

Date submitted (Mountain Standard Time): 5/28/2019 12:00:00 AM

First name: Ben

Last name: Hurwitz

Organization: Meagher County Commission

Title: Chairman

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: 15 West Main Street

Address2:

City: White Sulphur Springs

State: MT

Province/Region:

Zip/Postal Code: 59645

Country: United States

Email: rluchterhand@meagherco.net

Phone: 406-547-3612

Comments:

Please take our comments into consideration as you finalize the Custer Gallatin National Forest Proposed Forest Plan. If there are concerns on the intent of a comment or clarification is needed, please contact us.

Alternative Selection

Overall our preferred alternative is E. There are other alternatives which have management directions that are preferred over this alternative. The specific comments with our preferred alternative, E, and parts of other alternatives are listed below.

Recommended wilderness: We don't recommend that there be any additional wilderness areas. The National Forest land needs to be actively managed, placing any restrictions on management options with recommended wilderness would be detrimental to the protection of values at risk.

Timber: Alternative E contains the most acres of suitable timber for timber production and unsuitable timber for timber production. Thus creating many options of timber harvest for various purposes. The ability to manage National Forest lands can and will become important to protecting values at risk. The timber industry needs a reliable timber program to insure their existence. The timber industry provides important employment and financial benefit to local communities. The National Forest system needs the timber industry to provide the resources for management options now into the future.

Income: Alternative E also provides the most/best economic benefit, especially for small economically base counties such as Meagher County. Dollars derived from the National Forest such as payments in lieu taxes (PILT), secure rural schools and income created from timber and grazing are extremely important and needed.

Grazing: Alternatives B and C are the best alternative for grazing due to the additional animal units within those alternatives.

Roads and Trails: The use of roads, trails, and their condition to access the national forest for a variety of purposes are critical to the public. Alternative B and C with an annual maintenance of 20 percent of high clearance vehicle roads, based on available budgets should be chosen. Annually maintaining 75 percent of passenger vehicle clearance roads is especially critical to the public.

Alternative E; which obliterates only 5 to 20 miles of planned unneeded system should be chosen. Which roads to remove needs to be determined with long range use and or conversion to trails in mind. Trail maintenance should done at the 80% level annually if possible.

Fire: The wildland-urban interface "WUI" is only briefly mentioned as a reference and not to help define priority/direction in fire prevention. The Community Wildfire Protection Plans "CWPP" which are developed by each county is where the "WUI" is developed /defined according to county direction. Without using the "WUI" or referencing the "CWPP" it appears that you are taking the counties /counties officials out of one of the few

ways they have of influencing treatmentdirection/priorities especially in relation to values at risk on the national forest.

With the threat from wildfire to values at risk and the increase in the number of acres which will be burned by wildfires in the future. Hazardous fuels mitigation needs to be prioritized to reduce fire behavior adjacent to values at risk. None of the alternatives treat enough acres (4-7000 acres per year depending on the alternative) for hazardous fuels mitigation to make a difference. With the Objectives (FW-OBJ-FIRE) 02 Natural unplanned wildfire occurs on a minimum of 375,000 acres per decade, as conditions allow, in all vegetation types. It needs to be stated that hazardous fuels mitigation needs to be a high if not the highest priority with any vegetation management project.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider Meagher County's comments on the Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan. Please keep us informed as the Custer Gallatin National Forest Forest Plan is finalized.