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Comments:

Attachment Siebel

Thank you for this opportunity to send my short comments on the Draft Forest Plan for the Custer Gallatin National Forest. For more detail I refer to the comments sent by Phil Knight on behalf of Montanans for Gallatin Wilderness.

The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) of which the Gallatin Forest is a major part, is universally recognized as the best intact ecosystem in the lower 48, and the best functioning temperate ecosystem in the world - with still its full complement of wildlife since pre-Columbian times. There is no other place in the lower 48 that can be compared to its intact ecosystem. Unbelievably, the Gallatin Forest Partnership is proposing mechanized recreation (mountain bikes, motorcycles, A1V's) in the best wildlife habitat in the lower 48!!!

The Gallatin Range especially is of crucial importance for the future of Montana's precious wildlife populations and members of the Gallatin Forest Partnership (GFP) fail to recognize this by promoting development in this prime wildlife habitat and gambling away this resource. Also,

Moreover, the Gallatin Range provide[s] a migration corridor connecting the abundant wildlife of Yellowstone National Park with ranges north of it, like the Bangtail/Bridger, the Big Belts, and the Northern Continental Divide ecosystem with its rich wildlife, allowing for crucial genetic mixing of wildlife populations.

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The GFP in its proposal seems to be willing to sacrifice the Gallatin's Porcupine/Buffalo Horn (PBH) area, immediately north of the YNP boundary, and an area of low elevation that is the best wildlife habitat north of the park, where wildlife migrates out of YNP during harsh winters. This area is home to grizzlies, wolverines (only 300 considered still present in the lower 48), and an elk-calving area in the spring. For these reasons the Porcupine/Buffalo Horn should be designated as wilderness. Also, in recognition of the PBH's quality habitat, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks manages 10 sections of land there, with strong habitat-protecting restrictions.

Many of GFP participants are mountain biking advocates, not members of wildlife advocacy groups. Although many people enjoy riding mountain bikes, most would not want the best wildlife habitat in the Gallatin Range to be promoted as playground for mountain bikes at the expense of wildlife. Studies show that mountain bikes significantly disturb and stress wildlife, almost as much as motorized vehicles. Especially disturbing is that several powerful conservation groups have thrown their weight behind the GFP instead of the wildlife and habitat interests they purport to defend. With climate change and explosive growth, Montana's wildlife will encounter challenges whose magnitude is difficult to anticipate, therefore we must manage our remaining wild places conservatively, with permanent protection through wilderness designation.

It's increasingly clear that the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Montana Wilderness Association, and Wilderness Society are not advocating for protection of Montana's treasured wildlife. As the Forest Service releases its new management plan, we urgently support preference for Alternative D, which provides maximum wilderness protection for 230,000 acres in our world-class wildlife habitat in the Gallatin Range.

Thank you for your attention to the great importance of our wild lands and its wildlife.