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Comments:

Comments on Custer Gallatin Forest Plan

Attn: Mary Erickson

As the deadline for input into the new Forest Plan (FP) for the Custer Gallatin NF approaches, I would like to submit the following comments. My main concerns with the new FP mostly deal with Wilderness management and boundary designation.

First I'd like to point out concerns I have with current management of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wilderness areas. As I understand it, Wilderness Management Plans are out of date for both areas. This situation should be corrected as soon as possible. I believe the new FP should set the table for new Wilderness Management Plans. If possible, these should be written within a couple years of completion of the new FP. Also these new management plans should have the following:

- \*There should be language that prohibits trail development in the most pristine portions of the Wilderness, which is designated as Zone 1 in the new FP.

- \*There should be a black and white statement that prohibits bicycles from the Wilderness. The current narrative (Section 116) addresses the "lack of suitability" of motor cycles and bicycles. This falls short of a prohibition and does not provide enough cover for the national push to allow bicycles in Wilderness.

- \*Fisheries management should be directed only towards native species in previously stocked water bodies. Expansion into non-historic stocking sites should be prohibited unless it helps ensure the viability of an endangered or threatened fish species.

- \*Language describing the quality of "untrammeled" terrain should be written to include future agency actions such as vegetation, fish and wildlife manipulation. Language for any work proposed in Zone 1 should be very restrictive.

- \*Current Recommended Wilderness designated lands in the Custer Gallatin should be managed accordingly. Any mechanized or motorized use in these areas is not consistent with the original intent of establishing them as potential Wilderness. These lands should be managed as Wilderness so as not to degrade them to a lower standard that would disqualify them from future Wilderness consideration.

In the writing of the new FP, I'd like to see the following included:

- \*I have enjoyed several trips to the Pryor Mountains when higher elevation areas have more snow and colder temperatures. Thus, I am in favor of protecting the following roadless areas by placing them in recommended Wilderness status: Punch Bowl, Bear Canyon, Big Pryor and Lost Water.

- \*Similarly, the Ashland District offers "shoulder season" recreation that is often not available in higher elevation areas.

- \*I have loved my many trips to the AB Wilderness and want to see additional protections put on these lands. Thus, I would like to see all current recommended Wilderness areas adjacent to the Wilderness

retained. In addition, as I enjoy backcountry skiing in the mountains around Mill Creek and Chico, I would like Dome Mountain, Chico and Emmigrant Peak areas placed under recommended Wilderness designation.

\*On the Beartooth Front I favor recommended Wilderness designation for the country between the Stillwater River and East Rosebud Creek. There are some wonderful streams and lakes in this country and the mid-range elevations provide fine wildlife habitat. I would also like to see additional recommended Wilderness for the Red Lodge Creek and Woodbine areas.

\*I would like to see the boundaries of the current recommended Wilderness in the Lionhead remain unchanged. I ski in this area several times each winter and I enjoy the solitude provided by human powered travel.

\*I believe the Crazy Mountains should be managed in consultation with the Crow Nation. The Crazies are sacred ground to these people and they inhabited the area for centuries before Europeans came on the scene. From a personal perspective, I enjoy backpacking in these mountains, but do not enjoy the noise and stench of motorized vehicles that are present in some parts of the range.

\*Please implement the Gallatin Forest Partnership agreement as soon as possible. Originally I favored a plan that was more restrictive of motorcycle and bicycle use. However, I now believe it is the best possible outcome in a highly contentious debate. This plan does allow for various uses and all major user groups are represented in the solution.

Sincerely,

Darcy Tickner