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Comments:

I join millions in support of better wilderness recommendations than currently included in Alternative D of the Revised Draft Forest Plan.

These recommendations must be augmented by adding the entire 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range as Recommend Wilderness in the final forest plan. The following three points also expand on the importance for the wild Gallatin Range.

As with Designated Wilderness everywhere else, this plan must prohibit all motorized and mechanized uses, and any other activities not consistent with wilderness protection, so as to preserve their wilderness qualities until Congress acts on the wilderness recommendations.

The draft plan has little direction for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. The current wilderness management plans allows destructively large groups of up to 25 head of stock (horses and mules) and 15 people in most areas. Research shows that impacts increase significantly when group-sizes exceed eight head of stock and 12 people. The Forest Service needs to limit group size accordingly so as to protect from harm all such Wildernesses in forests everywhere. Further, the forest plan should put an end to ecologically destructive fish stocking in naturally fishless wilderness lakes, which significantly alters the areas' natural conditions.

The plan must address the issue of human and pack animal feces contamination of lakes and streams on the Beartooth Plateau in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Eliminating fish stocking would likely go a long way toward solving this problem, but additional measures must be included, as needed.

One gateway to Yellowstone National Park encompasses Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, home to Montana's high point, Granite Peak; the 155,000-acre Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (HPBH WSA) in the northern Gallatin Range; and the Lee Metcalfe Wilderness, across the Madison Range in southwest Montana. As part of the Forest Plan revision process, the Gallatin Range-stretching from Bozeman to Yellowstone National Park-is particularly at risk of being compromised as a motorized and mechanized recreational playground for the exploding populations of Big Sky and Bozeman. Alternative D must be strengthened to provide the best possible protection for the Gallatin Range and other critical wildlife habitat across the Custer Gallatin National Forest.