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Comments:

CGNF Planning Team,

As a regional resident with close ties to the Custer Gallatin, I would like to comment on several aspects of the draft forest plan options.

In general, the plan demonstrates a great deal of thought and effort on the part of the planning team, and I have found from my own experience at planning meetings that the team has been professional and thorough. I am confident that the new plan will represent significant improvement over the current one.

One of the areas of the CGNF that I know best is the Pryor Mountains. The new plan will acknowledge the Pryors as a unique region, a significant improvement. Option D has the benefit of establishing wilderness protection for significant areas in the Pryors. The management of Recommended Wilderness is relatively straightforward, with enough flexibility to maintain established uses such as grazing. Back Country Area designations, preferred elsewhere in the options, is ad hoc and uncertain, subject to shifting, perhaps contradictory, interpretations over the projected lifetime of the plan. I am familiar with both the landscape itself and the process by which it was evaluated by CGNF for wilderness characteristics. That process did not fully recognize the true nature of the landscape, tending to over-represent the impact of fading surface uranium scratchings, considered as "mines," and inconspicuous grazing infrastructure.

I would also like to see the new plan offer more protection for the Gallatin area, one of the least protected parts of Greater Yellowstone. For this region, Option C has advantages.

The plan should demonstrate clear awareness of likely changes that the region will experience over the lifetime of the plan. I live in Billings, the steady growth of which has already changed the role of the Beartooth, Crazy, and, especially, the Pryor Mountains, where the potential for recreation and spiritual renewal is emerging as more important than historic uses (with the exception of the longstanding Native American spiritual relationship to the Pryors and Crazies) such as mining. The Pryors have the potential to provide hiking and quiet recreation opportunities for an increasingly urban population. But the increased usage will also put pressure on fragile resources. It will be difficult to protect the Pryors from the impacts of increasing motorized recreation without wilderness designation. Option D preserves motorized access while addressing the current clear imbalance between motorized and nonmotorized opportunities and provides guidance for dealing with likely future changes in use patterns.

Finally, any plan projected to cover future decades should have clear guidance regarding climate change. How will the CGNF address the consequences of climate change when the desired future conditions are confronted with major impacts that are not the result of policy decisions as such, but will nonetheless create challenges for endemic or rare wildlife species and ecological communities?

Thank you for your careful consideration thus far, and I will continue to follow the process as it develops.