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Comments:

Custer Gallatin National Forest

Forest Plan Revision Team

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft management plan for the Custer Gallatin National Forest. The CGNF is without question one of the most unique and important National Forests in the country, and is a crucial part of one of the most significant temperate ecosystems in the United States and indeed the world, the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). Because of its biological significance, it is essential that preservation of the wide variety of ecosystems within the CGNF be the highest priority of the revised Forest Plan. This goal is all the more important given the increasing stress that climate change is placing on many of the species within the GYE. It is clear from the draft EIS that the best hope for preserving the ecological integrity of the GYE in our uncertain future is to manage the largest possible area of the CGNF as wilderness. Implementing Alternative D in each of the regions of the CGNF is the best strategy for protecting water and soil quality, species diversity, old growth habitat, and overall ecological function. Maximizing wilderness management will also increase carbon storage and provide the best hope for the GYE to adjust to the multiple stressors resulting from climate change.

For the last 39 years I have been fortunate to hike and backpack in many different regions of the CGNF and have experienced first-hand its remarkable wilderness attributes. Closest to home lies the Gallatin, where selecting Alternative D with 230,000 acres to be recommended and managed as wilderness is essential to protect the Buffalo Horn and Porcupine drainages, arguably the richest wildlife habitat that I've seen hiking the Gallatin crest from the Yellowstone NP boundary north to Hyalite. I also strongly support protecting the Spanish Peaks East and South, Cowboy Heaven, Buck Creek, Cabin Creek North, Taylor Hilgard, Lionhead, Cabin Creek South, Phelps Creek, and Yankee Jim Lake regions as Recommended Wilderness Areas (RWAs).

The Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness is the jewel in the crown of the CGNF where I often spend several weeks each summer hiking and exploring its countless lakes and drainages. I urge you to expand protection in the AB by including Mount Rae, Tie Creek, North Fork, Sheep Creek, Strawberry Creek, Chico Creek, Knowles Peak, Emigrant Peak, Dome Mountain, Yankee Jim Lake, Phelps Creek, Deckard Flats, Republic, Line Creek Plateau, West Fork Rock Creek, Red Lodge Creek, East Rosebud to Stillwater, West Woodbine, Deer Creek, and Mystic RWAs in the revised Forest Plan.

Over the years I have packed and hiked in several regions of the Crazy Mountains, including the Big Timber Creek, Cottonwood Creek, and Shields River drainages as well as into Campfire Lake. I urge you to preserve the outstanding natural values of the Crazies and their cultural significance to the Crow Nation by designating the Crazy Mountain RWA as described in Alternative D.

I have made two hiking trips into the Pryor Mountains and was pleased to find regions that still contain outstanding wilderness values. Please protect these by designating the Punch Bowl, Lost Water Canyon, Bear Canyon, and Big Pryor roadless areas as RWAs. In addition, I ask you to manage the Tongue River Breaks, King Mountain, and Cook Mountain areas in the Ashland district as RWAs.

In conclusion, in each of the regions I have mentioned, it is essential that you manage RWAs identically to designated wilderness areas, allowing only foot and horse travel and prohibiting any mechanized or motorized use, including bicycles.