

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/3/2020 7:49:54 PM

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Comments: Objections in the Gallatin Range:

The final Forest Management Plan must give Recommend Wilderness status to 193,700 acres per draft plan alternative D. Now the Forest Service's favored alternative recommends only 92,072 acres. The wilderness qualities of the landscape in the Gallatin Range, however, allow for many, many more acres. Designating only 92,072 acres is short sighted and in conflict with the Forest Service's mandate to protect our wild lands into the future. If the Forest Service doesn't protect these lands, they will be ruined by flagrant abusers of the land. If the Forest Service doesn't protect these lands, who will? Your leadership is needed.

The Gallatin key linkage area in the Nichols Creek and Limestone Creek areas must be designated as Recommended Wilderness to maintain key wildlife migration routes. Allowing mechanized use in this area would devastate wildlife that has established long-standing reliance on this migration corridor.

Objections in the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area:

The Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn (HPBH) Wilderness Study Area must be designated as Recommended Wilderness. The Forest Service has not met its legal obligation to maintain the area's 1977 wilderness character as mandated by the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Despite this legal obligation, the Forest Service's favored alternative divides the HPBH and emphasizes recreational use over wildlife and ecological needs on about half of the land. This would be in direct opposition to the Ninth Circuit's 2006 ruling.

The Big Sky Snowmobile Trail was allowed by the Forest Service, also in direct violation of the Ninth Circuit's mandate. This trail must be removed as it impacts the HPBH, and the land must be restored to its previous wilderness character. The trail should never have been allowed.

Objections in the Lionhead:

The final Forest Management Plan must restore Recommended Wilderness status to the Lionhead. I am a fourth generation Montanan and a resident of Big Sky, and it is well known among long-time residents that mechanized and motorized recreationists mounted a concerted effort to destroy the wilderness characteristics of the Lionhead in order to keep the area for themselves. Fortunately, the destruction they caused can and should be rehabilitated, and the area should become Wilderness. Allowing this type of behavior is akin to putting the inmates in charge of the penitentiary or deeding the bank to the bank robber. You should not reward this vandalism. Minus the mechanized and motorized chaos, the Lionhead is a lovely, pristine and fragile area that needs your protection.

Regarding mechanized use on any Forest Service land, you must understand how this equipment has evolved in recent years to make it considerably more destructive to the natural landscape. E bikes are hard to identify yet they propel users to higher and more remote landscapes. Fat tire and downhill bikes similarly allow access to new landscapes and more months of the year. Often these landscapes are fragile, and the user is so far back in the wilderness landscape that they know their vandalism will go unpunished. Recommended Wilderness designation would make detection and prosecution much easier and more likely. Recreational use designation only invites more of the same behavior.

Objections in the Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area:

The Recommended Wilderness areas in alternative D from the draft plan for the Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area must be restored in the final plan. The Forest Service has not effectively enforced use of the area by motorized recreationists. They have abused your forbearance. Again, the inmates are running the penitentiary. Bringing this to an end can best be achieved by Recommended Wilderness status.

Objections to overweighting the input of the Gallatin Forest Partnership (GFP):

The GFP does not represent the positions of a vast majority of National Forest users. It is a small, insular group of Montanans, dominated by mechanized recreationists. The GFP asked only a cursory, localized group for input prior to preparing its comments. They look like they have broad representation, but they do not. Membership numbers in the GFP is declining. The county commissioners, again, represent only a small group of Montanans. The commissioners are political and, as such, advocate political positions. The Forest Service should represent a broad, national, nonpolitical audience. If the Forest Service cannot do that, it should err on the side of limited, conservative and gentle use of the land.