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Comments:

In general, I support alternative D, with the caveat that the Wilderness recommendation for the Gallatin Range should be upgraded to reflect the boundaries of the 230,000-acre Wilderness proposal developed by Montanans for Gallatin Wilderness, and supported by many dozens of individuals and organizations.

An intact Gallatin Range is crucial to the health of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), and this world-class wildland should not be compromised in order to mollify self-interest mechanized recreation groups. The Gallatin Range is the only major mountain range with no designated Wilderness in the GYE that's within and/or adjacent to Yellowstone National Park. Half of the Gallatin Range acreage is already "roaded and developed", so the area's wilderness characteristics have already been (over)compromised.

In particular, the Porcupine and Buffalo Horn drainages and adjacent areas must be included in any Wilderness recommendation, for these areas are the biological heart of the range, connecting the bulk of the wildland with Yellowstone. This is crucial both for regional connectivity and for maintaining quality habitat for bison, grizzlies, and many species native to the GYE. It also provides winter range for a number of ungulates and habitat for an elk migration corridor.

As you know, the so-called Gallatin Forest Partnership (GFP) excluded from its Wilderness recommendation this crucial habitat in the Buffalo Horn and Porcupine drainages; but the GFP is an illegitimate entity. That's because it intentionally excluded all groups and individuals who were not inclined to further compromise the wildness of the Gallatin Range. I urge you to ignore their recommendations.

In general, although alternative D is the best of your offered choices, I urge you to also consider the following ideas/suggestions. First, eliminate the use of all vehicles, including mountain bikes, off road on the national forest. There are plenty of forest roads upon which folks can play with their machines. Just because an off-road contraption is invented does not mean that public land agencies should allow them off-road on public lands. First it was the jeep; then the snow-machine and dirt bike, then the mountain bike; now we have e-bikes and over-snow "fat bikes". And drones! When will it end? Pretty soon someone will invent a jet pack that can plop you down 21 miles from the nearest road in the Thorofare country, without requiring an ounce of human sweat. Must the Forest Service accommodate this? Or maybe someone will invent an off-road electric-powered skateboard with big rubber tires. It is time to stop pandering to the lowest common denominator of machine-oriented recreation on public lands. Keep machines on roads, where they belong. Do not cater to those who respect little beyond their own recreation preferences.

Values: We live in an era of expanding (over)population, a climate change crisis, and a global biodiversity crises fueled primarily by habitat destruction and fragmentation. The Forest Service has a responsibility to not only avoid exacerbating these problems, but also to reverse them wherever feasible. Resource extraction must be minimized in the GYE. The primary values of the GYE are wildness and wildlife. There simply is no other place like it. It is important to realize that public lands are not protected without actual statutory protection. And Wilderness designation is, by far, the most reliable protection that we have in 21st century America. Wilderness areas, including the iconic Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, should be managed to maintain and restore wilderness character, under stipulations of the Wilderness Act, no exceptions. In addition, the Custer-Gallatin National Forest should institute a forest-wide study to identify unnecessary roads and close and rehabilitate them in order to restore wilderness characteristics to as much land as possible. In summary: Protect all roadless areas, eliminate mechanized off-roading, protect and restore wildlife corridors, protect wilderness character in designated Wilderness, and manage the forest primarily for the wildlife and wild humans that have no alternative habitats to the public lands for both survival and sanity. Private lands simply do not provide for these values. Public lands should be managed primarily for protecting and restoring natural values and wildness.

