

Date submitted (Mountain Standard Time): 4/28/2019 11:16:25 AM

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Comments:

We have lived, worked and recreated in the magnificent Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem for over 40 years, hiking and backpacking, x-c skiing and canoeing, camping and driving front country and backcountry roads on our national park, national forest and BLM public lands. We spend much of our time on our precious national forest lands. The health of our natural heritage is of paramount importance to us as citizens and as conservationists. We want future generations of both native wildlife and people to have access to these wild lands in a way that best preserves their ecological integrity, which includes clean air and water, critical habitat and untrammeled places free of civilization, the roar of motors and mechanized use. We value solitude and quiet, the opportunity to experience wild nature "far from the madding crowd." This is why we support Alt. D with almost 195,000 acres of wilderness for the Gallatin Range as well as additional acreage in the Madison Range and an additional 214,000 acres for the Absaroka Beartooth. We have some reservations concerning the Crazy Mountains recommendations because of the checkerboard ownership problems there but the Crazies, Bridgers and Bangtails all have important wildlife habitat and migratory routes that should be protected. We also support the Alt. D wilderness acres for the botanically unique Pryor Mountains in 4 areas; this is a balanced approach and most motorized, bike routes remain. We are not familiar with the Ashland wilderness recommendations.

We believe that the USFS has the responsibility to abide by the 2012 Planning Rule and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 to manage ecosystems for their biodiversity, according to standards (sec. 6) and that the ecological integrity of adjacent landscapes like Yellowstone National Park must also be a priority. We also believe that climate change including huge weather events and less snowpack, is a huge driver of conditions like fire on our public lands. Water is a driver of conditions and we wonder why these issues are not addressed in the alternatives.

Why isn't the Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF) using the best available science for wildlife corridors-connectivity issues? The quality of the data is so important (ie., Steve Gehman and Lance Craighead's studies of our native wildlife and the importance of corridors between protected areas to their future. We are part of Yellowstone to the Yukon corridor as well as to lands in Idaho for wide-roaming species like grizzly bears and wolverine Why were 30 species deleted from "species of conservation concern"? Bighorn, bison, grizzly and wolverine certainly qualify. 23 species of the forest are identified as threatened or sensitive by state or local agencies. What about them? The IBMP (Interagency Bison Management Plan) is outdated and biased, limits bison's migratory instincts because of the power of the livestock industry. This must end. CGNF should welcome bison.

Alt. D best preserves the ecological integrity of the CGNF while allowing for appropriate recreational opportunities on the landscape. 95% of public lands are open to motorized and mechanized use. Shouldn't our imperiled native wildlife, future generations and those of us who value traditional recreation have more places to survive and thrive? Shouldn't the uniqueness of our largest, basically intact, temperate ecosystem with all of our species that were here historically be emphasized over simply providing recreation or resources to people? Polling has shown that Montanans value wilderness and want WSAs managed as wilderness and not degraded. These places are our refuge and wildlife's home. Natural systems and wilderness are disappearing before our very eyes around the world. Please do not let this happen in our last best place.

Wilderness is the gold standard of protection for our lands, water, wildlife, air, everything we hold dear. The Gallatin Range's value for wildlife has been recognized as far back as 1910 with Gifford Pinchot. We have the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalohorn Wilderness Study Area (WSA) created in 1977 designating 155,000 acres. It must not be altered. Roadless areas must not be altered. We have the 1990s land consolidation from the formerly checkerboarded lands to allow for wilderness as a trade off for Big Sky, etc. in the Madison Range. Efforts have been made since to try and resolve the wilderness issue in the Gallatins to no avail. Everyone goes into their corner and the lands and wildlife ultimately lose. Alt. D's recommended wilderness provides 40-50 miles of contiguous land for habitat and connectivity, almost twice that of Alt. C. Backcountry areas provide little protection. Porcupine-Buffalohorn's importance to wildlife makes it imperative that it be included in wilderness recommendation. We have no problem with events like the Hyalite Bozeman Ice Festival or historic use of the Big Sky Snowmobile Trail. Wilderness boundaries could be adjusted slightly to allow for such uses.

As far as our desired condition on the landscape, the CGNF must adhere to standards (or mandatory rules) requiring management for a desired outcome. It would help to have these better laid out and more specific. We would like to see closure and reclamation of excess or illegal routes that degrade the forest's natural resources. And no airstrips because of loss of solitude and noise. Obviously, helicopter use for search and rescue, evacuation, recovery could be allowed.

We realize that Forest Supervisor Mary Erickson will make the final decision on which alternative will guide the Forest for 20 or more years to come. We also realize that she can choose to take elements of different alternatives. It is our sincere hope that she will recommend the most wilderness possible for these deserving areas (Alt. D) preserving the uniqueness of our ecosystem for future generations of both people and wildlife. Thank you.