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Comments: At the end of November 2016, the Custer Gallatin National Forest released two documents in draft form concerning the future management decisions of the said National Forests. The first document is the Draft Assessment Report of Ecological, Social and Economic Conditions on the Custer Gallatin National Forest and the second is the Draft Preliminary Need to Change the Existing Custer and Gallatin Forest Plans. The draft assessment is a 130 page document stating the existing conditions of the Custer Gallatin National Forests as found today highlighting its resources, infrastructure and policies in place. I actually found this document to be quite comprehensive.

One aspect of the existing Custer Gallatin National Forest of today is the merger of the Custer and the Gallatin National Forests of 2014. Why did government managers see fit to bring these two forests together under one managing unit? I question such action which I never understood. If there was a need to merge the Custer National Forest with another, it would make more sense to me if this forest would have been merged with either the Bighorn or the Black Hills National Forests. The reason being, at least these lands are much more similar in landscape, topography, logistics as well as regional and social issues. This is perhaps outside the scope of this Forest Plan Revision, as the whole purpose of the plan is to merge these two forests together as one. But to me it would make more sense if the Custer National Forest were to merge with a forest where there were more similarities than differences.

In reviewing both documents above, one area of critical concern missing in the draft assessment of the forests has to do with the acknowledgement, recognition, and importance of wildlife corridors. Large mammals, predators and non-predators alike, need connectivity to other populations. This is especially true of grizzly bears, wolverines, bison, and bighorn sheep. The four species mentioned here are under attack in one way or another, directly or indirectly, as a result of man's activities. Climate change, grazing allotments, disease, hunting and loss of habitat all are partial reasons for declining populations. Greater protections must be in place to ensure viable populations and habitat. All large mammals must have room to roam allowing them the freedom to make contact with fellow species of other ecosystems. This must be done in order to preserve genetic viability. One obvious pathway is to establish wildlife corridors between the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem northward to the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. I urge the Custer Gallatin National Forests to include this regional concern as part of their management decisions.

Another area of corridor concern is that of utilities and powerline corridors. Our Nation's energy grid is not what it should be, but that is no excuse to allow energy companies and service utilities to exploit public land access for their own company's profit. These public utility corridors can have a devastating impact on the natural resources of a National Forest. These man-made corridors can impact wildlife corridors, potential wilderness areas as well as scenic viability of the natural landscape. These three natural resources are a vital part of the broader forest landscape and should not be used as a bargaining chip or trading commodity to further the utilization of a commercial enterprise. I firmly believe that there needs to be infrastructure improvements, but building powerlines which tower above ground level seems to me to be old technology. There should be new and advanced technologies which are more efficient in transporting power and communication lines across country.

One natural assessment missing from the draft report is the assessment of geologic hazards. The first examples of geologic hazards which most likely come to mind are those associated with that of volcanism. This is logical since this is where the formation of much of the surrounding landscape has its origin. Obviously, however, volcanoes are not on the current landscape even though the existence of hot springs and unstable ground is fairly common within the confines of Yellowstone National Park. But geologic hazards extend far beyond those associated with that of volcanism. Earthquakes, avalanches and landslides are quite common within the

boundaries of the Custer Gallatin National Forests. The latter two hazards are a result of steep and unstable slopes brought about by heavy and unstable snow and rain. But these steep slopes should be taken into account when considering best land use practices. Timber harvesting, road construction and other infrastructure work projects which may have a destabilization effect on the landscape should be monitored, analyzed, and acknowledged.

My final comment concerning the draft assessment of the forest's resources concerns with having a better understanding of the forest's water resources. The Custer Gallatin National Forest has an abundance of surface and ground water resources providing headwaters for numerous streams, rivers and lakes. I suggest a monitoring program of the forest's surface-water resources over the future years to help analyze the quality and quantity of its water resources. Climate change will have an impact on this resource and there needs to be an understanding of the impact of those changing conditions. The climate is changing and this draft assessment acknowledges climate's changing role. Monitoring this resource could help in this understanding as we might be able to lessen the impact these dramatic changes will have on timber, vegetation, wildlife and of the hydrological resource itself.

Thank you for you allowing the public to comment on these two documents. I sincerely believe that the work is on the right track and I look forward to working with the Custer Gallatin National Forests in the future.