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Comments:

The Custer Gallatin National Forest in Montana provides survival territory for many of America's unique wildlife species, including grizzly bears, wolves, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, and moose. All of these species react negatively to human presence and are close enough to extinction to be easily tipped into it by disturbance and development. For this reason, the draft plan requires numerous improvements before it will be adequate to providing the protections that these and other species require to survive.

Inaptly, the wilderness management plans allow up to 25 head of stock (horses and mules) and 15 people in most areas of the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses, which need to be reduced to no more than eight head of stock and 12 humans because groups larger than that inevitably are destructive. The forest plan should put an end to fish stocking in naturally fishless wilderness lakes, which significantly alters the areas' natural conditions and is especially detrimental to their ecology.

The issue of human and pack animal feces contamination of lakes and streams on the Beartooth Plateau in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness must be addressed by the plan, beginning with the elimination of fish stocking and any additional needed measures.

Areas should be returned to a wild condition through the closing of vacant grazing allotments. There should be no trail construction or reconstruction in the currently trailless areas of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses to provide wildlife with remote areas and solitude.

While I support the wilderness recommendations in Alternative D of the Revised Draft Forest Plan, they must be improved by the addition of the entire 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range as Recommended Wilderness in the final forest plan. The plan should prohibit all motorized and mechanized uses, and all activities inconsistent with wilderness protection in the Recommended Wilderness areas to preserve their wilderness qualities until Congress acts on the wilderness recommendations.