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First name: Anne

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Alternative D: Wilderness without mechanized travel All of the existing scientific studies indicate that while mountain biking, like all forms of recreational activity, can result in measurable impacts to vegetation, soil, water resources, and wi...

Regarding the Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan, I am in favor of wilderness, I am in favor of biking, and I am opposed to bikes in wilderness!

I ask you to support Alternative D, with as much wilderness as possible, at least 230,000 acres of wilderness, just the amount of a single large ranch holding in the state. I ask that you ban bikes, mountain bikes, motor bikes, bicycles, and other mechanized vehicles, in the wilderness. The forest has plenty of trails for bikers outside the wilderness study areas that should be protected with wilderness status.

I ride my bike - a 1979 Bickerton folding bike - on some trails not in any wilderness or wilderness study area. I am an old woman on a little old bike moving slowly along wide trails and not threatening anyone. But I cannot hike trails in the Custer Gallatin National Forest that bikers frequent because their speed endangers my safety, and their number is sometimes overwhelming. I don't hike to play dodge-the-bike once much less over and over again. There are many thousands of miles of public trails available to bikers. Closing wilderness areas to bikers merely protects the wilderness character, the very wilderness designation, from the disruption caused by bikes. Closing wilderness areas to bikers still leaves bikers with many, many miles of trails open for their use, and my use.

"To just say there's no impact is ridiculous because there is some. How much that is, is a matter of debate. Any human presence on the landscape has impacts on the wildlife. But when you have people that are moving fast and covering more ground, you're going to have more impact," said Phil Knight in a recent interview on Yellowstone Public Radio, transcript attached.

Furthermore, it has long been noted that bikers add to cumulative impact of human use on the outdoor environment. "Trail use in the last ten years has seen a dramatic increase in off-road bicycles. In many cases off-road bicyclists use the same trails as hikers, horseback riders, and motorcyclists, so that this additional use compounds erosional concerns," according to a 1994 study ("Erosional Impact of Hikers, Horses, Motorcycles, and Off-Road Bicycles on Mountain Trails in Montana," by John P. Wilson and Joseph P. Seney, in Mountain Research and Development, Vol. 14, No. 1 February 1994, pp. 77-88).

Later studies noted "trail impacts such as erosion from skidding, linear rut development, user conflict and the addition of unauthorized constructed features to existing trail networks. In addition, a number of off trail impacts were identified including the creation of informal trails, creation of constructed features (technical trail features) along with reduced amenity. There is potentially a significant cost associated with this when management has to respond to such impacts. Furthermore, multiple linear rut incision, the systematic addition of technical trail features and informal trail development with amended trail surfaces are mountain bike specific impacts (Davies and Newsome, 2009; Newsome and Davies, in press)." That is from "Comparing hiking, mountain biking and horse riding impacts on vegetation and soils in Australia and the United States of America," by Catherine Marina Pickering, Wendy Hill, David Newsome, and Yu-Fai Leung, in Journal of Environmental Management, Vol. 91, 2010, pp. 551-562.

Brian Horejsi reviewed how mountain biking can have substantial impacts on wildlife. He wrote specifically about the bikers' impact on bears: "The basic science solidly supports the general claim that bikers and bikes are displacing bears, can contribute to their habituation and are consequently adding negative load on human / wildlife conflict." That is from "Mountain Biking Impacts on Bears and Other Wildlife by Brian Horejsi," Wildlife News, August 5, 2014, online at <http://www.thewildlifeneews.com/2014/08/05/mountain-biking-impacts-on-bears-and-other-wildlife-by-brian-horesji/>

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The question has been asked before: ""Will we keep some parts of the American landscape natural and wild and free - or must every acre be easily accessible to people and their toys?" Brian O'Donnell and Michael Carroll asked that and answered, "Mountain bikes' impacts on the land are large and getting worse. ... The aggressive push of mountain bike organizations to build ever-growing webs of trails poses serious problems of habitat fragmentation, increased erosion, and wildlife conflicts." The quotations are from O'Donnell and Carroll, "Don't Tread Here," Wild Earth, Vol.13, No.1, 2003, pp.31-33, copy attached.

In a systematic review of the research to date (2004), " Mountain bikers have turned to scientific research to try to make mountain biking seem less harmful, and in particular, to studies comparing it with hiking. Although they have interpreted this data as indicating that mountain biking impacts are no greater than those of hiking, a more careful look at these studies leads to the conclusion that mountain biking impacts are actually several times greater than those of hikers." ("The Impacts of Mountain Biking on Wildlife and People: A Review of the Literature," by Michael J. Vandeman, Culture Change, July 3, 2004, culturechange.org/mountain_biking_impacts.htm

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Little has changed since that 2004 review. There are more studies, more evidence of mountain bikers' negative impacts on the environment, more denials from the bikers. But evidence is what should influence the decision to ban biking and other mechanized vehicles from wilderness! As wildlife biologist Frank Lance Craighead wrote,

"The amount of disturbance to wildlife caused by trail users is greatest from all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) or off-road vehicles (ORVs) followed by mountain bikes, horseback riders, and hikers according to most existing studies. ... Disturbance due to human activities reduces the amount of habitat available for use by wildlife, increases stress, and depletes energy reserves, thus reducing the carrying capacity of the habitat: the best habitat for wildlife is found in areas with the least human disturbance."

That is from his study of "Wilderness, Wildlife, and Ecological Values of the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area," copy attached.

Yes, there are studies that argue for responsible, "environmentally friendly" biking but fail to compute the management costs of minimizing bikers' negative impacts on vegetation, soil, water, and wildlife. Those studies do not acknowledge the limited budgets, manpower, and other resources to enforce the necessary restrictions for

environmentally friendly biking in a wilderness, which, I think, is a contradiction. Restrictions do not yet exist for that, enforcement does not exist for that, and combination of restrictions and enforcement would only lessen rather than remove harmful impacts of biking in a wilderness.

Please note: As a licensed private pilot, I also oppose airstrips in wilderness areas. I have experienced the joy of landing and taking off from grass strips, but I do not see the need in a wilderness area for the machines, noise, and luggage - gas grills, pets, etc. - associated with flying into backcountry strips, and there are plenty of backcountry strips outside of designated wilderness study areas and designated wilderness.

I ask you to support Alternative D with at least 230,000 acres of wilderness and to ban bikes, mountain bikes, motor bikes, bicycles, and other mechanized vehicles, in the wilderness.

Sincerely,
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