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Comments:

Dear Custer Gallatin National Forest,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Draft Assessment of Existing Conditions Report and the Draft Preliminary Need to Change Report.

Sacajawea Audubon Society is greatly concerned that there is an absence of significant reference to non-game bird populations in the Assessment. Though mention is made that 262 species of birds have been found to use the Forest, there is a lack of any emphasis on non-game and neo-tropical bird populations, or on any commitment to assess or monitor those populations. Birds are in many ways the best indicators of forest health and respond quickly (both positively and negatively) to changes in forest management, outbreaks of pine bark beetle and other insects, forest fires, and climate change. The Custer Gallatin National Forest is such a large area, encompassing most of the Montane Ecosystem in the counties where it is located, that it comprises almost the entire habitat in those counties for such forest specific birds as Northern Goshawk, Great Grey Owl, Clark's Nutcracker, Gray Jay, and Three-toed Woodpecker. The Northern Goshawk is considered a "Species of Concern" by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Montana's Fish, Wildlife and Park's Natural Heritage Program but is not noted as such in the Assessment. Many other species of birds on the Custer Gallatin NF are considered "Species of Concern" by the American Bird Conservancy including Cassin's Finch, Evening Grosbeak, Lewis's Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Black Rosy-finch.

We at Sacajawea Audubon would like to encourage you to acknowledge a greater significance to the role the Forest plays in the health of the populations of the many non-game bird species that live in the Forest. It would be quite valuable to develop some baseline data on these bird populations perhaps through Point Counts or MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) stations. The numbers and diversity of bird species which use the habitats of the Custer Gallatin National Forest would strongly suggest that a "Specialist Report" specific to all bird species should be an integral part of these documents, and avian populations should be a subject addressed in the future planning process. Sacajawea Audubon currently assists, actively and monetarily, with the annual Bridger Raptor Survey which is funded in part by the Forest Service. We may be able to provide expertise or assistance for developing data collection and monitoring plans for other bird species also.

Sacajawea Audubon Society is an organization of over 600 members serving Gallatin and Park Counties and the surrounding area since 1967. We are an affiliate of National Audubon and Montana Audubon and are committed to the conservation of our natural environment and its wildlife. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Loreene Reid, President

Sacajawea Audubon Society