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First name: Kassia

Last name: Randzio

Organization:

Title:

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: 17 North Park Drive

Address2:

City: Montpelier

State: VT

Province/Region: Montana

Zip/Postal Code: 05602

Country: United States

Email: k.randzio@gmail.com

Phone: 406-830-6035

Comments:

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the draft Custer Gallatin forest plan. I've spent considerable time on the forest - everywhere from the Lionhead to the Crazies to the Pryors to the Chalk Buttes - and know firsthand that you manage a gem of a landscape. Right now, you have the chance to do right by this landscape and by the people who have called these mountains and prairies home for millennia, by safeguarding the wild character of the last remaining roadless areas on the forest.

As you review comments, revise the draft, and move towards a preferred alternative, I hope you will:

1. Consider the voices of the Apsalooke (Crow) people, who have been asking for consultation and non-motorized management of the Axawapiia (Crazy) mountains for decades. They deserve to be heard, and their sacred mountains deserve to be treated as such. Please manage the area in consultation with the Crow Nation.

The Crazies are a biologically unique island range that deserves protection as recommended wilderness. I've seen mountain goats navigate the craggy summits, and families gather around fishing lines at Campfire Lake. Opportunities for solitude and quiet recreation abound. Please keep it that way by managing the Crazies as a non-motorized and non-mechanized recommended wilderness. The steep trails and high quality wildlife habitat are no place for motorized or mechanized recreation.

The fact that the landscape is "checker boarded" should have absolutely no bearing on your decision - your obligation is to the American people, not a single private landowner who had the means to buy a mountain range. You have the chance to chart the course for the public lands here.

2. Thank you for including alternatives that honor the Gallatin Forest Partnership agreement. Reaching this kind of agreement takes a lot of listening and trust, compromise and understanding. Please honor the entirety of the agreement, not just portions.

3. Keep the Lionhead Recommended Wilderness as it's been for the last 30+ years. Just outside Yellowstone National Park, this is clearly grizzly country. Every year, we hear of more and more mountain bike / grizzly bear attacks, which result in the worst for all involved. This is not the fault of grizzly bears - this is the result of mountain bikes being allowed to ride in grizzly bear habitat. Here in the Lionhead, you have the chance to prevent these human/wildlife conflicts by eliminating mountain bikes. As current recommended wilderness, your predecessors should have managed the area to retain the possibility of future wilderness designation. The fact that your predecessors chose not to honor this designation should have no bearing on your decision today. Please maintain the entirety of the current Lionhead Recommended Wilderness boundaries.

4. For anyone who's been to the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness, it's the kind of place that leaves an indelible impression. Where else can you meander from rocky plateau to rocky plateau in view of remnant glaciers and lakes galore? In this special place, it's important that we also protect lower elevation areas nearby that play a different role in the ecological whole. Please retain currently recommended wilderness in the Absaroka Beartooth area, and add recommended wilderness designations for Dome Mountain, Emigrant Peak, Chico Peak, Woodbine, East Rosebud to Stillwater, and Red Lodge Creek.

5. The Pryor Mountains are among the most ecologically unique in Montana. They're the only place with a true desert, and just miles away as the crow flies, there are perpetual springs in moss-laden fairy lands. As a result of their island geography and elevation, they're home to a range of endemic species found nowhere else. Yet, nearly every inch of the Pryor Mountains is currently open to motorized vehicles. There are almost no areas where it's possible to travel on foot and escape the din of motors. This is not balance.

Please protect a handful of key landscapes to provide opportunities for non-motorized, non-mechanized, quiet recreation, while preserving the unique ecological character of the Pryors by including Lost Water, Big Pryor, Punch Bowl, and Bear Canyon as Recommended Wilderness.

Not only is the land itself unique, but the mosaic management is unique, as it's managed by the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, BLM, and is culturally significant to the Apsalooke (Crow) people. In the forest plan, I encourage you to chart a management path that allows for improved communication and coordination between agencies. Within that group of co-managers, you have the opportunity right now to set the stage for balanced management by including Lost Water, Big Pryor, Punch Bowl, and Bear Canyon as Recommended Wilderness.

6. Many people who think of your forest probably think of mountains and alpine lakes. The ecologically significant prairies and breaks are no less stunning, and no less deserving of recommended wilderness status. I've stood atop the Chalk Buttes and seen prehistoric femurs hanging out of the light sandstone. And the King Mountain Hiking and Riding Area - one of the first non-motorized areas of its kind - provides a unique experience on the expansive Ashland Ranger District. Please provide areas for non-motorized, non-mechanized recreation while honoring these areas' ecological values by including the Chalk Buttes, King Mountain, Tongue River Breaks, and Cook Mountain as recommended wilderness.

7. Finally, a note about recommended wilderness. By definition, these are areas that you recommend for future Wilderness protections. Achieving this will take an act of Congress, but in the meantime, your recommendation rings hollow if you allow nonconforming uses in recommended wilderness. Doing so would unnecessarily create the social pressures that would effectively preclude the area from any future Wilderness designation. What good is your recommendation if you don't create the social climate in which to follow through on your own recommendation? Do not allow motorized recreation, mechanized recreation, or other nonconforming uses in recommended wilderness.

Thanks for your consideration.