

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/8/2020 5:00:06 PM

First name: Shari

Last name: Sutherland

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to register objections to the 2020 Custer/Gallatin Forest Plan. I previously commented on the Plan on June 1, 2019.

My first objection is that the plan declares too little wilderness and too much area open to mechanized and motorized use. My preferred Alternative D called for 700,000 acres of wilderness in 39 areas, but your plan only calls for 125,674 acres in 7 areas, a paltry amount of the forest that should be wilderness. It also gives 208,959 acres (13 areas) Backcountry designation, which allows for mechanized recreation and logging, and 224,608 acres (10 areas) Recreation Emphasis. These designations do nothing to protect wildlife habitat, and no plan is in place to monitor impacts or for enforcement of motorized or mechanized recreation. The USFS never has had enough manpower for enforcement and that is why there are illegally-created trails all over the forest, and why mountain bikers and motorized often don't obey rules as to when they are allowed on some of the Forest's trails, and don't get caught or fined.

The Gallatin Crest, adjacent to Yellowstone National Park, only got 2 Recommended Wilderness Areas for a total of 77,631 acres, out of a possible 155,000 in the Hyalite/Porcupine/Bufalo Horn WSA alone, and 250,000 overall. All of the HPBHWSA at the very least needs to be wilderness in order to ensure survival of the threatened grizzly bear because of its proximity to Yellowstone Park.

Many of the forest's mountain ranges got shortchanged for wilderness, a very small amount designated out of what is available: the Pryor Mountains, the Absaroka/Beartooths, the Crazy Mountains, the Bridgers. Blacktail Peak in the Bridgers is wild and has no trails, 6,790 acres of wilderness would help with migration corridors for wildlife. The USFS recommended 22,000 acres of wilderness in the Lionhead area in the 1986 Forest Plan, and none in this one, a travesty! This is a giveaway to the mountain bikers who were illegally on the trails in the first place! All 22,000 acres of the Lionhead should be wilderness!

No wilderness was designated in Cowboy's Heaven, a place that even the mountain bikers apparently agreed with, or in South Cottonwood, which has been called the "vest pocket wilderness of Bozeman." It has a potential 17,620 acres that could be wilderness, but at least the southern half of So. Cottonwood should be.

I also object to the forest plan allowing so many acres open to logging, up to 39% of the forest. The plan seems to want to return to the 90's, when conservation groups were fighting logging proposals in the Gallatin Forest that almost all violated forest regulations and were defeated. It appears to be following the current Washington, DC administration's mandates that hold logging and mining as preferred uses of the forest. This would be very shortsighted, as the current administration would only be around for 4 years at the most, if that, and the forest will be here long after they are gone. This is no longer the 90's, and the reason Greater Yellowstone still has all the wildlife it had when Lewis and Clark appeared is that those logging proposals were pretty much defeated. With Bozeman being the fastest growing small city in the nation, recreation pressures on the forest have been increasing astronomically, and wildlife habitat is seriously being degraded. Logging is not a use that will be beneficial to the overall forest health and especially that of wildlife.

I also object to the Plan's obvious preference of mountain biking to other forms of recreation, because of the amount of WSA's given to their use, instead of wilderness, even though studies show that they are seriously outnumbered by hikers. Also, to the extent that there is no attention paid to requests to have non-mountain biking and non-motorized days on all the trails in the Gallatin Valley. I hike 5 days/week in the Gallatin, and can tell you that mountain bikers displace other recreators from trails, having almost been run over at least a dozen times by bikers coming fast around blind corners. I have a friend who did get hit on the Triple Tree trail and he broke her rib. I see no mention in the Plan about designating certain days of the week on trails to be free of mechanized and motorized travel. I believe this would be desirable, especially because of the population growth in this area.

My final objection is to the lack of attention paid to wildlife connectivity between ecosystems, especially for grizzly bears, with the goal of genetic diversity and long-term health of the population. The Plan mentions this, but does nothing to effect it by protecting the north end of the Crazies or the Bridgers as wilderness.

Thank you for opportunity to comment. I hope you will remember that there will be no more wilderness study areas, and thus no more wilderness when these are gone. You have a chance to protect the last best wild place on the continent and the last place to have all the wildlife it had 150 years ago.