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Comments:

I have been a resident and business owner in West Yellowstone for 23 years. My business is a bicycle and cross country ski shop and we are also a permit holder on the Custer Gallatin. We tend to favor conservation over extraction or business opportunities with regards to management of public lands. I recreate extensively in the forest especially in the Hebgen Lake Basin and Henry's Lake Mountains. I recognize the importance of the wilderness areas and have a desire to connect these with other areas that still retain wilderness characteristics. We have witnessed first hand the degradation of the landscape in areas like the Lionshead area due to extensive motorized use. The single track trails which used to encompass the East Side of the mountain range (Denny Creek side) became rutted gnarly ATV and UTV routes with dozens of "ghost roads". We do not want to see this happen in the northern end of the range. The Mile Creek, Sheep Lake and Watkins/Coffin Lake trails are still pristine singletracks despite over 20 years of light mountain bike and hiking traffic. The low impact nature of non-motorized activities has proven to be effective in maintaining these areas wilderness characteristics. We have encountered almost every type of wildlife and have seen tracks for others including bears, elk, deer, moose, wolves, Bighorn sheep, mountain goats, wolverines, badgers , beaver and countless birds including several owl species. This area is critical habitat that must be kept quiet. Please consider the Backcountry area designation for this area. The mountain bikers that enjoy these types of trails, which are difficult, rocky, and involve thousands of feet of climbing and descending, are generally trained cyclists who are responsible backcountry enthusiasts. Your average tourist would not be able to ride more than a few hundred yards up any of these trails. Keeping this area open to non-motorized users including bikes will not bring a marked increase in use. It will allow those who are willing to work for it to ride in a truly wild environment. I would also like to comment on the fact that the Custer Gallatin Forest in the Hebgen Lake District has significantly more motorized opportunities than mountain bike opportunities. The Continental Divide Trail is currently one of the only trails in our district which is a non-motorized single track.

The northern end of the Henry's Lake mountains (Trapper Creek, Sheep Creek area) is also one of the only non-motorized areas in the winter in the Hebgen Basin. This area is used by backcountry skiers because of the low angle terrain, north and east aspects and an easy approach on Hebgen Lake. We do not want to lose this non-motorized status. Many of our wildlife sightings have occurred in winter and we believe this area to be a haven for many wildlife driven out of areas with heavy snowmobile use. I do not oppose snowmobile use in existing areas but do not want to see this area opened up to motorized users in the winter. If you cannot come to a compromise and use the backcountry designation for this previously "proposed wilderness or wilderness study" area I would prefer protection of the land over opening it up for all uses. Thank you for the opportunity to comment