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Comments:

To the Deciding Official(s), I am writing as an avid skier, mountain biker, hiker, and general conservationist to voice support for the majority of the elements presented in Alternative C of the Forest Plan Revision for the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Alternative C provides a balance of conservation and recreation, particularly in cherished mountain bike areas such as the Bridger Range and the Lionhead/Henry's Lake Mountains area.

The members of the Gallatin Forest Partnership have worked hard to promote this alternative as having something for everyone and their collaborative effort should serve as a good example for everyone.

I have been living and working in the area since 2012 and have been recreating throughout the Forest year round in that time. I have biked, skied, and hiked extensively in the Bridger, Gallatin, and Absaroka-Beartooth Ranges and place tremendous value on the range of recreation opportunities they provide. While I have not yet explored the Lionhead area, I know it is a highly valued area for mountain biking and that the bike communities of both Montana and Idaho have put a tremendous amount of work into improving and maintaining those trails. The story of the Lionhead trails and the cooperative trail work there has been very heartening. It is the sort of stewardship story that would be nice to hear of throughout the Forest.

As Recreation pressure grows it is important that the Forest takes a progressive approach to management. It is fair to say that Forest uses have changed dramatically since the Wilderness Act and the Forest is subject to a different kind of pressure than it was then. Gone are the days of widespread commercial activity. In its place we have many forms of recreation, year round, by an increasing number of people. The use of designated "Backcountry Areas", as proposed in Alternative C of the Forest Plan Revision, brings a new form of management to the Forest that is a worthy experiment. With so much usage pressure, more Wilderness is not the answer. Building more trails and roads is not a good solution either, as preserving the wild character of these places is critical. Designating "Backcountry Areas" such as the one proposed for the Gallatin Range, would limit commercial activity as a Wilderness Area does while maintaining recreation access and maintaining existing trails to a high standard. In conjunction with backcountry areas, seasonal use restrictions are another useful tool that would be nice to see on the Forest as part of a progressive management plan. Limitations on horse use during wet times of year would limit trail damage. Limitations on other uses at times critical for wild life would also be good to see. Yes, these tools take a lot more work, but I think the end result is that everyone, including the critters living in the Forest, get what they want from this style of management.

With this Forest Plan Revision, the Custer-Gallatin National Forest has a chance to set a new standard for progressive management that allows for both extensive conservation and recreation. I support the majority of the elements proposed under Alternative C for the Forest Plan Revision, especially Backcountry Areas and maintaining bike and motorized access where it currently exists.