

Date submitted (Mountain Standard Time): 6/3/2019 5:06:43 PM

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Comments:

Dear Custer Gallatin Planning Team and Supervisor Erickson,

I live in Billings and have been to the Pryor Mountains many times over the years. I can't think of an area better suited for wilderness and it's right out my back door. The Pryors, while visible from Billings, and a few hours away, are consistently overlooked when people come to see Yellowstone or recreate in the Bighorn Mountains. That's proved a blessing in disguise as it has kept this unique range pristine in many ways. The Pryors are a wonderful area for a day hike, a short overnight stay or a longer hike. I enjoy the ice caves and especially like the hike to Crater Ice Cave on Big Pryor Mountain although each of the four areas that are RWA possibilities offer wonderful hiking. The landscapes are so varied, along with the flora and fauna, much can be seen and enjoyed during any visit. One of my great joys in the west is vistas and imagining what a place I'm viewing looked like in the 1800's. The Pryors consistently offer both.

The most recent visit I made to the Pryors included travel by vehicle on existing roads and hiking. One big advantage to the recommendation in Alternative D is that wilderness can be recommended while keeping many of the motorized routes and other usage.

Revisiting the definition of wilderness from The Wilderness Act of 1964:

"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

The areas in consideration for wilderness in the Pryors are untrammeled. These areas, Big Pryor Mountain, Bear Canyon, Lost Water Canyon and Punch Bowl display a consistent lack of sign of human impact. They appear wild. The eroding Madison Limestone and sandstone landscapes offer great cliffs, exposed rock and water seeping through in unexpected places. In early summer the wildflowers are profuse.

An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act as "an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation."

Again, these areas have no human habitation and roads that do exist within RMA boundaries are few, short, and could be further shortened or eliminated.

"which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable;

There is cattle grazing. However, the last time I was there I specifically searched for fences and water developments, interested in tallying their number and how visible they would be to a visitor. The few I saw were not obvious and could easily be missed if one was not searching for them. What stands out to me was the variety of vegetation. Due to the differing landscapes and altitudes, the plant communities and their interplay with fauna is unique. The area is indeed a biologic hotspot.

"(2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;"

The solitude offered in these areas, even with existing roads at the boundaries, is tremendous. These areas would offer ideal chances for recreating with traditional skills, and fulfilling the need for challenges, self-discovery and freedom.

"(3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and"

I feel this criteria is best met with the acreage of Alternative D. Smaller parcels would detract from the overall wilderness experience that would be available here. The larger areas offer wildlife connectivity. With climate change at our door, more land set aside for wildlife to find suitable habitat becomes a priority. Some research has shown plant species altering their growth ranges to accomodate warming temperatures and changing precipitation.

"(4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value."

These areas each and together meet each of these descriptors. I believe that a segment in the Draft Plan describes a cultural significance of importance, which I suppose would fall into an educational or historical category. "The Pryor Mountains contain signifcation spiritual, traditional use, and ceremonial use sites for many Tribes including the Northern Cheyenne, Crow, Shoshone-Bannock, and Eastern Shoshone Tribes. It is considered a traditional cultural landscape integral to the maintenance of on-going traditional cultural practices of the Crow."

With each of these facets of the definition of Wilderness met with ease, I urge you to adopt Alternative D in the CGNF Forest Plan revision (with an additional 230,000 acres in the Gallatin Range). With the implementation of Alternative D, I would ask that the Forest Service improve signage and trails in the Pryor Mountains.

Thank you for your consideration of my input.