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Comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Revised Forest Plan for the Custer Gallatin National Forest ("CGNF").

You will quickly ascertain that my comments, unlike many (if not most) of the other comments, are not of the "cut and paste" variety that have been orchestrated by groups many of whose constituents have no interaction whatsoever with the CGNF and who likely could not find it on a map. They simply want to exert whatever influence they have over those of us who directly interact with the CGNF daily. I sincerely hope that when considering the comments you receive, those from individuals with frequent interaction with the CGNF carry more weight than those orchestrated by out of state special interest groups who have no regard for the impact the Plan may have on the local population.

I share a fence line with the CGNF. I hike daily. I hunt extensively but only with a camera - the magnificent animals in the CGNF seem to like it better that way. I do not fish except on my own property. The all-terrain vehicles that I have are used exclusively to maintain my property. I do not have a trail bike or snowmobile and do not personally care for them. I bought my property so that I could enjoy the tranquility and pristine nature of the area and am grateful that my immediate neighbor is the CGNF. I live in a county that is approximately 23% owned by the CGNF. I believe that I am entitled to comment based on the CGNF's direct impact on my family.

That said, I am troubled by portions of some of the Alternatives presented in the Plan. There are two overarching concerns that I have about potential changes to the current plan: (a) further restricting access to the CGNF (plus adding the recommendation for additional wilderness) and (b) imposing further restrictions on the Stillwater complex area. These concerns may seem incongruous considering the comments that I made above but I believe they are consistent with "the greater good" which is the point for which all commenters should be striving.

In the roughly 14 years I have owned my property, it seems to me that fewer and fewer people are accessing the CGNF from the county road that crosses my property and runs into the forest. At first glance, for a person seeking tranquility, that might seem to be a good thing - but I don't believe that it is. The CGNF is a majestic resource that should be accessed and enjoyed by as many people as possible while maintaining the sanctity of the forest. I live on the East Boulder Road and there is a USFS campground about a mile and a half from my gate. I pass that campground often and seldom is it used. It is a great spot on the bend of the river but there are essentially no services other than a pretty primitive unisex composting toilet. Whether this self-perceived impression is the norm or an aberration I do not know. I have asked people who might (or should) know about usage but no one does or at least no one will admit to knowing. If this little campground is a microcosm of what is going on in the remainder of a three plus million acre forest, then it is clear to me that rather than pursuing alternatives that limit access further to the CGNF, the Forest Service ("FS") would truly provide a greater "service" by enabling access and providing improvements - like trail maintenance and perhaps an amenity or two - to facilitate greater public usage.

As I mentioned, I am not a lethal hunter and do not snowmobile or do motorized biking. But, because I do not do any of those activities does not mean that others should be prohibited from doing them lawfully. The ugly truth is that if the FS imposes additional restrictions that further restrict activities that are now legal, many people will unlawfully pursue those activities and, due to the financial constraints on the FS, the FS will be

ineffective in stopping them. I do not know how many law/regulation enforcement folks work for the FS in the CGNF but I am willing to bet that enforcement activities decrease as the scope of regulations and the FS bureaucracy increase. We are in an area of non-existent cell service so a "neighborhood watch" kind of scenario is unworkable. By the time that a "civilian" observes a violator, that violator is long gone before FS law enforcement can arrive. If access is maintained as it is now, I believe that compliance will be greater than if access is restricted further.

About once a year, my son-in-law and a buddy or two of his hike from roughly Camp Christikon (Box Canyon) to Slough Creek in Yellowstone. This takes them across the Lakes Plateau and through the heart of the Beartooth Wilderness. I do not believe that in any of those treks they have encountered any other humans until they get near the Slough Creek Campground in Yellowstone. I fully understand preservation of resources but only if there is a future use for the resources being preserved. I know that we are attempting to preserve wilderness for the current and future generations but that seems incongruous if people can't get to such locations due to additional federal restrictions.

My second concern relates to the Stillwater complex. I am about six miles downstream from the East Boulder site. Having an operating mine upstream from me initially caused some very restless nights. But rather than judging the operation based on environment rumor/alarm, I got to know the Stillwater operation first hand. My wife has done water sampling for a local environmental group to ensure that operations are not adversely affecting the river. She and I have toured the underground operations of the mine. I have toured the mine mill while it is in operation and well as the water treatment facilities. I have become acquainted with some of the mine staff. I watch (and hear) trucks going to and from the complex daily. These efforts have unquestionably changed my initial impression of what is going on there. If ever a group of hard working people have attempted (and in my opinion achieved) to be outstanding stewards of their environmental resources as well as those that surround the complex, these people have. I truly believe that environmental stewardship and employee safety are at the top of the company's priorities because if these two objectives are not achieved, there is no operational Stillwater complex. If there is no operational Stillwater complex, hundreds of families (Stillwater employees) will be financially devastated. In addition, thousands of other families who supply Stillwater plus those in the local communities that supply those families will be adversely impacted. The social and economic fabric of our local counties will be destroyed.

I am not asking that the FS relax any of the restrictions that are currently in place governing the Stillwater complex; however, I am asking that no further constraints be placed on its operations.

I ask that you take these comments under serious consideration.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.