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Comments: RE: Custer-Gallatin Forest Plan Revision

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I am writing to comment on the proposed Forest Plan Revision for the Custer-Gallatin National Forest.

Recreational Aviation is not adequately addressed in this proposed revision. Evolving technology and advancement in design has made the definition of a suitable airfield something that is largely unrecognized in this plan. I operate a backcountry airplane with oversize "tundra" tires and advanced after-marked landing gear that allows me to land on a few hundred feet of rough ground. I land on two-track roads and gravel bars on public land - all in legal locations. The USFS already has an overly restrictive policy on aircraft and this plan only seems to further restrict a legitimate means of access to public land.

Aircraft with large tires inflated to very low pressures have far less impact than any wheeled motor vehicle and impact a fraction of the land. Since the plan calls for a 10% reduction in unneeded roads (Pg 71) I would suggest that aviation access be considered in areas where road access is not environmentally compatible.

On Page 74 the plan states that airfields may only be constructed under a special use permit. I believe that aviation should not be considered a special use, but rather be classified the same as a vehicle, atv, snowmachine, etc.

What defines an airfield is simply not the same as it was 20 years ago. The impact of an airplane today is generally far less than a typical four-wheel drive vehicle. My fully loaded airplane weighs less than my Toyota Tacoma.

Every year I participate in airstrip work parties on USFS airfields. These airfields are maintained by volunteer groups such as the RAF, and I believe the plan needs to provide guidance for planners on the importance of coordinating with volunteer groups.

The document also lists sources of guidance for various other infrastructure, but omits airfields entirely.

Backcountry flying is the fastest growing part of general aviation and for the USFS to take such a regressive stance on this evolving form of access is only asking for problems in the future.

Thank You,

Julian N. Pridmore-Brown

