

Forest Service
Attn: Forest Plan Revision
Custer Gallatin National Forest
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hand-delivered
6/4/19
to VK

Please accept this list of supporters
for a large Gallatin Wilderness.

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As biologists, wildlife advocates, and members of the scientific community, we are writing to express our strong support for maintaining the ecological integrity of the Gallatin Range by establishing a 230,000-acre or larger wilderness under the 1964 Wilderness Act. Wilderness designation is recognized as the "Gold Standard" for preserving wildlands and ecological values.

The scientific community recognizes that large protected areas with connectivity to other large protected patches is the best way to preserve high-quality wildlife habitat and permit the continued influence of ecological processes like wildfire, predation, migration, and other natural influences.

The Gallatin Range is the most significant unprotected wildlands in the northern Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. In particular, the Buffalo Horn and Porcupine (BHP) drainages that lie immediately north of Yellowstone National Park are critical to the biotic fidelity of the Yellowstone Ecosystem.

The Buffalo Horn-Porcupine was recognized early on for its wildlife values. In 1910 Forest Service Chief Gifford Pinchot advocated protecting the southern Gallatin Range as a wildlife refuge. A year later, the state of Montana created a wildlife refuge in the Buffalo Horn and Porcupine portion of the Gallatin Range. In recognition of the inherent wildlands values of the range, in 1977, some 155,000 acres, including the BHP drainages, were designated the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area by Congress.

The Buffalo Horn Porcupine area has some of the best grizzly bear habitat outside of Yellowstone National Park. It is also vital elk winter range and a migration corridor. These drainages also support bighorn sheep, moose, mountain goat, wolverine, cougar, wolf, and mule deer. It is also one of the best areas outside of Yellowstone NP for the restoration of wild bison herds. Both of these drainages also possess native Westslope cutthroat trout, a species once proposed for listing under the ESA. According to the Montana Heritage Program, 18 birds, eight mammals, three fish, three amphibians, and one reptile as "at risk" or declining in numbers, demonstrating the need to provide the most durable protection possible for this area.

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.

A biological assessment of the range by Lance Craighead also demonstrated the biological significance of the range.

http://www.craigheadresearch.org/uploads/7/6/9/0/7690832/executive_summary_hpbh_wsa.pdf

Another study by Steve Gehman lists the wildlife values of the range.

http://www.wildthingsultd.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Gallatin-Range_fullreport_with_photos.pdf

A comprehensive analysis of conservation values across the entire Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem identified the Gallatin Range as a critical area for protection. Noss RF, Carroll C., Vance-Borland K. and Wuerthner G. 2002. A multicriteria assessment of the irreplaceability and vulnerability of sites in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. *Conservation Biology* 16: 895–908

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1046/j.1523-1739.2002.01405.x>

With its high wildlands and ecological values, we the undersigned request that approximately 230,000 roadless acres of the Gallatin Range be given the full protection of the Wilderness Act by Congress to ensure the continued ecological integrity of these public lands.

To learn more about the Gallatin Range's wildlands values, see this link:

<https://mountainjournal.org/gallatin-mountains-in-montana-deserve-wilderness-protection>

A map showing the Gallatin Range roadless lands can be found here:

https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd577294.pdf

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