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First name: John

Last name: Youngberg

Organization: Montana Farm Bureau Federation

Title: Executive Vice President

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: 502 S 19th Ave, Ste. 104

Address2:

City: Bozeman

State: MT

Province/Region:

Zip/Postal Code: 59718

Country: United States

Email: livs@mfbf.org

Phone: 4065873153

Comments:

The Montana Farm Bureau Federation would like to thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on the Custer Gallatin National Forest Proposed Forest Plan. MFBF is the largest agricultural organization in the state, representing over 20,000 members [ndash] many of which are proud stewards of the Custer Gallatin National Forest. For this reason, the final management directives included in the Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan are of the utmost importance to our organization and members.

Alternative Selection

We primarily favor alternative E. However, there are management directions in other alternatives that are preferred over alternative E. The specific comments with our preferred alternative, E, and parts of other alternatives are listed below.

Recommended wilderness: We strongly oppose the designation of any additional wilderness areas in the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Such designations prevent the Forest Service's ability to effectively manage and protect our resources. Likewise, additional wilderness areas disproportionately constrain certain economic sectors, such as agriculture and timber industries.

Timber: Alternative E includes the most acres of suitable and unsuitable timber for timber production. The timber industry provides important employment, financial, and conservation benefits to local communities.

Grazing: Alternatives B and C are the best alternatives for grazing due to the additional animal units within those alternatives. Increased AUM capacity benefits the lessee, the county, as well as the United States Forest Service by increasing the amount of revenue generated from the land.

Bison: Alternative E is the best alternative for bison management as it does not include an objective for bison habitat improvement. The Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan should emphasize the importance of lessee land stewardship by minimizing impacts to livestock operations. Alternative E's guidelines certainly reflect that by favoring livestock in management actions taken to resolve bison-livestock conflicts.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on behalf of our farming and ranching members and hope you'll take our comments into consideration as you finalize the proposed Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan.