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Comments:

Dear Supervisor Erickson and the CGNF Planning Team,

Thank you for this rare opportunity to help shape the next thirty years of stewardship for the Custer-Gallatin National Forest.

The last chance was over three decades ago in the 1980s. The U S Forest Service was a very different agency; timber was the driving issue for the Reagan Administration, which actively discouraged recommendations for wilderness in its top-down drive to maximize timber.

Much has changed. Railroad land grant areas in the Madison, Gallatin and North Crazies have been acquired and returned to public ownership. Roadless areas have been recognized for their contribution to watersheds, wildlife, outdoor recreation and quality of life. Population is booming in many areas of the west located near wilderness, parks, national forest and public lands, including fast-growing Gallatin and Park Counties.

One thing that hasn't changed is congressional designation of wilderness in the state of Montana. Montana is the only state to have Congress agree and pass a statewide "Rare II" wilderness bill, yet not have those lands protected today as wilderness. Not a single "new" Montana wilderness has been protected since 1983.

Since the last new Montana wilderness (Lee Metcalf), 550 wilderness areas have been protected in 29 other states. Only 3.7% of our state is designated wilderness, though 12% is wild. Idaho is 9% wilderness, Washington 9.4% and California 14.2%-with 40 times the population.

National forest plan decisions -whether or not to protect lands with wilderness character-- are particularly important to our future.

I'd like to just touch on three areas of the CGNF I know best.

First, The Gallatin and Madison Ranges. I have backpacked, camped in all seasons, skied, snowshoed and hunted in wild lands of these ranges that have been addressed by the Gallatin Forest Partnership (GFP).

I have recently listened to critics of the partnership.

I too wish Porcupine and Buffalo Horn could be restored to wilderness, as the supervisor well knows.

However I commend and solidly support the Gallatin Forest Partnership.

I encourage you to include all its stewardship provisions including provisions that limit trail construction and preserve trail-less areas in the Hyalites, for example.

I know and fully support the GFP proposed wilderness extending from Big Creek (Inclusive) to the world's first national park, also recommended for wilderness by NPS. This is an excellent RWA.

I also support the proposed wildlife and watershed conservation zones, together they steward the entire wild Gallatin.

Cowboy's Heaven, a keystone in the wild Northern Madison, truly deserves to be included in the adjoining Lee Metcalf.

I commend the mountain bikers who had the integrity and courage to join in support of this invaluable addition that links the Beartrap to the Spanish Peaks, just as Lee Metcalf believed was necessary.

I have had the experience of spending a week in Cowboy's Heaven, and been amazed at its wild character, yet so close to the booming Gallatin valley. Wilderness best keeps it so!

The Crazy Mountains

This may well be the most important decision you make in your career, Supervisor Erickson. The Crazy Mountains are the single most deserving and least protected wild place I know in the state of Montana.

They are uniquely valuable, sacred to many, particularly the Apsáalooke (Crow) who have quietly asked for 32 years that these very special mountains be protected.

Glorious and awe-inspiring, yet so thinly protected.

The USFS failed to live up to promises made in 1992 to the Apsáalooke, a shameful fact that must be addressed in this new plan.

I believe, and pray, that the Crazies will at last be protected, and the Apsáalooke can play a key role in their stewardship.

I have traveled to the Crazy Mountains every year for the past 34. One of my first trips I met Burton Pretty On Top and his son. Burton was working as a truck driver, his Uncle was the Apsáalooke (Crow) Cultural Director.

He spoke about the Crazies while his son played in Cottonwood Creek. Burton quietly explained the very special history and spiritual importance of the Crazy Mountains to the Apsáalooke. I have never forgotten.

The U S Forest Service did forget what was promised. Now is the time, in this new plan, to remember and act.

I wholeheartedly support the Tribe's long-standing request for a traditional cultural district, for recognition of the very special historic, cultural and spiritual values of the Crazy Mountains to the Apsáalooke People, and for full protection of all that remains wild in the Crazy Mountains.

I looked long and hard at backcountry and considered the argument that the forest cannot manage intermingled public lands as recommended wilderness.

Backcountry (BCA) is clearly not intended to preserve wilderness character, yet that is just what the plan must do for next 30 years.

BCA allows off -road vehicle traffic, over-snow highmarking, electric and other bikes that are out of place in the wild heart of the Crazies.

BCA allows roads; temporary roads and multi-decade roads for minerals.

RWA allows no roads. Period. That is what the Crazies merit and require to stay wild.

In allowing some roads, BCA leaves the door ajar for granting new private road easements. Crossing wild public lands to develop roadless private sections- for logging, minerals or trophy homes -presents a unique and serious threat to the wilderness character present today.

In the past some landowners took pride in stewardship of the wild Crazies. But private lands change hands.

Even now the USFS is being pressed by private inholders to grant new road easements. We would be foolish not to expect more pressure for developing wild inholdings in the future.

While the USFS is under no legal obligation to grant new easements to construct private roads across wild public lands, they be under pressure from future landowners; wealthy and well-connected.

Future rangers will not have to consider private easement requests to build roads, temporary or otherwise- across the Crazy Mountains RWA.

That is wise.

Recommended wilderness allows NO roads. All but a handful of trails and roughly 90% of the wild Crazies are managed for travel by foot and stock only- no motors ebikes, winter or summer. BCA is a poor fit.

The Crazies are brimming with trail-less cirques and isolated basins.

The wilderness character is strong throughout the unroaded range.

The Crazies are brimming with silent cirques and isolated basins that are trail-less, and should always remain so. I have spent days, alone, with my son, and loved ones; exploring wild cirques without seeing another person. In silence so deep, it feels ancient, timeless. The Crows have said so, and I believe they are right, this is a healing place, a place we need to keep intact.

Sacred Land. 11, 214-foot Crazy Peak

If we miss the chance to do so now, it may never come again.

Recommended wilderness is a forest plan management prescription. It offers the strongest administrative protection, but it is not a congressional designation. It determines how certain national forest lands are to be managed, until the next plan revision, perhaps 2050.

If and when Congress chooses to act in some future decade, Congress will review and determine where wilderness boundaries fall.

For the plan, be sure to include all trail-less cirques and basins in RWA. The Crazies RWA needs to include trail less areas and roadless lands in Rapid Creek, Lone Lake, Iddings and all of Cottonwood (cherry stem section 9 road) above Trespass Creek. South Fork Shields, Sunlight Creek, American Fork, Sweetgrass, Big Timber, Swamp Creek, Rock Creek and Smeller.

Good RWA boundaries-designed to protect intrinsic values -- preserve wilderness and future options. RWA fits easily, and best keeps the Crazies wild.

That is what we need to do; keep the Crazies wild and pass it on!

Lionhead (Earthquake) Recommended Wilderness Area

This RWA is not as large as the Crazies, but it is terrific grizzly habitat, a measure of wildness very few wilderness areas in the nation hold. Lionhead is a key wild stepping stone between Yellowstone and the Centennials.

It adjoins along the Continental Divide the Targhee Creek RWA on the Caribou-Targhee NF.

It should have been fully protected in the 2007 travel plan but was ditched for reasons I never fully understood. I'm told there was a glitch in comments. No worries, we were told, the forest will do an EA, collect more comment and make a decision.

The NEPA was completed, but no decision was ever made. No decision became a decision, allowing IMBA to claim the only RWA in the 1987 Gallatin Plan that had any trails.

I had hoped this area would be included in the GFP, but mountain bikers were unwilling, despite the fact that it has been an RWA and was passed as a wilderness by Congress decades ago.

This is so wrong. It's wrong to downgrade Lionhead from an RWA, wrong to thus isolate Targhee Creek RWA, wrong for IMBA to claim the CDNST a dedicated foot and horse trail and wrong to riddle this RWA-super prime grizzly habitat- with bike trails with big fast silent downhill.

If you must compromise, at least keep the RWAs intact and the CDNST non-mechanized through the Lionhead RWA.

These are my heartfelt and personal comments.

Thank you for listening.