

Date submitted (Mountain Standard Time): 5/23/2019 4:28:26 PM

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Comments:

I am resident of Steamboat Springs, Colorado but I have visited Yellowstone National Park (YNP) and the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) many times, primarily for wildlife viewing and appreciation of the amazing beauty of the GYA. I support 230,000 acres of Wilderness and Alternative D in the Custer Gallatin Forest Service Draft EIS. My reasons for supporting the highest number of wilderness acreage is out of concern for the amazing beauty of the area, diversity of wildlife and the greatest conservation of wildlife habitat.

Recent studies have shown that recreation in wildlife habitat has a dramatic effect on recruitment and survival of wildlife. Recreational activities tend to stress wildlife and in the case of Grizzlies and Black Bears, mechanized users tend to surprise the bears and risk a fatal encounter. Studies have shown hikers and backpackers also disturb wildlife, but the silent high-speed travel of mountain bikes seems to cause a greater disturbance (The Treat Report and Recommendations). More important is the need to conserve wildlife habitat that is of high quality and to keep recreational use to existing developed areas. The pressures of recreational development in the Vail, Colorado area has resulted in a decline in the elk population despite a reduction in hunting licenses. (Vail Daily News, March 7, 2019 "Can Vail-area elk herds ever recover? Wildlife managers talk decline") It would be tragic to see this happen in the GYA. It is time for a new ethic on wildlife habitat versus recreational needs.

The Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn WSA is a particularly sensitive area and deserves wildlife refuge status and enforcement of illegal trail building and uses. It is an area directly outside YNP where wildlife is abundant. The annual round up and slaughter of Bison that migrate out of the park to the Porcupine Buffalo Horn (PBH) area is a travesty and a horrendous annual event. Protection of PBH would give Bison and other wildlife a safe refuge at a lower elevation as they migrate out of the park during the winter and during spring elk calving. Once the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn WSA is reduced, it can never be returned to the wilderness characteristics that earned it WSA status and would be a tragic loss of habitat. I encourage the CGFS to give this WSA full capital "W" protection.

Migration corridors are currently being eroded by residential and recreational development across the west. Land Trades in the 1980's and 1990's have been made with an eye to keeping the Gallatin Range intact and has set the stage to protect not just the high elevation portions, but the mid and low level elevation that we now know is essential for quality habitat. The Gallatin range will also provide connectivity from YNP to the Bangtail/Bridger ranges, northward to the Big Belts, and finally to the wildlife-rich Northern Continental Divide ecosystem, allowing crucial genetic mixing among wildlife populations.

The time to protect crucial habitat and wildlands is now. I encourage CGFS to choose Alternative D and protect the maximum amount of wilderness for this and future generations. As Mountain Journal writer Todd Wilkinson wrote recently "What takes courage, conviction and forward-thinking vision is consciously choosing not to blaze a trail out of respect for animals that have limited home ground to inhabit, and far fewer options to survive than we do to play." ("Can Greater Yellowstone's Wildlife Survive Industrial Strength Recreation" Mountain Journal, March 6, 2019)

Thank you for considering my comments.