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Comments:

The Custer Gallatin National Forest is a stronghold for vulnerable notable wildlife species including bighorn sheep, moose, mountain goats, grizzly bears and gray wolves. All of these species are extremely sensitive to human disturbance and development. These species are all teetering on the brink.

Unfortunately, the draft plan offers too little direction for administering the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses, which are part of the Custer Gallatin National Forest. The current wilderness management plans ignore this issue. They allow large groups of up to 25 head of stock (horses and mules) and 15 people in most areas. This could be devastating to these vulnerable species. Research has shown that such impacts increase significantly when group-sizes exceed 12 people and eight heads of stock. The Forest Service needs to reduce group size limits in order to protect all Wildernesses on the forest from harm. Also, the forest plan should put an end to ecologically destructive fish stocking in naturally fishless wilderness lakes, which significantly alters the areas' natural conditions.

The plan must address the issue of human and pack animal feces contamination of lakes and streams on the Beartooth Plateau in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Eliminating fish stocking would likely go a long way toward solving this problem, but additional measures must be included if needed.

Vacant grazing allotments in the Wildernesses should be closed so these areas can return to a wild condition.

No trail construction or reconstruction in the currently trailless areas of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses. This provides remote areas for wildlife as well as premier areas for solitude.

I support the wilderness recommendations in Alternative D of the Revised Draft Forest Plan; however, they must be improved by adding the entire 230,000 wild, roadless acres of the Gallatin Range as Recommended Wilderness in the final forest plan. The following three points also expand on the importance for the wild Gallatin Range.

The plan should prohibit all motorized and mechanized uses, and any other activities not consistent with wilderness protection, in the Recommended Wilderness areas so as to preserve their wilderness qualities until Congress acts on the wilderness recommendations.