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Comments:

To begin, I would like to address what I feel is the biggest issue in this Custer/Gallatin Forest Plan, that being that the two Forests should never have been combined. Too much space and diversity for one forest plan.

The document is not exactly user friendly. For ease of the reader it would be beneficial if each area were a separate chapter. Although it would be nice to say that I can consider each area within the entire document to carry the same weight in my thoughts it would, quite frankly, be a lie. Each person reading this document, myself included, cannot help but focus on the area of major concern for that individual. I suppose that statement is a positive thing for the people living, working, making a living, providing services and enjoying the ground give you the most insight into how an area actually functions within the forest.

Because I have lived in Cooke City for many years I am approaching this far reaching document from the standpoint of Cooke City with its surrounding massive wilderness, your statements that Cooke City is considered a "recreational emphasis" area and the limitations being placed on this physically small recreational space within the confines of the Custer/Gallatin Forest.

Within the document, under Cultural & Historic Resources, it states that retaining the historical value of any area is important and it will be done. So I have to ask, why is our mining history being completely erased? It seems that the historical value of the Beartooth Highway is more important to the forest service than the actual history of why and how Cooke City came to be. Slowly the history is being erased and we have had to focus on recreation and tourism to keep this valley alive.

We have a very small portion of the forest open to recreation that is motorized and that is what keeps this valley open in the winter months. In the summer months we have that same small area open with trails for people to access, there is space available here for more access but you will not allow it. You have taken trails away. The Forest Plan appears to be focusing on a reduction in motorized use opportunities, that is already happening. In your own travel plan you state that smaller areas for motorized use increases the effects and damage from motorized use due to an increased concentration. It appears that you want your own restrictions to put the blame for closures on the recreationalists. This is a deceptive practice on your part. Fortunately for this small corridor the influx of summer tourists also helps the economy and keeps the valley open.

At the same time we have the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness, you state "nearly one million acres of wilderness provide many opportunities for primitive unconfined recreation and solitude, though many portions of the area are untrailed and rarely traveled". Public open space that is, comparatively speaking, not used to its potential. In the document there were times I felt you didn't want the wilderness used, you want to manage it, but use of it is not stressed. And yet, you have a wilderness study area of another 388 acres that you want to manage. We do NOT need you to whittle away at our small area a few acres at a time. We do NOT need more wilderness, what we have for wilderness far outweighs the small area we have for this "recreation emphasis" area. The wilderness that is here, a million acres in the Absaroka Wilderness alone, is not used to its potential. Yellowstone National Park is to our west adding thousands of more acres to the wilderness experience, should it need to be explored.

We need to increase the opportunity for recreation within this small section of the Custer/Gallatin forest in order to keep the valley economically stable on a year round basis. We need the forest service to understand this valley.

I believe, in the best interest of this area, that emphasis should be place on Alternative E.

Thank you for your time.