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Comments: "Take away wilderness and you take away the opportunity to be American." ~Roderick Nash

As part of the Forest Plan revision process, the Gallatin Range in Montana - stretching from Bozeman to Yellowstone National Park - is at risk of being sacrificed as a motorized and mechanized recreational playground. I strongly support adding the ENTIRE 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range as Recommend Wilderness in the final Forest Plan.

The Gallatin Mountains are wilder than most national parks in the Lower 48 and renowned for their wildlife, yet they lack the landscape protection that other parts at the core of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem enjoy. Encompassing more than three million acres, the Custer Gallatin National Forest in Montana is a stronghold for iconic wildlife species like grizzly bears, gray wolves, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, and moose, which are very sensitive to human disturbance and development, and are teetering on the brink.

* The draft plan has little direction for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. The current wilderness management plans allows destructively large groups of up to 25 head of stock (horses and mules) and 15 people in most areas. Research shows that impacts increase significantly when group-sizes exceed eight head of stock and 12 people. The Forest Service should reduce group size limits accordingly so as to protect all Wildernesses on the forest from harm. Further, the forest plan should put an end to ecologically destructive fish stocking in naturally fishless wilderness lakes, which significantly alters the areas' natural conditions.

* The plan must address the issue of human and pack animal feces contamination of lakes and streams on the Beartooth Plateau in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Eliminating fish stocking would likely go a long way toward solving this problem, but additional measures must be included 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 in the currently trailless areas of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. This provides remote areas for wildlife as well as premier areas for solitude.

* 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, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range as Recommend Wilderness in the final forest plan. The following three points also expand 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. The Gallatin Range is NOT a recreation area. This wilderness belongs to the natural world NOT motorized recreationists and mountain bikers. Outdoor recreationists will destroy sensitive species such as grizzlies, wolverines, elk in their calving grounds and other animals with a low tolerance for human disturbance. Wild places are wild - there is no need for human presence.

We must do everything in our power to save and protect our wilderness. Once gone, it will be gone forever.