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Comments: USFS Planning

I found your meeting in Livingston a very helpful event to engage the public and help us learn about both the process and the proposals. What most helped me from that was understanding the flexibility of the decision makers to pick and choose appropriately from the alternatives. With that in mind I don't feel a need to recommend one or the other but rather to provide the perspective I have developed living, working and playing in this forest over the past 40+ years.

Background : I began using these lands in 1980 as a student at MSU where my studies included the famous "Conservation" course by Dr. Don who opened my eyes to the issues facing these public lands. Soon I became a fishing guide and outfitter spreading my use commercially throughout the region and attained Forest Service Use Days and the responsibility that goes with them. In the off season I planted trees on the forest. For winter, I began working for a USFS partner, Bridger Bowl which I continue today and about that time I married a woman working for the Gallatin Forest Service. As a family came along we spent the next seven years managing a ranch with responsibility for over 3000 acres in the Crazy Mountains surrounded by national forest and learned about being a USFS neighbor and the processes of change with land swaps and gifting. Following that we have spent that past 18 years managing a similar ranch within the National Forest and backed up to the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness where we raised our son and continue to live and work today. Throughout these years we have visited similar and different forests throughout the world, often holding up our home forests for comparison.

My Comment: With age, comes multiple and changing perspectives that enhance the view of the big picture and the future, through experience over time and the variety of places one visits and revisits. I see the future management of this forest benefiting immensely from the great management in the past with Wilderness Areas and River protections being the key ingredients. These were the hold off development decisions that have created the unspoiled areas we and people throughout the world come to treasure. With Yellowstone Park as a neighbor, perhaps the protections allowed the Gallatin Forest were easier than for other parts of the country as such a great example was so close. However, with today's Park overuse and the overflow into the National Forests we need to provide for the inevitable increase in forest use but not lose the big picture reason behind it all, that they come to see the forest, the animals, the rivers, nature, not the commercial ventures that lure them along the way. With those commercial distractions I should suggest the exclusion of motorized vehicles where a natural environment is desired. Like children whose parents restrict their cell phones on a hike, ATV users come to appreciate the line where though they may use them to get to a point, eventually they must leave their machines behind to appreciate what lies beyond. My solution to provide the motorized users with a venue is to develop specific ATV use areas as was done at Wicked Creek rather than allow general access throughout the forest. With the mechanized, I see bicycles and e-bikes as a tougher issue. As the e-bikes begin an expected huge increase in use, now is the time to set and that might mean curb, expectations by implementing regulations beyond that of a regular bicycle. An avid cyclist myself I feel current regulations are acceptable with improvements on existing trails a way to provide more rideable terrain including linking existing trails like the West Pine area.

For the reasons mentioned above it might be obvious that I would choose Alternative D for its progressive thinking about the importance of Wilderness acreage. However in considering the politics of appeasing a wider group of interests instead I accept Alternative C knowing that good choices can still be made to incorporate elements of the other alternatives as needed.

Finally I would like to take this chance to address an issue brought up at the Livingston meeting. That of making

a Forest Plan that can be administered within an expected budget. Being realistic about that is certainly important as a plan without financing is futile. However the size of the explosion of interest in utilizing this national forest is not very predictable. That it will be big however is fairly certain. Beginning with the local users and businesses that are supported by the forest use and going on to the foreign tourist or Go Pro software editor thousands of miles away, there will be a demand for financial support for this plan so don't be timid about going big.

Thank you for considering my suggestions.