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Title:

Comments: I'm a Montana resident who moved here 15 years ago from a midwestern state that has limited public land and limited public recreational opportunities. I spend my spare time hunting, hiking, backpacking, mountain biking, and recreating in motorized vehicles on the diverse public lands in Montana from the Custer NF by Ashland, to the Missouri River breaks, to the dense timber forests of Eureka, and south to the steep Bitterroots. I've lived across the state and received formal education in biology, ecology, forestry, hydrology, and engineering from both UM and MSU. My background brings a unique perspective, one who truly appreciates trails, access and wilderness recognizing pitfalls each of these bring.

Firstly, I've been extremely disappointed in the USFS response to illegal closures of existing access, especially in the Crazy Mountains. I'm witnessing many of my old hunting and hiking areas being locked up by wealthy landowners. I can sometimes find a way to get around a trail closures, but the other 95% of the recreational USFS users will not be willing to go through the extreme physical measures it takes to access these areas now. So without the USFS formally limiting access, we are losing it regardless. There is so much of the Custer and Gallatin USFS lands in extreme and rugged terrain that formally reducing further access is not in the benefit of the people. USFS lands must be managed for multiple users, the elderly, the youth, the ATV riders, and the wilderness seekers. When reading through all of the alternatives I noticed increasing access wasn't an option on any of them, but almost all had a component of further access restriction. When access is restricted only a very small percentage of the public can recreate, and we currently have plenty of roadless areas for remote hikers and backpackers to enjoy. I'm opposed to all alternatives to the Forest Plan that will restrict foot, bicycle, motorcycle, ATV, or vehicle use due to this reason. The USFS must manage for multiple use, further reduction of trails and roads is not management at all, its simply lack of management.

Secondly, I in support of all responsible timber harvest in feasible areas. The USFS must reduce forest fuels, increase operating income, and curb the costs of future fires through active forest management now. We need to reverse the USFS spending back to 70% on management, 30% on fires, not the opposite we are living in today. Further, the big game populations that are the economic backbone of the north American conservation model cannot sustain life in dense timber stands. Logging is necessary more now than ever to create biodiversity in the lack of healthy frequent fires. Anyone who believes logging is killing our forests hasn't seen what good forestry management looks like. A weekend spent hunting around Eureka, Libby, Plains, or St. Regis is all it takes to understand that biodiversity and robust big game populations only exists where the forest is broken up to allow plant diversity and new growth establishment.

This Custer Gallatin Forest Plan is massive in scope, too large for the average working family man to read through all of the details and every single alternative created. However, the average family with a strong appreciation of the outdoors is who the USFS should be managing the forest for. We are the ones recreating responsibly, using our limited incomes to buy tags and keep MT FWP afloat, and teaching the next generation to appreciate our forests and all the animals that live within. Further restrictions to the access of our forests will only reduce the number of families and friends recreating on our forest lands and caring about their future.