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Comments:

I believe that the draft plan lacks an adequate framework for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. The current wilderness management plans allow destructively large groups of up to 25 head of stock (horses and mules) and 15 people in most areas. Research shows that negative impacts increase significantly when the numbers of heads of stock is greater than eight and twelve people. The Forest Service should reduce group size limits accordingly so as to protect all Wilderness areas in the forests from harm. Further, the forest plan should end ecologically destructive fish stocking in naturally fish-free wilderness lakes; stocking fish in these lakes will significantly alter the areas' natural conditions.

The plan also needs to address the issue of human and pack animal feces contamination of lakes and streams on the Beartooth Plateau in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Eliminating the stocking of these naturally fish-free lakes would probably solve this problem; however, additional measures must be undertaken, if needed.

Vacant grazing allotments in the Wildernesses should be closed so these areas can return to a wild condition.

No trail construction or reconstruction should be permitted in the currently trail-less areas of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. This provides remote areas for wildlife as well as premier areas for contemplation in solitude, and spiritual renewal.

I support the wilderness recommendations in Alternative D of the Revised Draft Forest Plan; however, they must be improved by adding the entire 230,000 wild, road free acres of the Gallatin Range as Recommended Wilderness in the final forest plan. The following point also expands on the importance for the wild Gallatin Range.

The plan should prohibit all motorized and mechanized uses, and any other activities not consistent with wilderness protection, in the Recommended Wilderness areas so as to preserve their wilderness qualities until Congress acts on the wilderness recommendations.