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Comments:

Forest Supervisor:

Thanks for the opportunity to comment. And particular credit is due to your forest region for how you're handling the entire planning process. I'm on the email chain and it's really impressive seeing all the ways you interact with the public and make the planning documents accessible. I know the Helena Forest planners are doing great work too, but the level of sophistication on your end is clearly a step above.

My family and I live in the Big Belt Mountains, north of your planning area. We do nearly all our hunting, fishing, foraging, and recreating in our home range. Consequently, my biggest concern with the Custer-Gallatin Forest is encouraging biological connectivity north into the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE). A glance at the map shows the Bridgers-to-Big Belts is one such connecting route, and formal modelling research shows the same ("Potential paths for male-mediated gene flow to and from an isolated grizzly bear population" - <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/ecs2.1969>).

It's tempting to gravitate towards middle-of-the-ground alternatives. I'm a big supporter of forest collaboratives, for instance. But the Custer-Gallatin is unique in the lower 48. Who else can consider connectivity for Grizzly Bears, Wolves, and Bison? As such, I believe your alternatives should defer to ecological integrity (or whichever such buzzword you'd like to use) over any other consideration. Coupled with my chief personal concern of biological connectivity with the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), all signs point to Alternative D as the best path moving forward, in my opinion.

Thanks for your consideration.

Joe Donohoe