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Comments:

Subject: Public Comments for Custer Gallatin Forest Plan Revision Project#50185

Dear Custer Gallatin Forest Service:

Please accept the following as part of the record of public comments regarding the Custer Gallatin Forest Plan Revision Project #50185.

The National Forest surrounding Yellowstone National Park has stunning vistas, amazing wildlife, clear running streams and rivers, and ample areas where visitors can engage with the natural world. These forests provide many of us with renewed energy and relaxation that cannot be experienced elsewhere. We need these forests to sustain us and the forest needs us to sustain it in return. It's a mutually beneficial relationship that must continue.

Towns and cities just outside this National Forests and Yellowstone National Park have, and are undergoing rapid development and change brought on by an increasing human population. Other National Forests are in the same situation and have had issues balancing the protection of the forest with the demands for expanded use of the forest with regard to development, timber sales, and further recreational opportunities. My main concern is that the revised Forest Management Plan be able to sustain a healthy, resilient forest, while simultaneously providing visitors with various opportunities to experience Nature. Conflicts that arise around the uses being made of these lands must be decided with the protection of the forest as a functioning ecosystem, with all its various components (wildlife, water resources, habitat), being maintained as the top priority.

After reading through the draft revision, I support the wilderness recommendations in Alternative D of the Revised Draft Forest Plan. However, I feel that they would offer the best protection for the Gallatin Range if the entire 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range were added as Recommended Wilderness in the final forest plan.

Currently, the draft plan provides little direction for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. The current wilderness management plans allow destructively large groups of up to 25 head of stock (horses and mules) and 15 people in most areas. Research done in other National Forests has shown that impacts increase significantly when group-sizes exceed eight head of stock and 12 people. Other forests are dealing with this same issue and decisive action is required to protect these wilderness areas so that all visitors can have the best experience possible, while also maintaining a healthy, sustainable forest. The Forest Service should reduce group size limits accordingly so as to protect all Wildernesses on the forest from harm. Further, the forest plan should put an end to the practice of fish stocking in naturally fishless wilderness lakes, this activity significantly alters the area's natural conditions and is not in keeping with the idea of wilderness. Additionally, 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. Eliminating fish stocking could go a long way toward solving this problem, but additional measures must be included if needed.

I believe that vacant grazing allotments in the Wildernesses should be closed so these areas can recover and return to their wild condition.

No trail construction or reconstruction should be permitted in the currently trailless areas of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. This action provides remote areas for wildlife as well as premier areas for solitude.

Finally, I believe that the plan should 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.

I wish to thank the Forest Service for giving me the opportunity to comment on the Custer Gallatin Forest Plan Revision.

Sincerely,

LeeAnn Bennett, Forest supporter