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Comments:

To: Custer Gallatin National Forest

Re: CGNF Forest Plan Revision #50185

My name is Shana Wood and I have been a resident of the Greater Yellowstone area since 1989. I currently live in Bozeman, MT. I have worked and recreated on the Custer-Gallatin National Forest since 1994. I have worked as a trail crew member and Wilderness Ranger in Wilderness areas in Colorado, Wyoming and Montana. I am a member of the Montana Wilderness Association. I respect and support MWAs hard work and leadership in protecting wildlands since the days they worked with Lee Metcalf to establish Wilderness areas in MT. Therefore, as a general statement I support MWAs comments to the Custer-Gallatin NF plan revision and their conservation priorities. I also support the Gallatin Forest Partnership's combination of conservation and recreation designations. This group has worked very hard to reach consensus about protecting water, wildlife, vegetation, recreation and wildland resources in certain important and popular areas on the Custer Gallatin National Forest. The GFP agreement is reasonable, well thought out and deserves to be implemented.

There are a couple of specific points I would like to make about areas I have visited or experiences I have had (or would like to have in the future).

I would like to see the Lionhead RWA remain intact at the current 22,800 acres with non-conforming uses (mountain biking) no longer allowed. It's unfortunate that bicycle traffic was permitted after the USFS made the recommendation for wilderness, and I understand it will be terribly hard for some visitors to no longer ride their bikes there. They can still access the area by foot or by stock. This is a difficult thing for me because I am a mountain biker and I know local mountain biking groups have adopted this area because it offers excellent subalpine and alpine riding. They have formed partnerships with other user groups and cleared/maintained trails throughout the RWA and I know they feel that they are an established user group. Yet I feel very strongly that the area should be managed as Wilderness so that one day it will be congressionally designated. It's an important wildlife corridor connecting Yellowstone NP and the Centennial Mountains. There is a picture grizzly tracks on the trail in an article about mountain biking in the Lionhead in Outside Bozeman Online. Also, there is an important single-track section of the CDT through the Lionhead. I know that improved mountain bike technology will just bring more users riding faster bikes and that conflicts will increase between users and between users and wildlife. The current boundary of the Lionhead should be maintained and managed for Wilderness values.

The Absaroka Beartooth is one of the premier crown jewels of the Wilderness System of the US. I worked in the A-B Wilderness from 1994-1999. Its breadth and scale are part of why it's so magnificent. I support increasing its size, thus protecting more watersheds, wildlife and wilderness character, by incorporating the adjacent RWA additions: Dome Mountain, Chico Peak, Emigrant Peak, East Rosebud to Stillwater, Woodbine, Red Lodge Creek and West Fork Rock Creek.

I worked as a Wilderness Ranger in the Crazies in the late 1990s. It's a stunning area that feels wild and remote, especially away from the major trails. The head of Sweetgrass Creek is like a mini-Glacier NP. Campfire and Sunlight Lakes offer a high and wild-feeling alpine lake experience. Cutthroat trout are plentiful in Sunlight Lake. I would like to see no new expansion of motorized or mechanized use in the Crazy Mountains so that someday parts of the Crazies might be recommended for Wilderness.

My husband and I did an amazing through hike from Myers Creek Guard Station and out Bad Canyon one spring, combining USFS and BLM public lands on our route. We saw not a single person and experienced the beauty of the Beartooth foothill country in full blown, lush and beautiful spring. Bad Canyon provides rare access to rangeland and sagebrush vegetation communities along the Beartooth front. I support managing Bad Canyon as a Backcountry area with no mechanized and motorized recreation as proposed in Alternative B.

I have visited the Pryor Mountains in the spring, when the higher montane-subalpine areas of the Custer Gallatin NF are still too wet or under snow. They are an ecologically and geologically rich mountain range, home to endemic flora and supporting migratory and resident bird life. During my visits I have seen plenty of roads and 2-tracks for OHV users to travel and ride on. Therefore, I support MWAs recommendation for managing Bear Canyon, Big Pryor and the Punch Bowl areas as recommended Wilderness as in Alternative D. I also support increasing the Lost Water Canyon RWA by 13,000 acres, reflected in Alternative D. I want to be able to visit the Pryors in the future and have these areas be a quiet place to explore by foot.

Finally, there are places on the Custer Gallatin National Forest that I have not yet been able to visit or experience. I want these places managed as recommended Wilderness so that their wild character, ecological integrity and archeological resources are protected. This includes the Tongue River Breaks, King Mountain and Cook Mountain areas of the Ashland Ranger District. Also, manage the Chalk Buttes as a backcountry area, prohibiting motorized and mechanized recreation, as reflected in Alternative D.

Finally, I ask that the Forest Service manage recommended Wilderness areas to protect wilderness character. This means managing RWAs as Wilderness and disallowing mechanized and motorized use. This will ensure that such areas have the potential to become designated Wilderness someday. To do anything less takes the decision away from future generations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Shana D. Wood