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First name: Toyia

Last name: Hatten

Organization:

Title:

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: PO Box 6276

Address2:

City: Bozeman

State:

Province/Region: MT

Zip/Postal Code: 59771

Country: United States

Email: toyiarenee@gmail.com

Phone: 4064049565

Comments:

I am writing in support of Option D of the Revised Draft Forest Plan. Option D also comes closest to what I hope to see- a 230,000 acre Wilderness in the Gallatin Range, as proposed by Montanans for Gallatin Wilderness. Option D sets aside nearly 200,000 acres of the Gallatins - please include the remaining 35,000 roadless acres as Recommended Wilderness in the final forest plan.

The Buffalo Horn-Porcupine drainages just north of Yellowstone National Park contain critical grizzly bear habitat, elk winter range, and a vital elk migration corridor, and are one of the best places for recolonization by wild bison. The Gallatin Range has 18 species identified as at risk by the Montana Heritage Program. The Gallatins are part of a critical pathway for genetic connectivity between the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, and on to the Yukon.

The 155,000 acre Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (WSA) has long been recognized as the biological heart of the region. Historical land trades made it possible for the Gallatins to be consolidated into public ownership while public lands in Big Sky became largely private in exchange.

Alternative C would protect only about half of the wilderness quality lands, in a "rocks and ice" proposal that releases the Porcupine Buffalo Horn (PBH) drainages for motorized and mechanized recreation, more timber harvest, and temporary road-building. Worse, Alternatives B and C propose legitimizing decades of illegal mountain biking and ORV use in the HPBH WSA. The 1977 law that created the WSA required the Forest Service to manage the area as Wilderness and to limit ongoing uses to the level and area where they existed at the time of passage of the Act.