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Comments: I'm writing in regard to the Custer Gallatin Forest Plan Revision #50185. I strongly support alternative D, which provides for 711,425 acres of recommended wilderness, including all 155,000 acres of the existing Wilderness Study Area (the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn WSA). I also strongly support a proposal to include a total of 229,000 acres of recommended wilderness in the Gallatin Range.

The reasons for my recommendations fall into 3 categories:

1) The Custer Gallatin National Forest, and the Gallatin Range in particular, provide critical habitat for a large number of threatened species, such as grizzly, bighorn sheep, wolverine, wolf, cougar, lynx and many others. Conserving as much area of the forest as possible to serve as protected primary habitat for these and other animal and plant species is absolutely essential for the health and long-term viability of mountain ecosystems in the western US. The Gallatin Range also provides a critical corridor for the movement of many animal species between the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and other protected ecosystems to the west and north.

2) Our planet is rapidly losing wilderness ecosystems on a large scale. Human populations continue to increase globally, and Montana's population is rapidly increasing, particularly in the regions in and around Bozeman and Gallatin and surrounding counties. These changes will exert ever increasing pressures on wilderness habitats and it is vitally important to preserve the wilderness that remains before it is too late. Failure to do so could lead to an irreversible loss of natural ecosystems and the loss of many of the plant and animal species that live within them.

3) I favor wilderness protection in particular because other forms of limited protection, such as "Backcountry Area", "Recreation Emphasis Area", or no protection at all, will permit mechanized travel or recreational uses of the land, such as the use of motorized vehicles, mountain bikes and the building of additional roads, that will lead to continued and sustained degradation. 95% of public lands in the US are already open to motorized and mechanized recreation. Less than 3% of the lower 48 states are designated as wilderness.

It's time to preserve as much of the remaining wild lands that exist!