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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. 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. Some of my most spectacular and memorable hikes in the Madison Range have been in areas adjacent to Cowboy Heaven. Lee Metcalf wanted Cowboy Heaven to be preserved as wilderness, and it's obvious why, as it would connect Bear Trap Canyon to the Spanish Peaks and indeed remain a haven for wildlife and visitors alike -- but only if unspoiled by development or mechanized travel. Please incorporate this important element of the Gallatin Forest Partnership Agreement by recommending Cowboy Heaven for wilderness in the final plan.

Crazy Mountains:

The Crazies are highly visible and spectacular from all vantage points, even from distant highways, wowing tourists, most of whom have never even heard of the range. And they are equally stunning to hike in, always filling me with gratitude that such a wild place can exist right here in southwest Montana. The unique ecosystems and rare wildlife of the range, along with the long cultural and historical significance to Crow Nation, argues for the highest levels of protection possible for the Crazies. Please recommend more of the range for wilderness. 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. There is no need to allow mountain biking in the east Crazies; it's too disruptive, and at odds with preserving the wilderness character of this area so valued by those enjoying the range on foot or hoof. 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 Crazies 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. My favorite hiking experiences have long been off-trail, wherever I want to go, exploring vast landscapes as if I were the first person ever to set foot there. It always provides a great feeling of adventure and discovery. The presence of trails takes much of the excitement away, so they are best avoided. 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. Once landscapes are degraded, their appealing wilderness character is lost forever. The amount of designated wilderness is far too little; now is the time to take the opportunity to protect as much land in the Pryors as possible, as it will pay dividends in the future. 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. Backsliding on recommended wilderness areas is very disheartening, as now is the time we should be redoubling our efforts to save as much unspoiled land as possible. Once it's gone, it's gone. One of my longest and most memorable day hikes was in the Lionhead area, and I was inspired by the vastness, vistas and wildness of the area. Please work to retain these virtues for current and future generations.. 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 30 year resident of Bozeman, I have enjoyed many extraordinary hikes in the Hyalite region. I'm always amazed that such a spectacular area lies so close to a university town, and hope that its wilderness character can be forever preserved, unspoiled by more logging or road building. As the northern terminus of the Gallatin Crest, a wild corridor extending all the way to Yellowstone National Park, this area deserves wilderness protection as a vital part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. 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.

Thanks for your extensive analyses. Please consider greater protections for our wild lands, as they can never be replaced. Wildlife will more easily thrive, and current and future generations of recreationists will sincerely thank you.

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.