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Comments:

I urge you to select Alternative D. This is the only alternative that gives adequate protection to the Gallatin Range, which is one of the most diverse and important wildlife areas in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem. The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 18 birds, 8 mammals, 3 fish, 3 amphibians, and 1 reptile as "at risk" or declining in numbers. The Forest Service should be doing everything it can to ensure that the habitat for these species is given the highest possible protection. Designated Wilderness is the best protection for wildlife habitat.

I oppose the establishment of so-called "Wildlife Management Areas" in the Buffalo Horn Porcupine Area and the West Pine Creek area as called for by the Gallatin Forest Partnership. These areas deserve full protection as Wilderness. There are numerous studies showing the harmful effects of recreation, particularly motorized and mechanized recreation, on wildlife. The promise to regulate recreational use in these "wildlife management areas" rings hollow in these days of tight Forest Service budgets. You don't have the staff to patrol trailheads or monitor trail use. Nor do you have the staff to prevent mountain bikers from building unauthorized trails, as they so love to do.

Making these areas mechanized recreational zones greatly diminishes their value to wildlife, even if you slap on a name like "Wildlife Management Area." What are the legal standards for such a designation? There are none. Whereas standards for Wilderness are laid out in the Wilderness Act and 50 years of legal interpretations of the Act. In Wilderness, logging, mining, and other forms of destructive human activity are prohibited. In these "Wildlife Management Areas" landscape-level manipulation in the form of logging would be permitted, as long as it's called "thinning" and is done for "forest health"-more euphemisms meaning the areas could easily lose their wild character and their ecological integrity.

With our ever-expanding human population, wild areas all over the globe are being destroyed at a terrifying rate. As habitat declines, wildlife disappears. We don't need to "compromise" away the best wild areas remaining anywhere. We don't need to ride our bikes in pristine wildlife habitat. We need to protect it for its original inhabitants, for the bears and lynx and wolverines and bighorn sheep and elk and goshawks and frogs and insects and all the other species that depend on it for their survival. Wilderness provides the best protection available under law. Please select Alternative D and do what's right for wildlife and for the future.