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Comments:

As a 15-year resident of the Bozeman and Big Sky area, it saddens me to see the overwhelming out-of-state support to turn our public lands into wilderness. I am an avid user of many of the proposed wilderness areas, whether on my mountain bike or on my snowmobile. It is a big part of why I live here to begin with. The current access that we enjoy is something truly special, but with our ever-expanding population and popularity as a tourist destination, we simply cannot shrink these areas and expect the remaining still-accessible areas to not suffer from increased traffic. If anything, we need to explore the idea of expanding our accessible areas, which is why I recommend Alternative E.

The current options to turn the Western Bridgers into wilderness is going to be devastating to the mountain bike community in the Bozeman area, where there are so many well-established, well-maintained trails. I feel like dirt bikers and mountain bikers do more than their share of building and maintaining trails, so it seems silly to restrict their access.

Similarly, the areas south of Big Sky would have consequences likely felt the most by local businesses, many of which thrive on the winter business of snowmobilers visiting our area. Less access=less visitors=less revenue for the little guys, my hard-working neighbors.

Have you traveled to Big Timber lately? Have you noticed how many residents work in the mines to the south in the Absaroka/Beartooth range? Some are people that I know personally, and I know that it could affect their lives and livelihoods if sustainable growth was halted. Similarly, many Montanans rely on timber production as their source of income. Perhaps people who don't live here just don't grasp the concept of living off the land.

I sincerely hope that Alternative E is how we can move forward with managing our neighboring national forests. It accommodates the inevitable growth we have been experiencing, allows more hard-working Montanans the ability to continue their careers as miners and timber producers, and will continue to boost Montana's growing tourism industry.