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First name: Bryan

Last name: Wyberg

Organization:

Title:

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: 12854 Raven Street NW

Address2:

City: Coon Rapids

State: MN

Province/Region:

Zip/Postal Code: 55448

Country: United States

Email: bryan.wyberg@juno.com

Phone: 6128491718

Comments:

I am writing to provide my comments on the proposed alternatives for the Custer Gallatin National Forest management plan.

I strongly support Alternative D, with its strong protections for all existing Wilderness Study Areas and its balanced recommendation of Wilderness to be designated by Congress.

The lands of the Custer Gallatin National Forest are close to my heart. I have treasured the many trips I have taken through the region and in Yellowstone National Park. I have hiked through magnificent public lands on the National Forest, and I am very concerned that future generations of Americans also be able to enjoy the attributes of this National Forest land without degradation or diminishment of its wilderness and raw wildness.

In addition, the CGNF provides extremely important habitat for wild animals, including the endangered grizzly bear. I strongly support the continued protection of the grizzly bear, because it needs to continue its recovery into additional wildlands, and the CGNF provides some very important connectivity to other wilderness regions, the protection of which are critical to the continued development of genetically healthy populations of grizzlies.

Finally, when one looks at the map of the Greater Yellowstone area and the wilderness areas designations surrounding Yellowstone, it is starkly obvious that there are missing pieces of wilderness that are missing. It is absolutely necessary that all lands on the National Forest that have wilderness characteristics are managed as wilderness, until such time that Congress chooses to act upon the proposals and scientifically based boundaries of additional wilderness designations on the Custer Gallatin National Forest. I strongly support full wilderness protection for not just the officially designated wilderness study areas, such as the entire 155,000-acre Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area, but also the lands that have been recommended for wilderness protection by citizens groups. It is necessary to preserve a complete web of Wilderness around Yellowstone National Park to best preserve its amazing attributes for all future generations of Americans to be able to experience.

I support Alternative D for the very reason that it preserves over 711,000 acres of wilderness through management as recommended wilderness areas that are protected from all development and motorized access until Congress has acted upon this recommendation. I support all 39 areas, including the Gallatin Range, Lionhead, Crazy Mountains, Bridger Range, Cowboys Heaven, Deer Creeks, Line Creek Plateau, Emigrant Peak, West Fork Rock Creek, Red Lodge Creek, Pryor Mountains, and Tongue River Breaks.

I want to express my love of the buttes and bluff lands on the Custer Gallatin National Forest, which I have experienced in Southeastern Montana on the many trips I have made to the Yellowstone region from my home in Minnesota. I feel that these lands are undervalued relative to their true importance to the prairie landscape and the continued conservation of important species such as the greater sage grouse. I fully support maintaining all lands with wilderness characteristics in their current state, managed as wilderness, until Congress debates and votes up or down on their designation. We must keep industrial development and motorized travel off of these lands. It is not just the mountains that deserve protection for their beauty, but the more subtle beauty of the southeastern Montana wildlands are also worthy of this as well.

I believe that there should be explicit prohibitions of all mechanized activities in all Wilderness Study Areas. I believe that it is the responsibility of the Forest Service to maintain the existing wilderness characteristics of all these defined WSAs until the Congress holds an actual vote up or down on their designation under the Wilderness Act. This means that a vote of the entire Congress is taken on a bona fide Wilderness designation.

I am a quiet recreationalist, hiking and Nordic skiing being my preferred method of access to these magnificent public lands within the Forest boundaries. As such, I demand that balanced opportunities be provided for quiet recreation - free from the noise of mechanized recreation. This means that more of the forest should be off-limits to OHV or other mechanized transportation. The majority of our public lands are open to motorized use, too much if you ask me, but I recognize that the rights of those who prefer to recreate using OHVs deserve a balanced opportunity as well. The key word is balanced, and this should include consideration that the effects of OHV use extends miles from the actual vehicle, as the sound of the motors travels miles. Therefore any changes to OHV access must provide buffers such that the areas set aside for quiet recreation are truly quiet.

Even given the positive attributes I support in Alternative D, there is room for improvement. I would like to ask that the final revision of this management plan includes the strengthening items I discuss below.

1. The entire 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range must be included as Recommended Wilderness in the final forest plan.
2. Implement the Gallatin Forest Partnership agreement, a citizen initiated compromise supported by the usually conflicting stakeholders of our public lands.
3. No trail construction or reconstruction in the currently untrammeled areas of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. I believe that it is critical to reserve these remote areas for wildlife as well as for quiet recreation.
4. Fully protect the Crazy Mountains to preserve their outstanding wilderness values, and showing respect to the indigenous Crow Nation by managing the Crazies in close consultation with the Crow Nation.
5. The final plan must provide better direction for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses by reducing the currently allowed large groups of up to 25 head of stock (horses and mules) and 15 people, a level which is clearly destructive to the wilderness values the Forest Service is legally required to maintain in the Wildernesses.
6. The plan must explicitly prohibit non-scientific predator control methods on all National Forest lands, particularly those managed as recommended or designated Wilderness.

In conclusion, please select Alternative D as the final management plan, as modified through the improvements listed above.

Thank you for including these comments in the final revision of the Forest Plan when it is released.