

Please accept my comments on the Custer Gallatin Forest Plan

The Custer Gallatin Forest is critically important to the future of many wildlife species. It has the largest unprotected roadless area in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem – the Gallatin Range. The Forest, also includes the Pryor, Bridger, and Crazy Mountains, It is crossroads between ecosystems to the north, west and east. These are lands grizzlies are now recolonizing. All roadless lands on this vast Forest deserve protection from roading, and use by off-road vehicles and mountain bikes Only Alternative D and wilderness gives protection.

Many prominent scientists, ecologists, and managers like Dr. Cathy Whitlock, a climate change scientist and member of the National Academies of Sciences, former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, and a list of prominent others—including eminent ecologists and retired federal public land managers have signed on to a large wilderness in the Gallatin Range. A list of over 100 has said that it is important.

How much of the Gallatin Range should receive wilderness protection is a source of heated debate. Motorized recreationists and mountain bikers want less landscape placed under the umbrella of capital W wilderness. They want the WSA carved up to satisfy their demands. They say it is hugely important to the recreation community, however here is what the data shows;

What activities do visitors come to do? According to a UM Scholar Works report, Montana Visitors' Key Niche Activities 10/2017 Number 1 scenic driving, Number 2 watching wildlife Number 3 Day hiking. **Mountain biking is not even in the top ten.**

Another report from UM-Key finding from a statewide survey, Crown of the Continent, April 2018 shows that in Montana 67% hike, 65% camp, 49% watch wildlife and only **27% mountain bike.**

In another report from Scholar Works at the UM 5/2019 Montana Trends: Travel and Recreation. The report questions were; Activities Montanans will do over Memorial Weekend – **3% mountain bike**, Activities Montanans will do over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July – **2% mountain bike**

These low numbers do not warrant carving up a WSA. Montanans do not support eliminating protections for wilderness study areas. In the Crown of the Continent Report, **81% say add new/keep all. Only 11% say to eliminate protections.** Support to keep WSAs as they are now is strong across parties; total add new/keep all – Republicans 74%, Independents 81%, Democrats 94% Overall 81%

There is also a poor understanding of what mountain bikes and motorized use in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem has on sensitive species such as grizzlies, wolverines, elk in their calving grounds and other animals with a low tolerance for human disturbance.

The effects of recreation are also huge. Dr Lance Craighead reports on this in his report: Wilderness, Wildlife and Ecological Values of the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area 11/2015

The Custer-Gallatin has recommended setting aside less than 100,000 acres of the Gallatin's as wilderness. This is not enough. This will not be enough for wildlife and connectivity between other protected areas.

It has long been recognized by the scientific community that protected areas in isolation fail to preserve species and ecosystem processes adequately. Wildlife corridors provide connectivity, sustaining vital natural processes, wildlife populations, and biodiversity while allowing species to move in response to climate change. The Gallatin Range is a recognized wildlife corridor linking YNP to the Northern Continental Ecosystem. Without a large wilderness in the Gallatin's connected to the Bridger's and the Madison's wildlife will be impacted. Without wilderness in the Abs connected to wilderness in the Crazies, wildlife will be impacted

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