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First name: Kristine
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Comments: Dear Custer Gallatin Planning Team and Supervisor Erickson,

Alternative D is moving toward the best environmentally sound decision in the Custer Gallatin National Forest Revision plan selection. Of all the the options and with consideration of the best (factual & complete) available scientific information Alternative D supports something for almost all forest users. Hopefully the entire forest plan will help facilitate conservation of land resources and plants and wildlife. And restore easier connectivity for wildlife to reach wild places, use public lands compatibly with human demands on those same lands and allow for migrations of species to safely pass along the Rocky Mountain region both north and west.

My interest is in the viability of a wilderness system that will support and ensure that wilderness areas will continue to exist as natural as possible without being subject to piecemeal disassembly by special players, as has been the case during the interim since first legislation creating the Wilderness Study Areas in 1977.
There are not a lot of specific definitions & language spelling out standards of wilderness characteristics in the plan. Since this plan will be the guidelines for decades, it needs them. The 2012 planning rules are not comforting- there is a sense that subjective judgment at the time of a need for a future decision is acceptable with no absolute standards in place. The 1987 Gallatin Forest Plan for the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf plans are dated, and will go away entirely when the new Forest Plan is published. Custer Gallatin NF needs to spell out plans to manage and protect wilderness character that are much more site specific. Noted thresholds that identify when unacceptable changes disrupt the wilderness are needed. Zone 1 needs to be clearly described by absolute standards. It is critical for the existing wilderness and new wilderness areas have consistent protections over time.
The Gallatin wilderness areas are spectacular and unique and most suitable for conservation of the almost complete assembly of North American wildlife species. The contiguity and proximity to Yellowstone Nation Park will augment the conservation and viability of grizzly bear, bison, grey wolves, bighorns and other native animals of this region that are sensitive to the artifacts of human encroachment on their habitat. Thresholds are also important for the less "charismatic" smaller animals, insects and flora when identifying problems effecting them as well. There should never be excessive pressures on wildlife and ecosystems in wilderness areas, they have evolved in balance of one another.

I live in the Jefferson River valley between the Tobacco Root Mountains & the island range of the Highland Mountains. These mountain ranges are in the Beaverhead Deer-Lodge National Forest but what's worth mentioning here is that the eastern bank of the Jefferson River has been considered a western boundary of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. That's not just a romantic notion of environmental conservation concern. The issue of connectivity between protected areas of public lands starting from the Custer Gallatin NF and the "less developed rural areas" across Montana to the west and the north are serious issues for viability of wildlife, so often treated as an inconvenient problem needing to be solved.
We moved here in 1991, reluctantly and sadly leaving Bozeman & the Gallatin Valley. The Gallatin & Madison Ranges were a bit further away. We left because of the rapid pace of growth & development that was happening at that time. In hindsight that seems a funny statement considering the explosive growth in the Bozeman/Big Sky area today. Who would have predicted this region would claim the national ranking of the fastest growing small town/city & rural interface region today?
We should not throw away this opportunity to preserve what is special, unique and vital here-
today there is very little margin for error.