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Comments:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments and feedback on the Custer-Gallatin National Forest Plan. I live within 500 ft of this national forest boundary outside Gardiner, MT. It is incredibly important to me and my community members as a place to wander, relax, hike, camp, ski, and watch wildlife. It is where most of us go when they need a break from the stresses of daily life. We are so grateful to have this refuge for the health of our minds and bodies.

Specific to the Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan, I have the following comments:

I prefer Alternative D, because:

- it has the most proactive support for bison in the national forest
- prioritizes this native wildlife above non-native, weed transporting cattle
- maximizes the number and total area of recommended wilderness areas
- minimizes timber production
- has the best disease prevention measures for bighorn sheep
- includes wildlife connectivity components/key linkage areas

I would suggest the following changes to Alternative D:

- I do not support forest-wide exclusion of domestic sheep or goats for weed control. I think this should remain a management option with appropriate mitigation measures.
- I also think that use of existing recreation cabins should continue. These cabins should be maintained but I do not think that we need to build new ones.
- I think that Aircraft Landing Strips should be considered where they are proposed near existing roads and infrastructure, outside of wilderness areas.
- Aircraft landing strips in roadless areas should only be considered if those are deemed necessary for the maintenance and management needs of the Forest Service, not for private use.

Although I prefer Alternative D, I find Alternative C mostly acceptable because it includes a reasonable amount of recommended wilderness area and backcountry areas and includes key linkage areas. It is also generally aligned with the Gallatin Forest Partnership, which has been agreed upon by a variety of stakeholders to balance recreation and conservation. This stakeholder involvement and buy-in is extremely valuable for encouraging a sense of stewardship. I suggest the following changes to Alternative C/ the Gallatin Forest Partnership:

- Areas that are recommended wilderness areas (RWAs) in Alternative D, not included as RWAs in Alternative C should be designated as Backcountry Areas. This would bring the Backcountry Area acreage to 564,870 instead of 252,896. Backcountry Areas provide more use opportunities while minimizing impacts and limiting future development.
- I do not support an expansion of Stillwater Mines, nor do I support the allocation of Forest Service lands for the specific purpose of mining.
- Bison support should be most proactive because they are a native wildlife species. Their habitat needs should be prioritized above non-native domestic cattle. As wildlife, they are a shared resource for all Americans as opposed to the private resource of a cattle operation. Their grazing promotes the growth of native grasses and increased primary productivity overall, which benefits ecosystem health, cheaply!
- Use of domestic sheep or goats for grazing, outfitting and recreation pack animals is not suitable because of disease risk to native bighorn sheep and because of the onerous difficulties of mitigating and managing these uses in the National Forest. Agency use of sheep or goats for weed control should be considered where risks of disease transmission can be minimized.

I do not support Alternative A, Alternative B or Alternative E because it prioritizes extraction and misuse of National Forest resources over wildlife management and ecosystem health. These alternatives do not protect bighorn sheep from domestic sheep/goat disease transmission, are not proactive enough in supporting bison, exclude key linkages and have less than preferred Backcountry Areas and RWAs.

Additionally, I recommend the following changes to the draft Plan:

Riparian management zones must NOT be reduced from the current 300 ft/200 ft area in fish bearing/non-fish bearing streams. Riparian management zones and buffers are important for protecting aquatic resources, riparian associated flora and fauna and they provide important habitat linkages or corridors for wildlife in areas where disturbance to the rest of the landscape (timber harvest) is or has occurred.

Ensure wildlife connectivity in portions of the Madison, Henrys Lake, and Gallatin Geographic Area that aren't otherwise protected by the grizzly bear recovery zone. The Madisons are critical for wildlife movement to areas beyond the National Forest.

Habitat protections for grizzly bears must extend wherever population health is monitored and into areas important for connectivity.

Grizzlies and bison must also be designated as a Species of Conservation Concern.

Plan components must support a year-round self-sustaining bison population within tolerance areas on National Forest System lands.

West Pine and Porcupine Buffalo Horn backcountry areas must mirror Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area in wildlife protection and wild character plan components.

Recreational use must be monitored more extensively by area, and standards must ensure that increasing recreation is balanced with wildlife protection.

Manage existing wilderness areas in line with the 2020 Vision.

Given the uncertainties of climate change, monitoring questions for vegetation, invasive species, aquatic resources, fire, and more must explicitly assess the effects of climate change and guide adaptive management as required by the 2012 planning rule (219.12(a)(5)(vi)).

In addition to the 30 rivers recommended as eligible for Wild and Scenic designation, include Taylor Creek, Hellroaring Creek, and the South Fork of the Madison due to their outstanding wildlife values.

Thank you for considering my input. I wish you the best in your revision process and appreciate the time and hard work that has been put in to consultations and plan development.

