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Organization:

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Dear Forest Supervisor,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on Custer Gallatin National Forest's Hyalite Cottonwood Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project. I support the project's goals to reduce wildfire risk and protect Bozeman's watershed, ecosystems, and WUI residences. Fire mitigation in this area is critical. Years ago, I biked to Fox Creek Meadow and watched as the Millie Fire charged over the ridge from Storm Castle into upper South Cottonwood. I watched terrified elk run by us and watch trees exploding one by one across the canyon. At that moment I thought Hyalite was doomed. Hyalite is very vulnerable, we must manage fuel sources proactively.

As a member of the Gallatin Valley outdoor recreation community, I want to emphasize the importance of preserving and enhancing recreation 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 access to nature, and outdoor experiences for residents and visitors alike. Bozeman area residents depend on National Forest access. But almost annually our trail network has been reduced, and lacking a Recreation Emphasis Area planning process, Hyalite South Cottonwood treatment may become another significant reduction of access.

I have several concerns. The first is a location of particular scenic aesthetic, a small plateau, elevation 7722, of beautiful weathered pines protecting a small shrine-like meadow along the Hyalite Cottonwood Divide. It's located in the SE quadrant of Section 36, near the top of Langohr-Toole Road. It may also be at the NW corner of the larger prescribed fire treatment area. I hope you will exclude this summit plateau from your proposed hand treatment map. This site is only a few acres.

I 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. Southwest Montana Mountain Bike Association (SWMMBA) can help implement post treatment trail restoration.

Of note is the historical ridgeline trail between Langohr-Toole Road 6233 southward to Road 6230. This is not a system trail, but I nevertheless believe it should be. It is used and enjoyed by the public and resident wildlife alike. I think it should be adopted under the most primitive trail classification and managed primarily for wildlife migration and habitat, thus with opening and closing dates, unlike present management absence. Care should be taken to protect this historical route during treatment.

Please 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 initiate planning for overdue recreation enhancements as part of the broader stewardship of this high-use Recreation Emphasis Area landscape. Please create a civil process emphasizing multiple scoping opportunities and workshops.

Collaborate with recreation groups: Engage with local organizations like SWMMBA to identify priority trails and opportunities to improve trail connectivity and sustainability.

This is a unique opportunity to balance wildfire resiliency with recreation access-both vital to Bozeman'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 on this and future projects. Thank you for your service and commitment to

our public lands.

Greg Beardslee