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Comments: As the population of southern Montana, and especially Bozeman, continues to grow the strain on our natural spaces is already mounting. Coupled with exploding tourism centered around Yellowstone Park, the need for aggressive conservation of the surrounding national forests is paramount both for our own future recreational interests as well as the safeguarding of the natural ecosystem.

I understand that many people's recreation interests differ from mine, and many people depend on resource extraction from the forests for their livelihood, but we need a forest service plan that is forward looking--extrapolating decades into the future when population and tourism strains are exponentially higher. The world is changing, and we can no longer stick to old practices or rely on policies of yesteryear to meet these new challenges. Optimizing the plan now to maximize conservation of our forests will help protect our forests in the future.

To me an ideal plan would reserve much of the high country land as a wilderness or other strongly protected area and keep access point limited to the front country. Many Forest Service roads that lead deep into the high country should be gated near the bottom. This would relieve the strain on the backcountry from overuse, and limit the road maintenance currently required of the Forest Service to keep miles of roads open to cars and their heavy wear and tear. These closed road would be able to accommodate the increased light traffic of hikers, bikers, skiers, and light vehicles compared to the current automobile traffic. Additionally, I would propose strong restrictions on light motorized recreation-- whether dirt bikes, ATVs, or snowmobiles-- which contribute heavily to erosion and noise and air pollution--impacting not only the land but other users. I believe an optimal solution would be to limit their use to a few allocated areas. Restricting this traffic will increase the strain in the permitted areas, but limit its reach in the forest as a whole. Limiting access will never be a popular position, but it will only become worse as population increases at which point the forests themselves may be already irreparably damaged-- the time to act is now.

The proposal put forward by the Gallatin Forest Partnership represents a compromise between conservation and recreation that I could get behind, but I would support the conservation of every additional acre of land and the conversion of every additional mile of road to trail.

Thanks for preserving what we love best about Montana!