
File Code: 1920
Date: April 15, 2021

Dear Objectors and Interested Persons:

This is my response to the objections filed on the draft record of decision for the revised Custer Gallatin National Forest Land Management Plan prepared by Forest Supervisor Mary Erickson.

The draft record of decision, land management plan, and associated environmental documents were published on July 9, 2020, initiating a 60-day objection filing period. Eligible objectors filed 677 timely objections. Comments received from 1,199 individuals that did not meet the objection filing requirements were forwarded to the Forest Supervisor for consideration in making the final decision. I also received requests to participate in the resolution meetings from 72 eligible interested persons. All eligible objectors and interested persons will receive notification of my response. The objection response, plan, environmental impact statement, and draft record of decision can be found via links on the Custer Gallatin National Forest website at: www.fs.usda.gov/CusterGallatin.

I conducted my objection review in accordance with the pre-decisional administrative review process described in the Code of Federal Regulations at 36 CFR 219 subpart B. The intent of this step is to allow interested individuals and organizations an opportunity for an independent review and to resolve issues before plan approval.

After an initial review of the objections, I held 3 days of resolution meetings with objectors and interested persons to discuss a subset of the issues and explore opportunities for reasonable solutions to conflicting views. The meetings focused on eight topic areas including management of several geographic area land allocations, sustainable recreation, timber harvest and livestock grazing, general wildlife concerns, bison, and the identification of species of conservation.

The discussions at the meetings helped me fully understand the issues and remedies suggested by some of the objectors from their differing perspectives. I appreciate the time offered by all the participants, and the willingness to have open, candid discussions. I encourage the objectors, interested persons, and the responsible official to continue to engage with each other during implementation of the revised plan.

The objections covered a broad range of resource management and public use concerns and many were similar enough to consolidate under topic areas. The planning regulations require a written response to the objections that sets forth the reasons for my response; however, this response need not be point by point. Therefore, all objections have been consolidated into one set of issues.



This response is the outcome of a deliberative and extensive review of concerns raised by objectors involving complex regulatory and management issues. My response reflects my findings from review of the planning record, the objections, the discussions with objectors and interested persons at the resolution meetings, and follow up discussions with the responsible official in the context of law, regulation, and policy. Although some issues raised in the objections are not specifically cited in my response, all objectors' concerns have been considered.

Objections regarding the identification of species of conservation concern were forwarded to the Chief of the Forest Service for review. The response from her delegated representative can be found on the Northern Region's website:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r1/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd500402>.

I have complied with the reviewing officer's instructions and have reconfirmed the species of conservation concern identified for the Forest. I would like to acknowledge the very high level of interest in identifying bison as a species of conservation concern. I asked my staff to thoroughly review the scientific literature provided during the objection period as instructed by the reviewing officer to ensure I had considered all relevant factors. However, my conclusion remains unchanged and I have determined bison do not meet the Agency's criteria to be identified as Forest Service species of conservation concern. The updated documentation can be found on the Northern Region's website cited here, along with a frequently asked questions document that may answer questions about the identification process.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the Forest's planning effort over the last several years. If you have questions concerning the processing of your objection, please contact the regional planner, Timory Peel at timory.peel@usda.gov.

This letter and the detailed review posted at www.fs.usda.gov/CusterGallatin document the completion of my objection review. Once my instructions have been addressed and she has completed any other changes to the final plan in response to the objections as per her discretion as responsible official, Forest Supervisor Erickson will sign the record of decision approving the Custer Gallatin National Forest Land Management Plan. This written response is the final decision for all objections to the revised plan and is not subject to further administrative review by the Forest Service or the Department of Agriculture.

Sincerely,

LEANNE M. MARTEN
Regional Forester

cc: Mary Erickson, Julie Schaefers