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Comments:

The Porcupine-Buffalo Horn area is a critical region for biodiversity within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and it should remain a landscape that is protected from bicycles, motorized vehicles, and other development. As an ecologist who studied the area extensively from 1993-2007, I know firsthand the diversity of plants, butterflies, birds, and wildlife species that inhabit this region. What is unique about this portion of the Custer-Gallatin National Forest is the fact that these valleys have an incredible diversity of plant communities and associated habitats. The mosaics of montane meadows, interspersed with aspen and conifer stands surrounding creeks and wetlands support a correspondingly high diversity of pollinators, avian species, large mammals, and aquatic organisms. Bicycle and motorized vehicle use, as well as other forms of development cause erosion, increase the spread of weedy species, fragment the landscape, and disturb wildlife. All of these pressures threaten biodiversity.

Decades ago, the State of Montana and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) consolidated public landholdings in the Porcupine-Buffalo Horn drainages in order to protect this important region. Given the rate of development in Bozeman, Big Sky, and Gallatin County, plus the contiguous nature of the land to Yellowstone National Park, it is essential to protect this area. Fragmentation of habitat is one of the largest threats to biodiversity.

Alternative D supports the highest level of protection for the biodiversity in the Porcupine-Buffalo Horn area. I urge the USFS to prioritize protection of this southern portion of the Gallatin Range.