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Organization:

Title:

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

For the past 50 plus years I have had the great fortune to have spent many unforgettable days, long weekends and vacations in the Custer Gallatin Forest lands. I have rock climbed, scrambled peaks, backpacked and ice climbed in the Gallatin and Madison ranges, the Absaroka Beartooths and the Crazyes.

I have tried to leave only footprints, but more often than not, I managed to leave a lot of sweat, scrapings of skin, some blood and hopefully all of my hubris behind.

In return, those mountains and forests and the experiences I gained there left their indelible mark on me. I would be a lesser person had I not had those wild and untamed places in which to test myself. My hope is that these areas will be around for future generations seeking adventure and a meaningful life.

I have also been around long enough to have seen the incredible growth of the cities and towns that border these lands. In the past few years I have actually been turned away from a trailhead or two in the Bridgers because the parking lots were overflowing. I worry that the pressure from so many people to recreate on these lands will ultimately destroy them; that they will be "loved" to death. Furthermore, I am concerned that human pressure will contribute to the decline and lack of diversity of wildlife populations.

Therefore I would like to make the following recommendations:

For the Crazyes, I recommend that the Forest Service manage the area to preserve its wilderness values. I would like to see a moratorium on any new trails for mechanized or motorized vehicles. There are some inholdings on the eastern side of the range which are heavily grazed by cattle. These should be monitored for overgrazing and the spread of noxious weeds because of their proximity to the public lands. Unauthorized gates and other obstructions of historically used public trails should not be tolerated.

For the Absaroka Beartooths I recommend that the Forest Service manage as wilderness the following areas (Alternative D): all of Line Creek plateau, Red Lodge Creek-Hell Roaring plateau, North Fork, Strawberry Creek, Chico Peak, Emigrant Peak, and Dome Mountain. I would also like to see Bad Canyon managed as a backcountry area with no mechanized or motorized use (Alternative B).

The Gallatin and Madison Ranges are home to a huge array of wildlife species, in addition to being an important watershed. I would like to see this managed as wilderness as well (Alternative D). I actually started this section by saying I reluctantly support Alternative C for these areas. I say "reluctantly" because I feel mountain bikes don't belong in certain areas, however, I believe the Gallatin Forest Partnership agreement is probably the most likely path we have to ultimately achieving wilderness designations for much of these lands, but only because the issue of whether mountain bikes belong in the wilderness is causing a schism among groups who would otherwise advocate for wilderness.

I also recommend that all the Recommended Wilderness Areas be managed to preserve their wilderness value so that in the future they will qualify for Wilderness designation. The preservation of these lands for wildlife habitat should be paramount. Therefore, any mechanized or motorized use should not be allowed.

As I get older, it's getting a bit harder to strap on a heavy backpack and force my creaky knees to carry me up into the mountains. But I will continue to go, as long as I can. And when I'm simply too arthritic to make the hike, I won't be complaining about access or whining about the lack of roads. At that point I will gladly leave it for the animals. Because while I left my DNA on the trails and rocks of the Custer Gallatin, it also left it's DNA in me.

Thanks for listening,

Kristen Drumheller