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Comments:

My husband and I make our home several miles south of Big Sky. We've been in the area since the early 90's. We have led and participated in backcountry volunteer trail maintenance projects in National Forests, Wilderness areas and National Parks in the northern Rocky Mountains for many years and through those efforts have tried to mitigate the impact that human presence has on the land.

We have, for years, been wildlife watching, hiking and camping up and down the Gallatin and Madison Ranges. We love playing in the wilds of the area but realize conservation of the natural ecosystem is more important than our access to it.

While we can't speak directly about some of the districts in the GCNF, we feel strongly about protections in the Madison, Henry's Lake and Gallatin Mountain Geographic Area because of the proximity to Yellowstone. We feel that the best option for this section of the plan is option D, protections that could lead to creating as much designated Wilderness as possible in the Gallatin Range of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

The stress that recent private land development (and, yes, we count ourselves here) is putting on the region is significant. The population and visitation growth between YNP and Bozeman/Livingston was unforeseen even 10 years ago. We are seeing far less wildlife than we used to and trails where we once could go and see no other humans for hours or days are much busier than they were even a couple of years ago. We find ourselves now avoiding altogether the trails that allow bikes, RVs and snowmobiles.

Mountain biking groups, outfitters and developers are putting tremendous pressure on decision makers to put recreation above conservation, to put humans above a sustainable and healthy ecosystem. Big Sky Resort and BSCO are developing a wonderful and extensive trail system for mountain bikers which is great since these areas are already developed for year round activities. Concentrating human activity is a much better way to go than allowing it to creep further and further into the limited wild areas that remain.

If the wild areas of the National Forest are opened up to more invasive human activities, it will be nearly impossible to return them to a more protected state. Please take a long term approach and consider the consequences to future generations.

The most valuable asset in southwest MT is Yellowstone National Park and the health and diversity of native flora and fauna in the GY Ecosystem. We believe the Gallatin and Madison Ranges deserve the highest levels of protection. It is our hope that the Forest Service plan will protect the Gallatin Range as outlined in plan D so that it can one day be designated Wilderness.

Please leave the legacy of one of the last truly wild places in the US to future generations by minimizing human impact on the area.

Thank you, Steve and Carolyn Jones