

January 6, 2017

Attn: Forest Plan Revision,  
Custer Gallatin National Forest,  
10 E Babcock, P.O. Box 130,  
Bozeman, MT 59771

Dear Forest Plan Revision Team;

Please accept these comments from me on the Draft Assessment of Existing Conditions and Draft Preliminary Need to Change document on behalf of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies and Native Ecosystems Council.

For grizzly bear habitat, the current Custer National Forest does not have a Forest Plan standard for total motorized access route density in over 2 mi./mi.<sup>2</sup>, but the limit on the Flathead National Forest is 19%.

The Custer National Forest does not have a Forest Plan standard for secure habitat, but the minimum required on the Flathead National Forest is 68%. The State of Montana's "Grizzly Bear Management Plan for Southwestern Montana 2013 Final Programmatic EIS recommends that land-management agencies manage for an average open road density of one mile per square mile or less of habitat." Likewise, the 1985 Biological Opinion/Incidental Take Statement for the Custer Forest Plan requires a road density of less than or equal to 1.0 mi./mi.<sup>2</sup> in all occupied grizzly habitat on the Forest.

In the past 30 years, grizzly bear distribution on the Custer National Forest has significantly changed. Grizzly bears now regularly occupy areas on the Custer National Forest where logging and grazing occur. This is a significantly changed condition.

Despite the movement of grizzly bears out of the Wilderness and into areas that allow commercial logging and grazing, the Forest Service has

not reinitiated consultation with the FWS on the Forest Plan to assess the impact of contemporary Forest Plan implementation on threatened grizzly bears. Please do so.

The agency has repeatedly represented to the public that there are no Forest Plan standards to protect grizzly bears in these areas:

- “There are no standards for motorized route density inside or outside the Recovery Zone;”
- “There are no standards in the Conservation Strategy for management of grizzly bears outside of the [Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone;”
- “There are no ‘standards’ for road density for grizzly bear as a listed species. The conservation strategy standard (adopted as a forest plan amendment but only binding if the bear is delisted) is to maintain secure habitat at or above 1998 baseline levels within the Primary Conservation Area (PCA). The project area is OUTSIDE of the PCA. There are no standards in the conservation strategy for habitat outside the PCA (see also response to 276d).”

Adverse impacts and unpermitted take of grizzly bears are likely occurring in these areas of occupied grizzly bear habitat for which there are no standards and no forest plan consultation.

The agencies must reinitiate and complete consultation on the impact of Custer Forest Plan implementation on grizzly bears where they occur today.

The Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest and Gallatin National Forest have already re-initiated consultation on their forest plans to address contemporary grizzly bear distribution. In 2010, the Kootenai National Forest was court-ordered to reinitiate consultation on the impacts of its forest plan on contemporary grizzly bear distribution.

Alternatively, if the 1985 Biological Opinion/Incidental Take Statement applies to all occupied grizzly habitat, then the Forest Service must designate Management Situations for all current grizzly habitat on the Forest and implement the management direction required under the Guidelines. Where an area is occupied grizzly bear habitat the Forest Service must designate the area as Management Situation 1 because grizzly use of the area is common, and the agency must demonstrate Project area compliance with the road density standard for Management Situation 1, which is 1.0 miles/square mile open road density.

The best available science Schwartz et al (2010) acknowledge open road density as a key factor that impacts grizzly bears.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely yours,

Michael Garrity  
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and for

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