

Date submitted (Mountain Standard Time): 5/28/2019 4:12:21 PM

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Comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the various options of The Plan for the Custer-Gallatin National Forest. By way of background, I have hiked, skied, and backpacked in many places of the Madison, Gallatin, Bridger/Bangtail, Absaroka, and Beartooth Ranges, so I have a fair amount of on-the-ground familiarity with those ranges, and will limit my comments to those locations. One of my photos is on the cover of the hiking guide: Day Hikes in the Beartooths.

Summary Comments:

There is an increasing body of scientific evidence that supports the idea that mechanized travel can disturb wildlife, especially grizzly bears. (See the so-called Treat report as just one example.) Humans are already impacting the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem thru anthropogenically-exacerbated climate change. It would seem that from a truly ecological standpoint, the best thing to do for the remaining roadless areas of the Custer-Gallatin National Forest would be to manage them as "big W" wilderness. However, to do so would be politically impractical. Mechanized recreation (mountain and dirt biking, ATVs and snowmobiling) on the Forest is simply too popular to be able to pull such off. So while many conservation advocates have supported Alternative D for the Forest Plan (and yes, I know these comments are NOT a vote), the likely solution to the recreation/preservation dilemma is a Plan based more on the compromises put forth in Alternative C (especially for the Gallatin Range by the Gallatin Forest Partnership), while continuing to limit mechanized travel and resource extraction to existing levels. Put another way, there should be no expansion of mechanized use of the Forest in existing roadless areas.

Specific Comments:

AB #6: Line Creek area: It would seem to me that the southern boundary of the RWA (Recommended Wilderness area) in the Line Creek area could be pushed south to the edge of the existing bike trail, rather than have a relatively small RWA as mentioned in Alternative D.

AB #23 Strawberry Creek RWA: I would recommend that to avoid management conflicts, limit the northern extent of the RWA addition to the AB Wilderness to the area SOUTH of George Lake. It would be a good addition, otherwise to the AB Wilderness.

AB #93 North Shore of Mystic Lake: I have hiked in the area, and the north shore area, when viewed across the lake, is "apparently" natural and thus, should be included as an RWA.

Bridgers #34 Given the recreation pressure on the west side of the Bridger Range, I would say that the Backcountry Designation in Alternative C is probably most appropriate. However, if the Plan is going to continue the Trail Time Sharing arrangement for trails like the Middle Cottonwood Creek trail, there simply HAS to be more of a "sharing" mentality. Currently, only one day out of seven is mechanized travel-free. That is not "sharing." I fear taking my younger grandchildren on the trail, because if it is not Tuesday, they might get run over by someone. Also, on the east side of the range, there should be SOME additional trails designated as snowmobile-free in the winter.

Crazy Mountains: Some effort needs to be made to begin some land exchanges, similar to what was done in the Gallatin Range, to eliminate the checkerboarded ownership patterns. These private lands would seem to

be fairly inaccessible to anything but off-trail foot traffic. However, to aid in this process, the CGNF should recommend the unroaded areas in Polygons #36 and #37 as RWAs. If such looked like it could become Wilderness, perhaps existing land holders would be encouraged to swap for lands that would be more accessible.

Gallatin # 28: As suggested above, the political solution, sadly, is probably the Gallatin Forest Partnership plan for the Gallatin Range. Which is the alternative C mentioned in the Plan. However, There needs to be a couple of changes. First, the area south of Castle Creek and north of Swan Creek that is un-trailed and un-roaded needs to be included in the RWA, so as to minimize wildlife disturbance. Secondly, the mechanized trail up Porcupine creek to Ramshorn Lake and down Porcupine Creek needs to be relocated to the west, so as to provide a wider wildlife corridor/RWA in the area of Buffalo Horn Pass. Focusing on wildlife, in contrast to recreation, would be more in keeping with State of Montana Management goals in the general area. A suggestion would be to relocate the bike trail to the south, just upstream of the mouth of North Fork, and use lower elevation, less steep routing to come into Elkhorn Creek. This would keep the bike trail WEST of Lone Indian Peak. CGNF land east of the route would be part of an RWA.

Gallatins #62 This is an area that is immediately west of Crown Butte. I guess I do not agree with the CGNF assessment that the area would be difficult to "manage" as a Wilderness area, because there are no trails (I have been in the specific area with the late Walkin' Jim Stoltz) and the "apparent naturalness" character of the area is strong. Also, the area is contiguous with land in Yellowstone Nat'l Park that is being essentially managed as wilderness.

Madisons #12 While the area of the polygon is over 100K acres, there is Wilderness to be recommended in the area. The "solution" to deal with potential management conflicts would be to expand the Monument section of the Lee Metcalf to the north, south and west to the existing ATV and motorcycle trail. Also, the area immediately south of the Taylor-Hilgard section, west of the Beaver Creek road, and north of US 287 could be easily recommended as Wilderness, expanding the aforementioned section.

Madisons #25 It would seem that by making the area SOUTH of the bike trail as an RWA to be added to the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, it would resolve most of the potential management conflicts and make a nice addition to the LM Wilderness.

Madisons # 64, 65, & 66 This area, in Alternative D, would be the Spanish Peaks South RWA. I have hiked in the area, as it is near our friends' home, and encompasses the route to Bear Basin and part of Beehive Basin, plus the connector trail between the two routes. To me, it would be a no brainer to add this to the Lee Metcalf Wilderness and protect the area from future development. However, to resolve a potential management conflict, it would be best to remove the lower part of the North Fork Valley from the RWA, since currently, snow mobile grooming is used there for Walkin'n Jim Way by the Lone Mtn Ranch. Another approach would be to set the RWA boundary to be NORTH of the existing bike trail in polygon #66. There should be NO non-conforming uses permitted in Wilderness areas when at all possible.

Madisons #76 I have hiked the trail thru this area a number of times. The solution to the real management conflict (the bike trail) would be to set the northern boundary of the RWA immediately south of the bike trail and the recreation area. Since the area is adjacent to existing Wilderness, I would think that it would be easy to manage the resulting RWA as wilderness.