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New report shows areas in GMUG National Forests with best potential for conserving biodiversity and mitigating impacts of climate change

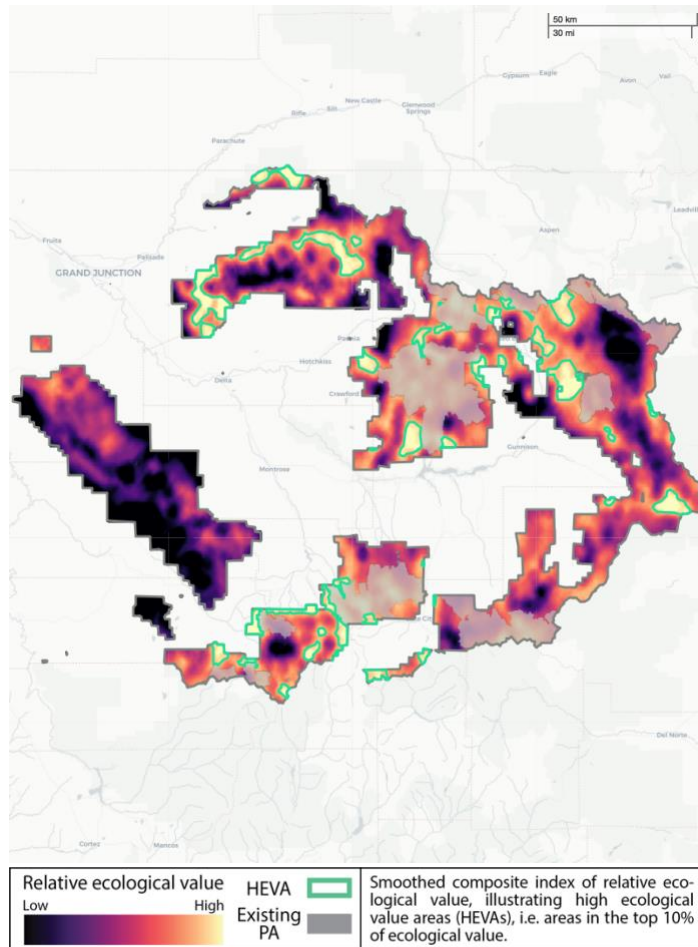
Analysis comes as Forest Service updates management plan for the forests

Truckee, Calif. – October 27, 2021 – A new report using innovative geospatial techniques identifies the top 10 percent of lands within the 2.9-million-acre Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests that hold high ‘ecological value.’ These areas are important for the conservation of biodiversity and can help mitigate against the impacts of climate change. Conservation Science Partners (CSP) authored the peer-reviewed report, which was commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

By using several literature-supported ecological and environmental indicators, the researchers developed a composite index, or score, of an area’s overall ecological value. They then used this composite score to identify 52 High Ecological Value Areas (HEVAs) within the national forests - i.e., continuous areas with composite scores in the top 10 percent.

The scientists examined a variety of indicators to identify the HEVAs, which included the total amount of carbon, both below and above ground; climate resilience, or the area’s resistance to the impacts of climate change; the number of vertebrate species and all imperiled species; ecological intactness, or the amount of human alteration; ecological connectivity, highlighting important wildlife movement routes; and vegetation diversity, including areas like wetlands and marshlands.

“This important research provides the first targeted, quantitative approach to identifying key areas within the GMUG national forests for conservation-focused management,” said CSP lead scientist Justin Suraci. “Our results highlight areas of the national forests that will be critical for balancing both climate change mitigation and biodiversity protection, reconciling potential trade-offs between these two crucial conservation objectives.”



While the analysis identified only the top 10 percent of lands as HEVAs, it should be noted that there are many other areas on the forests with important ecological values, which the Forest Service should also consider for protection.

The report states, “Because HEVAs consider only ecological aspects, it is important that the Forest Service and stakeholders include additional social and economic sustainability considerations when determining the appropriateness of a given HEVA for increased conservation or any other management emphasis. These social and economic considerations are best applied during the forest plan revision process through stakeholder input received by the Forest Service. This research provides a useful starting point for those discussions.”

DOWNLOAD THE REPORT [HERE](#).

Conservation Science Partners, with the support of The Pew Charitable Trusts, is planning to conduct similar analyses across the country as other forest plans are released.

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Founded in 2012, CSP is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit scientific collective established to provide advanced quantitative research and planning services for conservation-oriented projects. CSP connects the best minds in conservation science to solve environmental problems in a comprehensive, flexible, and service-oriented manner. To learn more, visit www.csp-inc.org.