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Comments:

I have lived in and around the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem since 1978. I have made a living as a co-owner of a Wilderness backpacking guide service and as a Registered Nurse. I'm also a Wilderness First Responder. I recreate throughout the Custer-Gallatin National Forest. The primary attraction to both living and recreating in this area is the numerous tracks of unspoiled wildlands, including both designated Wilderness and unprotected Roadless Areas. The greatest threats to these wildlands are: resource extraction, population growth in surrounding areas and mechanized recreation. Intact wildlands are essential habitats for the world-class variety of wildlife found throughout the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Numerous studies show that mechanized recreation is much more disruptive to wildlife than non-mechanized forms of recreation such as hiking or horsepacking. Mountain biking is particularly disruptive due to speed, and rapid silent approaches that startle wildlife. They increase access to deep backcountry which disrupts Wilderness-dependent species, and a growing problem throughout the national forest system is a proliferation of illegal new trails that are being created by the rapidly expanding mountain biking constituency. The world-class wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem should not be compromised especially in light of increasing pressures from population growth and climate change. The Forest Service should recommend all qualifying wildlands for Wilderness designation and should manage designated Wilderness to protect maximum wildness and naturalness under the Wilderness Act of 1964. For example: numerous studies show that a maximum group size of 12 people and 8 head of stock goes a long way towards preventing damage to the Wilderness resource. Your forest plan should adopt these limits. In summary, I urge you to implement Alternative D with the following improvement: the Forest Service should support the full 230,000 acre Wilderness Proposal for the Gallatin Range as developed and supported by Montanans for Gallatin Wilderness and numerous other conservation organizations and individuals.