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Comments:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

I am not a scientist, and, though I have read many articles, attended meetings, watched videos, and studied maps, I do not feel I am the best person to comment on ecology. I trust you will be hearing from many people more skilled than myself in this context.

What I am is a nature lover, a writer, and a mother of 3 young children. As a family, we spend a lot of time in the Gallatin National Forest- hiking, camping, fishing, and simply resting into the quiet, regenerative power of the wilderness.

I see this forest revision plan as a balance of priorities that comes back to one simple question- Who has more right to the forest- people or nature itself?

People are loud- both on the trail and in their comments. They form partnerships and committees and garner votes and support. They push for their priorities and want to win. They want to protect their own view of life at all costs. They want to mountain bike, ATV, snowmobile, hunt, hike, cut down trees, mine for minerals, guide others for income, conserve everything and reduce access... You name it, someone wants to do it.

Meanwhile, nature is simply, quietly, doing her nature things. Worms are digging in the soil. Ants are carrying little bits of leaves to their nests. Moose calves are learning to stand on wobbly legs. Birds are dipping and soaring. Grizzlies cubs are tumbling and playing. Seeds are shooting out of hard soil. Wildflowers are opening.

Humans are making maps and fighting over borders and designations.

A cold mountain stream is bubbling over rocks, and a trout leaps for a mayfly.

Humans are writing letters, submitting comments, calling their neighbors and urging them to be heard.

A wood duck swims across a cold mountain lake beneath a gentle rain.

And somewhere sits Ms. Erickson, holding all of this in her two hands. I think of her, of the enormity of her decision, and I wish her the peace of the alpine meadow at sunset.

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From my home here in Bozeman, looking south toward the Spanish Peaks, I find it ironic that, in this forest revision plan, those who love the forest are, in many ways, fighting against the heart of the forest itself.

How long can an ecosystem survive being chipped away and chipped away as greater and greater pressures are put on it? Once wilderness is lost, it is gone for generations.

The question remains, Who has more right to the forest- people or nature itself?

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For my children, I take the long view. I see protected wilderness north of Yellowstone National Park. I see safe, quiet, wildlife corridors between the Gallatin and Bridger ranges. I see the curtailing of the human need for more, more, more.

I see the sovereignty of nature to have its own space, to be left undisturbed, to live its own life free from the human grabbing and claiming.

I see the backbone of the mountains standing firm. I see the arms of the trees holding consumption at bay. I see the veins of rivers carrying the abundance of life. I see the forest vibrant and healthy and protected by those who love her.

May it be so.

In Light-
Leigh Dennis