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Comments:

I support the wilderness recommendations in Alternative D of the Revised Draft Forest Plan; however, they must be improved by adding the entire 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range as Recommend Wilderness in the final forest plan.

The plan must prohibit all motorized and mechanized uses, and any other activities not consistent with wilderness protection in the Recommended Wilderness areas so as to preserve their wilderness qualities until Congress acts on the wilderness recommendations--this is commonsense protection of a delicate ecosystem that is still self sufficient and functioning.

Wilderness is rare and must be protected so that delicate ecosystem are not disrupted and or destroyed by human activity. Human activity is the primary cause of wildlife injuries and death as well as the destruction of habitat and breeding space. Any plan must address these concerns that are unique to wilderness areas. Unfortunately, the draft plan gives little direction for the proper care of the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses.

For example, the current wilderness management plans allows large groups of up to 25 head of stock (horses and mules) and 15 people in most areas that will obviously result in degradation of the wilderness ecosystem. Research shows that impacts increase significantly when group-sizes exceed eight head of stock and 12 people. The Forest Service should reduce group size limits accordingly so as to protect all Wildernesses on the forest from harm. Further, the forest plan does not address the introduction of non-native fish into wilderness lake, which is an obvious violation of the integrity of any wilderness area and will cause unintended and harmful outcomes to the lakes and surrounding watershed..

Finally, the plan must address the issue of human and pack animal feces contamination of lakes and streams on the Beartooth Plateau in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. This is an unacceptable level of contamination to the watershed and the lakes. Eliminating fish stocking would likely go a long way toward solving this problem, but additional measures must be included if needed.

Wilderness is not for human recreation, there are plenty of other places designed for just that activity. Instead wilderness should be preserved as a refuge for the animals, plants and watersheds that constitute the meaning of wilderness. Limits must be place on human access and use (especially activities like fishing in a lake stocked with non-native fish) or wilderness will be degraded to the point where it cannot sustain itself and will cease to be wilderness and just be a park for human recreation--that would be a tragedy and a moral failure.