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Comments: Thank you

Thank you for the effort you have put into creating the draft Assessment of Existing Conditions and draft Preliminary Need to Change reports. As a retired biologist and user of the Custer-Gallatin National Forests for over 35 years, there are a few aspects of the Need to Change draft document that I urge you to emphasize in the final version.

First and foremost, the restoration and preservation of the wide variety of ecosystems found within the CGNF must be your highest priority. The CGNF is one of the most important National Forests in the nation because of its location within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Large as it is, Yellowstone National Park is insufficient to maintain viable populations of all its native species. The CGNF must carefully integrate management plans with YNP to provide the greatest protection possible for this unique ecosystem.

In this regard, I strongly support the following sections of the Need to Change document;

- "maintaining sufficient habitat conditions to sustain healthy wildlife populations" under Resource Integration;
- all parts of the New Information and Science section, but especially the "need to address impacts reasonably expected to occur as a result of new information regarding climate change" and the "need to incorporate best available ecological and restoration concepts, such as metapopulation dynamics; headwater and prairie stream, riparian, and groundwater ecology; and invasive species";
- the "need for flexibility to manage for sustainable ecosystems and to allow adaptive responses to changing resource conditions (and) new science" under Strategic Planning;
- and under Required Plan Content, the need "to incorporate plan direction for the wildlife and recreation interface...while maintaining sufficient habitat conditions to sustain healthy wildlife populations, particularly for bears, bison, and mountain lions"; the "need to develop plan direction that emphasizes ecological restoration"; and the "need to consider how management guidance, emphases, and monitoring dovetail with various aspects of changing climate".

It is essential that these needs be emphasized in the final document so as to guide the future forest planning process.

Finally, I urge the CGNF to change its approach to managing recommended wilderness and stop allowing non-conforming uses (such as mountain biking and motorized activities). Allowing these kinds of uses in recommended wilderness compromises an area's wilderness characteristics and creates conflict among user groups. This is especially critical within the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (HPBH WSA).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these draft documents.

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