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Comments:

Comments on Draft EIS & Draft Revised Forest Plan, Custer Gallatin National Forest

In commenting on the DEIS and Draft Forest Plan Revision, I can speak for the feelings of nearly 6,000 recreational rockhounds and more than 65 Gem and Mineral clubs and societies in the entire Northwestern U.S. (within the states of Montana, Idaho, Northern Utah, Alaska, Washington and Oregon) as 1st Vice President of the Northwestern Federation of Mineralogical Societies (NFMS).

Thousands of our members, as well as those from the other American Federation regions of the U.S. (~ 50,000 members) have travelled to the combined Custer and Gallatin National Forest areas to engage in recreational rockhounding and casual-use mineral, fossils, and petrified wood collecting since our founding in the late-1930s. We depend on reasonable access to key collecting areas by motorized vehicles for our elderly and partially disabled members, and for youth groups who cannot endure long, rigorous hikes to be educated about these resources on field trips. We implore the Forest to make reasonable motorized access accommodation for these 3 groups to be able to reach close to collecting areas that generally in both the newly designated "backcountry" and "recommended wilderness" areas among the various alternatives. We have great concerns that where such motorized access is currently allowed or permitted, the very nebulous wording of how backcountry areas will, can, or could be managed will lead to continued closure of both mechanized and motorized access in this designation - a trend the Forest has continued to implement Forest-wide since 2006's Travel Plan decision.

We strongly support selection of Alternative E in view of the draconian issues we see in Alternative D - especially the poorly thought-out concept of the Gallatin Key Linkage area - a new designation category not codified in 36 CFR part 219.

Please retain access and availability to Windy Pass Cabin in all alternative designations.

Discuss the extensive condition-assessment and Inventory of trails within the Forest done earlier by Todd Orr; his monumental work and photos continue to be completely ignored in Forest documentation and in this DEIS.

Expand the discussions of collecting fossils under the provisions of the 1993 PRPA and recent Montana court decisions, and bring current the discussion on Sage Grouse management issues.

The pdf files of maps for each Alternative still cannot be properly studied online to decipher trail numbers, etc.

Eliminate any text that might lead to possible reduction of continued road and trail access within the Backcountry and Recommended Wilderness designations within the Pryor Mountains for all alternatives, as there are world-class collecting areas there that are visited by recreational rockhounds and collectors from the entire U.S.