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Comments:

The Porcupine-Buffalo Horn area in the Gallatin Range provides exceptional value for wildlife. Since before the area was designated as a Wilderness Study Area (WSA) in 1977, the area has provided important habitat for animals including grizzly bears. This area was within the original designated critical habitat when the grizzly was listed under the Endangered Species Act (the northern boundary of the critical habitat designation came east to Swan Creek at Highway 191, and thence northeast to the creek's headwaters . . . ). The Porcupine-Buffalo Horn area is within the home range of Yellowstone grizzlies, and it is within the management unit in the Recovery Plan for the grizzly bear in the Yellowstone area. Moose live there, and Bighorn Sheep are another special species inhabiting the area, sensitive to human intrusions and needing remote and larger areas. The Montana Wilderness Association suggests the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn WSA is at the heart of the Gallatin Range, an area containing "nearly the full complement" of species there when Lewis and Clark traveled west 200 years ago.

The U.S. Forest Service went to considerable trouble to consolidate public landholdings in the Porcupine-Buffalo Horn area in the early 1990s. The Gallatin Range Consolidation and Protection Act of 1993 traded USFS land parcels near Big Sky for inholdings in the Porcupine drainage, so that wildlife would have contiguous areas in the Porcupine-Buffalo Horn, free of vacation home development proposed by Big Sky Lumber. The State of Montana recognized the area's outstanding wildlife values when they designated sections in the Buffalo Horn drainage as the Gallatin Wildlife Management Area. These investments in the interest of wildlife conservation need to be re-affirmed today.

Alternative D supports a higher level of protection for the wildlife and habitat in the Porcupine-Buffalo Horn drainages, in nearby areas, and across the diverse landscapes of the CGNF. The USFS should prioritize wildlife protections in the southern portions of the Gallatin Range, because there are so many pressures on wildlife to the north, including recreation. While mountain biking is good clean fun, moving fast and quietly through the landscape stresses animals, and seems a recipe for conflict with bears. Also, motorized use of the area has changed significantly since the 1970s, from the occasional fisherman on a Honda 100-cc, towards more riders and a more intensive style of trail riding. Motorbike riding is popular, but it conflicts with long-established horseback riding in the Gallatin Canyon area, and is a stressor for the wildlife. The excellent habitat in the Porcupine-Buffalo Horn should be prioritized for wildlife.

The Porcupine-Buffalo Horn area is a good case example demonstrating how wildlife values, including people's enjoyment of wildlife (whether utilitarian hunting, or non-consumptive wildlife watching), make Alternative D the best choice for the Custer-Gallatin Forest Plan Revision. Other nearby places would benefit from enhanced wildlife values, such as Cowboy Heaven, the Lionhead, and Cabin Creek. In other geographical areas of the CGNF, such as the Pryor Mountains (Bear Canyon, Big Pryor, and Punch Bowl areas), and the Ashland District (Tongue River Breaks, King Mountain and Cook Mountain), enhanced emphasis for wildlife conservation would result from Wilderness designations. I urge the CGNF to adopt Alternative D, as wildlife conservation is one of the most important functions of our Forest Service lands.