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First name: Kelly

Last name: Brignell

Organization:

Title:

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: 1747 SW Sunset Blvd

Address2:

City: Portland

State:

Province/Region: OR

Zip/Postal Code: 97239

Country: United States

Email: resist4peace@outlook.com

Phone: 5039561313

Comments:

It is not acceptable to disturb species and eco-systems on the cusp of annihilation; humans are destroying this planet at a disastrous rate. The Custer Gallatin National Forest in Montana is a stronghold for iconic wildlife species like grizzly bears, gray wolves, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, and moose, which are very sensitive to human disturbance and development, and are teetering on the brink and currently AT GREAT RISK of irrevocable destruction from motorized and mechanized recreational 'play' impacts of the exploding populations of Big Sky and Bozeman.

Wilderness recommendations in Alternative D of the draft forest plan, with the suggested improvements outlined below, would offer the best protection for the Gallatin Range and other critical wildlife habitat across the Custer Gallatin National Forest.

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.

* The draft plan has little direction for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. The current wilderness management plans allows destructively 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 Wildernesses on the forest from harm. Further, the forest plan should put an end to ecologically destructive fish stocking in naturally fishless wilderness lakes, which significantly alters the areas' natural conditions.

* The plan must address the issue of human and pack animal feces contamination of lakes and streams on the Beartooth Plateau in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Eliminating fish stocking would likely go a long way toward solving this problem, but additional measures must be included if needed.

* Vacant grazing allotments in the Wildernesses should be closed so these areas can return to a wild condition.

* No trail construction or reconstruction in the currently trail-less areas of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. This provides remote areas for wildlife as well as premier areas for solitude.

* I support the wilderness recommendations in Alternative D of the Revised Draft Forest Plan; however, they must be improved by adding the entire 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range as Recommended Wilderness in the final forest plan. The following points also expand on the importance for the wild Gallatin Range.

* The plan should prohibit all motorized and mechanized uses, and any other activities not consistent with wilderness protection, in the Recommended Wilderness areas so as to preserve their wilderness qualities until Congress acts on the wilderness recommendations.