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Comments:

Thank you Custer Gallatin National Forest staff for encouraging public comment on the Forest Plan. Below you will find my comments on the proposed alternatives.

Henrys Lake Mountains

In 1987, the FS recommended 22,800 acre of Wilderness in the Lionhead. Continuing on this path is important to one day allow for congressional Wilderness designation, an outcome that I believe is important for the ecological health of this area. In that vein, I suggest that the FS manage this area to allow foot and stock travel only. I support managing this area beyond its recreation wants of the community and to prioritize connectivity and a wildness in the landscape. This is an important area to allow migration and dispersal out of Yellowstone National Park. Many of these recommendations are supported in alternative A.

The Gallatin and Madison Ranges

The Gallatins are my home range. They provide a space for solitude, reflection, and solace. They are the place I go when I need a break from society.

Even though I would love to see most of this range be designated as wilderness, I'm happy to support the Gallatin Forest Partnership because it was a compromise crafted by bringing so many members of my community together. Though it isn't perfect, I truly believe it is a positive step forward and I recommend the the FS implement the partnership's recommendations.

I especially appreciate ensuring north south connectivity in the Gallatins and recommend Wilderness for the heart of the range. Having run, skied, and backpacked along the crest of the range, I'm amazed at the wildness of the Gallatins and want to see them remain untrammled for future generations. There is no need to open the heart of the range to mechanized or motorized travel and recommending the crest as wilderness provides long term security for the landscape. Having a wild landscape, just outside of Bozeman and Big Sky, is a huge draw to residents like me.

With Hyalite's heavy use, I'd recommend the lower portions of this drainage be managed as a recreation emphasis area and I look forward to creative solutions to manage crowding, resource damage, and accessibility. These areas receive more visitors than other areas of the forest and require special management direction to ensure that recreation within these areas is sustainable - both in terms of the public enjoying specific recreation opportunities, but also so that recreation uses do not degrade the natural environment. Also, securing Bozeman's drinking water is important as the city continues to grow. These recreation areas should be created to limit motorized and mechanized recreation to trails where it is already established practice and they can provide the framework for monitoring recreation use and better understand the impact of recreation on wildlife.

Having lived in Tom Miner, I want to specifically highlight alternative D for the Yankee Jim Lake RWA and Gallatin RWA near Yellowstone. Both of these would secure habitat for grizzlies and is a wise use of this wild landscape. These areas are already roadless and should remain so. The landscape near Sheep Mountain is some of the wildest I've ever traveled through.

Along with the Gallatins, I'm excited to recommend Cowboy Heaven and Quake Lake in the Madison Range as additions to the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Area. These are wild spaces that deserve protecting and connecting the Spanish Peaks with Beartrap which protects an important and vital wildlife corridor.

Bridger and Bangtails Mountains

While living in Bozeman, these were my most frequented ranges. I would travel to the west side of the Bridgers most days to get my after work exercise and nature experience. I valued the many roadless miles in these mountains. As Bozeman grows, I'd recommend managing most of the inventoried roadless area as backcountry, non-motorized. To often I ran into dirt bikes off trail or had to jump out of their way on narrow singletrack. There are a plethora of logging roads on the east side of the range for motorized use to be continued but the west should be prioritized for quiet recreation and connectivity. Please prioritize keeping the inventoried roadless area roadless and non-motorized as well. This is a limited resource and in the next thirty years it's going to be greatly appreciated.

I also support designating the Bridger Recreation Emphasis Area identified in Alternative E with modifications. The Bridger Winter Recreation Emphasis Area should be expanded north to Fairy Lake to provide more access for backcountry skiing in that area.

The Crazy Mountains

The Crazy Mountains provide amazing opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. I support keeping the 83,000 roadless areas primitive to protect their wilderness values and cultural significance. I would like to see no new expansion of motorized or mechanized trails and more effort made to secure long term access to the range. I also urge the Forest Service to manage the area in close consultation with the Crow Nation in order to protect and honor Crow reserved treaty rights and traditional cultural practices. I love the rugged, wild nature of this range and don't want to see the core of this range developed. Long term, I'd like to see the FS prioritize decheckerboarding this range and securing front country access and right of ways.

The Pryor Mountains

In the Pryors I support the recommendation of the four recommended wilderness areas in Alternative D. The "Backcountry Area" designation is weak and inadequate and they focus on recreation, not ecosystem preservation. BCAs are only defined by a few statements in the Management Plan which can be easily reinterpreted or amended. Even with these four RWAs, it is a moderate and balanced proposal. Nearly all the existing motorized and bike routes will remain. The Pryor Mountains include landscape and ecosystem types that are underrepresented in the National Wilderness Preservation System and this landscape is a valuable asset to preserve simply because of its scarcity. I also urge the Forest Service to manage the area in close consultation with the Crow Nation where their people continue to practice traditional cultural rituals, such as vision quests and medicinal plant gatherings.

Absaroka-Beartooth Area

The AB Wilderness is the crown jewel of our forest. Surrounding Absaroka-Bearthooth Wilderness are several roadless areas that have Wilderness-worthy qualities and they should be preserved as such conserve what little roadless space our country has left. I support alternative D where it suggests RWAs for Line Creek Plateau (the entirety of the plateau), Red Lodge Creek-Hellroaring Plateau, Deer Creek and the RWAs along the northern front, North Fork, Strawberry Creek, Chico Peak, Emigrant Peak, and Dome Mountain. These are great additions to the AB, and worth preserving as wilderness for wildlife and future generations. I've hiked, backpacked, and skied so many of these places and the solitude and wilderness characteristics are important to my recreational experience. I also support managing Bad Canyon as a Backcountry area with no mechanized and motorized recreation as proposed in Alternative B.

The Rock Creek REA is a wise designation for this landscape and I use the ski touring portion every spring. As this portion of the pass gets more crowded on opening weekend, this recommendation gives the FS options for managing congestion and preserving the recreational opportunities I look forward to each season.

Ashland Ranger District

Three areas -- the Tongue River Breaks, King Mountain, and Cook Mountain -- are roadless and have been managed for their primitive foot-and-hoofstock opportunities alongside thoughtful grazing for the last 30 years. I recommend that Tongue River Breaks, King Mountain, and Cook Mountain be recommended for wilderness, thereby protecting the incredible natural landscapes and indigenous cultural values, while still allowing ranchers to administer essential components of their grazing permits.

Sioux Ranger District

The area is rich in archeological and paleontological resources and offer many opportunities for solitude. Chalk Buttes, in particular, provides rewarding hiking opportunities that are unique in the far southeastern corner of our state. I recommend that this place be managed as a "backcountry area" prohibiting motorized and mechanized recreation, as reflected in Alternative D.

Other Notes

Recommended Wilderness areas (RWAs) should be managed to protect their wilderness character and the potential for Congressional designation in the future. RWA management can also improve the wilderness character of an otherwise outstanding area, so that it may qualify for future designation. This means allowing foot and horse travel only. Recreational uses that do not conform with the Wilderness Act -- such as mountain biking, snowmobiling, OHV riding, and other mechanized and motorized uses -- are not allowed. I recommend that the FS adopts clear standards that prohibit non-conforming uses in RWAs.

As the populations boarding our forest grow, we need to preserve what little wild space remains. I'm opposed to expanding motorized or mechanical access in our forest and believe we should prioritize wildlife habitat, opportunities for solitude, and clean water. Recommending more wilderness across the landscape is a viable way to meet those goals.

I'd like to see the revised forest plan include more language and support for partnerships. Nonprofit groups can assist the Forest Service with trail maintenance and construction, other forms of stewardship, and travel management compliance. The revised plan should contain tools and instructions for how the Forest Service will seek out and work with partners.

The revised plan should also include an objective to begin winter travel planning on the Custer portion of the forest within 1 year of completing forest plan revision. The winter ROS maps in the final forest plan must show desired future conditions reflecting where over-snow vehicles are ecologically, socially, and physically suitable, and not simply map where snowmobiles are currently allowed.

The Forest Service should also monitor wildlife populations across the forest, particularly in areas with high human use, and adapt recreation management as necessary to protect wildlife.