

Date submitted (Mountain Standard Time): 5/12/2019 12:00:00 AM

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Comments:

I am hereby recommending Alternative D of the Draft Revised Forest Plan for the following reasons.

I am a retired 7th grade science teacher who is an avid wildlife watcher in Lamar Valley. We own a cabin in Silver Gate which we rent out to fellow wildlife enthusiasts. We enjoy cross country skiing and hiking, i.e., low-impact uses of the land. I believe in and try to follow [lsquo]leave no trace[rsquo] best practices. In our younger years we would backpack in the Cloud Peak Wilderness Area. When we came upon off-road vehicle use areas, they were virtually impassable to us, due to the deep ruts and craters formed by the vehicles. We saw the road widened so they could avoid a mudhole, only to create a new mudhole, destroying the vegetation and leaving the area looking like a moonscape.

Wilderness areas are the jewels of our land, providing habitat to native fauna and flora. Since the wilderness with its natural inhabitants do not have a voice in debates about best use of the resources, and no concrete monetary reward for harvesting its resources, we need to protect what acreages are still in existence, which would qualify as wilderness area, before they are gone. Once they are gone, there is no way to restore them to wilderness condition. While there are no directly evident monetary rewards to keeping the ecosystem in a healthy condition, the ecosystem services provided by a wilderness area are invaluable to the health of us all. This includes carbon sequestration, water infiltration and filtering, cooling temperatures, soil erosion prevention, and peace and serenity for the hiker in an ever more frantic world.

I also am advocating for Alternative D as it promotes the well being of native wildlife, such as Bighorn sheep and bison, rather than domestic animals. I was saddened to hear that native Bighorn sheep in the area north of Gardiner had to be killed as a precaution, because domestic sheep disease had been introduced to the area, and they were worried that it would spread.

With habitat fragmentation, connectivity of ecosystems becomes more and more vital to the preservation of genetic diversity among wildlife species.