

Comments to the Custer-Gallatin Forest Plan Revision

The Custer Gallatin Forest Plan Revision comes at a pivotal moment in time as we experience generally drier and warmer climate conditions here in Montana and more public visitation in our public lands. More Recommended Wilderness Areas (RWA) would help ensure the better long- term viability of these lands by fostering a less impact management policy on the land. My wife and I generally support Alternative D which best supports this focus. On the whole, the proposed Forest Plan Revision is well researched, well presented and well documented. Thank you.

As long term residents of Southwest Montana, we are particularly familiar with one area in the Custer-Gallatin, namely the Lionhead in the Henry's Lake Mountains and Cabin Creek Region near the outlet of Hebgen Lake.

We enthusiastically support the proposal spelled out in Alternative D to continue to manage the Lionhead as a RWA and to the increase in the scope of the existing RWA as indicated on your maps. On several occasions we have hiked up the Sheep Creek Trail with friends to Sheep Lake only to encounter fast moving clusters of bicycle riders careening downhill. We view this mechanized use as too disruptive to the wild animals that need areas less travelled by fast moving people and machines and as being disruptive to the rugged, fragile trail which terminates in delicate alpine terrain.

Surely there are ample trails for mechanized and motorized users on lower elevation more resilient land to the east of the Lionhead Area near Hebgen Lake and the town of West Yellowstone. It is not a good idea- as proposed in Alternative C- to abruptly bisect the remote Lionhead RWA all along the trail to Sheep Lake and the connecting trail east to the Watkins Creek Trail from RWA designation just to placate mechanized users. Such a proposal would be difficult and costly to manage and be inconsistent with surrounding land management.

The southern portion of the Lionhead should also be protected as a RWA also for several reasons. This is within a grizzly recovery area as well as being prime habitat for mountain lions and other wild animals. Many animals here depend on being able to migrate in and out of Yellowstone and the general area due to the severe climate and the seasonal availability of food. The upper region of the Mile Creek Trail where it intersects the important National Continental Divide Trail skirts fragile alpine terrain. It is near this intersection about 15 years ago when a small group of us spotted a grizzly and two cubs. This entire wild, spectacular area should be embedded in a RWA as mapped in Alternative D.

The Madison River Canyon Earthquake Area includes terrain drained by Cabin Creek. The dramatic Cabin Creek Trail should be included in an area managed as a RWA as proposed in Alternative D. This trail and steep wild land is not suitable for mechanical or motorized users. The first two miles or so of the narrow, fragile trail traverses along steep hillsides adjacent to Cabin Creek where any travel other than

by foot or horse is not feasible. Even on foot it is difficult to follow the contour of the trail along the steep canyon of Cabin Creek. This is especially so in winter. We have trekked here on snowshoes with friends up past the intersection of Cabin Creek with Cub Creek only to witness some in our group slipping and sliding sideways down a steep bank towards Cabin Creek! We often see numerous animal prints in this canyon in winter. This wild, scenic area like many others needs the protection of RWA designation.