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Comments:

Please accept my comments regarding management plans for wild lands in the Custer Gallatin National Forest.

The draft plan has little guidance for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. The current wilderness management plan allows too large groups of stock (horses and mules) and 15 people in most areas. Large groups of stock and even people can be very impactful and even destructive. 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 in the forest from harm. Groups of 9 people in other wilderness areas have proven to be less impactful.

The forest plan should also put an end to ecologically destructive fish stocking in naturally fishless wilderness lakes. Stocking in naturally fishless bodies significantly alters the natural ecosystem of the lakes where organisms susceptible to being preyed upon are adapted to live without predators. To reduce pollution, 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 would likely go a long way toward solving this problem by eliminating fishing as draw to such large groups,

Additional measures may also be needed to reduce impacts in high use areas. Vacant grazing allotments in the Wildernesses should be closed so these areas can return to a wild condition.

No trail construction or reconstruction should be allowed in currently trail-less areas of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. This would preserve remote areas for wildlife as well as a premier solitude experience for visitors so inclined.

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 Recommended Wilderness in the final forest plan.

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.