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Comments:

My name is Scott Hancock, and my wife, Julie, and I have lived in Park County, MT, surrounded by the Custer Gallatin National Forest, for over 35 years. We would like to offer some specific comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Draft Revised Forest for the Custer Gallatin N.F. Although we have been employed as teachers, a water treatment operator, a school program director, and a property manager, the presence of the open public lands of the Custer Gallatin are a primary reason we have resided and raised our family here for so many years.

We value the Custer Gallatin National Forest for many reasons. The forest is a primary component of a diverse mosaic of ecosystems which function together as an interlocking and interdependent whole. We feel the forest should be managed to promote ecosystem integrity with particular attention to the following:

- 1) maintaining the highest sustainable water and riparian quality with full protection for CGNF wetlands,
- 2) reducing soil disturbance and maintaining its productivity,
- 3) protecting and supporting the diversity of native vegetation,
- 4) protection of diverse and interconnected wildlife habitat to support the health, genetic diversity, and security of native wildlife populations,
- 5) reducing the footprint of existing and inactive forest roads where possible and restoring the roadways to a more natural contour and native vegetation,
- 6) allowing fire to play its natural role in shaping succession in vegetation communities and in reducing the likelihood of intense burns over large areas of the forest,
- 7) providing maximum opportunities for quiet and slow nonmotorized and nonmechanized recreation (including the exclusion of airstrips and landing facilities) in a composite of solitude, high quality water and undisturbed soil resources, and wildlife habitat.

Some more specific comments:

The Pryor Mountains Geographic Area:

The Pryors exhibit a unique panoply of ecosystems within the CGNF - extremely rich in its native plant species and diversity due to the intersection of major botanical biomes as a result of its location and geology.

*We heartily support the establishment of designated Recommended Wilderness Areas for four specific areas of the Pryors - Bear Canyon RWA, Punch Bowl RWA, Big Pryor Mountain and expanding the Lost water Canyon RWA- consistent with the land use laid out by Alternative D for the Pryors G.A.

*Julie and I are not in favor of a Backcountry designation for these four areas of the Pryors because such management is too arbitrary and subject to change. We do not want to see motorized or mechanized recreation in these areas - ever. The use of trailbikes and mountain bikes will be eclipsed by newer technologies in the future, and the Pryors deserve long-term codified protection from such disruptions and intrusions. Our reading of the Plan indicates wilderness designation will only reduce available motorized trails by 5 miles and mechanized trails by 6 miles. We all know there are plenty of other areas and trails available for these uses elsewhere in the Pryors and south central/east Montana. Designation of the above four areas as Recommended Wilderness therefore represents a balanced plan for the Pryor's future.

*We want our children and their families to be able to hike, bird-watch, and study this special area quietly into the future. Eastern Montana, with its unique ecosystems within the USFS's Northern Region, needs more

designated Wilderness Areas and these four areas will begin to provide such public opportunities as human impacts expand regionally.

*Aircraft landing strips and facilities should not be allowed (except in cases of dire emergencies) in any part of the GCNF in the Pryors—simply too disruptive to their wildland nature and wildlife.

The Crazy Mountains:

*Julie and I believe that motorized and mechanized backcountry travel is inappropriate and should not be allowed and that as much of the Crazies as possible should be managed and designated as a Recommended Wilderness Area. Our family has backpacked, fished and climbed throughout the Crazies and their wilderness character is undeniable. Our personal experience along upper Sweetgrass Creek has shown us this is prime, although isolated, wolverine habitat and that mechanized and motorized recreation in the Crazies will greatly diminish its suitability for these rare mammals. The use, speed, and noise of mountain bikes (and illegal motorbike incursions) in Trespass Creek and related drainages is not compatible with the wild nature of the landscape. Technological advances (some unimaginable at this time) will only amplify and expand the disruptions. "Backcountry" designation will not protect these areas adequately for current and future generations of wildlife and people.

*The patchwork/checkerboard land ownership pattern in the Crazy Mountains does not lend itself toward efficient or desirable public access and wilderness management. We recommend that the CGNF work to consolidate USFS land in the Crazies to improve access for non-motorized and nonmechanized recreation. Until consolidation of checkerboard land ownership patterns can occur we believe the CGNF portion of the checkerboard should be managed for both nonmotorized and nonmechanized recreation only to help insure wildlife security and wilderness values for future generations.

*Until the Crazies receive official Wilderness Act status, no mining should be allowed, no new roads should be constructed (including access to new recreation sites and facilities), and energy /utility corridors should not be allowed.

*Again, no aircraft landing strips or facilities should be allowed in the GCNF lands of the Crazies.

The Gallatin Range:

The Gallatin Range forms much of the western boundary of our home - Park County. This is wild country, and most of it should remain that way. Opportunities for solitude and wildlife security and connectivity exist in the Gallatins but these factors could be greatly enhanced by further Wilderness protection.

*As Park county residents Julie and I believe that the Gallatin Range offers extremely valuable wildlife habitat, security and connectivity, protection for high standard water quality, and the potential for high quality wilderness solitude and values. The majority of the Gallatin Range should be included in the Gallatin RWA.

*We are pleased to see that Alternative C offers wilderness protection to the Gallatin Recommended Wilderness area, but we feel it does not go far enough. We feel that both the Buffalo Horn Backcountry Area and the West Pine Backcountry Areas should be included in the Gallatin RWA as set up in Alternative D. These two areas deserve wilderness status that excludes motorized and mechanized recreation. For the last two decades I have hunted in the West Pine area and I have witnessed the negative effects motorized trail bikes and ATVs have on wildlife security, horse and mule travel, and hunting solitude. Likewise, in numerous day hikes up Tom Miner further south in the Gallatin we have been disturbed by motorized trail and mountain bikes coming up to the divide above Tom Miner from the Buffalo Horn area and traveling along the divide trail towards Ramshorn Peak. In backpacking up Rock Creek on the east side of the Gallatin and north of Tom Miner we have witnessed motor bike incursions into the nonmotorized area E of the Gallatin divide from the Ramshorn-Buffalo Horn areas W of the divide. These incursions have a significant negative impact on the moose, bighorn sheep, and grizzly and black bear (& wolverine) populations in the area, damage the integrity of the trail system and promote trail erosion and degradation, as well as a profound deleterious effect on the solitude and wild nature of this portion of the Gallatins. Designation of these two areas as Backcountry Areas does not provide adequate protections to these wildlands; only prohibiting motorized and mechanized recreation and travel in both the Buffalo Horn/Ramshorn and West Pine areas will provide long-term (think decades and centuries, if possible) wildlife connectivity and corridors, sustainable soil and water quality, and increasingly hard-to-find solitude. Again, the Gallatin Recommended Wilderness should also include West Pine and Buffalo Horn.

*As frequent hikers and skiers up the East Fork of Hyalite Creek to the basin holding Emerald and Heather Lakes, we believe this drainage should be designated as both nonmotorized and nonmechanized areas -

preferably included in the Gallatin RWA. The staggered scheduling separating motorized use, mountain bikes, and hikers limits multiple-night use and has a negative effect on trail and soil conditions.

* We feel that the Storm Castle Creek trail from its current trailhead east to Hyalite Lake should likewise be included in the Gallatin RWA. We have seen the degradation of trail and soil conditions due to motorized and mechanized use on this trail, and we feel these recreational uses should be prohibited from this drainage. A mountain bike passing by on the trail can cause conflicts with hikers, stockusers, and wildlife. My family includes avid mountain-bikers and they recognize there are innumerable areas outside of these wilderness-appropriate public lands on which to ride.

*No aircraft landing strips or facilities should be allowed in the CGNF lands of the Gallatin Range except in a case of dire emergency. Aircraft landing and low-altitude flights are simply too disruptive to wildlife and other core wilderness values.

The Absaroka-Beartooth Mountains and Wilderness:

Living where we do in Park County, MT, our family spends more time in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness than in any other area of CGNF, and we value the presence of these designated wilderness public lands and the foresight which established that status decades ago

*We strongly recommend the addition of the following Park County locales of the CGNF to be added to the A-B Wilderness: Emigrant Peak, Chico Peak, and Dome Mountain. As a frequent climber of Emigrant and Chico Peaks, I believe these areas need full wilderness protection. This protection should extend as close to the Gold Prize Creek Trailhead as possible up Six Mile Creek and should include the Balm of Gilead and adjacent drainages below Chico Peak. Having hunted The Dome Mountain area, both successfully and unsuccessfully, for over twenty years, I would like to see the solitude, wildlife and wild nature of this landscape receive permanent Wilderness protection free from mechanized and motorized recreation. Foot and horse travel are appropriate; mountain bikes, trail bikes and ATVs are not.

*In addition, we also feel that Red Lodge Creek and Stillwater to East Rosebud acreage along the northern Beartooth front also be added to the AB Wilderness. Having hunted and hiked these lands, we can attest to their wild nature and the importance of these ecotones to biotic diversity. Mechanized and motorized travel should be prohibited from these wildlands forever.

*Again, landing strips and aircraft facilities should not be allowed within or adjacent to the A-B Wilderness. Noise intrusion and the potential for abuse make such facilities detrimental to the wilderness nature of these wildlands.

*As an established Wilderness Area with visitor use increasing notably, the CGNF should bolster efforts in the A-B to educate (and enforce where feasible) the public regarding no-trace/minimum impact practices. Specifically, we would like to recommend that group size for camping and travel be limited to no more than 12 people total and no more than eight head of stock where appropriate. Certain areas cannot tolerate even these numbers, but eight head and twelve people can provide a legitimate wilderness wide standard. Education and enforcement (where possible) of the public (including outfitters) as to 200 ft minimum camp setbacks from lakes and 100 ft minimum camp setbacks from streams and rivers should be a priority.

We thank the Custer Gallatin National Forest and its forest planning staff for their efforts in planning for the future. Thank you for careful consideration of our comments and for all thoughtful public input. We look forward to seeing what decisions and perspectives evolve as the CGNF plan moves forward. Thanks again!