

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 8/18/2020 4:40:10 AM

First name: Millie

Last name: Carson

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Custer-Gallatin Planning Team-

What a momentous undertaking!!! Thank you for your time and energy in putting this thing together!!

I am commenting from the perspective of a former backcountry ranger who worked out of West Yellowstone, and Red Lodge, Custer/Gallatin ranger districts (before it was the Custer-Gallatin). I was one of the original people who inventoried backcountry campsites (wilderness and non wilderness) for Levels-of-Acceptable Change. Inventories were also performed in the Lee Metcalf, and in the A/B wilderness areas. I've seen backcountry use in the Custer/Gallatin wilderness and surrounding areas go from a little bit of use to use of epic proportions, primarily in the past 10 years.

I realize the USFS is tasked with a multiple use mandate, however given the extraordinary location in which we live, I believe extraordinary measures are in order to protect this amazing resource called THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE ECOSYSTEM!!!!!! As we are witnessing, Bozeman has become the new relocation hotspot!!! This burgeoning population is having a substantial, negative impact on ecological resources. Increased automobile traffic, increased numbers of people using public lands, increased threats and disturbances to wildlife. Sadly, the GYE/YNP is being boxed in from all sides. From Cody, WY to West Yellowstone, MT there is development in every major drainage outside Yellowstone National Park boundaries (I also worked as a firefighter for the USFS up the North Fork of the Shoshone out of Cody, WY). Based on the huge influx of people to the GYE, especially Bozeman, it is imperative every measure be taken to ensure its wild character, its longevity, and for the resources it holds to remain intact, especially wildlife!!!

Looking at a map showing public lands/wilderness on the east and west sides of I-89, I'm amazed at the lack of wilderness on the west side of I-89. It's piddly, quite sad really. The area seeing the greatest increase in human population numbers is the area with the least protection; a wilderness designation. The public land surrounding the Bozeman area demands/requires the most protection precisely because of the heavy impacts it is experiencing. The entire Gallatin Range, based on it's ecological characteristics warrants wilderness designation. It is huge habitat for wildlife, and a thoroughfare for wildlife migration. Why is it not being designated as wilderness? The Gallatin Range is the largest unprotected, roadless area left in the CGNF and is a critical ecological link with YNP, especially the Porcupine Buffalo Horn drainages which are home to countless wildlife species: bighorn sheep, wolves, moose, wolverine, lynx to name a few. What does the Forest Service think this area will look like when Bozeman/Big Sky and the surrounding area population is in excess of 500,000 (and it won't be long!)? What will happen to wildlife, and where will wildlife go? Numbers are already imperiled!!!

The PBH drainages are part of the Congressionally-designated, 155,000-acre Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area. Legislation enacted in 1977 directs you, the Forest Service, to maintain it's wilderness characteristics until Congress determines otherwise. What does "backcountry" mean in terms of use? Will it maintain its wilderness characteristics or open the area up for complete degradation? Mechanized, motorized, logging, mining?

Stop making YNP an island ecosystem for wildlife and give wilderness designation where it is due: Hyalite and West Pine, Porcupine/Bufalo Horn. A world without wildlife is no world at all. And as we are experiencing, getting away from people into the restorative qualities of wilderness/nature is becoming harder and harder. There are countless areas for mountain bikers, and motorized vehicle users to recreate. Unfortunately wildlife does not have those same options. Protect our wildlife and designate wild lands as wilderness!!! Please!!!! Wildlife is counting on you!!!

"Wilderness-it is important for our happiness, our spiritual welfare, for our success in dealing with the confusions of a materialistic and sophisticated civilization." Olaus Murie; "To know the wilderness is to know a profound humility, to recognize one's littleness, to sense dependence and interdependence, indebtedness and responsibility." Howard Zahniser, author of The Wilderness Act.