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Comments:

To the Forest Service Comment reviewers,

I would like to voice my support for various mountain-bike friendly revisions in the Custer Gallatin Forest Plan. I, like many, came to Southwest Montana to enjoy seemingly endless outdoor access while attending school at Montana State. As far as I'm concerned, there is no place in the United States that has better outdoor amenities than what we have right here out our backdoor. I have enjoyed fishing, camping, hunting, hiking, running, skiing and mountain biking in this area -- almost exclusively in the Custer Gallatin National Forest -- for the last five years.

It's incredibly upsetting to me to discover that the one activity that I enjoy most, mountain biking, is under threat in many of my favorite spots under some of the proposed revisions for the forest plan. I know that this is only a small piece of a much wider-reaching effort to maintain the health of the forest, but it's one that is incredibly important to me. I would like to voice my support for the following measures and revisions:

(1) I believe the Gallatin Forest Partnership Agreement should be upheld in its entirety. This ensures that the organizations who represent mountain bikers and other recreationist like me can have their voice heard when important decisions are made regarding our forests.

(2) Maintain access to the Lionhead area by managing it as a BCA (described in Alternative E in the recreation plan). I grew up in Idaho where, not too long ago, a similar proposal was put forth to designate an area in the Salmon-Challis national forest as wilderness which has removed access for mountain bikes indefinitely. I still enjoy this area today but I long for the day when I can ride my bike through the high peaks and rocky hillsides again. I do not want this same fate to fall upon the Lionhead region. It is a little-known treasure in this state and should be enjoyed by a variety of forest users.

(3) Continue the management of recommended wilderness areas to allow bikes. This is the most point to me personally. The alternative plans C and D threaten to remove bike access to some of my favorite trails such as Truman's, Middle Cottonwood, South Cottonwood and the upper Mystic Lake trails. Not only do I not want to see these trails closed down to bicycles, it's important to note that mountain biking in this area has exploded in popularity thanks to the expanding opportunity to ride at places such as Big Sky and Copper City.

Concentrating rides to smaller areas will only degrade the quality of trail experience for all trail users. I strongly feel this updated plan should continue to include access for mountain bikes.

I really hope that the Forest Service takes these public comments seriously when considering the updated Gallatin Custer plan to continue to include mountain bikers. We have an incredible resource in this area and I hope to never see its access revoked to the thousands of residents and visitors in this great state. Thanks for reading through my comments and I hope to see a favorable outcome with this plan.

-Aidan Weltner