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Comments: As to plans for the Custer Gallatin National Forest, my overall recommendation and hope is that the Gallatin Range and other critical wildlife habitat across this forest be kept as pristine and true to their natural states as possible, the better to protect flora and fauna. It also is a better way for human visitors to enjoy nature when the environment has not been turned into a motorized recreational playground for large crowds.

Specifically, wilderness recommendations in Alternative D of the draft forest plan, with some adjustments, offer the best protection for the Gallatin Range and beyond.

Current wilderness management plans allow groups of up to 25 head of horses and mules and 15 people in most areas, but those groups are too large. Research has shown better results for wild places when the group sizes are no more than eight head of stock and 12 people. The U.S. Forest Service should take guidance from the latter numbers and further limit group sizes for all wildernesses in the forest.

Further, the forest plan should end the ecologically destructive practice of stocking fish in wilderness lakes that naturally have no fish.

Please ensure there is no trail construction or reconstruction in the currently trailless areas of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf wildernesses. This preserves remote areas that are protective of wildlife as well as providing the blessings of solitude for visitors who seek it.

Finally, I urge that the entire 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range be identified as a "recommended wilderness." Then, follow this designation with a prohibition against all motorized and mechanized uses, and any other activities not consistent with wilderness protection, in the "recommended wilderness" areas. In this way, these wildernesses can be preserved until Congress acts on the wilderness recommendations.

Our wildernesses are treasures. Let's keep them wild!