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Comments:

Comments on the 'process' as a whole

The 'new' Custer-Gallatin forest plan is a vast document of possibilities, attempting to adequately describe and categorize very disparate lands, separated by miles of space, wildlife and vegetative ecosystems, climate variables and current uses. Encompassed inside are the 5 recommended alternatives of actions, inside of which are a myriad of different scenarios. At the public meetings held in April, 2019, Mary Erickson stated that the 'final' proposed plan would be some mixture derived from pieces of each alternative. Yet the public is asked to pick one alternative. One alternative from a near infinity of possibilities. And regardless of the public's input, the NFS will decide the final plan's mosaic from all 5 alternative constructs. The public input seems to be a facade at best, especially for the non-professional everyday user of the NFS.

We only attended one public meeting. It was a posturing joke. The special interest, professional people were notably in attendance, the employees of non-profit soothsaying organizations who attended EVERY forest service public meeting and are PAID to read every line of the 'alternatives' and speak on them. The everyday people, to whom access and use is very personal and in their backyard, cannot have the same depth of input. They have lives to live and wages to be earned, yet it could be argued they have a more in-depth understanding and need IN SPECIFIC AREAS of the incredibly huge and varied landscape that the NFS wishes them to address. This is highly unfair to the locals.

The public meeting that we attended in April was an introduction of forest personnel and public attendees, an introduction by Ms Erickson and a 40 minute presentation on the bureaucratic decision tree process. Having worked in large corporations, it was disheartening to see the same tactics utilized by the NFS concerning the PUBLIC's lands. The three million acres of the C-G is so mixed and varied as to be incomprehensible to the average forest user, who may care about mixed trail usage or aesthetics or increasing access or increased forest health through thinning, etc.... on some piece of the forest near them. The only segment of the attending public (who have the resources to address the myriad of 'choices') are those professionals-for-hire by non-for-profit environment groups. The average forest user who owns a computer cannot even download the large scale maps to scrutinize the proposals under the different alternatives for areas of interest. Shame on the NFS for excluding the general public forest users from this detailed information and thus guiding most input on the Alternatives to be from the professional and paid environmentalists.

It would be much more useful to issue alternatives for each forest area; the Bridgers, the Crazies, the North Gallatin, West Yellowstone to Big Sky, etc. Each person or organization could address issues for that forest area. Professional organizations making general statements addressing wildlife or timbering issues would need to address each land block, but the local users of each land block would address what they would like to see specifically addressed in the neck of the forests that they use, are familiar with and live next to. And could download maps of those areas illustrating enough details so that they can impactfully address the proposed changes. As it is, the NFS of the Custer-Gallatin is not allowing the user public enough detail. For example, the proposed wilderness designation of the Bridgers. Where, exactly are those boundaries? Are they inside NFS lands? Are the boundaries at private land? Put it on a T & R grid with trails marked so people can actually relate your proposals to the land. The NFS is either posturing at giving the public information and requesting input OR the NFS is purposefully obfuscating the issues from the public.

What will be allowed on those lands and trails? Bikes, ebikes, hydrocarbon powered motorbikes, drones? Bikes barreling down hills and switchbacks are already highly dangerous to hikers and skiers. Their handlebars are wide on the trails. They force hikers off the trail to allow passage, as they slowly ascend or quickly descend. They do not want to stop, going up or going down. I've had wobbling slow ascending bikes cross right in front of me. I've had rapidly descending bikes blitz past or force me off blind switchback turns where they take the wide outside banked turn rather than their inside track. I like bikes, I ride bikes. But I am appalled at the interaction between hikers and the metal missiles that bikes on trails have become. I believe that bikes on trails must have noise makers installed so that the hikers can hear them coming, for safety. And that would ruin the experience for both biker and hiker. But bikes need to have advance warning devices. Or be allowed on bike only trails. Shared use is not an option in high volume areas. And the Custer-Gallatin has a lot of high volume areas.

Bikes and hikers push the weather envelope each spring. Muddy hiking/biking is ruining the existing trails and the parallel, off trail, mud-avoidance trails that are proliferating. Riparian crossings are being destroyed, crossed by bikes and feet at spring melt but made for low water crossings. The drainage patterns are being altered. The NFS has a limited budget...it is NOT getting spent on trail maintenance. The interaction between different trail user types and the deteriorated trail conditions in places is death by too much love. You cannot enforce restrictions, you can not revitalize trails, you can not easily separate user types for the same trails. You have boxed yourself in. And your exclusion of bikes by date or days of the week is a joke. Those rules are never obeyed. And you put the general populace at risk because 1) irate bikers threaten hikers who mention the date/days rules and 2) hikers don't expect metal bombs during those restricted times, yet they are there.

If you try to make more areas off limits, it concentrates more people onto fewer areas, degrading those areas faster. There are no truly equitable 'use' answers for all users. National forest lands cannot be all things for all people (users). The NFS has to create obstacles (logs across the trails) for some trails for hikers. The number of bikes and hikers on some trails is ridiculous. Specifically, the Bridgers can be a scary place to hike.

Alternatives

Maximize forest health treatment areas/logging. Prescribed burns/wildfires release smoke and CO2 into the atmosphere. Logging utilizes the CO2 sinks that are trees as building materials in almost permanent storage. And the regrowth is maximized with maximized water, nutrients and sunlight. And wildfire destruction of CO2 sinks, wildlife and human life is minimized.

Alternative E shows maximized recreation opportunity up to the boundary of Ross Peak Ranch in Northern Bridger Canyon/S. Brackett Creek. Already the public puts home owners at risk here with target practicing on the NFS lands adjacent to the private lands. Please do not allow more recreation on this highly pressured area. Our black bear population will not tolerate it. This is a sensitive riparian area of upper S Fork of Brackett Creek, shared by NFS, Cross Cut Mountain, Ross Peak Ranch and the Testers. Help protect it; not abuse it with dangerous overuse. Please ban target shooting along the S. Fork of Brackett Creek NFS lands and roads.