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Comments:

The draft plan has little direction for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. 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.

A big concern with the current wilderness management plans is the allowance of destructively large groups of up to 25 head of stock (horses and mules) and 15 people in most areas. Research has shown that impacts increase significantly when group-sizes exceed eight head of stock and 12 people. Management plans should be created using science whenever possible so the Forest Service should reduce group size limits to protect all Wildernesses on the forest from harm.

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. The forest plan should put an end to ecologically destructive fish stocking in naturally fishless wilderness lakes. This practice significantly alters the areas' natural conditions. Eliminating fish stocking would help solve this problem, but additional measures must be included if needed.

Vacant grazing allotments in the Wildernesses should be closed and these areas should be allowed to return to a wild condition.

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