

Date submitted (Mountain Standard Time): 5/31/2019 1:15:43 PM

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Comments:

Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan for Pryors

The Custer Gallatin National Forest draft plan says:

"The national forest portion of the Pryor Mountains contains a unique and diverse assemblage of botanical resources and plant associations within a relatively small area. The Pryor Mountains are important for scientific study and education."

"Because of a unique convergence of three floristic provinces (Northern Great Basin, Middle Rocky Mountains, and Northern Great Plains), the Pryor Mountains are considered a 'botanical hotspot,' rich in species and community diversity. More than 400 plant species can be found here."

"Recommended wilderness areas are ... important for species diversity, protection of threatened and endangered species, protection of watershed, scientific research, and various social values."

Certainly, I hope, the Forest Service recognizes that these are compelling reasons to recommend wilderness status in the Pryors as proposed in Alternative D. Only Alternative D has meaningful recommended wilderness in the Pryors.

Backcountry designation is too weak to protect such valuable resources as Bear Canyon, Big Pryor Mountain, Punch Bowl RWAs, and an enlarged Lost Water Canyon RWA. These areas should all have wilderness status and wilderness protection. I think the four Pryors RWAs are reasonable, even moderate given the uniqueness of the ecosystems and landscapes. Wilderness designation would have little impact on the existing motorized and bike routes, and that little impact well compensated by the protection of such valuable wilderness resources!

Please protect the Pryors wilderness areas by adopting Alternative D.

Sincerely,

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