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Organization: SWMMBA

Title: Trails and Advocacy Executive Board Member

Comments: Dear Forest Supervisor,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Hyalite Cottonwood Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project in the Custer Gallatin National Forest. I support the project's goals to reduce wildfire risk and protect Bozeman's watershed, ecosystems, and surrounding communities. Fire mitigation in this area is critical.

As a member of the Gallatin Valley outdoor recreation community, I want to emphasize the importance of preserving and enhancing non-motorized recreational access, particularly mountain biking and multi-use trails in the project area. Hyalite and Cottonwood drainages are among the most heavily used and loved trail systems in our region, offering critical access to nature, physical activity, and outdoor experiences for residents and visitors alike.

As you move forward with planning and implementation, I respectfully ask that the Forest Service:

Protect existing trail infrastructure: Ensure that trail corridors, particularly those used for mountain biking and hiking, are preserved and restored if impacted by thinning, prescribed fire, or temporary road construction.

Collaborate with recreation groups: Engage with local organizations like the Southwest Montana Mountain Bike Association (SWMMBA) to identify priority trails and opportunities to improve connectivity and sustainability.

Consider future trail development: While the emergency authority used for this project may not directly include recreation improvements, we encourage the Forest Service to use this moment to plan for compatible future recreation enhancements as part of the broader stewardship of this high-use landscape.

This is a unique opportunity to balance wildfire resiliency with recreation access-both vital to the Bozeman area's identity and quality of life. I appreciate the Forest Service's efforts to involve the community and strongly urge the inclusion of recreation considerations in this and future projects.

Thank you for your service and commitment to our public lands.