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Comments:

I want to acknowledge that the Custer Gallatin National Forest occupies the the ancestral lands of Montana's indigenous peoples including the Crow, Flathead, Salish, Kalispel, Kootenai, Blackfoot and other peoples. This plan must both acknowledge these sovereign nations' reserved treaty rights to these areas and the cultural importance of these native landscapes and the species that rely on these lands for life in all aspects of the proposed forest plan revisions. All of these tribes must be afforded legally mandated free, prior, and informed consent to any plans for these lands. This is a bare minimum and should further be expanded through procedural justice allowing representatives from associated tribes to sit on the authoritative governmental structure that decides on a final plan.

We are living in a time of climate crisis that is putting the health of the ecosystems and wildlife, societies, economies, and governments of these areas at risk of significant disruption. Any approved forest plan must both acknowledge this reality and propose actions that will improve the resiliency of these places to all current and projected climate crisis impacts expected throughout the rest of the 21st century. As the climate crisis will compound impacts on already threatened ecosystems and wildlife, it is imperative that no actions of the forest plan lead to any further impacts that reduce the resiliency of these organisms and landscapes to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

I am concerned by the draft plan having little direction for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. The current wilderness management plans 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. The Forest Service should reduce group size limits accordingly so as to protect all Wildernesses on 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.

The plan must 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 must be included if needed.

Vacant grazing allotments in the Wildernesses should be closed so these areas can return to functioning and healthy indigenous ecological conditions.

I support the wilderness recommendations in Alternative D of the Revised Draft Forest Plan; however, they must be improved by adding the entire 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range as Recommended Wilderness in the final forest plan.

The following three points also expand on the importance for the wild Gallatin Range. The 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 wilderness recommendations.