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First name: Ben

Last name: Phinney

Organization:

Title:

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: 2018 Knaab Dr

Address2:

City: Bozeman

State: MT

Province/Region:

Zip/Postal Code: 59715

Country: United States

Email: phinneyben@me.com

Phone: 6176997515

Comments:

Alternative D is my first choice because it provides the most wilderness area. Although I am a very active recreationist in this national forest (skiing, mountain biking, hiking, fishing, birding), I feel strongly that managing the forest for wildlife is a far more important objective than recreation. Protecting lands that border on Yellowstone National Park - the Hyalite-Porcupine- Buffalo Horn Wilderness study area - is the highest and best land use in spades. However, the challenge of getting our local politicians to support this under an administration that so far seems to have little appreciation for wildlife and wild places, may be difficult. Therefore, I would support as second choice the Gallatin National Forest Partnership plan, with wilderness designation of the Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness area, as its centerpiece. The Partnership plan, if implemented properly, will require more aggressive management by the Forest Service and, therefore, more funding.

Mountain biking, while fun, intrudes on wildlife habitat, damages trails, and must be carefully managed to not discourage other uses, such as hiking. However, it is far less disruptive than motorized recreation, which is the worst for wildlife habitat and destroys trails and hiking experiences. If possible, I would discourage motorized use except for search and rescue operations.

One further thought. As the neighboring populations and tourism continue rapid growth, pressure for recreational uses will soon overwhelm existing trails, parking, and associated facilities. I recommend the Forest Service take a fresh look at ways to make improvements that will enhance user experiences and safety. Building more short trails to viewpoints, waterfalls, and remote picnic areas in places such as Hyalite, around Big Sky and Paradise Valley might help. Loop trails rather than "out and backs" and interpretive nature trails are two examples. I have spent decades on the north slopes of the Presidential Range in the White Mountains of New Hampshire where the population pressure far exceeds what we have here. We have been successful there at helping hikers feel they have good experiences of nature by spreading them out over more trails. As the former president of a 100 year old and very successful mountain club, I would be happy to chat with your staff about this.