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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Forest Service

Thank you for permitting comment on the proposed Forest Service plan changes. As a Bozeman resident that uses the Gallatin, Madison, Bridger/Bangtail and Crazy mountain areas extensively for outdoor recreation including hiking, fishing, mountain biking, E-biking, photography, motorcycle and ATV riding, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, snowmobiling and snowbiking, the thought of losing mechanized and motorized use of these areas is of great concern. Also of concern is that many of those voices supporting Wilderness expansion are from outside the area and/or have never even been to the state of Montana. They are simply users of various websites that have been provided a form letter to copy and paste. Reading through the letters in the Public Reading Room and seeing the same form letters, repeated over and over, and from out of state senders, tells the story. It's easy for those writers to ask for land to be closed to mechanized and motorized use when they have not experienced and enjoyed the use of these areas they ask to re-designate as Wilderness, effectively closing them off to most users.

Many, including Wilderness supporters from afar, do not have first hand experience on how little impact mechanized and motorized use have on the wildlife. When we encounter wildlife while riding our motorcycles or ATVs, bear, deer, elk and moose move off the edge of the trail and then stand and watch us ride by. Summertime-use trails are not a spiderweb of trails covering every inch of an area. They are extremely small corridors through huge tracks of land and so still mostly wild space. In the wintertime, when snow allows for overland use, that riding is taking place at elevations and snowdepths too high for herding animals and large carnivores, such as bear, are hibernating. When we stop for a break, other wildlife, such as birds, flock around us (looking for hand-outs which we don't give). I know the wilderness supporters mean well, but they don't have a realistic, and first-hand, picture of the human/wildlife interactions in these areas. In my experience, Wilderness supporters are more concerned about mechanized and motorized use than the wildlife.

The motorized areas have vast amounts of wildlife and some of the large carnivores (Wolves and Grizzly Bear) are quickly expanding their ranges into heavily used motorized-use areas showing the motorized use is of little impact to these species. Herds of elk and deer graze immediately next to roadways and in ranch fields with tractors dropping hay right next to them. Bighorn sheep stand on the shoulders of the highway with little concern for passing cars. Though slightly outside the subject area, Yellowstone National Park is a real-world example of how extremely heavily used areas have little impact on wildlife. Elk graze amongst the buildings, cars and tourists in Mammoth. Bison stand in the road. Deer bed down feet from traffic jammed roads. The animals could choose to occupy areas of the park with no roads, cars, bikes, snowmobiles, people. These examples show that leaving areas open to mechanized and motorized use does not impact the wildlife to the extent claimed by those hoping designate many areas as Wilderness. There is no reason to close these areas to mechanized and motorized use.

Some Wilderness supporters claim the economic benefits of expanding Wilderness as photographers, animal watchers and other Wilderness users bring money to the area. What they fail to consider is most animal watchers and photographers use mechanized or motorized means to access these areas. Again, Yellowstone National Park is a real-world example. The population bringing funds into the area are not coming in and hiking into backcountry or Wilderness areas for a week. Mechanized and motorized users (be that wolf watchers driving to their destination with their cameras and scopes or be that mountain bikers, motorcycle/ATV/UTV trail riding) bring dollars to the local economy.

I've watched the various plans closely but have waiting to comment towards the end of the comment period to ensure I had all the latest available information.

Plan opinion:

I support plan revision alternative E which creates special use emphasis area and designates no new wilderness areas. I believe the local Forest Service has the ability to manage the lands without official designations such as Wilderness. This will allow for balanced use (mechanized and motorized use as well as managing areas for wildlife). It also allows more flexibility in changing use of specific areas as needed where a broad sweeping change to Wilderness area takes that management ability away from the local departments that know these areas the best.

If some areas must be re-designated as Wilderness, I support the plan that designates as little as possible, such as Forest Plan Revision Alternative B. If Plan B (or C or D) is chosen, please ensure the Big Sky trail, that passes through the current Hyalite-Porcupine Wilderness Study Area, remains open to mechanized and motorized use. Also, remove the Lionhead wilderness area from that plan.

Plan Revision Alternative D is unacceptable. It takes away so many areas that are in use today. There are an incredible amount of year round mechanized and motorized users that would be impacted and those users would be crowded into ever decreasing areas which would only increase the use impact that the Wilderness supporters are trying to prevent. Plan D impacts to Taylor Fork, Buck Ridge, Tepee, Cabin Creek, Lionhead, Bridger, Hyalite and Crazy Mountain are much too vast. Please, for the sake of all users, do NOT implement Plan Revision Alternative D.

In summary, please implement Plan Revision Alternative E.

A reluctant second would be Plan Revision Alternative B.

Please do NOT implement Plan Revision Alternative D.