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First name: Chelan

Last name: Babineau-Z

Organization:

Title:

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: 810 N Rouse Ave

Address2:

City: Bozeman

State: MT

Province/Region: Montana

Zip/Postal Code: 59715

Country: United States

Email: cheluluz@gmail.com

Phone: 4065994176

Comments:

To: Custer-Gallatin National Forest

Re: Draft Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Date: June 5, 2019

Dear Mary Erickson:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Draft Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement as part of the Forest Plan Revision Process. My name is Chelan Babineau-Z and I am a 41 year old male who has lived, worked and recreated in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem and Custer-Gallatin National Forest to be specific, for the past 20 years. I am an outdoor enthusiast who's love and appreciation of our public lands takes many forms. I have dedicated nearly 2 decades of my life working for the NRCS Snow Survey program in order to provide quality data used to manage our natural resources. I have also volunteered countless hours helping to maintain trail infrastructure to help enhance recreational experiences for all user groups. I recreate within our public lands year round; on skis, by foot, with motorized equipment and by bicycle. I enjoy the diversity of such activities and appreciate the opportunities we have in the Custer-Gallatin National Forest to choose how we spend our time on our public lands. In reviewing the Draft Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement I see there are several Forest Plan alternatives that significantly affect these choices by limiting/eliminating access to certain uses particularly mechanized and motorized user groups.

I have always and continue to consider myself an environmentalist and I thoroughly embrace the concepts of conservation and preservation of our most sacred natural resources. However I strongly object to any Forest Plan Alternative that seeks to further limit or eliminate recreational access to public lands based on user group. In my assessment of the document Alternatives C and D do exactly that. Alternative D is a comically (dark) extreme version of conservationism that severely limits recreational access to public lands by zealously pursuing wilderness regulations in areas that do not currently nor will ever exhibit wilderness characteristics (Bridgers). This is an extremist viewpoint at best and one whose true entitled nature can easily be seen despite being hid under a thin veil of environmentalism. While Alternative C is not nearly as extreme I do not agree that current levels of mechanized and motorized use are not compatible with Recommended Wilderness Areas. The Wilderness Act of 1964 supports the management of these areas for existing and historical multiple uses. RWA's are exactly that, Recommended. They are not defacto Wilderness areas and should not be managed as such until an act of Congress designates them as such (Lionhead area).

Arguments against mountain biking often refer to resource damage via tires, degradation of personal experience and user conflicts. In reality these arguments are rarely based on facts and findings and are instead being used anecdotally in order to subjectify the matter. As far as mountain bikes go it has been cited in numerous studies that responsible riders are only slightly more impactful than hikers and significantly less impactful than horses. Personal experience is exactly that, personal. My day in the woods is no more important or more appropriate than your day in the woods. And user conflict just isn't a "real thing". In all of my trail interactions, across the west, no matter the mode of travel, I have never had a truly negative experience. User conflict is a red herring and one that is being used to fuel user conflict by creating arbitrary and in my opinion unnecessary trail hierarchy amongst user groups.

I support Alternatives A and B which allow continued access to mechanized and motorized travel where currently allowed. Alternative B explores some designation of Backcountry and Recreation emphasis areas which I find intriguing but do not know enough about to comment on but it seems like a step in the right direction. I would argue that these would be much more inclusive and effective ways to protect our public lands while allowing recreation to flourish. As a mountain biker Alternative E looks amazing but I know deep down it would come with consequences and I do not support any action that would weaken the protection already in place of our public lands from the onslaught of commercial greed and development that would ensue.

In summary I consider recreation to be an important component of the management of our public lands. I strongly believe that supporting as many modes of responsible outdoor recreation as possible would benefit society in general while further limiting the choices and accessibility of certain modes of recreation would be unnecessary, unfair and a detriment to a large portion of the population.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter. Sincerely,
Chelan Babineau-Z
810 N Rouse Ave
Bozeman, MT
59715
406 599 4176
cheluluz@gmail.com