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Comments: Please see the attached objection from the American Forest Resource Council

I. The Plan does not consider a reasonable range of Alternatives to address the needs of the landscape for increased restoration. The adoption of a new Forest Plan is not simply a matter of updating the old plan, but rather it involves looking at all of the conditions and issues that have impacted the Forest during the past 33 years since the current plans were adopted. In the case of the Custer Gallatin, these changes have been very significant and demand special considerations that AFRC believes are not thoroughly addressed in the new Plan. For example, the Custer Gallatin National Forest consists of two individual proclaimed national forests: the Custer National Forest and the Gallatin National Forest. In 2014 the two Forests were combined to be administratively managed as one national forest. NEPA requires that an agency to consider a reasonable range of alternatives. 42 U.S.C. [sect] 4332(E); Hells Canyon Alliance v. U.S. Forest Serv., 227 F.3d 1170, 1181 (9th Cir. 2000), as amended (Nov. 29, 2000). AFRC does not believe that the Forest Service considered a reasonable range of alternatives that support any of the existing needs of the Forest. First, Table 11 points out that since 1980 approximately 809,759 acres (or about 26%) of the Custer Gallatin National Forest land base has been burned by wildfire. Of this, about 195,399 acres burned in areas considered tentatively suitable for timber production in the 1987 forest plans, representing about 31% of the tentatively suitable base. (see table in attached) Unfortunately, the Forest is only proposing under Objectives (FW-OBJ-TIM- 03), in Alternative E: Annually complete vegetation management treatments (such as, timber harvest, planned ignitions, thinning, planting) on an average of 5,000 acres of the Custer Gallatin, measured on a decadal basis, to maintain or move towards achieving desired conditions for forest, deciduous woodland, shrubland and grassland ecosystems (this objective includes the acres outlined in FW-OBJ-FIRE-01). Since there is a total of 1,204,364 acres of suitable timber land and lands that could be managed for other Resource improvements[mdash]it would take the Forest 240 years to cover these lands to do needed stand improvements and fuels reduction! Further the Plan states: [ldquo]Timber harvest plan direction under the current plans are not designed to move the Custer Gallatin National Forest towards desired vegetation conditions. However, in practice, the current plans are being implemented to achieve desired conditions.[rdquo] This statement further exemplifies the lack of an alternative that would allow a DEPARTURE from non-declining even-flow timber management to more quickly get the Forest into the stated desired conditions! III. The Plan inappropriately ties timber harvest levels to current budgets. Further compounding the problem of getting needed management and increasing the pace and scale of restoration, the Plan considers the current fiscal budget that the Custer-Gallatin receives as the management level for the life of the Plan. This severely handicaps management opportunities and will fail to bring resource needs into balance. [ldquo]Both the projected wood sale quantity and the projected timber sale quantity are limited by the projected fiscal capability and organizational capacity of the Custer Gallatin.[rdquo] (see table in objection letter) AFRC believes it is both illegal, and not meeting the needs of the Forest by tying the projected wood sale quantity and the projected timber sale quantity to current budgets as depicted in Table 16 above. The Forest proposes that both be based on reasonable expectations about the fiscal capability and organizational capacity to achieve the desired conditions and objectives in the revised plan for the planning period. As such, calculation of these volume estimates are sensitive to a number of important assumptions including future budget trends, future markets for timber products, efficiency in planning and implementation, and the timing and locations of large disturbance events. AFRC believes that this severely limits future management opportunities and taints the current needs of the Forest and those who depend on resources from the Forest. AFRC acknowledges that the 2012 Planning

Rule requires the responsible official to ensure that plan content is within the [ldquo]fiscal capability[rdquo] of the unit. 36 C.F.R. [sect] 219.1(g). [ldquo]Fiscal capability[rdquo] is not defined in the Rule or elsewhere. The 2012 Rule also states that [ldquo]objectives should be based on reasonably foreseeable budgets.[rdquo] 36 C.F.R. [sect] 219.7(e)(1)(ii). To the extent that budget leads the Forest to impose a limit on future timber production that is not tied to the capability of the land, it is violating NFMA, the MUSYA, and the Organic Act. The Plan should make clear that any figures tied to budget are merely non-binding projections rather than restrictions on future management.

III. The Plan does not consider the needs of the existing sawmilling infrastructure.

The 3.039 million-acre Custer-Gallatin National Forest contributes to the local economy and social conditions in a variety of ways. The Forest is located in several Montana and South Dakota Counties. These contributions include the supply of products, services and uses, as well as directly hiring employees and spending budgetary dollars. These activities support jobs and income in each of the Forest[rsquo]s socio-economic impact zones. At best, Alternative E (the Alternative with the highest timber output) under Objectives (FW-OBJ-TIM)-Alternative E would annually offer timber (meeting timber product utilization standards) for sale at an average projected timber sale quantity of 2.9 million cubic feet (15 million board feet), measured on a decadal basis.

To achieve 15 mmbf in alternative E, it was necessary to assume that the budget for vegetation management would increase relative to the current plans and alternatives B, C, D, and F. This would have effects on other resource areas as displayed in the comparison of alternatives in table 9 of chapter 2.

AFRC strongly believes that having these volume limitations in the proposed Plan severely impacts that volume of sawlogs that the Forest can sell and will not support sawmills in the local area long-term. In fact the R-Y Townsend, Montana sawmill ended operations earlier this year. (see attached article)

Currently, Montana[rsquo]s forest products industry is one of the largest components of manufacturing in

the state and employs roughly 7,700 workers earning about \$335 million in compensation annually.

AFRC members are struggling to find needed raw materials to run their operations

and keep employment levels at their current rate.

IV. AFRC believes the economic analysis as it pertains to newly created jobs in the timber sector is fatally flawed.

Table 4 below shows employment in the analysis area by resource and by alternative (direct employment contribution, estimated number of jobs). AFRC is baffled as to how the Forest estimated a job increase from 191 jobs to 575 under Alternative E when the timber harvest is going up very little! (see table in attached objection)

Table 4 shows timber jobs increasing from the current Plan numbers of 191 up to 575 jobs under the Alternative E (a 300% increase). Yet Table 10 shows that the Projected wood supply quantity is only going from 18 mmbf to 25 mmbf (a 139% increase) Further, the acres treated under Alternative E is less than those of other Alternatives (only 5,000 acres compared to as many as 8,000 acres under Alternative D).

Further in Table 5 above it shows Labor Income from Timber going from the current of \$8,860 million up to \$26,717 million under Alternative E. This is a 300 percent increase as well.

AFRC doesn't believe this can happen with timber sale quantities basically remaining the same from the old plan to the new.

V. The Forest did not prepare an Alternative that would have produced the Sustained Yield Limit (SYL).

Standards (FW-STD-TIM) 07 allows the quantity of timber that may be sold per decade from lands both suitable and not suitable for timber production shall not exceed the sustained-yield limit 8.08 million cubic feet average annual volume (approximately 38.3 million board feet) with the exception of salvage or sanitation cutting of trees that are damaged by fire, windthrow, or other disturbance

or to manage insect infestation or disease spread. Salvage harvest of such trees may be harvested above the sustained yield limit, where such harvest is consistent with desired conditions for terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. None of the Alternatives have an option for harvesting the SYL.

AFRC strongly believes that one Alternative should have been analyzed and modeled that would have allowed the Forest to hit the SYL. The SYL as calculated is 38.3 mmbf, and none of the alternatives, even with unconstrained budgets came close to hitting that number. Deferring such an alternative inappropriately limits the reasonable range of alternatives and ultimately inhibits the decision-maker's ability to make an informed decision. AFRC believes the Forest should and could have developed an alternative that achieves SYL especially considering all of the Forest health issues facing the Forest.

The sustained-yield limit was calculated using the PRISM model for each proclaimed forest separately and was determined to be 3.16 million cubic feet (15.3 million board feet) annually on the Custer National Forest and be 4.92 million cubic feet (22.95 million board feet) annually on the Gallatin National Forest. This totals 38.2 mmbf combined.

Table 34 below shows that none of the Alternatives (assuming reasonable budgets) will hit the Sustained Yield Limit for the Forest. Alternative E only will produce 35.4 mmbf. (see table in attached objection)

VI. AFRC does not believe that the DEIS meets the intent of the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (MUSYA).

The MUSYA directs the Secretary of Agriculture to [Idquo]develop and administer the renewable surface resources of the national forests for multiple use and sustained yield of the several products and

services obtained therefrom.[rdquo] The MUSYA also defines [ldquo]sustained yield of the several products and services[rdquo] as [ldquo]the achievement and maintenance in perpetuity of a high- level annual or regular periodic output of the various renewable resources of the national forests without impairment of the productivity of the land.[rdquo]

The Timber section of the DEIS (3.15.1) on page 629 only identifies a [ldquo]sustained-yield limit.[rdquo] The PRISM models that were run for each alternative only calculated this [ldquo]limit.[rdquo] This approach does not satisfy the intent and direction from MUSYA, as this Act requires the Secretary to develop and administer timber resources for achievement and maintenance of regular outputs. Simply calculating an upper limit for sustained-yield does not ensure that the Forest will [ldquo]achieve and maintain[rdquo] regular outputs. The DEIS must identify and explain how the Plan will ensure achievement and maintenance of regular outputs.

Furthermore, the DEIS is clear in that the PRISM model was run to [ldquo]move vegetation towards desired conditions.[rdquo] The DEIS clearly describes what the desired condition is on page 130 as the following: [ldquo]the desired conditions for terrestrial vegetation on the Custer Gallatin National Forest are characterized by increases in large trees and large forest size classes; more open forest densities; vigorous non-forested plant communities; increasing early-seral shade tolerant species; and maintaining the full suite of native biodiversity on the landscape.[rdquo] Nowhere did the DEIS include a sustained-yield of timber as a [ldquo]desired condition.[rdquo] Therefore, the PRISM model and its volume outputs are not based on sustained yield and the subsequent Projected Timber Sale Quantities (PTSQs) are likely inconsistent with MUSYA.

VII. The Plan is invalid where it relies on unlawful portions of the 2012 Planning Rule.

The 2012 Planning Rule (Rule) violates the Organic Act, NFMA, and MUSYA in several respects. Among

these violations, the Rule establishes [ldquo]ecological sustainability[rdquo] as an overriding objective of forest management, through the maintenance of [ldquo]ecological integrity[rdquo] and [ldquo]diversity of ecosystems.[rdquo]

36 C.F.R. [sect] 219.8(a). This violates the management mandates of the Organic Act, 16 U.S.C. [sect] 475, the MUSYA, 16 U.S.C. [sect] 528, and NFMA, 16 U.S.C. [sect] 1604(e). The Rule also contains an improper requirement to provide [ldquo]ecosystem services.[rdquo] 36

C.F.R. [sect][sect] 219.10, 219.10(a). The ecosystem services requirement again violates the Organic Act, MUSYA, and NFMA.

Section 219.3 of the Rule imposes a [ldquo]best available science[rdquo] use requirement which unlawfully limits the information on which forest planning decisions can be based. This violates the analysis requirements in NFMA sections 1604(b) and 1610. The Rule omits, and the Plans accordingly fail to include, provisions for increasing harvest levels pursuant to 16 U.S.C. [sect] 1604(g)(3)(D). Finally, the Rule violates NFMA section 1604(k) because it does not allow salvage or sanitation harvest as provided by the statute. 36 C.F.R. [sect] 219.11(d).

The Plan violates the Organic Act, MUSYA, and NFMA where it relies on a Planning Rule that violates those statutes.

#### Resolution Requested

This Custer-Gallatin Revised Plan will provide management direction to the C-G National Forest for the next 15 plus years. The Final Plan attempts to provide public benefits including making available recreation access, facilities, and services; supplying renewable and non-renewable forest products; and providing roads, services, and accommodations to support local economies. AFRC believes this Final Plan fails to provide the certainty needed for our membership that a consistent, and predictable volume of timber will be produced in a timely manner that will more

quickly move the Forest toward the desired HRV.

To resolve the issues that AFRC has raised above, the following actions will need to occur.

1. Provide an adequate range of Alternatives to address the needs of the landscape for increased restoration. Provide an alternative that moves the Forest more quickly to the desired conditions representing the Historic Range of Variability.
2. Do not inappropriately tie timber harvest levels to current budgets.
3. Provide an Alternative that truly considers the needs of the existing sawmilling infrastructure.
4. Rework the Economic Analysis as it pertains to newly created jobs in the timber sector which AFRC believes is fatally flawed.
5. Prepare an Alternative that would have produced the Sustained Yield Limit (SYL).
6. Analyze the Timber component of the Plan to meet the intent of the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act.
7. Remove unlawful portions of the 2012 Planning Rule from the Document.