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Comments:

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Greetings,

I'm writing to comment on the Custer-Gallatin Draft Forest Plan.

My comments primarily address recommendations for Wilderness, including (most important) the Gallatin Range.

My interest and participation in USDA-FS wilderness process goes back to RARE (I, before there was a II), and I spent a career as a USDI land and resource planner. If I have one takeaway with respect to wildlands from all that time, it is that anything that isn't legally prohibited in wildlands will occur there, and some things that aren't legal will too.

This current time is the last comprehensive opportunity for real protection of our cherished wildlands in this part of Montana. Over the life of this Forest Plan, any area not recommended and managed for future designation will almost certainly be degraded or carved up for the benefit of recreation or commodity-focused groups, to the point it will never again be considered as a protected, intact wildland. In thirty years, the span of the existing Gallatin Forest plan, and likely the span of this one, wilderness resource analysis and recommendations will be looked on as quaint and irrelevant, an echo of a past age.

Therefore, this plan requires more serious consideration, and larger recommendations, for areas suitable and recommended for Wilderness designation.

The remaining, fast-shrinking wildlands are the only places left on the planet where humans can experience a "right relationship" with the Earth and its creatures, the only possibility of experiencing life, even for just a few days, as it has been for humans for several million years of evolutionary time. Wilderness must be protected for the health and sanity of humanity, and the minimal recommendations in this plan are not adequate to the task.

Specifics:

\*\*\* The Gallatin Range Wilderness should include the entire HPBH WSA and all adjacent unroaded lands, a Wilderness more than double the minimal CGNF draft recommendation for this last large, contiguous, intact, unprotected wildland in the GY Region, approximately 230,000 acres.

With the portion of the range in Yellowstone NP, it's world class, high elevation country that I've covered north, south, east, and west during multiple trips over the past two decades. The Wilderness should be contiguous through the range, including all roadless lands from the YNP boundary to the base of the north slope of the Hyalites outside Bozeman, and including the entire lower elevation roadless lands in Big Creek and the Porcupine and Buffalo Horn.

I'm in 100% agreement with the "ecological integrity" letter from the hundred or so signees published in the Chronicle, which I'm sure you're familiar with. The Gallatin Range is a national issue, not one of narrow, local recreation use concerns, like the "partnership" recommendation is based on.

I completely oppose and am profoundly saddened by such a narrow focus supported by a few conservation groups - one of which, MWA, I used to serve as local chapter president, and whose actions on this issue I utterly disagree with. The "collaborative" "partnership" recommendation deserves no more consideration than any other.

Other concerns:

--- All roadless lands contiguous to the Lee Metcalf Wilderness and the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness should be recommended for additions to the existing wilderness areas.

--- The Crazies deserve Wilderness protection, not to mention protection and expansion of public access and consolidation of public ownership. It's hard to fathom no proposed wilderness for this mountain gem of high walls, rugged peaks, and wild country lakes. The range's unique cultural significance to the Crow Tribe is another important value, one that's been a strong point of discussion in FS planning going back at least to the Gallatin Travel Plan of a dozen years ago.

--- The entire Lionhead roadless area in the Henry Mtns should be proposed Wilderness. I've managed to get into the Lionhead on foot in two areas, and the rest of this beautiful area is on my bucket list. It's a gem, perfectly suitable for and manageable as Wilderness.

--- I've spent only a few days in the Pryor Mountains, but the canyons and high open ridge country are a treasure. Their unique ecology and their cultural significance to the Crow seem to me to well deserve Wilderness status, including all the units proposed by area citizen groups (Lost Water, Bear Canyon, Punch Bowl, and Big Pryor), about 44,000 acres. Any conflicts appear minimal to non-existent; I don't see why not.

--- Please include a provision for strong and active management of recommended Wilderness areas, consistent with preservation of all of their wilderness character and value, on every acre. The entire WSA, as mandated in the Montana WSA Act, should receive the same level of protection in the interim. Forest Service management should avoid creating incompatible user group capture of any of the WSA and any of the proposed Wilderness.

I hope the Forest Service will reconsider its apparent paradigm of very little new Wilderness for the purposes of this Forest Plan. More and larger areas of designated wildlands will be a gift from the present to future generations, whose opportunities to experience wild country will almost certainly be limited to only those areas set aside, in law, for protection.

Think of your legacy for future Americans, and do the right thing for wildlands: much more proposed Wilderness, and much stronger protection of wilderness values.

Thank you for all your work on these crucial public lands issues.