

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/4/2020 7:29:27 PM

First name: Ben

Last name: Polk

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I would like to thank the Forest Service for all of the work that has gone into the Forest Plan. I was especially excited to see that the Forest Plan includes the following:

Recommended wilderness in the Crazy Mountains and recognition of the area as important to the Crow Tribe.

Expansion of recommended wilderness in Lost Water Canyon and the addition of Bear Canyon in the Pryor Mountains. Ensuring recommended wilderness will be managed without non-conforming uses. Incorporating many elements of the Gallatin Forest Partnership, including recommended wilderness for the Gallatin Range..

Statement of issues and/or parts of the plan revision to which the objection applies:

My objections apply to the following issues in the Custer Gallatin Land Management Plan:

Cowboy Heaven (MG-CHBCA)

Crazy Mountains Backcountry Area (BC-CMBCA)

South Crazy Mountain Recommended Wilderness

Chalk Buttes Backcountry Area (SX-CBBCA)

Pryor Mountains BCAs

Elimination of recommended Wilderness, including Lionhead

Hyalite area (MG-HREA)

Concise statements explaining the objection and suggestions on how the proposed plan should be improved:

Cowboy Heaven (MG-CHBCA):

I strongly object to Cowboy Heaven not being recommended for Wilderness. Recommending Cowboy Heaven for Wilderness would provide a critical and safe corridor for wildlife to travel between two existing Wilderness areas (Beartrap Canyon and the Spanish Peaks), and help maintain the natural beauty of both of these special places. In addition, this Wilderness designation was a key feature of Gallatin Forest Partnership, which reflected the interests of many diverse stakeholders; please incorporate this important element of the Agreement by recommending Cowboy Heaven for wilderness in the final plan.

Crazy Mountains:

The Crazy mountains are unlike any other area of the Custer Gallatin. When you walk among the tall peaks, jutting up from a sea of grass and brush, you can instantly perceive why this is such an important and special place to the Crow people, as well as the myriad of wildlife that find shelter and solace among the bony ridges, deep valleys, and pure lakes. Because this range faces so many challenges on account of checkerboarding, it is critical to protect it as much as possible. The proposed protections and special designations should be expanded eastward. The proposed Backcountry Area should be modified to prohibit mechanized use. There are no existing mountain bike trails in this area and leaving the door open for the trails to become designated down the road only invites conflict where there doesn't need to be any. Expanding mountain biking access to this area, which does not have any established biking trails, would disturb its wild character and likely lead to conflicts between recreationists and perhaps private land owners. Mechanized travel would disrupt the sort of soul-searching, spiritual experience that primitive users currently enjoy among the spindly ridges and peaks. I feel very strongly that the area should include a suitability component similar to the Bad Canyon backcountry area: The backcountry area is not suitable for mechanized transport, except use of game carts.

I would also like to see the Crazy's BCA expanded east to include sections 4, 22, 26, and 34. If the proposed East Crazy Mountains land swap goes through, this will be a contiguous area and should be managed consistently with the adjacent backcountry area.

I was extremely pleased to see the Crazies receive some recommended wilderness protection. While I wish it was much bigger, I understand that there are many interests Supervisor Erickson is balancing. However, I ask that the South Crazy Mountains recommended wilderness be expanded east. That would help to make a larger contiguous recommended wilderness area.

Chalk Buttes:

The Chalk Buttes are another important place where I would like to see improved language in the backcountry area plan components. I do not see the logic of allowing mountain biking in this area, as the landscape is not well suited to biking and could be irreparably harmed by the activity. There is not currently much pressure from user groups to allow biking in the area, so it is unclear who the mountain biking allowance is intended to serve. Conversely, many hikers find the trail-less and challenging terrain to be a welcome sojourn, and their experiences would be harmed by the development of mountain biking trails. Similar to the Crazy Mountains, there are no existing designated mountain bike trails here. The Backcountry area should include the following suitability component in order to protect the current wild character of the area: The backcountry area is not suitable for mechanized transport, except use of game carts.

Pryor Mountains:

While I appreciate that recommended wilderness was expanded in Alternative F, I would like to see Punch Bowl and Big Pryor also recommended for wilderness. As an area of intense concern to the Crow Tribe, the Pryors should be afforded as much protection and respect as possible. The proposed plan has the opportunity to further incorporate their historically marginalized voices and protect more areas of the Pryor Mountains with recommended wilderness designations. Not only that, but since the Pryors are a hotspot of biological diversity, the Forest Service should do everything it can to maintain their wild character. For these reasons, I request that the Big Pryor and Punch Bowl areas be recommended for wilderness in the final plan.

Elimination of recommended Wilderness:

I was extremely disappointed that the Forest Service decided to eliminate 26,135 acres that had been previously recommended in the 1986 and 1987 plans respectively. I am particularly disappointed to see that the Lionhead recommended wilderness has been eliminated. In our current environment, with encroaching populations, climate change, and the increasingly obvious need for sustainable economic practices, the Forest Service should be looking to maintain as much recommended wilderness as possible. The Lionhead area offers a fantastic backcountry experience, and is the only area of the forest that contains a section of the Continental Divide Trail. It should retain its recommended wilderness designation to ensure that recreationists can count on it for solace and the peace of nature for generations to come. In general, removing recommended wilderness areas is a step in the wrong direction when our public lands need all the support they can get. Please consider reincorporating the Lionhead, Burnt Mountain, Republic, Mystic, and Line Creek Plateau as recommended wilderness in the new plan. It is important that we continue to protect these areas as recommended wilderness because the wilderness character has not changed there since they were recommended in the old plans.

Hyalite:

I encourage the Forest Service to fully implement the Gallatin Forest Partnership agreement, including key elements of the agreement that would protect Hyalite. Currently the plan doesn't offer any protection for the South Cottonwood Area or Mount Blackmore. As a Bozeman resident, it would be painful to see wide-scale development there. Those of us lucky enough to call Montana's fastest-growing town home know that recreation in the Hyalite area is priceless, and a key feature that contributes to our quality of life. Logging and/or road building around South Cottonwood Creek or Mt. Blackmore would be an affront to many of us who hold hiking, running, biking, and skiing in those areas dear. It would scar the landscape and detract from the experience. I would have to abashedly admit to visitors that we couldn't manage to protect some of our closest, most beautiful terrain from the hands of development. Please ensure the natural character of these areas is preserved by protecting them more stringently. It is important that these areas receive protection as the Gallatin Forest

Partnership recommends.

In addition, I would like to see the Hyalite Recreation Emphasis area include the standard that was in Alternative C in the DEIS: Construction of new motorized trails shall not be allowed. It is very important that we ensure that the motorized footprint does not continue to expand because of the impact it has on the opportunity for high quality recreation for other users. There is plenty of motorized opportunity in Hyalite as is. Please include this important standard to ensure that Hyalite continues to be a place where users of all types can have high quality recreation experiences.

Many of my suggestions were originally offered by a broad coalition of concerned parties through the Gallatin Forest Partnership Agreement. Please do not take their advice lightly, as it represents a sustainable, well-thought-out, and balanced approach to managing the forest.

Statement demonstrating the link between objection and prior formal comments:

I submitted a comment on the draft plan and draft EIS last spring. While I appreciate that many things I supported are included in the final plan, my objections speak to those priorities from my prior comments that were not included. Thank you for considering these objections that I believe could significantly improve the final plan.