

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/7/2020 5:37:22 PM

First name: Maurie

Last name: Petterson

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:

Incorporating many elements of the Gallatin Forest Partnership, including recommended wilderness for the Gallatin Range. Ensuring recommended wilderness will be managed without non-conforming uses. Maintaining the primitive character and management of the roadless areas in the Ashland Ranger District (Tongue River Breaks, King Mountain, and Cook Mountain). Expansion of recommended wilderness in Lost Water Canyon and the addition of Bear Canyon in the Pryor Mountains. Recommended wilderness in the Crazy Mountains and recognition of the area as important to the Crow Tribe..

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. Cowboy Heaven is contiguous with the Recommended Wilderness in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest directly to the west. This area retains the required wilderness attributes. Recommending Cowboy Heaven for Wilderness, the Forest Service would be recommending consistent management and consolidating a wild corridor for wildlife away from the busy Gallatin Canyon and Gallatin Valley. Protecting Cowboy Heaven was also at the heart of the Gallatin Forest Partnership Agreement, which was endorsed by over 900 individuals and 100 organizations and businesses, including the Park, Gallatin, and Madison County Commissions. Please incorporate this important element of the Gallatin Forest Partnership Agreement by recommending Cowboy Heaven for wilderness in the final plan.

Crazy Mountains:

I grew up hiking/camping/fishing in the Crazy Mountains. Now much of that access is prohibited. The Crazy Mountains are a unique geologic and recreational entity. They provide critical habitat for several species and are essential for accessible wilderness. Request the back country area be designated as wilderness to protect this area. 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. The wilderness experience is incredibly important. During the current pandemic there has been significantly increased traffic in the areas I visit. Bike trails run counter to this experience. Increased wilderness without bike trails is essential. 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 Mountains 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. The Chalk Buttes offer a singular opportunity. They provide the essence of wilderness experience and should be protected as such. This is a primitive with no trails and that's how it should remain. This area should be preserved to protect the solitude and maintain the wildlife habitat. 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. I congratulate the Forest Service in recommending expanding the Lost Water Canyon Recommended Wilderness area to include more of Crooked Creek, and recommending Bear Canyon for Wilderness designation. This is a noteworthy achievement. I encourage recommending Big Pryor and Punch Bowl for Wilderness. The Pryors are close to Billings the largest city in Montana. The Pryors are in danger of being loved to death. It is critical to preserve as much of this area as possible with wilderness protection. Mechanized and motorized use will destroy these irreplaceable areas. 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. One of the lessons of the current pandemic is the desperate requirement for places to be alone. The solitude of wilderness is crucial to finding and maintaining oneself. That is why the Lionhead Recommended Wilderness area, and others, are important. The Lionhead adjoins the Targhee Creek Recommended Wilderness in Idaho along the Continental Divide. The area protects an important wildlife linkage between Yellowstone National Park and the Centennial Mountains and provides secure habitat for elk, bighorn sheep, wolverines, and grizzly bears. It also offers a stunning backcountry experience and encompasses the only section of the Continental Divide Trail within the Custer Gallatin National Forest. The Forest Service has allowed mountain biking to become established here, and though it states the wilderness character has not changed, it points to this recreational conflict as the reason it is no longer suitable for Recommended Wilderness. This makes no sense. Request the Lionhead Recommended Wilderness area, and others, retain that designation and protected as wilderness as soon as possible.. 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 student at Montana State in the 60s we hiked, camped, and more in Hyalite. The growth of Bozeman, the University, and the increased tourist traffic have made this another area that is being loved to death. Additionally this area provides most of Bozeman's water supply. The South Cottonwood trail, characterized by old-growth forest, lush riparian areas, and meadows, is popular with hikers,

mountain bikers, and trail runners and connects with Hyalite Canyon. It also connects with Mt. Blackmore, a popular area for backcountry recreation and an iconic Bozeman landmark. The final plan reduces the Gallatin Partnership protections, notably leaving out both South Cottonwood and Mt. Blackmore. This leaves the area vulnerable to logging, temporary road building, and increased recreational development. Request the Forest Service include the GFPs proposed protections for this area and protect its important wildlife habitat and backcountry recreation opportunities. 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.

A recent "Time" magazine article documented the increased use and need for wild spaces. Far more people searched out and used nature to find and renew themselves. The phrase "loved to death" has gained new importance as the crowds have increased. Recent times and events verified the requirement to have natural spaces accessible for increased numbers as critical. The founding principles of the Forest Service - equal access and ownership for all, and preservation of these resources have been validated as visits have increased. This uniquely American opportunity has served us well. We now have a duty to not only preserve what we have, but to protect more to accommodate the increased need and use. Growing up our family hiked, camped, fished, hunted in the Custer/Gallatin forests. I remember being in the Wilderness and being disappointed if we saw another party. On a recent hike we were never out of sight of others. A similar, but not exactly the same, experience occurred while living in Wyoming. I walked and hunted a state land section. There was solitude and game. The land was leased for coal bed methane development. The character of the that section and the adjoining land is lost forever. We must protect these critical habitats.

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.