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Comments:

I am a 16-year resident of Gallatin County, who first visited the area in 1990. Since that first visit, I have had the privilege to hike, snowshoe, fish and ski in the public lands in the Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF). Each morning I am fortunate to see the Gallatin mountains from my living room window. Some of my favorite experiences have been in the Spanish Peaks and the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study area (HPBH). However, two of my most memorable moments have been a visit to the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Territory and, unrelated to the Custer Gallatin National Forest, the Dolly Sods Wilderness in West Virginia. I mention Dolly Sods because it was my first wilderness experience and started my infatuation with and amazement of places so cherished by the American people that they can be set aside in their natural states for future generations.

Since moving to Montana, I have enjoyed the beauty and solitude of the HPBH, been overwhelmed by the rugged terrain of the Pryor Mountains surrounding the wild horse territory and enjoyed the recreational possibilities of the Hyalite area. These experiences have taught me to respect the experiences of others but also to recognize the continued need to preserve these lands so future generations of Americans can enjoy a variety of experiences.

Finally, as a person with a minor congenital disability, my enjoyment of America's wildest places has always been limited and is becoming more limited with age. However, I do not believe that my inability to access some of these places should be used as an excuse to destroy the solitude and peace provided by those places to others. We all age and become limited in our abilities. That does not allow us to impose our perceived needs on the nature and character of the wildest places.

#### GALLATIN RANGE

One unavoidable fact is the expected growth to those areas surrounding much of the CGNF, in particular, Gallatin County. The Bozeman Daily Chronicle reported in May 2018 that the U.S. Census Bureau predicts the population of Gallatin County could see 55,000 new residents by 2045. These new residents will create new pressures upon our public lands for recreation and resources. However, balanced against these pressures is the need and the legal requirement to protect those lands that have wilderness characteristics under the Wilderness Act. It is with this growth in mind that I have supported the Gallatin Forest Partnership Plan. After reviewing that plan, I believe it best provides for guaranteed recreational opportunities in the Hyalite area while also providing protection for the wilderness quality areas of the HPBH WSA. After reviewing the draft forest plan, I find that Alternative C contains much of the concepts of the Gallatin Forest Partnership Plan and that is why I support Alternative C as it pertains to the Gallatin Mountains.

Hiking to Windy Pass and along the Gallatin Crest has provided me the opportunity to look upon lands I can only experience from that vantage point. The peace and solitude found in these areas only enhance the experience, whether hiking only with my spouse or a group of friends. The HPBH WSA is a link between Yellowstone National Park and the Lee Metcalf Wilderness area and has a full complement of the species that were present 200 years ago. This area is also critical winter range for elk, big horn sheep and other game animals. As the habitat for these species is increasingly developed around the Bozeman and Big Sky areas, it is important to preserve what remains of their habitat. Additionally, the inclusion of the entire Big Creek drainage, Rock Creek and Tom Miner basins will ensure habitat at lower elevations for grizzly bears. For these reasons, I support the recommendation that these areas be recommended as wilderness to be preserved in perpetuity.

But, while I may prefer the wilderness experience, I understand the desire of other to enjoy other forms of recreation. That is why I understand the need for increasing areas for those other types of recreation. I believe

the inclusion of the Hyalite Recreation Emphasis Area will provide the necessary additional space for such recreation. Such an addition will allow users other options than foot or stock travel, while preserving the recommended wilderness areas for more quiet use.

#### THE LIONHEAD

I also support the recommended wilderness status for the Lionhead area found in Alternative A. First recommended as wilderness in the 1987 forest plan, the wilderness characteristics of this area deserve preservation. This area contains the only section of the Continental Scenic Trail in the CGNF. This historic trail deserves surroundings that preserve the wildlife and scenery that draws hikers to meet the challenge of completing this hike. The presence of grizzly bears, moose, westslope cutthroat trout, elk lynx and sage grouse, whether seen or unseen, only add to this experience while preserving areas for these fellow species to survive.

While the use of this area for mountain biking in the recent past may weaken the recommendation for wilderness status, the provisions under Alternative C for additional areas elsewhere for mountain biking experiences, supported by many in the mountain biking community, warrant management of this area for foot and stock traffic only which will enhance its eligibility for wilderness designation.

#### THE PRYOR MOUNTAINS

As regards the Pryor Mountains, I support Alternative D, which provides for 4 different recommended wilderness areas - Big Pryor Mountain, Bear Canyon, Lost Water Canyon and Punch Bowl. And, while I have not visited these areas, I have spent time in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Territory and visited the ice cave in the adjacent area, both of which were amazing experiences for me. In the CGNF draft plan, the Pryor Mountains are described as "contain[ing] a unique and diverse assemblage of botanica resources and plant associations with a relatively small area. The Pryor Mountains are important for scientific study and education." This description alone qualifies these areas to be recommended wilderness areas. In addition, this area has been important to scientific research and has been recognized for its scientific value by many researchers and educators. Draft Plan at 3.4. Most compelling, however, is the fact that these mountains contain a convergence of three separate and distinct ecoregions: the Middle Rockies, Wyoming Basin and the Northern Great Plains, making this a biodiversity hotspot. Only preservation of this area as wilderness can guarantee the continued existence of this ecosystem. Nothing is more likely to destroy such ecosystems than mechanical and motorized use in the area.

#### Conclusion

The task of the Forest Service to compose a forest plan that will dictate the fate of the Custer Gallatin National Forest for the next several decades appears to me to be daunting. I recognize the expertise and experience of the Forest Service staff in undertaking this task. However, the greatest challenge I see for you is the necessity to predict the future needs and desired uses of all Americans for these lands. For, these lands do belong to all Americans, not just we few privileged to live in their proximity. I appreciate the hard work of the staff of the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Thank you.