

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 6/7/2019 3:46:07 AM

First name: Nike

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I have lived near Bozeman for over 20 years and recreate often in the Custer-Gallatin National Forest. I seek out the least developed areas of the forest for hiking, fishing, backpacking, camping, photography and wildlife watching.

I am a wildlife biologist and enjoy forest areas with healthy populations of native wildlife that afford the opportunity to view wildlife. I seek peace, beauty, quiet, and connection with nature in the Custer-Gallatin NF.

As the years have passed it has become more difficult to access areas for recreation where I will not be disturbed by bicycles, motorcycles, ATVs or 4-WD vehicles. The problem with these mechanized and motorized forms of recreation is that they enable people to move much faster and disturb a much larger area and chase away the wildlife and that the number of people using these methods of movement have increased greatly over the years. My husband grew up in this area and worked for the state as a wildlife biologist years ago. He used a dirt bike in his work but there were very few other people using motorcycles during that time. Although much of the forests was open to motorized use back then there was little chance of them disturbing you during a hike. Now you have to go to an area where they are not allowed to hope for any peace. A few years ago I was hiking a trail near Bozeman in the Gallatin NF that was designated hiking only for one day out of the week. I chose that day to hike it and was passed by two groups on bicycles during the day. We left the trail rather late and after 5 PM two other bicycles parties showed up. When we pointed out the regulation to the bicycle parties none volunteered to leave. These bikers are really annoying because they are all healthy young people who can obviously walk. In fact the motorcycle riders I have run into are also sturdy young people who are obviously capable of hiking. This is why I get tired of the motorized and mechanized proponents saying areas are locked away if they cannot ride or drive to them. It is also true that if areas can be accessed by motorized vehicles they have more trash. If people have to walk in they visit with respect if they can drive in they often leave their respect behind. We need more quiet trails where hikers do not have to worry about their child or dog or selves being run over by bicyclers or motor bikers.

I am concerned about maintaining the abundance and diversity of wildlife in the Custer Gallatin. Areas like the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area provide critical wildlife movement corridors that link the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem with the Continental Divide wild lands to the north. All of the HPBH WSA should be recommended for Wilderness since wildlife habitat is the highest and best use of that area.

I urge you to recommend four Wilderness Areas in the Pryors Bear Canyon, Big Pryor Mountain, Punch Bowl RWAs, and Lost Water Canyon RWA. The Pryor area stands out for its remarkable diversity in elevations, habitats, wildlife, scenery and recreation quality. Wilderness designation is the best way to maintain its unique value.

As a wildlife biologist who has worked on bighorn sheep I believe that only alternatives that address managing disease risk of bighorn sheep should be considered. The Custer Gallatin includes large areas of excellent bighorn habitat only some of which is currently occupied. Outstanding occupied and unoccupied bighorn habitat within the Custer-Gallatin NF such as the Beartooths, Gallatins and Pryors should be managed to maintain their value for bighorn sheep. Pack goats, domestic sheep and vegetation management using goats or sheep should not be permitted in bighorn sheep habitat or anywhere near (buffers of 20 miles are recommended). Most domestic sheep and goats carry *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, *Mannheimia hemolytica* and other pneumonia bacteria that transferred to bighorn cause significant all age mortality and often depress lamb survival for decades. It is critical to minimize the risk of contact as much as possible since there is no available vaccine or treatment for wild bighorn sheep. One nose to nose contact between a bighorn and a domestic sheep or goat

can spread disease to the bighorn sheep and then back to the bighorn population and their linked herds causing declines that will last decades.

I am also concerned about grizzly bears and wolves. Both species have been under endangered species protections but are under consideration for delisting now. All increases in disturbance (roads, timber harvest, mechanized and motorized recreation) impact wolves and grizzly bears as well as other remarkable and rare species including fisher, lynx, and wolverine. These species have been extirpated over much of their original range, and still inhabit the Custer-Gallatin NF. To maintain these species into the future requires protection of their habitat from increased disturbance despite the increasing human population and increasing recreation pressure. For heavily hunted species such as deer and elk increases in access through road building for timber sales or other uses increases their risk of hunting mortality and if road density and use become high will cause them to avoid an area.

Please choose Alternative D as the preferred alternative because it affords Wildlife habitat and quiet wild recreation the best support among the alternatives. Please designate lands that should remain wild as Wilderness. The backcountry designation does not have a clear meaning and seems to invite abuse.

"Recommended wilderness areas are important for species diversity, protection of threatened and endangered species, protection of watershed, scientific research, and various social values." (Draft Plan DEIS, Volume 1, page 813)

I urge you to recommended the greatest acreage of Recommended Wilderness. they are not making any more of it and it will serve to maintain threatened species and will be the most needed in the future.