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Comments:

I'm writing to urge you to support the wilderness recommendations listed in Alternative D of the Revised Draft Forest Plan for the Custer Gallatin National Forest in Montana. I also urge you to improve this plan by adding the entire 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range as Recommended Wilderness in the final forest plan as well as the following three suggestions.

The final plan should prohibit all motorized and mechanized uses, and any other activities not consistent with wilderness protection, in the Recommended Wilderness areas so as to preserve their wilderness qualities until Congress acts on the overall plan.

The draft plan has little direction for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. The current wilderness management plan 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. I hope the Forest Service will reduce group size limits accordingly so as to protect all Wildernesses in the forest from harm. 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.

I also hope the final plan will 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 may have to be included to prevent significant contamination.

We're in the midst of the sixth great mass extinction event in the Earth's history. Preserving more wildlife habitat in the Custer Gallatin National Forest as suggested in Alternative D will ease this extinction crisis in addition to allowing more people to enjoy this unique national treasure. As a U.S. citizen and part owner of these public lands, I urge you to support Alternative D and improve the plan further by including all 230,000 acres as wilderness and the three additional action items listed above in your future plan of action. Thank you.