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Comments:

I write to support Alternative C of the Custer Gallatin National Forest revised management plan and endorse the Gallatin Forest Partnership proposal. Specifically I hope to see the Gallatin Crest from Hyalite Peak to Yellowstone National Park preserved as Wilderness area.

I have been a physician practicing in Bozeman for 30 years and have hiked the Gallatin Crest numerous times, most recently a beautiful September day hike 2 years ago from Windy Pass over Eaglehead Peak past Onion Basin to Fortress Mountain and back. I saw no one else that day, had magnificent views of the Sphinx and Taylor-Hilgards, and although I saw no bears I did see plenty of their diggings in the whitebark pines. I have hiked throughout the Northern Rockies for nearly 40 years and can attest that no other country is more wild than this portion of the Gallatin Crest.

Ernest Hemingway wrote of the healing and regenerative powers of nature in his timeless short story Big Two-Hearted River about a shell shocked veteran returning from World War I. I have found in my own career as have many of my own patients that "taking to the mountains" can provide refuge and recuperation when life stresses start to accumulate to an unhealthy level. The ability to find such refuge is becoming increasingly more difficult as our rapidly expanding local population continues to exert ever growing recreational pressure on our public lands. Wallace Stegner, writing about the importance of federal protection of wild places prior to passage of the Wilderness Act, stated "We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope."

Thank you.