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Comments:

Custer Gallatin Forest Plan Revision Comments

I would like to thank all the staff at the U.S. Forest Service who have worked diligently to put together all the written materials; all the public meetings; and the webinars which in sum brings us to the 4 alternatives. I also want to thank you for the opportunity to express my opinion on the alternatives.

I have lived in Bozeman for over 20 years and hiked trails and cross country skied in the Gallatin, Madison, Bridgers, and even hiked a little in the Pryors. I would like the person(s) making the final decisions about the best alternative or combination of elements in alternatives, to consider the following negative impacts on wilderness which are happening right now and will only get worse in the next 20-30 years, the expected life span of the new forest service plan.

**Population growth** We are experiencing a major influx of people coming to Gallatin County. We can safely predict many more will be coming to MT into the future. There will be more vehicles on roads, and the demand for more residential development and new roads. More people will be enjoying many different outdoor activities across all four seasons. The wilderness trails in the Gallatin and Bridgers are already filled with hikers, bikers, dogs and motorized vehicles especially on weekends. The Hyalites are called the "back yard" of Bozeman. If the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study area is designated as wilderness, it would create more control over the access and use of the land and waters.

**Climate change** We already have climate change: hotter temperatures in the summer months; huge forest fires; loss of species; and we can only expect more extreme natural disasters to come in the years ahead.

**Water scarcity** Access to clean drinking water is one of the most critical resources for our survival. In this regard, protecting the watersheds, streams, tributaries, and rivers and classifying them as Natural Wild and Scenic Rivers now would protect the ecosystems, the wild life, the aquatic species, and the people in MT.

**Inadequate federal funding** Right now there is insufficient funding to have adequate U.S. Forest Service staff to monitor, to measure, to study, to manage and to protect forest lands from illegal activities such as poaching. There is limited funding to buy equipment, advanced technology and so much more. You know this problem better than I do. **Advanced technology and motorized machines** The use of advanced technology will only increase. Drones are used now for good and not so good purposes by the public. Winters in the wilderness are no longer silent. There are many snow mobiles, newer motorized machines that can go faster and higher in the snow covered mountains. Animals are being disturbed and so is their survival. The combination of each of these negative impacts are currently stressing wilderness areas in MT and as the years go by the problems will multiply. I urge your support for as much recommended wilderness acreage as possible. For example, only Alternative D for the Pryor Mts allocates significant wilderness in the "wilderness acres" category. Also the largest number of acres protected from winter motorized recreation in the Pryors is in Alt. D. The Pryors are a small and isolated mountain range. Your report details its unique characteristics in that region and in MT.

Audubon experts say that there are unusual species of birds (for MT) that depend on the Pryors for rest and food in their migrations. Only Alt. D would substantially protect this small mountain range from over use by faster and more powerful motorized vehicles and invasive technology. Natural restoration of vegetation and animal habitat could occur. The four recommended wilderness areas: Big Pryor, Punch Bowl, Bear Canyon, Lost Water, if approved, would help to greatly protect the four eligible wild rivers. Connectivity must be a priority to protect many different species that migrate and or need large areas in which to live. Many of our mountain ranges are surrounded by roads and highways where wild animals are killed crossing them. In the Gallatin mountains, the Big Sky area is an example of animals such as mountain sheep, moose, deer, and bears who try to cross the highway to drink from the Gallatin River and are either injured or killed. More "landscape linkages" need to be created now for animals, for aquatic species, etc. before land use for roads

and private development precludes this possibility in many areas of MT adjacent to wilderness and back country. It is good to see that connectivity is equally addressed in Alternatives B, C, and D. In conclusion I support a proactive effort as much as possible for the designation of "recommended wilderness" for new wilderness in Mt. And we want to support existing wilderness areas too. "Back country" has "some" roads, "some" development, "some" motorized use and allows the development of aircraft landing strips. In the years ahead this will lead to more potential encroachment on wildlife and wildlife habitat, potential damage to ecosystems including natural water resources. The strongest protection for our natural resources, our ecosystems, and our wild life is more "recommended wilderness" not more "back country."