

To: Bureau of Land Management, Uncompahgre Field Office

From: Delta Area Mountain Bikers (DAMB), a Chapter of COPMOBA

Re: Comments regarding Draft Resource Management Plan & Environmental Impact Statement, May, 2016

Date: October 26, 2016

Please accept the following comments from Delta Area Mountain Bikers (DAMB) regarding the draft Resource Management Plan for the BLM public lands managed by the Uncompahgre Field Office.

DAMB is a Chapter of Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trails Association (COPMOBA). Currently we have 21 paying members, approximately 50 other supporting members locally, as well as 220 members who support mountain biking in Delta from outside the area. Our mission is to build, maintain, and advocate for singletrack mountain bike trails on the Colorado Plateau in Western Colorado. Our vision is to provide high-quality sustainable singletrack mountain bike trails for users of all ages and abilities providing outstanding recreation opportunities and improving the quality of life and economies of the communities we serve for generations to come. As an organized user group on public lands, we are nurturing our relationships with governing agencies accordingly, and hope to bridge the gaps of what is possible for mountain biking in Delta County. As well, we look forward to working with the BLM to fulfill their Recreational Strategy of Connecting with Communities. The following article outlines what else is happening regionally to make the ideas of advocate groups like ours become a reality. <http://www.adventure-journal.com/2016/08/blm-turns-to-mountain-bikers-to-build-trails-stem-illegal-routes/>

Our organization believes that Alternative B and where it applies Alternative B1 provide the best management strategies for the preservation of public lands for the uses outlined in COPMOBAs mission and vision statements, and will also provide support for a local economy based on recreational activities and development.

DAMB supports the development of any Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) in the managed area of the UFO. We believe creating these environments for local communities will result in unlimited numbers of positive experiences and benefits. These will develop in all shapes and forms no matter the location of the SRMAs. The experiences include, but are not limited to: developing skills and abilities specific to mountain biking, enjoying having access to natural landscapes, being able to frequently participate in desired activities and natural environments, getting much needed physical exercise, releasing and reducing built-up mental tensions, increasing and maintaining quality of life, perceived value of the community due to quality of life, and community building for those who use and enjoy it. Potential general benefits include improved mental well-being, increased skills for outdoor enjoyment, a greater understanding of the importance of recreation and tourism to our communities, a more outdoor oriented lifestyle, improved physical fitness and health maintenance, and an enhanced lifestyle

and quality of life. With the epidemic of declining health in America, we feel that the physical and mental benefits listed above are crucial to developing healthy communities in Delta County.

In reference to any proposed SRMAs in the North Fork region, DAMB requests for regulations to allow for non-motorized competitive events at the discretion of the Authorized Officer. We believe this is one key element to economic development surrounding our sport, as well as trail system recognition on a regional scale. DAMB also agrees with the notion of “not allowing livestock grazing in areas that conflict with recreation sites would generally improve recreation opportunities by eliminating animals and their waste from these areas over the long term” chapter 4-301. We also support the concept of creating Ecological Emphasis Areas (EEAs) for winter habitat for mule deer and other animals of concern, where deemed necessary and where EEAs coalesce with the objectives of our organization.

DAMB and COPMOBA support the development of recreational areas because sustainably designed and built trail systems are a major economic driver for local and regional communities.

The members of DAMB are not just focused on the advocacy of mountain bike trails for our own leisure. Our group is comprised of people from all walks of life with differing jobs and careers, and participate in a variety of community improvement organizations. We are experiencing the economic challenges that come with the decline of coal mining operations in Delta County.

A recent economic study funded by Delta County Economic Development (DCED) concluded that the fastest and most attainable route to economic growth in Delta County would be through tourism, primarily agricultural and recreational tourism. While the Delta Tourism Council is working to promote our rich organic agricultural farms, and vinyards, we feel that the establishment of SMRAs in conjunction with sustainably designed trail systems will fast track the popularity of all types of tourism in the area.

Recognizing that families are multidimensional when it comes to travel needs, we believe the more variety of tourism opportunities we can supply for all age levels, the greater opportunity for economic growth through family and baby boomer friendly tourism experiences. We see the building of a mountain biking trail system throughout the county as an integral component of economic growth through tourism.

For example, the town of Fruita, Colorado has \$1.5 million pumped into its annual economy from mountain biking; has had a 51% increase in sales tax revenue, including 80% sales tax revenues from restaurants. According to [americantrails.org](http://www.americantrails.org) over 50% of bicyclist earn \$100,000 or more per year and over 80% of bicyclist earn \$50,000 or more per year. More supporting evidence of economics of cycling can be found at this link:

<http://www.americantrails.org/resources/economics/economic-benefits-trails-macdonald.html> .

The potential for a trail both similar and yet differing in terrain and scenic beauty, would add Delta to the list of major mountain biking destinations in Colorado and enhance the Western Slope as a world class mountain biking destination, rivaling or surpassing Moab.

The economics of recreational development directly related to mountain biking is further exemplified in the following articles.

This article references the history and economic benefits of mountain biking locally in the Grand Valley: <http://www.steamboattoday.com/news/2013/may/19/biking-series-part-2-how-fruits-did-it/>

This is an article giving an overview of economic impacts found from mountain biking world wide: <http://www.pinkbike.com/news/economic-impacts-of-mountain-bike-tourism-2016-update.html>

Lastly, another economic study of mountain bike economic impacts in the Southern U.S. <http://headwaterseconomics.org/trail/13-coldwater-mountain-bike-trail/>

Members of DAMB have long voiced concern with the fact that there are no official non-motorized trails in Delta County developed for mountain biking, and we as a user group are severely under represented. For that reason, the following section outlines a reasonable proposal for development of SRMAs in the UFOs management area. Experiences and benefits specific to each area are included with the areas unique recreational opportunity.

**1. Jumbo Mountain SRMA** – DAMB believes Jumbo Mountain is unique and could be the keystone recreational hub for the North Fork Valley. As a whole, we believe Jumbo Mountain provides a great location for recreation and visitor service management to be the predominant land use planning focus, as defined by a SRMA. Jumbo Mountain is geographically oriented in a prime location for users to enjoy high scenic values, low altitude trail networks that allow for longer riding season, and close to amenities and higher density population.

Specific experiences and benefits obtained by this management area would be ease of access for local and regional outdoor enthusiasts to a variety of front, middle, and backcountry terrain, diversity within trail system for all skill levels and abilities on non-motorized routes to be used daily by residents, promoting a quiet environment that would enhance the quality of life and health for residents and visitors locally and regionally, and lastly, provide a resource supporting recreation as an economic driver for Delta County.

By designating the entire Jumbo Unit as a SRMA, as outlined in Alt B1, diversification for multi-use opportunities would be possible. These could be delineated by specific Recreation Management Zones (RMZ). Specifically, we suggest expanding RMZ-1 and its proposed characteristics as listed on page J-27 and J-28 in appendix J, to encompass proposed area of RMZ-2. Furthermore, we suggest expanding RMZ-2 and its proposed characteristics to encompass the hatched area as shown on Figure J-4, appendix J.

**2. North Delta SRMA** - DAMB requests the development of non-motorized singletrack trails in North Delta for mountain biking. Currently cyclists are not considered in the SRMA plan for North Delta. With consideration of our user group, cyclists could access Grand Mesa from Delta City limits on backcountry routes. A mountain bike trail created in this area would mimic the 'Palisade

Plunge' trail being developed in Mesa County, a potential destination trail taking cycling enthusiasts from high altitude of Grand Mesa down through multiple geographic regions to the town of Palisade. This trail concept partially has been adapted from 'The Whole Enchilada' in Moab, UT. This in part has proven to be effective in solidifying Moab as a world-class mountain bike destination.

**3. Hotchkiss High School Area** – Recently DAMB has been working with the Nature Connection to create a master plan of trail networks adjacent to the Hotchkiss High School. This network will include youth oriented bike skill courses and singletrack on Parks and Rec land, and also development of a mountain bike course on Delta County School District property. With BLM property adjoining this location, this would be a great opportunity to expand trail networks to the south, creating a diversified trail network for all types of recreationalists. The Nature Connection plans to give kids and families easy access to mountain bike equipment, for short-term use, to gain experience in a sport that promotes good health, and opportunities of adventure. By developing a fun and exciting trail network on public lands in this area, residents of Delta County will have turn key access to a healthy sport that allows them access to the natural environment, opportunities to improve outdoor knowledge and self-confidence, improve outdoor recreation skills, and gain more understanding of our community's dependence and impact on public lands. DAMB asks that you protect this area for current and future use, with an emphasis on recreation, and designate these lands as an SRMA.

**4. Youngs Peak, Crawford** – DAMB members and local residents recognize the great potential for the development of recreational non-motorized trails on Youngs Peak. It has great proximity to the community of Crawford, and its K-6 where it would provide an optimal environment for kids, families, and residents to enjoy the fresh air and beautiful views of the West Elk Mountains. By designating this area as a SRMA, Delta County residents could quickly access the natural environment by means of a trail network that would have them engaging with nature within minutes of downtown Crawford. A well-designed trail network would provide an opportunity for this community to attract recreationalists from around the region, thus stimulating the economy by increased use of developed public lands in the area.

**5. Elephant Hill/Lone Cabin** - Elephant Hill and Lone Cabin is a great location for the development of a SRMA, with close proximity to the town of Paonia and the Jumbo Mountain trail network. This area would provide citizens with a more remote backcountry experience, and create corridors which would allow access to the high country thru non-motorized trail networks extending into the National Forest. Being so close to town and adjoining neighborhoods, trails on Elephant Hill and Lone Cabin area would quickly provide local residents the splendor of quite and solitude of the outdoor environment.

**6. Paonia State Park/Paonia Reservoir** - Members of DAMB and the North Fork Trail Advocacy Group (NFTAG) have been considering development of trails in Paonia State Park to provide a regional attraction and a destination for the mountain bike community. With the cooperation of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife, this area has great potential to provide a high country experience unmatched by any others in Western Colorado at this time. By creating an SRMA in this area, the BLM along with partners of CPW, USFS, DAMB and NFTAG, could tap into territory that is unique and would provide recreational opportunities that would stand alone in this region.

**7. Powell Mesa/Oak Mesa, Hotchkiss** – Developing recreational trails on Oak Mesa would allow the community of Hotchkiss close to town access of trails possessing all skill levels, very similar to what is being built in the Ridgeway Area Trails. This location would be ideal for residents to explore the outdoors, and enjoy the fresh air and beautiful views into the North Fork Valley and beyond.

**8. McDonald Mesa** – McDonald Mesa possesses a small amount of existing multi-use trails that could be developed into a much greater mountain bike trail network if designated as an SRMA. This country provides users great access to front, middle and backcountry, and is unique into itself with its proximity to Forest Service land. An SRMA would coincide nicely with the proposed development of SRMA on Youngs Peak just to the south. This area would be developed with the more adventurous mountain biker and trail user in mind, with its diversity of slope aspect and geography.

**9. Stevens Gulch** –Developing a trail network in Stevens Gulch would greatly benefit the community of Paonia due to its proximity and access to varied natural terrain, and would present an opportunity to use old mining territory as the backbone of recreational trail development reaching into the National Forest.

As trail advocacy groups, DAMB, NFTAG, and COPMOBA would cherish the opportunity to work with the BLM in making these designations a reality. We feel that if the correct measures are taken in developing these proposed recreational areas, great benefits would be established for all the communities involved, and reach beyond the boundaries of the Uncompaghre Field Office Management Area.

Thank you for consideration of our comment,

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