

Alternative D is my recommendation as the best alternative for the long term conservation (wise use) of our forest resources and watersheds. The Custer Gallatin National Forest provides water to people and all living things. Unprecedented human population growth in south central and western MT increases demand for water from forest watersheds. Uses include consumption, recreation, agriculture, and timber production. Also, the changing climate is forecast to decrease mountain snowpacks and increase annual temperatures (Whitlock C, et. al. 2017. Montana Climate Assessment. Bozeman and Missoula MT: Montana State University and University of Montana, Montana Institute on Ecosystems, 318 p). Population growth with changing climate will stress forest watersheds. Managers should exercise extreme caution in allowing human activities known to impact forest watersheds.

The protection and reclamation of forest watersheds is mandated by the National Forest Management Act of 1976. Specific provisions that support Alternative D of the Draft Revised Forest Plan for the Custer Gallatin National Forest include:

1. A thorough analysis of all recreational uses that could impact forest watersheds.
2. A promotion of a sound technical and ecological base for effective management.
3. The responsibility to be a leader in assuring the Nation maintains a natural resource conservation posture that meets the requirements of our people in perpetuity.
4. Insure research is based on continuous monitoring and assessment in the field evaluation of the effects of each management system to the end that it will not produce substantial and permanent impairment of the productivity of the land.
5. Insure that timber will be harvested from National Forest System lands only where:
 - soil, slope, or other watershed conditions will not be irreversibly damaged.
 - protection is provided for water bodies from detrimental changes likely to adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat.
 - such cuts are carried out in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, aesthetic resources, and the regeneration of the timber resource.

Protecting and improving the future productivity of the renewable resources of the forest land on sale areas including sale area improvement operations, reforestation, and wildlife habitat management. The National Forest Management Act of 1976 does not exclude recreational activities from similar concern for the protection and reclamation of forest watersheds. In conclusion, Alternative D offers the best long-term option of satisfying the above mandates and promoting the natural revegetation of plant communities already impacted by mechanized and motorized vehicle access.