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Comments:

To: Custer Gallatin National Forest Planning Team

From:

Re: Comments for Custer Gallatin NF Proposed Forest Plan Draft EIS

Date: June 5, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Custer Gallatin Forest Management Plan and Draft EIS. I have lived in Montana for 43 years working as an electrician and enjoying my time spent hiking, skiing, camping, and backpacking on our public lands. This is a very comprehensive document and I can see that a lot of effort went into the planning and preparation of it - thank you for that effort.

My high school chemistry teacher once joked that chemistry was superior to biology because chemistry wasn't as messy - no bothersome blood or excrement from living organisms. I've since decided the opposite is true; biology is more relevant in that I've found it to be the way to understand the natural world and importantly, our place in it. In my time spent outdoors I have come to understand and appreciate parts of nature's complexity, and biology is the key to that.

I have a large respect for, though a limited understanding of, the relationships between bugs and birds, plants and fungi, predators and prey, aquatic plants and insects and fish, invasive aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals, and the effects of fire and grazing and moisture and drought. I understand there is enormous complexity in the soils, riparian areas, lakes, forests, prairies, wetlands, and all of the other pieces of a healthy ecosystem. All of these things interact and provide a stable, highly resilient, healthy and robust assemblage of life. And that assemblage provides a good place for all of us to live. I believe that every time we till new land, build a road or building, or in some way negatively impact a natural system, that we are making our world less hospitable to our growing population - and it seems as if climate change is only exacerbating the situation. I think it's important for our future to conserve as many of our undeveloped lands as possible, and I think the federal government, through the FS, should play a role in that conservation effort. One way to do that is through the adoption of a responsible, conservation minded CG Forest Plan.

The draft plan has many parts, and reading through the alternatives I find that Alternative D does the most to promote long term forest health. Table 9 of the DEIS compares how much each of the the various proposals of the plan contribute to social and economic sustainability. The plan with the most 'hits' in the first (greatest contribution) column is proposal D. Similarly, in Table 10 of the DEIS the option with the highest number of objectives that improve the health or integrity of the forest is Alternative D. There are enormous tracts of USFS (including the CG NF) and other public land that provide opportunities for economic and recreational activities. I don't believe we need to develop every possible piece of land. Alternative D allows a substantial number of recreational and economic activities and still provides for conservation of some of the last of the undeveloped or minimally developed land. I encourage you to adopt Alternative D as the revised Custer Gallatin Forest Plan. And two specifics:

Existing Custer Gallatin wilderness needs to be effectively managed and monitored to preserve, or better yet improve wilderness character. The revised forest plan will need to include provisions and standards to properly define and manage for that wilderness character.

In my visits to the Pryor Mountains I've learned they contain some excellent plant and bird habitat. I'm a long time member of the Montana Native Plant Society which has designated an Important Plant Area in the Pryors,

and I understand Audubon has also designated an Important Bird Area there. Those designations are made because the areas are ecologically diverse and contain exceptional habitat for plants (including a number of endemic species) and birds, supporting some of them at the very edges of their normal ranges. I encourage you to preserve these and other Pryor Mountain areas by adopting Alternative D.

I understand that the final Forest Plan may select various parts from different alternatives. If that is how a new plan is devised I urge you to use as many selections as possible from Plan D. There are some serious negative effects - pollution, erosion, spread of disease and/or weeds - for some of the activities proposed in the other alternatives. If any of those activities are chosen for the final plan I urge you to restrict and effectively supervise them so they do not cause degradation of the land. That may inconvenience some people and affect other's livelihoods, and if that happens it is unfortunate. But I think those restrictions would affect a relatively small portion of forest users, and I think protection of the resource is the primary goal. I believe very strongly that the plan should be a long-term, sustainable one that improves the health of the forest, not something that degrades the forest and provides a relatively small number of short-term benefits.

In conclusion, I strongly urge you to choose Alternative D as the permanent Revised Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan. I think it provides the highest probability of insuring a permanent, healthy forest far into the future. Developing the best possible forest plan is the best thing for all of us.

Thank you for your work managing these forests of ours that get pulled so many different directions by so many different groups, and I hope we can keep them viable and robust for generations to come.