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Comments:

The Custer Gallatin forest plan revision has the potential to close many miles of trails that are currently open to motorized use. If this were to happen it would affect a large portion of the community and their access to public lands. Consider the following reasons:

1.) Many elderly or disabled people have no way to access large parts of the Custer Gallatin N.F. without the use of motorized OHVs. Hiking any distance is often times not possible and riding/balancing on a horse can be just as strenuous. The use of an OHV with a seat belt that can be driven by someone else is often the only option for the elderly and disabled to access the back-country for recreation. Creating new wilderness areas that are closed to motorized use effectively closes those areas to everyone but the young and able bodied. This is discrimination against the disabled and elderly and could be grounds for a lawsuit.

2.) Access to public lands should reflect the uses of the people that recreate on those lands. Motorized users are a large and growing segment of the people that recreate in the Custer Gallatin N.F. However, motorized trails are being closed and restricted at every turn. I have personally seen a large segment of the motorized trails available in the Custer-gallatin N.F. reduced by at least 80% compared to what was available in the 1980s and 1990s. Meanwhile, the number of motorized users has increased dramatically. The Forest service's refusal to provide an adequate number of trails for motorized users is neglect of duty to the taxpayers. Access to motorized trails should be increased instead of decreased.

3.) The economic impact of closing motorized trails in the Custer-gallatin N.F. is significant. There is a considerable industry in Bozeman, Four Corners, Belgrade, Livingston, Big Sky, West Yellowstone, Cook City, Gardiner, and Red Lodge that depends on its income through the sale and rentals of motorized OHVs. Thousands of people travel to S.W. Montana every year to buy or rent Snowmobiles, ATVs, and dirt bikes and ride them in the Custer-Gallatin N.F. There are currently so few trails open to motorized use that they can become very crowded and the removal of access to ANY motorized trail would have significant impact to this local economy. The Forest Service must take into account the economic impact they are having on the livelihood of Montana taxpayers.

4.) One claim that has been commonly made is that trail erosion is worsened by allowing dirt-bikes on single track trails. This has never been shown to be true in a formal study. The studies that have been done on this subject show that by far the worst erosion damage to a trail is caused by cutting switchbacks and wandering off trail which is most often done by hikers and horses. Dirt-bike riders are very aware of restrictions on motorized trails and are much more likely to stay on the trail. The other thing studies have conclusively shown is that overuse of any trail by any user group will cause erosion. Therefore, the practice of closing increasingly more trails to motorized use is actually worsening erosion on the few trails that are still open to OHVs due to more users being concentrated onto fewer trails.

5. Another claim that has been made to justify the closing of motorized use trails is that OHVs are too loud and disturb the wildlife. While it is true that some pipes can be overly loud, this issue is easily solved by creating a maximum decibel level restriction on OHVs in the Custer-Gallatin N.F. There are many options available for silencers that keep noise levels down. For this reason, noise levels is not a reason trails should be closed to motorized use.

6. Finally, the Gallatin county commission's endorsement of the plan being pushed on Montana taxpayers by the GFP is nothing short of outrageous. The GFP misrepresented Montana taxpayers when they claimed that all relevant parties were included in their discussions on the Custer-Gallatin forest plan revision. They only included parties that supported their agenda. As a member of the Montana trail riders association, The 5 Rivers trail riders, and the Gallatin Valley easy riders, I know for a fact that they did not include any local motorized groups in their discussions. Furthermore, local ranchers who use the N.F. for cattle grazing, and many mountain biking organizations that would be shut out of new R.W.As were not included either. The fact that the Gallatin County commission was willing to endorse a plan that alienates so many users of the N.F. shows that are not serious about their responsibility to represent their constituents in Gallatin County.

For these reasons and others, I do not support any new Wilderness areas in the Custer-Gallatin N.F. and I strongly urge the Forest Service to do their duty to Montana motorized users by expanding motorized access to trails.