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Comments:

I support Alternative D. I like that Alternative C and the Gallatin Forest Partnership recognizes it is used by multiple users, I feel the motorized use and use by non-motorized bikes would detrimentally affect the areas that we so need to protect in Alternative C and the Gallatin Forest Partnership.

Alternative C incorporates parts of that agreement, it does not accurately reflect the GFP's recommendations for wildlife protections or recreation monitoring. I am worried about the certain increase of weeds regardless of alternative but with alternative D this increase in weeds would not be accelerated. Many places in these ranges remain relatively weed free with an in tact flora mainly because recreational users have been restricted. The native flora provides valuable forage for animals. Montana and Wyoming have lost over 50% of their sagebrush. Additionally, with climate change, the alpine system is predicted to see the most change. We need to mitigate for climate change impacts and the best way to do that is restrict use and access of those areas. This includes lower access areas that are often the corridors for weeds and help provide a buffer for the native alpine flora. Alternative D does provide protection for other areas, including the alpine, wildlife linkage areas and existing wilderness, and include enforceable climate change components. Specifically, we would like to see wildlife connectivity in portions of the Madison, Henrys Lake, and Gallatin Geographic Area that aren't otherwise protected by the grizzly bear recovery zone. The Madison range is critical for wildlife movement to areas beyond the National Forest.

Habitat protections for native flora must extend wherever plants occupy the forest/alpine, and those should extend into areas important for connectivity. Their future is uncertain in the era of climate change and their conservation must receive the highest priority in forest planning. These same principles apply for any animal of concern (Grizzlies, Lynx, Wolverines, etc).

Plan components need to support a year-round self-sustaining bison population on National Forest System lands. Restoring connectivity for bison needs to be a priority for the new forest plan.

The USDA stated in 2006, "there are two primary requirements for habitat connectivity. The first is that suitable habitats are present for species of interest, and the second is that there are no barriers to movement." There is ample suitable habitat for bison available.

We need to remove barriers to connectivity for bison on the Custer Gallatin National Forest, including these segments of fencing (1) 695 feet of electrified fencing to "maintain a bison corridor fence" with the Royal Teton Ranch, (2) 900 feet of jackleg fencing along the Yellowstone River near Yankee Jim Canyon and cattle guards on HWY 89 to stop bison from migrating beyond Gardiner Basin, and (3) jackleg fencing and cattle guards on HWY 287 in Hebgen Basin to prevent bison from migrating further west, toward the Madison Valley.

Cattle allotments are a barrier to year-round access to habitat for bison, and managing for cattle also displaces bison on the National Forest and at the same time brings grizzly bears into conflict with cattle, which results in dead bears. Previous permitting decisions represent substantial barriers to restoring connectivity for these species.

In terms of other wildlife priorities, West Pine and Porcupine Buffalo Horn backcountry areas must mirror Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area in wildlife protection and wild character plan components.

Recreational use must be monitored more extensively by area, and standards must ensure that increasing recreation is balanced with wildlife protection.

Given the uncertainties of climate change, monitoring questions for vegetation, invasive species, aquatic resources, fire, and more must explicitly assess the effects of climate change and guide adaptive management as required by the 2012 planning rule (219.12(a)(5)(vi)).

We strongly support the eligibility of the Yellowstone River from the park boundary at Gardiner through Yankee Jim Canyon. In addition to the 30 rivers recommended as eligible for Wild and Scenic designation, also include Taylor Creek, Hellroaring Creek, and the South Fork of the Madison due to their outstanding wild character.

Thank you for your work on this important issue. I greatly appreciate all the work that has gone into protecting the forest.