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Comments:

Greetings U.S. Forest Service,

My name is Ben, and I'm a staff member at Montana State University - Bozeman. Over the last several years I have fallen ever more in love with the wild beauty of our public lands and the adventurous opportunities they afford; six months ago I relocated to southwest Montana, excited for near-instant access to a variety of backcountry terrain.

As an ardent backpacker, maintaining the wilderness character of our local gems is important to me because the limited trail usage makes the area much more friendly to those on foot. Not only does it reduce traffic on the trails, but also preserves the sense of serenity that permeates these barely-touched natural places. As such, I would like to see roadless areas in the Pryor Mountains protected as recommended Wilderness, current Wilderness boundaries in Lionhead maintained, and roadless areas around the Absaroka-Beartooth protected as recommended Wilderness. Also, it is critical that recommended Wilderness be managed the same as designated Wilderness, so that the wildness of these places is better preserved and they are all the more likely to be formally protected in the future.

This is especially important in the Crazy Mountains, where issues with land ownership already complicate recreation and conservation opportunities. Since they are vulnerable, it will be important to protect the Crazy Mountains to preserve their outstanding wilderness values.

However, as a recent transplant to a rapidly growing part of the country, I also try to be sensitive to and aware of the pressures the expanding population puts on the CGNF. I know the increasing crowds on trails can generate friction between different user groups enjoying the great outdoors, not to mention the more serious concerns of strain on the natural environment. So, I would very much like to see the Forest Service implement the Gallatin Forest Partnership agreement. This ecologically sensitive proposal, worked out by diverse stakeholders representative of many user groups, offers a management path that is sustainable from both an environmental and "political" standpoint. It is important for outdoor recreationists of all stripes to come together in support of conserving our precious natural places, and the Gallatin Forest Partnership captures this idea.

On a related note, the Forest Service should manage the CGNF in close consultation with local Native American populations, especially sacred areas around the Crazy and Pryor mountains. It is profoundly important for the U.S. Federal Government to treat native peoples' input on land management with weight and respect, given their deep, historic connection to the land and our government's past cruel treatment.

Thank you for all of your hard work conserving and managing the Custer Gallatin National Forest, and also thank you for considering my comments on future management. I know my voice is not the only one in support of these management options and priorities, and I hope you strongly consider the opinions of us who love Wilderness Areas and believe they are the best way to preserve our beautiful natural heritage for generations to come.

Sincerely,

-Ben

