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Comments:

The Custer Gallatin National Forest holds some of the best wild lands remaining in the United States. The Forest Service management priority for this landscape must be for wildlife habitat, watershed conservation, and compatible managed recreational opportunities. The draft plan comes up short, and needs to be revised in the following specific ways:

-- The Forest Service needs to commit to implementing the Gallatin Forest Partnership agreement. The management provisions endorsed by the partners represent the best way to address the crucial conservation issues facing the Forest over the upcoming decades, decades that will see more population pressure on our public lands and further challenges posed by climate change. The CGNF needs to get on board with the Partnership's well-negotiated resolutions, including the recommendation for more than 100,000 acres of wilderness in the Gallatin Range. Protection of these areas through wilderness designation is the best way to ensure that these key wildlife habitats with outstanding dispersed recreational characteristics continue as incredible national resources for Montanans and all Americans.

-- The forest plan needs to provide stronger protections for unroaded landscapes in the Crazy Mountains and needs to recommend new wilderness areas in the Pryor Mountains, including Lost Water, Big Pryor, Punch Bowl, and Bear Canyon.

-- Wild lands in the Lionhead, Absaroka Beartooth, Dome Mountain, Emigrant Peak, Chico Peak, Woodbine, East Rosebud to Stillwater, and Red Lodge Creek deserve recommendation for permanent wilderness designation.

-- The unique landscapes of Tongue River Breaks, King Mountain, and Cook Mountain in the Ashland district should be managed as and recommended for federal wilderness designation. These areas represent low-elevation landscape types with dry forest and rugged breaks that are woefully under-represented in the national wilderness system.

-- All recommended wilderness areas need to be managed as if they are designated wilderness, with only foot and horse travel and not allowing any mechanized or motorized use.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and, as you analyze the comments, please keep in mind what makes the Custer Gallatin National Forest one of the most important intact American landscapes -- wildlife, wilderness and watershed. Those are the spectacular natural resources that the Forest provides, and your job and our job is simply not to allow these resources to be degraded or destroyed.