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First name: Sharon

Last name: Sutherland

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I recommend Alternative D in the Custer/Gallatin National Forest plan for wilderness and wildlife!

Alternative D comes closest to the ideal of 230,000 acres of wilderness.

The population of the Gallatin Valley is growing at 4%/year, putting it over 200,000 by 2030, meaning there will be many more recreationists on our trails. Park County is not growing as fast, but still exponentially. What will happen to the wildlife that is unique and special to this area? The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is only one in the temperate zone that has all the wildlife species that were here when Lewis and Clark arrived, and one of only two in the lower 48 where grizzly bears survive. The Custer/Gallatin Forest is the only unprotected piece adjacent to Yellowstone Park, and is at risk of being sacrificed as a recreational playground to the exploding populations of Bozeman and Big Sky.

The wildlands of Greater Yellowstone are important in connecting the wildlife of Yellowstone to the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, and onward to the Yukon. The Gallatin Range has 18 species at risk, as identified by the Montana Heritage Program. It contains critical grizzly habitat, elk winter range and a vital elk migration corridor, and is one of the best places for recolonization by wild bison. The Gallatins are part of a critical pathway for genetic connectivity between the GYE and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. The most important area for this is the West Pine in the Paradise Valley, which Alternative C calls for opening to mountain bikes.

The Gallatin Forest Partnership, which is comprised of MWA, TWS, and GYC is recommending Alternative C, and calling for only 130,000 acres of wilderness in the Gallatin, out of a possible 230,000, because several of their backers are mountain bike organizations. What is grievous is that they are leaving out the 155,000 acre Buffalo-Horn Porcupine Wilderness Study Area, directly adjacent to Yellowstone National Park, and important habitat for wolves, grizzlies, wolverines, bighorn sheep, moose and many other species. The Partnership's plan would designate this critical habitat as a "National Recreation Area", and would continue to allow motorized and mechanized recreation. It would also call for monitoring by the Forest Service to assess impacts, when the USFS doesn't have the manpower now to enforce regulations, such as the one banning mountain bikes, motorcycles and horses from certain trails on certain days or before a scheduled date. Every time I have hiked these trails on those days because I don't like constantly watching behind me for mountain bikes, (having almost gotten run over myriad times) bikers have attempted to ride when the regulations on the signs prohibit it. We hikers and horseback riders have had to ask them to obey the rules. A friend told a group of 8 mountain bikers that they were not allowed on the Bear Canyon trail before Jul. 16, and when she went to take a photo of their license plates, one took her phone and threw it on the ground. I hiked Bear Canyon yesterday, and had to tell a mountain biker he wasn't supposed to be up there until July 16th. Unlike others, he did turn around.

I worked for GYC in the 90's, when we and others strove to eliminate the checkerboard ownership in the upper Gallatin so that Buffalo Horn/Porcupine could be included in wilderness. Because of these trades, we ended up with the Yellowstone Club, which is a blight on the face of the earth. And, now Buffalo Horn/Porcupine will be sacrificed?

I worry for the future of the grizzly bear in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem if all possible WSA's are not declared wilderness, and especially if the Buffalo Horn/Porcupine does not become wilderness. According to research done in Alberta's parks, mountain bikers have the most conflict with grizzly bears because of their speed and silence. Mountain Journal quoted Chris Servheen, the 40-year head of the USFWS Grizzly Bear Recovery Team in an article recently, saying that mountain bikers are a grave threat to bears, both grizzly and black, due to their high speed and quiet travel. The Buffalo Horn/Porcupine needs to be wilderness, along with the remainder of 230,000 WSA acres in the Gallatin, to ensure grizzly bear survival.

Please choose Alternative D for wildlife in Greater Yellowstone, and add to it so that there are 230,000 acres of wilderness in the Gallatin Range. Please also incorporate my previous comments into this one.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.