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Comments: Wilderness and wildlife should be a prime focus in the Custer Gallatin Forest Plan Revision.

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 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.

Vacant grazing allotments in the wildernesses should be closed so those areas can return to a wild condition. There should be no trail construction or reconstruction in the currently trailless areas of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses, in order to provide remote areas for wildlife as well as premier areas for solitude.

The Forest Service should 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 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.