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Greetings,

My great grandparents homesteaded along the Stillwater and East Rosebud Rivers. I grew up hiking, fishing, hunting, and recreating in Southcentral Montana. The Absaroka, Beartooth, and Crazy mountains were our playground. Family friends owned a ranch near Henry's lake - we hiked and fished there as well. As we hiked with family and friends we were disappointed if we saw another party during our trips that lasted a week or two. Solitude, getting away from it all, was part of the goal.

While attending Montana State University my friends, to include my now wife and I hiked and fished in the area around Bozeman. Again, we enjoyed the peace and solitude of the wilderness.

I returned home after 31+ years in the U.S. Army. What I enjoyed in my youth is gone today. The route from Cooke City to East Rosebud is called the "beaten path". A hike up the Stillwater from Woodbine is shared by scores of people. While it is truly great that so many people are enjoying the outdoors, the bad news is the crowds have diminished the experience. The huge economic impact of the hordes of people visiting is important and a similar huge responsibility to manage and to maintain a quality experience. Based on the numbers of visitors, my answer to "how much wilderness and wild land do we need?" is more - a lot more. We must preserve and increase this vital resource.

Some specific requests:

The Lionhead - Limit travel to foot and livestock. Approve "no action alternative A" to preserve the existing recommended wilderness and request Congressional Wilderness designation for same.

Gallatin and Madison Range - With the growing population in the area and the attraction for tourists it is critical to preserve and protect this area. Request the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn WSA be protected and designated as Wilderness. This area provides a critical buffer to Yellowstone Park. I heartily support the recommendations of the Gallatin Forest Partnership Agreement.

Crazy Mountains - Request motorized and mechanized trails be limited to existing areas. Request effort to preserve the great wild value of this unique area.

Pryor Mountains - These Mountains are surrounded by large populations in Wyoming and Montana. Preserving this area as wild area - without mechanized access is critical. Request the lost water canyon recommended wilderness area be expanded as far as possible. Request the Recommended Wilderness areas in Alternative D be implemented.

Absaroka - Beartooth area - As noted in my introduction, this area is very heavily used. It is essential to protect all existing Wilderness areas in and adjacent to the area including the additional areas as in Alternative D. Request Bad Canyon be designated a BackCountry area as in Alternative B.

Ashland Ranger District - I am not familiar with this area. Based on the proposal I request roadless areas be protected and increased as possible and areas that qualify be designated as Wilderness.

Sioux Ranger District - I am not familiar with this area. As a prairie transition area this is critical habitat. Request management as a BackCountry area as in Alternative D.

All recommended Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas - Manage as Wilderness and aggressively pursue permanent designation as Wilderness.

It is truly great so many people are interested in outdoor experiences in our public lands. The down side is the crowds are detrimental to that experience. We owe it to current and future generations to protect and increase the opportunity to have places in diverse environments to enjoy the peace, solitude, and wonder of the outdoors. . And don't forget the huge financial impact this brings to the area.

While living in Wyoming I hiked and hunted a remote piece of state land. It was a great place of escape and solitude in the prairie. It was leased for coal bed methane development. The animals disappeared, the ground was torn up, with the development came ATVs and motorcycles. It was no longer a place of quiet and reflection. "The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the pieces." - Aldo Leopold. We must seize the opportunity we have to not only save, but increase these critical resources.

Sincerely,
Maurie Petterson