

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 8/22/2020 9:54:07 PM

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Comments: OBJECTIONS TO 2020 LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN for the Custer Gallatin National Forest (Mary Erickson, Supervisor) for the GALLATIN RANGE AND HENRY MOUNTAINS

The following objections pertain to the Gallatin Range.

The final decision designates too few acres of wilderness quality land as recommended wilderness.

This decision is arbitrary and is not based on a coherent rationale pertinent to the unique characteristics and history of management of the Gallatin Range. Specifically, it ignores the identified features that qualify at least half of the range to be designated as Recommended Wilderness. These features include an abundance of wilderness quality lands, habitat that supports a full complement of native wildlife species, and a connection to Yellowstone National Park. Also, the Hyalite drainage is the main source of water for the rapidly growing city of Bozeman.

The decision also ignores the long history of efforts to legislatively recognize and protect these features. It fails to address the rapidly growing volume of recreational use and the technological proliferation of new mechanized vehicles. The decision mistakenly interprets "multiple use" to mean many unrestricted uses on the same area at the same time. It over-emphasizes the importance of recreation, particularly motorized recreation. And the decision discounts a litany of past forest service actions that violated and flouted laws and administrative orders regulating travel and management of lands. Politics has clearly played an outsized role in this decision.

1. THE 2020 LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN IS SHORT SIGHTED

In the Draft Record of Decision, the Forest Supervisor states the following. "My role as the decision maker is to put forth a plan that provides for long-term sustainability (ecological, economic, and social) and considers the richness of public interests and the uniqueness of affected communities. I also wished to develop a plan that reflects the knowledge gained through 100-plus years of management experience across the national forest and the continued and continuing evolution of our social and ecological scientific understandings."

As it is only the second Plan this forest has ever written, 35 years after the first Plan, this Plan should look decades ahead. Instead, it focuses on maintaining the status quo.

Without explanation or justification, the Forest Supervisor states, "In most areas, I felt that existing recreational uses should continue." By continuing existing recreational uses without any restrictions on volume, the Plan does not allow for future growth in population or the current rapid changes in technology.

Population growth in Gallatin County and Bozeman is rapid and shows no sign of slowing down. Bozeman is the fastest growing small town in the U.S. Visitation figures for Yellowstone National Park (YNP) the highest they have ever been. Volume of recreation use is rising in concert with population. High volumes of recreation have negative effects on wildlife, water and air quality, quality of recreational experience, trail conditions, social interactions among recreationists.

Population

Gallatin County Bozeman

1980 42,86521,645

2019 114,43449,831

Growth since 2010

20%27%

As an example, the 2006 Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan was outdated nearly as soon as it was adopted. It failed to define bicycles as vehicles and had no mechanism to deal with new snow bikes and e-bikes. It failed to foresee how the increased volume of mountain bikers allowed to travel off system trails would damage the forest where new illegal trails cut by bike riders are appearing regularly. I have personally seen three such trails in the Hyalite Creek valley and have reported them to forest officials who respond politely but decline to take action.

The plan needs to acknowledge the foresight of previous generations in trying to protect the wilderness character of the Gallatin Range. The Gallatin Range is special in its shared boundary with Yellowstone National Park and its ability to sustain a full complement of its original wildlife. Such wilderness quality land is rare in the US and should be cherished and protected, not divided up into recreational sectors.

Many local citizens and politicians labored long and hard to protect the wilderness qualities of the Gallatin Range. Their efforts and accomplishments were not given sufficient weight in the Decision, if they were considered at all.

*In 1958 Montana Wilderness Association was founded in Bozeman to protect the wilderness lands of the Gallatin and Madison Ranges.

*In 1977 the US Forest Service Roadless Area Review and Evaluation singled out much of the Gallatin Range to be protected.

*In 1977 Congress recognized this by passing the Montana Wilderness Study Area Act.

*In 2001 the Roadless Rule reinforced the need for protection.

*All these efforts were handicapped by the severe checkerboard pattern of private and national forest sections of land, a legacy of the 19th century railroad expansion. However, in the 1990s Montana's representatives in Congress worked hard to pass the Gallatin Range Consolidation Act of 1993 which significantly reduced the private ownership that existed in 1985 and that had prevented serious consideration of wilderness designation back then.

The plan also completely overlooks the main lesson of the "history" of the last 50 years of the Gallatin National Forest. That lesson is that managers repeatedly failed to realize the immense value of the wildness of the Gallatin Range, squandered it by allowing and encouraging unrestricted mechanized recreation, and deliberately violated laws mandating limits on mechanized use to 1977 levels. Gallatin National Forest officials were so unconcerned with enforcing the terms of the Wilderness Study Act in 1977 that they failed to record existing modes and levels of use.

The Big Sky Snowmobile trail was planned and built with Forest Service encouragement in around 1967 without any thought for the consequences for future forest management. ATVs were allowed on trails without public input. Motorized and mechanized use was allowed inside the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (HPBH WSA) in violation of the requirement to maintain wilderness character of 1977 when motorized use was non-existent or infrequent. In 1977 motorcycles and snowmobiles were so underpowered that they could not negotiate terrain they routinely cover now. Mountain bikes, which certainly, did not exist in 1977, were allowed on all trails. Instead of regulating or prohibiting these uses inside the HPBH WSA, the 2006 Travel Management Plan codified them.

On May 9, 1975, Martin F. Whalen, representing the Gallatin Valley Snowmobile Association, testified at a hearing on the proposed Wilderness Study Act. He said, "The areas I speak of as meeting the definition of a wilderness are the Upper Hyalite, the Taylor-Hilgard, the Lionhead, and of course, the Spanish Peaks Primitive Area. They are areas untrammelled by man, which retain their primeval characteristics, have outstanding opportunities for solitude, have a fragile ecosystem, and are totally federally owned as the law prescribes." The

Upper Hyalite and Lionhead are now overrun with bicycles and motorcycles. Solitude is gone. This Forest Plan fails to acknowledge and correct these management failings.

Gallatin National Forest has been repeatedly sued successfully for not maintaining the wilderness character of the HPBH WSA. The last time was in 2011 when the Forest was required to change the Travel Management Plan to account for increased volume of mechanized use and create conditions for solitude in the HPBH WSA. The Forest has yet to fully comply with the court order over the entirety of the HPBH WSA. Alternative F of the Final Forest Plan does not "meet law" regarding maintaining the 1977 wilderness character of the HPBH WSA now and into the future. Instead it divides the WSA into sectors, dedicating half of it to recreational emphasis.

2. THE PLAN UNDERVALUES THE MAJOR QUALITIES OF THE LANDSCAPE

The Gallatin Range is unique in the national forest system because its southern portion is within Yellowstone National Park. This connection makes it a vital corridor for many species of native wildlife, large and small, common and rare, mammals and birds. Despite the lack of permanent protection, it has retained wild, intact habit through the efforts of many protectors over the years and due to its remoteness from major population centers. However, the remoteness is quickly diminishing as population and visitation pressures increase.

The Gallatin Range is special to many people because of its 'wildness' where solitude, quiet, closeness to nature, wildlife, beauty, opportunities for adventure, clean air and clean water abound. The headwaters of Hyalite Creek which are a major source of Bozeman's drinking water are contained within the boundary of the HPBH WSA. The lower elevation area between Porcupine Creek, the Yellowstone National Park boundary, the Gallatin River, and the Gallatin Crest is important elk winter habitat. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks manages more than 10 sections there for that purpose.

As distinctive and valuable as the characteristics of the Gallatin Range are, the Forest Plan evaluation and decision failed to give them sufficient weight.

Eight items are listed as "Issues that Drove Alternatives" in section 2.4.1 of The Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Draft Revised Forest Plan. Of the eight, 5 concern recreation, 1 concerns wildlife connections, 1 concerns timber, and 1 concerns aircraft landing strips.

Listed among "Issues that Did Not Drive Alternatives" in section 2.4.2 are several major attributes of the Gallatin Range which are water supply and quality, wildlife species diversity and viability of species, and congressionally or administratively designated areas.

The very qualities that distinguish the Gallatin Range and make its protection important were not seriously considered in designing the alternative on which the final decision is based. Recreation seems to be the overriding factor in defining alternatives and making decisions. Additionally, all revised Plan alternatives had to be consistent with existing travel plans, despite the fact that the travel plan for the HPBH WSA had been found defective by the courts.

Analysis in the draft plan identified 193,709 acres or 56% of the Gallatin Range as suitable for wilderness designation. Surely, 44% or nearly half of the range is sufficient for recreation. Nevertheless, the final plan recommends only 92,072 acres or 26% for Recommended Wilderness.

3. FAILURE OF OBJECTIVITY AND LEADERSHIP

As noted previously, the Plan for the Gallatin Range ignores past management history and focuses on the short term. By subdividing the HPBH WSA into several small sections and dedicating 74% of the Range to mechanized

recreation, it compromises the ecological sustainability upon which economic and social sustainability depend.

Most of the 92,072 acres proposed as Recommended Wilderness is located along the high elevation spine of the Gallatin Range. As someone who loves nature and seeks escape from noise and machines in the national forest, I would be forced to walk long distances and climb high peaks to find quiet and solitude within Recommended Wilderness. Theoretically, this is solitude and quiet that I should be able to find everywhere in the HPBH WSA and especially on a stroll to a waterfall along Hyalite Creek that Mr. Whalen described in 1975 as having outstanding opportunities for solitude and a fragile ecosystem. Mountain bikers and motorcycle riders, meanwhile, can reach their designated areas directly from well used roads. Looked at this way, the Plan is clearly discriminatory against forest users not involved in mechanized recreation. Wilderness is not just rocks and ice to be admired as scenery. It is also forests and meadows to be explored and enjoyed by people.

The Draft Record makes no mention of enforcement which is woefully lacking in the Gallatin Range. The public has given up reporting violations because they know nothing will happen. Rogue mountain bikers are building their own trails with chain saws. I have found them myself, on the Bozeman Creek watershed ridges, on the ridge between Langhor and South Cottonwood creeks, on the Lick Creek Ridge. On July 26 of this year, two motorcycle riders were witnessed chasing bighorn sheep in the Storm Castle creek headwaters basin (inside the HPBH WSA). When returning from the summit of Ramshorn Peak I heard and smelled motorcycles on the Big Horn Pass trail which is closed to mechanized travel. Every time I hike Rock Creek trail and the Gallatin Crest trail at Eaglehead Mtn. there are bicycle and motorcycle tire tracks in the soil on and off the trail where these vehicles are prohibited. It is clear that mechanized use of trails in any part of the HPBH WSA will degrade the wilderness character and ecological health of the land. No one can ensure that recreationists will not travel off trail or use trails closed to them but enforcement would be simplified if all of the WSA were managed as wilderness.

In evaluating candidates for recommended wilderness designation, the Forest Supervisor said that, "In most areas, I felt that existing recreational uses should continue." Later, she writes that, "Plan direction would provide direction that is consistent with existing travel plans, except where suitability for motorized recreation and mechanized recreation varies by revised plan alternatives." There is no explanation or justification for valuing recreation over other qualities. It appears to be arbitrary and not objective.

There is also no mention of the fact that all trails are "shared use" which means that, outside of Wilderness, hikers are displaced by bicycle riders and motorcycle riders. A survey of recreation use in the Gallatin National Forest included in the Travel Management Plan (October 2006, Volume 2, Table 3-16) found that hiking was the main activity of 29.1% of visitors, snowmobiling and OHV use was the main activity of 9.3% of visitors, and bicycling was the main activity of 1.44% of visitors. Of 26 types of recreation in the survey, hiking/walking was the most popular. Hiking was 19 points more popular than the next most popular activity which was relaxing. The least numerous users of the Forest are getting the most attention in this Forest Plan.

The 2006 Travel Plan was found to violate the 1977 Wilderness Study Act by the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in 2011. The justices wrote, "We hold that the travel plan improperly ignores the impact of increased volume of motorized and mechanized use on current users' ability to seek quiet and solitude in the study area. Because the Service entirely failed to consider this important aspect of its duty to maintain the study area's 1977 wilderness character, its decision is arbitrary and capricious." In light of this decision, why does the Forest Supervisor want to conform the Forest Plan to a defective Travel Plan?

The Court also held that the Forest Service must continue to manage the HPBH WSA to "maintain [its] 1977 wilderness character and potential for wilderness designation," for current users as well as future generations. By continuing existing uses within the HPBH WSA, the Plan cannot possibly maintain 1977 wilderness character.

It is clear that Custer Gallatin National Forest dislikes the constraints of the Wilderness Study Act and is molding

its Plan in a way to ensure that HPBH WSA is "released by Congress".

The Forest Supervisor states, "I found the work of the Gallatin Forest Partnership to be the most compelling. This was due to the area-specific recommendations combined with local knowledge, and the outreach and coalition-building across diverse interests that accompanied their proposal. Indeed, the Gallatin County Commission, Park County Commission, and Madison County Commission have all endorsed the Gallatin Forest Partnership proposal."

The Gallatin Forest Partnership plan must not have been very compelling since major parts of it were rejected. And endorsement by County Commissioners may be required by rules, but in Gallatin County three men cannot be considered remotely representative of the 114,434 residents of the county. The County Commissioners never asked the general public for input on the plan.

This overemphasis on mechanized recreation points to a misplaced philosophy of never restricting recreation and trying to accommodate all public desires for use. It also indicates an undue influence of current politicians over the planning process, a middle road that is "safe" for administrators but not suited to protecting the wilderness character of much of the forest.

When snowmobile traffic threatened to overwhelm the human and natural resources of Yellowstone National Park, the leaders took strong measures to reduce and control use. As a result, winter travel is now relatively quiet, the air is clean, and visitors seeking these qualities who stayed away, now flock to the Park.

This kind of leadership is needed for the Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Gallatin Range

The Forest Plan must designate 193,700 acres as Recommended Wilderness according to Alternative D of the Draft EIS.

To preserve wilderness character in the HPBH WSA, the Big Sky Snowmobile trail needs to be moved to the west side of US 191 at the Porcupine Creek trailhead. It can easily be rerouted up Buck Ridge road and onto the Cinnamon-Buck trail and existing and decommissioned logging roads to the south. The trail is discontinuous now at the Buffalo Horn trailhead. This route change would solve this problem and allow preservation of wilderness character in this area of the HPBH WSA.

Lionhead

Recommended Wilderness status for Lionhead must be restored. This is another area where illegal mountain bike use was allowed and later legitimized instead of stopped, by inclusion in the Travel Management Plan. Saying that bike traffic there is "light" is not a prescription for long term sustainability. Given the rapid and huge increase in population and visitation in Gallatin County and Yellowstone National Park, use is guaranteed to increase. It is not now as light as the Forest Supervisor says. I have hiked all three trails in the Lionhead area and backpacked to Coffin Lakes. Just as I arrived at the lakes, a group of brightly clad mountain bikers, hollering loudly, raced to the lake shore and quickly departed, not a comforting start to a quiet night in the forest.

Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area

The only reason Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area was not made wilderness in 1983 was the presence of the Big Sky Snowmobile trail. The Forest has managed it in violation of the law since it was created by allowing unrestricted recreation. The law clearly states that wildlife protection and snowmobiling are the principal uses. Only motorized use established prior to the Act is allowed as long as presently existing wilderness character is maintained. I disagree with the statement that wording in the Act prevents classification as Recommended

Wilderness. Also, there is no enforcement of winter recreation there. Every time I ski along the Yellowstone National Park boundary with the Monument Wilderness I hear snowmobiles close by. The Recommended Wilderness identified in the draft alternative D on the east and south sides of the Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area should be included in the Final Plan. Once again, this is a unique lower elevation landscape highly suited to wildlife that has been mistakenly dedicated to motorized recreation.

List of references supporting the fact that recreation displaces elk and grizzly bears and other wildlife.

<https://mountainjournal.org/scientists-say-mountain-biking-negatively-impacts-bears>

May 26, 2020

Griz Expert Says 'Mountain Bikes Are A Grave Threat To Bears'

When it comes to safeguarding bears, scientists say wilderness-caliber lands, free of riders, are important to bruin persistence and other wildland species

by Todd Wilkinson

https://www.backcountryhunters.org/e_bikes_elk_a_bad_combination

E-Bikes & Elk: A Bad Combination

Posted by David Lien | May 21, 2020 BHA (Backcountry Hunters & Anglers)

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/speeches/delivering-natural-resource-values-four-threats-our-mission>

Speech

Delivering Natural Resource Values: Four Threats to Our Mission

Dale Bosworth, Chief

Israel Visit

Volcani Center, Israel

- February 10, 2004

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5145168/>

PLoS One. 2016; 11(12): e0167259.

Published online 2016 Dec 8. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0167259

PMCID: PMC5145168

PMID: 27930730

Effects of Recreation on Animals Revealed as Widespread through a Global Systematic Review

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