

Dear Custer Gallatin National Forest,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important Forest plan. As a long-term resident of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (23 years), I am invested in this landscape in a significant way. Indeed, it is where I call home, where I most love to recreate, and one of the places I value most in the US.

I spend a lot of time on our federally managed public lands including the CGNF. Probably my most cherished activity is the opportunity to hike and backpack in wild, remote areas away from people and motorized use. Using the trail system on the CGNF and hiking or skiing off-trail is something I do year-round on multiple days per week. My point in sharing that is that I am an avid user of our local National Forest lands.

As the Gallatin Valley fills up and Bozeman booms into a much larger town than it used to be, it is getting harder and harder to access trailheads that don't have full parking lots, particularly on the weekends. It wasn't so many years ago that I could easily find solitude in the public lands around Bozeman. Now, I find that I have to go further and further away.

With that in mind, planning for the future is really important. As you are well aware, the greater Bozeman area is growing rapidly. People move here for the quality of life and the access to recreate on public lands. For that reason, I strongly encourage and support you in protecting more public lands for non-motorized uses. Allowing for a future where more and more residents from the Gallatin Valley will be using trailheads for their recreational needs is smart and necessary to protect the quality of life we have here. Planning for non-motorized recreation increases is the most effective and ecological way to address this.

In addition to recreational experiences, I also greatly value and support protecting federal public lands for wildlife habitat. Numerous species rely on the CGNF for habitat and I believe that utmost importance should be given to protecting these lands for species other than ourselves. The vast majority of these species rely on non-motorized habitat and there are decades of scientific papers and research to support this. Our remaining roadless areas are critically important to wildlife (and humans) and should be protected from any development. Designating additional wilderness areas is also critically important and should be a priority in the new forest plan.

Alternative D is the only alternative I am aware of that attempts to plan for a future of more people and greater impacts to wildlife by setting aside and protecting public lands from additional development and/or motorized use. Even so, it is inadequate in its proposal for wilderness designation which is our most protected land status that can ensure a future for native wildlife species and as a result a better quality of life for all of us. Simply put, roadless areas across the CGNF should be protected for future designation as wilderness. We simply cannot afford to lose any additional roadless habitat to development as our wildlife populations rely on these areas for their long-term viability.

Regarding water resources, I am very much in favor of adding all of the proposed rivers as eligible for Wild and Scenic designation and believe strongly that the Taylor Fork, Hellroaring Creek, and the South Fork of the Madison should be added to this list for the high quality of habitat they provide.

Moving specifically to wildlife concerns, I am very concerned about the impacts of opening up the Porcupine Buffalo Horn area to motorized recreational use, road-building, and timber harvest. Likewise, the West Pine area on the northern end of the Gallatins is also an area of concern. While I applaud the efforts that numerous interest groups have invested in coming up with some common ground, I just cannot support allowing these new proposed uses in an area

such as this. Besides which, as a WSA, the NF has a mandate to manage this area as wilderness. Critical wildlife habitat adjacent to remote roadless areas and Yellowstone Park should be protected. As you know, the Gallatin Range is home to numerous wildlife species that rely on the ability to travel throughout their range for seasonal movement. Providing secure corridors allows for the connectivity that makes the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) special in a world where habitat fragmentation and degradation is the norm. Numerous prominent scientists and former public land managers agree that the Gallatin Range is critical to the health of Yellowstone Park and the GYE in general. It is important to the long-term health of this area that it be protected from any further development and from increased motorized access.

In general, I believe the CGNF Plan could do a better job designating wildlife connectivity areas that need to be maintained and protected for the long-term. It is critical that this plan provide ways for islands of wildlife habitat to be connected such that populations do not suffer from the fate of further habitat fragmentation. This is especially important in areas adjacent to wild chunks of habitat and areas that are not otherwise protected. For example, the Madisons should be recognized more for their value as wildlife habitat and as a corridor for multiple species.

Speaking specifically to grizzly bears, I believe that this species should be listed as a species of conservation concern on the CGNF and that it needs increased habitat protection across all areas that its population inhabits. This is particularly important in areas where the grizzly bear is monitored and in areas that are essential for connectivity so that the population can sustain itself.

On the topic of wildlife, I would also like to comment on the need for the CGNF to provide more opportunities for migrating bison to utilize habitat on the CGNF. As these bison move out of the Park seasonally, it is critical that they have areas to forage on, particularly in the Hebgen Basin area. Bison are native wildlife to our local ecosystem and should not be treated as livestock. The CGNF Plan should provide for year-round habitat for the bison without threat of being harassed, captured, or killed.

Finally, as our local population expands and recreational impacts increase on the CGNF, there needs to be a better way to more effectively and more extensively monitor impacts of recreation (motorized and non-motorized) on wildlife and quality of habitat. This is critical so that the NF can adapt management in an area when recreational impacts are shown to be detrimental, which is inevitable.

At the end of the day, what I come back to is this: the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is a national treasure in large part because of its wilderness character and the wildlife populations that still exist here. The CGNF manages a significant portion of the GYE and its Forest Plan should recognize the importance of the GYE as a national treasure and plan management accordingly to protect the future of the GYE. There are very very few places left in the lower 48 states of the US where native species occur and function in the ways that they have for centuries. We cannot afford to lose this by altering wildlife habitat in detrimental ways and instead should be looking for ways to increase protections and provide a future for the GYE.

Please select Alternative D and choose a long-term approach to providing secure wildlife habitat, wilderness, and protecting biodiversity for the future.

Thank you,

Marlena Renwyck