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First name: Chuck

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Organization: Save the Yellowstone Grizzly

Title: Director

Comments: Dear Mary C. Erickson and the Forest Plan Revision Team,

Save the Yellowstone Grizzly is in support of Alternative D in the Custer Gallatin National Forest revision plan. Alternative D provides the best opportunity to create the most secure habitat for the Yellowstone grizzly bear. The Yellowstone grizzly is threatened by the effects of climate change, lack of secure habitat, high mortality rates, genetic isolation, lack of connectivity, declining food resources, and human intolerance. Protecting the needs of the grizzly on the national forest adjacent to Yellowstone is of great benefit to the health of the entire Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and will allow the grizzly safe passage to connect with the grizzlies in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem.

Endangered Species Act

The grizzly bear was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1975. The Endangered Species Act empowers the Custer Gallatin National Forest with a mandate to help recover threatened and endangered species. We ask that you manage for the Endangered Species Act and the grizzly bear by protecting and restoring as much habitat as possible. Including designating all recommended wilderness as such, closing and removing forest roads, retiring grazing allotments, and restoring degraded habitat.

Habitat

The grizzly needs all wilderness study area's and recommended wilderness to become wilderness in order to adapt to a changing landscape due to the effects of climate change. In order for the great bear to survive, it must have secure habitat in the form of wilderness. Dispersal of grizzly bears from Yellowstone National Park due to the effects of climate change make the Custer Gallatin National Forest the most important habitat for the grizzly. It's also the stepping stone to connectivity with grizzlies in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem.

We support the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area becoming wilderness. Mountain biking and ORV use must not be allowed in this critical grizzly bear habitat. Numerous grizzlies move through this part of the national forest on their way to the Tom Miner Basin for caraway roots. This is a unique area and should be deemed and treated as such. Disturbance of this area by mountain biking and ORV use will only lead to the dispersal of grizzlies and more conflict with humans. 2018 was a record mortality year in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem for grizzly bears. Grizzlies need safe secure passage through this habitat as they move north to connect with the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem grizzlies.

Connectivity

The Bridger and Crazy Mountains are important linkage ranges between the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and Yellowstone grizzly bears. The Crazies are also historically and culturally significant to the Crow Native American Indian Tribe. We are in support of honoring the wishes of the Native Americans and all recommended wilderness in these two ranges.

I-90 and state highways are major barriers to connecting these isolated ranges. We would like to see the Custer Gallatin National Forest encourage and support wildlife overpasses and underpasses in order to allow safe passage of grizzly bears and other wildlife.

Grazing allotments

A significant number of grizzly bear deaths are due to livestock depredation. In order to protect the grizzly, we recommend closing grazing allotments on the national forest.

Expand the Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone

We recommend that The Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone be expanded to cover the entire Custer Gallatin National Forest. We also recommend implementing an educational program of coexistence and tolerance.

Other Species

We recommend that Big Horn Sheep be protected by not allowing the grazing of domestic sheep. We also recommend that the Yellowstone Bison be considered a species of conservation concern and allowed to roam freely.

About Save the Yellowstone Grizzly

Save the Yellowstone Grizzly fights for the safety and welfare of all grizzlies south of Canada. Our goal is to establish a large-scale grizzly bear recovery area with appropriate linkages, ensuring the long-term viability of bears in the face of imminent effects of climate change.

Thank you for your time and consideration in supporting Alternative D.

Chuck Irestone, Director
and the Save the Yellowstone Grizzly Team