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Comments: I have reviewed the draft Custer Gallatin Forest Plan. It seems to be a good balanced approach to forest management. I have focused my comments on the old Gallatin NF portion of the plan because that is the area I am most familiar with.

I believe the Plan should propose the most Wilderness possible to augment wild lands in the Greater Yellowstone Area. Of course boundaries must be practical for Wilderness management and fragmentation of wild lands must be avoided.

The Plan proposes Wilderness for the Gallatin range. I applaud this decision. My comments begin in the Buffalo Horn area where proposed Wilderness connects with Yellowstone National Park.

The Plan shows a connection of National Forest proposed Wilderness with Yellowstone National Park only in S 22, T 8 S, R 5 E, a tenuous connection. I suggest proposing Wilderness for all or as much of the Buffalo Horn Backcountry Area as possible to strengthen the physical connection of wild land in this important transition zone.

I know there are outfitter and other recreation interests opposed to Wilderness designation there. But 100 years from now any practical connection of wildland between National Forest and Yellowstone National Park will be gone. In 100 years undeveloped contiguous wild country will be rare.

The approximately 10 sections of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks "wildlife management lands" should be addressed if Wilderness is proposed. A land exchange or a formal management agreement for Wilderness management between agencies would be needed.

It is difficult to safeguard wilderness values in designated Wilderness. It is more difficult to protect those values in a less secure designation such as Backcountry Area. Pressure to degrade those values in all areas of the Forest will increase as public use increases.

In the north portion of the Gallatin range I suggest extending Wilderness designation north to include the Mount Blackmore portion of the Wilderness Study Area. I would strongly consider including sections 7, 17, 18 and 19, T 5 S, R 6 E. These are outside of the Wilderness Study Area, high in the Storm Castle and Swan Creek drainages. I believe that sections 7, 17 and 19 were privately owned when the WSA was developed, and thus not included for study. Including these four sections will enhance Blackmore area Wilderness values and simplify the Wilderness boundary.

The Crazy Mountains certainly are candidates for Wilderness except for the checkerboard land ownership problem. They should be high priority for a land exchange to consolidate ownership on both the Custer Gallatin and Lewis and Clark National Forests.

Somewhere in the Plan it should be stated prominently that the Custer Gallatin National Forest is a critical part of the internationally recognized Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, perhaps the preeminent contiguous wildlands in the continental United States.

New road construction should be limited and roads put to bed or closed when the need for them ends.

Opportunities for consolidating National Forest lands should be pursued aggressively through purchase or exchange when it promotes Forest objectives.

It might be appropriate to explain National Forest responsibility for public safety on the Hyalite, Hebgen Lake and perhaps other dam, where people and property are at risk.

Sincerely, John Dolan
Former Bozeman District Ranger
1979 - 1988