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Comments:

Hello,

I am writing to voice my concerns that, as part of the Forest Plan revision process, the Gallatin Range (stretching from Bozeman to Yellowstone National Park and including the HPBH WSA) is particularly at risk of being sacrificed as a motorized and mechanized recreational playground for the exploding populations of the Big Sky and Bozeman areas.

I strongly support the Wilderness recommendations in Alternative D of the current "Draft Forest Plan", with suggested improvements outlined below. These measures would offer the best protection for the Gallatin Range and other critical wildlife habitat across the Custer-Gallatin National Forest of Southwest Montana.

Alternative D creates 39 Recommended Wilderness areas totaling over 711,000 acres, including; the Gallatin Range, Lionhead, Crazy Mountains, Bridger Range, Cowboys Heaven, Deer Creeks, Line Creek Plateau, Emigrant Peak, West Fork Rock Creek, Red Lodge Creek, Pryor Mountains, and Tongue River Breaks. Protection of these areas in perpetuity would greatly secure the biodiversity of this exceptional area.

Additionally:

1. The wilderness recommendations in Alternative D they must be improved by adding the entire 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range as Recommend Wilderness in the final forest plan.
2. The plan should prohibit all motorized and mechanized uses (and any other activities not consistent with wilderness protection) in the Recommended Wilderness areas, to ensure the preservation of their wilderness qualities until Congress acts on their designation.
3. The draft plan has little direction for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. The current wilderness Management Plan allows for potentially destructive, large groups (of up to 25 head of stock: horses and mules) and 15 people in most areas. Research shows that impacts increase significantly when group-sizes exceed eight head of stock and 12 people. The Forest Service should reduce group size limits accordingly so as to protect all Wilderness lands on the Forest from harm.
4. The Forest Management Plan should also initiate efforts to end to ecologically destructive fish stocking in naturally-fishless, wilderness lakes, which significantly and negatively alters their biotic community.
5. The plan must address the issue of human and pack animal feces contamination of trails, lakes and streams on the Beartooth Plateau in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. I have personally observed many sections of trail (esp. near trailheads) that are covered in horse feces, on steep slopes, which then wash into streams during rain and snow melt events. Pack animal feces also typically contain abundant seeds of invasive weeds - plants that germinate and then further degrade the environment in this fantastic natural wonder. I have also observed human feces and litter scattered around designated camp sites within the Forest-Wilderness, esp. near lakes and streams. A serious effort needs to be made to educate visitors on rules and regulations regarding the proper use of back country lands. Efforts also need to be instituted to limit the size of groups and the numbers of pack animals allowed into the wilderness per year. There should also be a requirement that

droppings/feces be carried out to designated dump/receptacle sites. Discontinuing fish stocking would also limit the number of people and the size of groups that visit the area.

I believe these recommendations will make the entire region a better place for generations to come. I thank you for your time and effort in allowing me the opportunity to provide these comments on an area I once lived in and will always love.

Sincerely,

James Bess