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First name: Scott

Last name: Bischke

Organization:

Title:

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: 3940 E Graf Street

Address2: (also from Katie Gibson)

City: Bozeman

State:

Province/Region: MT

Zip/Postal Code: 59715

Country: United States

Email: scott.bischke@gmail.com

Phone: 4065824442

Comments:

We are a husband and wife team. The following statement provides our comments on the Draft Revised Forest Plan for the Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF). Thanks for the chance to provide our input.

Overall, we support ALTERNATIVE D, because it best protects recommended wilderness lands. That protection is provided not only in the Gallatin Range, but in other vital regions of the CGNF like the Crazyes, the Pryors, and the Absaroka-Beartooths. To ensure the CGNF maintains its ability to maintain healthy habitats, wildlife, and ecological diversity into the future, we strongly recommend that the CGNF enact a management plan that is equal to those goals - thus ALTERNATIVE D.

If asked to provide input to what we like about each alternative, we support the following (note, of course, that we find by far the most positives in ALTERNATIVE D):

\*\* In Alternative A we support:

----- Keeping the current boundaries of the recommended wilderness in the Lionhead Area of the Madison, Gallatin, and Henrys Lake Mountains Geographic Area

----- Keeping the current areas recommended for wilderness adjacent to the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness

\*\* In Alternative B we support:

----- Backcountry Area in the Bad Canyon area of the Absaroka-Beartooth Geographic Area with no motorized or mechanized recreation.

\*\* In Alternative C we support:

----- The land designations proposed by the Gallatin Forest Partnership's agreement in the Madison, Gallatin, and Henrys Lake Mountains Geographic Area

----- Manage recommended wilderness with no non-conforming uses allowed

\*\* In Alternative D we support:

----- Recommended Wilderness in the Big Pryor, Bear Canyon, Punch Bowl, and Lost Water Canyon (expansion of the existing recommended wilderness in Lost Water Canyon) areas of the Pryor Mountains

----- Recommended Wilderness in the Tongue River Breaks, King Mountain, and Cook Mountain areas of the Ashland Ranger District

----- Backcountry Area in the Chalk Buttes area of the Sioux Ranger District

----- Recommended Wilderness in the Crazy Mountains

----- Retain areas currently recommended for Wilderness in the Absaroka-Beartooth area, and additionally recommend Dome Mountain, Emigrant Peak, Chico Peak, Woodbine, East Rosebud to Stillwater, and Red Lodge Creek.

----- Manage recommended wilderness with no non-conforming uses allowed

----- Mountain biking no longer a suitable use on the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail when the trail is within a recommended wilderness area.

(----> NOTE we are explicitly using capital "W" Wilderness to signify that we want those lands to eventually become federally designated Wilderness, though are fully aware neither the CGNF nor its Forest Plan are the avenue to accomplish that designation)

Following are specific personal occurrences that lead to our recommendation of ALTERNATIVE D. Both occurrences happened in the Gallatin Range. Our experiences in the Beartooth Wilderness-where we backpack every year, have been vastly better for the soul, vastly more wild. Here are descriptions of unfortunate summer and winter experiences in the Gallatin Range:

**\*\* ALTERNATIVE D removes the most miles of motorized and mechanized trails**

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In 2006 we left on our 4.5 day backpack trip from Tom Miner Basin to our home's doorstep in Bozeman. We found the Crest, a key feature of CGNF lands, to be an amazing hike of unending beauty. Yet sadly we also found the Gallatin Crest at great risk of being overrun by motorcyclists.

We found trail damage the entire length of the Crest caused by racing motorcycles. The damage included countless places where motorcyclists had cut switchbacks straight up and down, perhaps because they needed the momentum to climb some of the incredible inclines on the Crest (or perhaps it's just more fun?); muddy bogs with deep tire ruts; widened, eroded trails (sometimes as wide as Main Street in Bozeman!); and ripped out trail margins as motorcycles "high side" the outside of corners. Perhaps most egregious, we saw tracks of motorcyclists who had high-marked grassy hillsides (fully off-trail), just as snowmobilers are known to do in winter.

So for all the beauty of this place, those of who are the most traditional users-hikers wearing leather boots, carrying a map and compass, and shouldering 30 pounds of gear to support ourselves-are at risk of losing this place to a small number of elite folks who can afford a \$5000 toy that is effectively a 500-pound trail wrecking machine. The folks practicing this activity are not bad folks; the activity is simply incompatible with land that in 1977 was declared a wilderness study area-because of its phenomenal natural attributes-suitable for future protection as federally designated Wilderness.

How incompatible? After a hard, hot hike, we sat down at stunning Ramshorn Lake to marvel at its cathedral-like feel due to the walls of Fortress and Ramshorn Mountains that tightly surround it. Our moment of peace was not to be, however, as in the next 30 minutes we were assaulted with the noise of 12 motorcycles in four separate groups. One of the motorcyclists drove straight into our camp, saw our tent, hit the throttle, spun 180 degrees, jumped a log, and raced off without even a tip of the helmet. When the biggest group of four started up after a break and gunned their motors to peel out, the already enormous roar of their engines quadrupled as it echoed off Fortress Mountain. Imagine sitting in a silent Sistine Chapel marveling at the ceiling and then having someone walk in and start a chainsaw right in your face.

The answer is simple: we need to protect the Gallatin Crest as federally designated Wilderness. ALTERNATIVE D best keeps that opportunity alive.

**\*\* ALTERNATIVE D removes the most winter mechanized trails**

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In February, 2006, we went cross-country skiing on the Buffalo Horn trail in the southern portion of the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (WSA). We had never skied on the Buffalo Horn trail and we had hoped that the trip would be a 5-hour tour of beautiful and wild country. Instead, we cut our trip short after only 2.5 hours due to the disruption of snowmobiles. During our short trip we encountered roughly a dozen snowmobiles. Not only on the trail, but everywhere we looked, snowmobile tracks compacted the snow and scarred the landscape.

When skiing, you hear snowmobiles, like motorcycles, long before you see them and long after they have passed. Our trip was marked by periodic disruption due to the noise, exhaust, and speed of the snowmobiles and constant disruption of the sense of wild by snowmobile tracks on almost every piece of open ground. The WSA contains an alpine landscape of great natural beauty and ecological value, yet snowmobiles destroyed our enjoyment of these attributes and the wildness of our backcountry experience.

Because we live in Bozeman, the WSA is literally at our backdoor. It offers some of the best winter-time opportunities to easily access the spectacular alpine terrain of the northern Rocky Mountains. However, because of our experience with snowmobiles on the Buffalo Horn trail, we have not returned to the area to ski since our February 2006 trip. Although the Buffalo Horn is closer and more accessible than trails in

Yellowstone National Park, we often drive the long distance into the park to cross-country ski in areas where there are no snowmobiles.

**\*\* Summary statements in support of ALTERNATIVE D**

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We are all so lucky to have the CGNF in SW Montana. We walked a large part of its breadth in a single trip -- from Clark Montana over Line Creek Plateau, across the Beartooths, across the Lake Plateau, into the Paradise Valley, up Tom Miner Basin, and along the Gallatin Crest right to our home in Bozeman. We have hiked and skied in the Lee Metcalf and Spanish Peaks wildernesses, hiked in the Pryors, backpacked in the Crazies, and hunted (one of us) deer in the Ashland area of the CGNF back in the early 1970s.

The CGNF truly encompasses environs and landscapes worthy of the ultimate ecological protection possible. Consider the Gallatin Range and its connection to the entirety of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. From Bozeman one can walk from the edge of Gallatin National Forest, through the Gallatin Range of the CGNF, to beyond Wyoming's Tetons and cross only two paved roads. How amazing is that in this day and age?!

Yet the Gallatin Range of the CGNF holds a dubious distinction in all of Greater Yellowstone Region: it is the only range emanating from Yellowstone Park that does not have some level of permanent Wilderness protection. The Gallatin Range-and other unprotected lands of the CGNF as we detailed previously-is so deserving of such protection!

ALTERNATIVE D best keeps the opportunity open for protecting CGNF lands worthy of Wilderness protection open to that eventuality.

Unfortunately, the Gallatin Range is challenged by the threat of being "loved to death". That love is on display via the range of alternatives being considered in the CGNF Forest Plan alternatives. We believe there is a place where all parties could have a bit of what they want. Key to us all "getting something" is for everyone to recognize that recreational opportunity, particularly travel recreation, is only one value that that CGNF lands hold. Almost all of us would agree we value the range as a place for plants and wildlife to thrive, for clean air and water, and for solitude and quiet.

We believe there is already room for all types of recreation on CGNF lands on existing trails and motorways. In fact some of them should be closed to protect habitat. But there is also room for Wilderness designation on more CGNF lands. Such designation is critically important to protect into perpetuity those values which draw us all to these sacred places. We need places for solitude, places for quiet, places we don't race through but instead stop, look, listen, marvel, savor, remember, and be inspired by. Places we know will remain unchanged. Places we can feel pride in leaving untouched for future generations.

Wilderness is not the full solution for all CGNF lands, but it is a core part of that solution. The best way for us to include Wilderness in the solution path for the CGNF is to choose ALTERNATIVE D as the final choice in moving forward with the new CGNF Forest Plan.