ROS) are identified on draft plan maps as **overlays**. These final maps would be established in the final plan record of decision (ROD), and they can only be changed through a plan amendment.

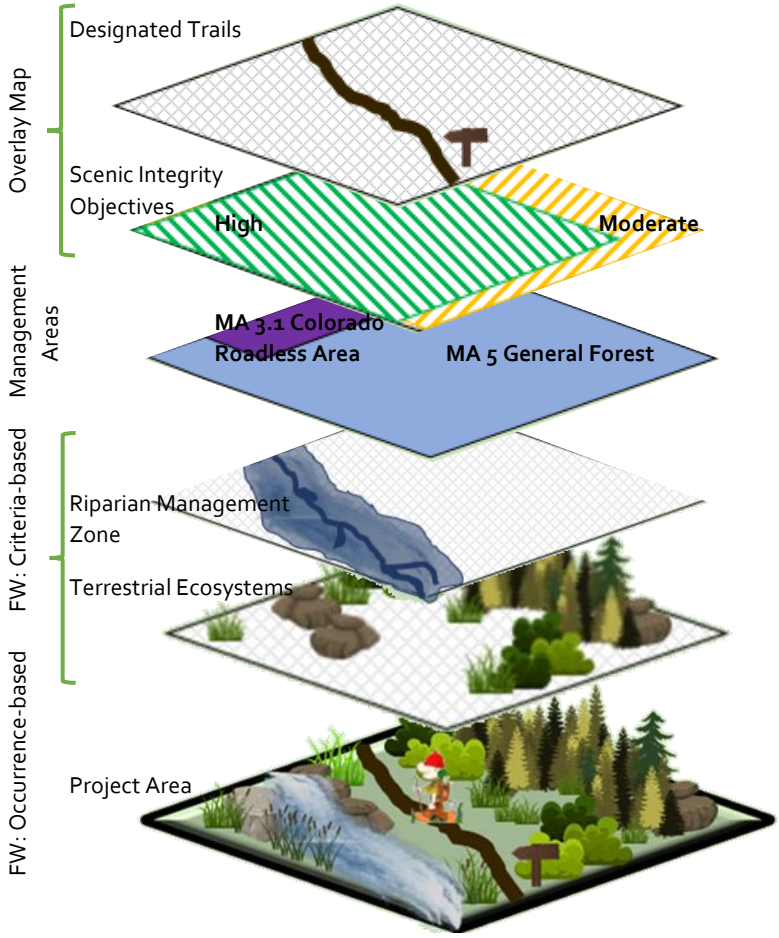
Management for other resources needs to be more responsive to rapidly changing conditions, so their plan components instead identify **criteria** to determine where the direction would apply. This provides needed flexibility to accommodate current data limitations and/or unanticipated future changes. One example is the riparian management zones because the Forest will continue to improve its dataset of existing riparian areas.

What are Management Areas and overlays? Management areas (MAs) and overlays are both mapped and they represent areas with more specific management emphases. The direction for these areas builds on FW direction. For example, while the direction to provide diverse, high-quality recreation is forest-wide, other MAs provide more specific direction, so that more developed and visited areas can be found in Mountain Resorts (MA 4.1) and Recreation Emphasis Areas (MA 4.2), while more primitive recreation would be maintained in Designated Wilderness (MA 1.1.).

How do Management Areas and overlays compare? While management areas are a conventional part of forest plans, **overlays** in the draft plan are mapped areas that have a particular emphasis, but they overlay other draft Management Areas. An example of this is the designated trails overlay, which includes the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST). While CDNST direction would apply along the entirety of the trail on the GMUG, how the trail is managed would be impacted by the underlying management area direction. The trail traverses through several draft MAs, including Designated Wilderness (1.1), Colorado Roadless Areas (3.1), Mountain Resorts (4.1), and General Forest (5).

How will these layers of direction be used to guide future projects? Land managers (and interested members of the public) would identify which resources occur and which direction applies in a given area. As you can see in the simplified example on the right, they would take into consideration direction for FW resources, MAs, and any overlays. The combined layers of direction attempt to reflect our multifaceted landscape.

The layers of direction reflect the diverse resources and values on the landscape, providing strategic guidance for projects.



This draft plan framework of FW, MA, and overlay direction is a step towards meeting the needs for change in long-term Forest management. As you review the plan, please review how these layers of direction interact, and let us know what works and what needs improvement for a strategic and integrated plan that supports a resilient, diverse landscape.

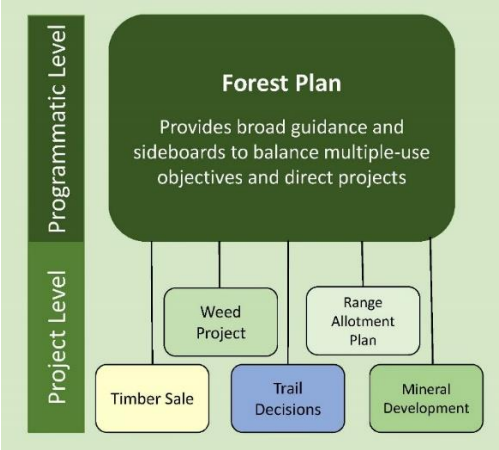
Frequently Asked Questions

What is a forest plan?

The intent of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests is to develop a strategic and integrated revised forest plan. The forest plan will give District Rangers and our communities opportunities and tools to work together in the management of the GMUG National Forests.

A forest plan provides big-picture guidance and sets the stage for subsequent decisions (i.e. site-specific projects, forest orders, etc.), but it does not authorize activities, and it does not replace project-level analysis and public processes.

Similar to a comprehensive county plan, the forest plan guides **what** we do, **where** we do it, and **how** we do it for 15+ years, while specific activities are authorized by later project-level decisions.



What does the draft plan *not* do?

Travel management decisions (summer) and over-the-snow (winter) decisions will **not** be made in this forest plan. An approved forest plan would set the stage for future travel planning through desired recreation settings for different areas, as well as other direction, but it does not authorize the opening or closing of individual routes or over-the snow areas.

Oil and Gas Leasing Availability – Oil and gas leasing decisions will **not** be made in this Forest Plan. In a phased approach, leasing will be conducted subsequent to the plan. An approved Forest Plan would set the stage through land allocation decisions (i.e. recommended wilderness, if any) and forest-wide direction.

What public participation opportunities are available during the draft plan step?

Four webinars and five public in-person open houses are scheduled to provide more context, answer questions, and provide an opportunity for you to speak directly with planning team members about ideas and concerns. Please consider joining us:

Upcoming Webinars:

Tuesday, August 17th from 9:00-11:00 AM
Focus: Overview of the planning process, structure of the draft plan, key terms, comparison of alternatives, key issues, timeline, next steps

How to join? Join via Zoom from a PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone or Android device: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89604863812

Tuesday, August 17th from 4:00-6:00 PM
Focus: Overview of the planning process, structure of the draft plan, key terms, comparison of alternatives, key issues, timeline, next steps

How to join? Join via Zoom from a PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone or Android device: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84004566942

Thursday, August 19th from 9:00-11:00 AM
Focus: Recreation, Plan Components, Scenic Integrity Objectives, Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, Recreation emphasis corridors, Wilderness, Special Management Areas and Wild & Scenic Rivers

How to join? Join via Zoom from a PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone or Android device: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88630888054

Thursday, August 19th from 4:00-6:00 PM
Focus: Wildlife, Wildlife management areas, Plan components for Wildlife, Species Conservation Concern list. Lynx, Suitable Timber and Timber production

How to join? Join via Zoom from a PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone or Android device: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87411827825

Open Houses*

- September 9, 2021, from 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m. for the Grand Valley Ranger District: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83477625910
- September 14, 2021, from 5 p.m.-7 p.m. for the Ouray Ranger District: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82103943979
- September 21, 2021, from 5 p.m.-7 p.m. for the Paonia Ranger District: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89427171814
- September 22, 2021, from 5 p.m.-7 p.m. for the Norwood Ranger District: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83132542669
- September 28, 2021, from 5 p.m.-7 p.m. for the Gunnison Ranger District: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81812011784

**Any schedule changes will be posted on the planning website.*

The draft forest plan is available electronically and in hard copy at the GMUG's District and Supervisors offices. The comment period runs through November 12, 2021

Comments can be submitted via the online comment tool

Once the comments are processed and incorporated into the selected alternative, a draft record of decision and a final EIS will be published for a 60-day objection period.

How was the draft plan built?

The draft forest plan was built to meet the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule, to incorporate best available scientific information, and to respond to current and anticipated resource conditions (described in the Assessment Reports), community needs, and public participation. The draft aims to strike a balance between the many and diverse uses and values for the Forests.

The draft plan was developed through public involvement and input, including but not limited to meetings with cooperating agencies (including recurring all-county meetings), comments received through scoping and the wilderness and wild and scenic river processes, and webinars.

The comments received during the scoping period indicated interest in incorporating adaptive management, identifying management areas that reflect the diversity of uses across the forest, and emphasizing ecosystem resiliency to continue to provide key ecosystem services and benefits.

How does the draft plan address the challenges of climate change?

Through the draft's emphasis on resilient ecosystems, land managers may be better suited to adapt to the current and future challenges of climate change.

The draft plan addresses these changes through:

- Direction for ecosystem-based management at a landscape scale, emphasizing maintenance and restoration of ecosystem function and natural processes. Objectives indicate the role of active vegetation management activities, including timber harvests, as the primary tools to help move towards the desired landscape mosaic.
- Direction that accounts for a dynamic environment via adaptive management, combining desired conditions and objectives that move the forest towards ecosystem integrity and resilience, a monitoring plan to help identify changing conditions, and specified adaptive responses that support action but provide some flexibility during real-time implementation.

How would the draft plan contribute to social and economic sustainability?

The draft plan would continue to provide key socioeconomic contributions through multiple-use programs including sustainable recreation, forest products, range, mineral resources, etc.

The draft plan would support sustainable recreation by:

- Continuing to offer a broad array of developed and dispersed recreation settings for forest visitors for motorized, mechanized, and non-motorized recreation uses. Local communities serve as gateways to forest recreation, benefiting economically from visitors.
- Identifying recreation emphasis areas, mountain resorts, wildlife management areas, and areas to be analyzed as wilderness that support sustainable and diverse recreational opportunities over the long-term.
- Recreation emphasis areas - 101,600 acres (3.2% of the GMUG) and Mountain Resorts - 9,400 acres (<1% of the GMUG) respond to the need to concentrate existing and future recreational uses in sustainable settings, to provide high-quality opportunities in areas of concentrated use, and to address dispersed camping hotspots. These areas also respond to the need to plan for recreation's increasing role in the region by ensuring that a given area's recreation setting is maintained, despite other management activities and increasing recreational use, and by ensuring that scenic areas remain scenic. These areas largely reflect what the public already knows and enjoys today, so that these settings can be maintained into the future.
- Reflecting public desire to manage scenic resources for the long-term.

The draft plan continues to support multiple-use programs by:

- Encouraging the development of partnerships with local communities and stakeholder groups, and engaging in cooperative agreements to foster shared stewardship and get more work done on the ground;
- Protecting and sustaining the high-quality, local sources of water that communities depend upon through an emphasis on ecosystem resilience and watershed health;
- Continuing to support one of the largest grazing programs in the Forest Service;
- Continuing to support local communities and a viable timber industry through production of timber, fuelwood, and other forest products; and
- Continuing to support the development of energy and mineral resources as well as broadband infrastructure.

How does the draft plan address wildland fire?

The draft plan focuses on protecting lives, property and resources by reducing wildfire risk while recognizing the role that naturally-ignited fire plays on the landscape. We will work alongside state partners supporting a shared stewardship goal to accomplish resilient, productive forests utilizing the right tools and treatments in the right locations across the landscape.

The draft plan:

- Allows for greater options in managing naturally-ignited wildland fires as a tool to improve ecosystems and reduce the risk of future fire when conditions allow.
- Supports active fuels reduction near communities and homes to support fire-safe communities.

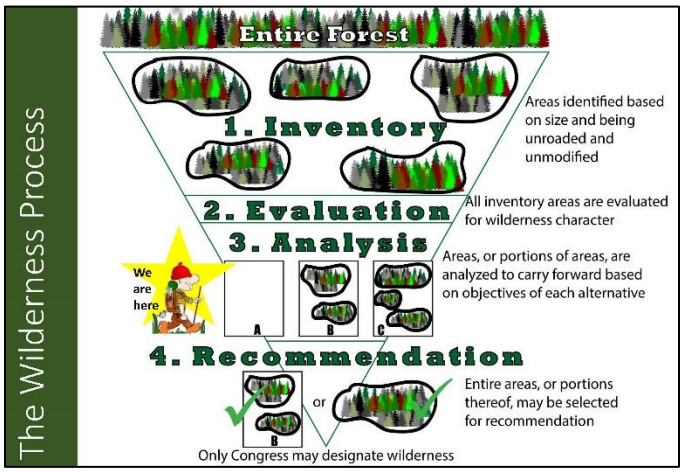
How are wildlife and recreation needs balanced?

The Wildlife Management Areas – 740,000-acres or 25% of the GMUG - are identified to maintain intact habitats for big game and other wildlife with respect to future recreational trails. In these areas, recreational trail density would be capped. To conserve high-quality Gunnison sage-grouse habitat, no new trail construction would be permitted specifically in the Flat Top Wildlife

Management Area in Gunnison. This Management Area responds to the need to maintain existing, relatively unfragmented big game habitat and associated hunting opportunities, and other wildlife habitat, in the context of increasing recreational pressures.

How does the wilderness process fit in with the draft plan?

The GMUG has completed the draft analysis, explaining why some areas are carried forward in an alternative and why others are not. See Appendix 6 of Volume II of the DEIS.



Alternative B of the draft plan includes 34,000-acres analyzed for potential wilderness recommendation across fourteen different areas/analysis polygons.

If the Forest Service carries these areas forward into the final plan, the GMUG will continue to work with counties and stakeholders to identify the appropriate boundaries.

How are Colorado Roadless Areas addressed?

There are no changes to existing Colorado Roadless Area boundaries.

The overlap of the draft Wildlife Management Areas with existing Roadless Areas are intended to help balance the need and desire for new recreation trail construction with the value of existing wildlife habitat to improve and sustain hunting opportunities. Currently, the Colorado Roadless Rule does not address trail construction.

How was the Species of Conservation Concern list developed?

Species of Conservation Concern (SCC) are species, other than federally recognized threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species, that are known to occur in the plan area and for which the Regional Forester has determined that the best available scientific information indicates substantial concern about the species' capability to persist over the long-term in the plan area.

The Regional Forester identified the current draft list after years of initial work (beginning with assessments of potential species in 2018).

Where can I find more background information about resources on the GMUG?

Plan revision began with the assessment phase, in which we gathered information on current conditions and trends and identified the needs for change for the various resources on the GMUG. These assessments were improved upon based on your feedback and include all kinds of helpful information that provides additional context for topics such as ecosystems, recreation, scenery, socioeconomics, and more. The Revised Assessments are available on the planning website.