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Title:

Comments: To all who read this, especially those tasked with determining what should be done with the Custer Gallatin Forest Plan and the Custer Gallatin National Forest.

I write to you to express my preferences and to explain why I feel the way I do. For the entirety of the Custer Gallatin National Forest, I support Alternative D and would encourage you to consider making an additional 230,000 acres of that area wilderness in the Gallatin Range specifically.

I grew up in Montana (in Billings) and lived in the state until the age of 25. I'm still immensely proud of where I come from and I return as often as I'm able. Though I'm tempted to say that growing up in Montana I was taught to hold a reverence for its diverse beauties and natural splendor, it's not like there were any proper lessons. Rather, my fondness for the wilderness of Montana has grown gradually over time. Indeed, I've moved around the country a fair amount since leaving in 2008 and, having now lived in a number of different places, I appreciate Montana now more than ever. So many other places just don't have the vast expanses of mountains, plains, and forests that are sparsely populated and unadulterated in their natural beauty. I love the fact that I can go hiking near Tom Miner Basin, or camping in the Absorakas (perhaps my favorite mountain range), and not encounter another soul. Keeping these places remote, protecting them from development and resource extraction industries is immensely important in my mind. I hope you will see the value of that too.

Here are two non-autobiographical things I'd like you to consider which recommend my preferred alternative beyond the mere fact that Alternative D is my preference. First, anyone who cares to look at the data cannot help but appreciate that climate change is occurring, that human carbon-producing activities are accelerating that process, and that we, as global citizens, need to be doing everything in our power to slow and hopefully even reverse the global temperature trends we're seeing. One of the ways we can achieve this is by preserving and increasing the natural carbon sinks (such as plants that absorb greenhouse gases out of the air) we're fortunate enough to have. Obviously, our forested and wilderness areas are some of those and so I think it's vital that we keep them intact and unmolested. There are, of course, many forested areas around the world that contribute to this process, but everyone everywhere needs to be working to preserve the carbon sinks they can. For our part, I think we should be preserving as many natural forests as we can in the Mountain West.

Second, it is entirely natural and understandable for humans to be focused on human interests and to be concerned with how best we can utilize natural resources for our economic and recreational ends. However, if that is the ONLY thing with which we concern ourselves, I think we are adopting a morally problematic perspective. Think of all the different plant and animal species that rely on the Custer Gallatin National Forest's ecosystems being intact. I don't think it's wrong for us to focus on their interest in our deliberations. In fact it's quite the opposite; if we give little to no consideration to the ways in which our plans for development and utilization affect the environment, we're doing something morally unconscionable. Allowing mines, logging, motorized/mechanized vehicles to permeate these spaces has a negative impact on plants and animals who use these regions. If we don't need to do so (and we don't really!) we shouldn't do so.

All this being said, I think that even if designating massive stretches of public land in Montana means that it will be utilized by fewer people, that's not a bad thing. The National Forests are serving a vital function all the same and we need to be mindful and respectful of that fact, or so I think anyway.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Best,

Chris Healow