

# Custer Gallatin Working Group

*Big Horn, Carbon, Gallatin, Madison, Park,  
Powder River, Rosebud, Sweet Grass,  
& Stillwater Counties*

c/o Beartooth Resource, Conservation and Development – 128 So Main St. - Joliet, Montana 59041 – 406-962-3914

April 19, 2017

Objection Reviewing Officer  
USDA Forest Service, Northern Region  
26 Fort Missoula Rd, Missoula, MT 59804  
Email: [appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us)

Dear Objection Reviewing Officer,

The Custer Gallatin Working Group (CGWG), established in July 2014, is a collaborative that works to develop agreement around priority areas and approaches for project work on the Custer Gallatin National Forest. The CGWG represents a wide range of stakeholder interests including County Commissioners, representatives of Conservation NGO's, the Skiing industry, Agriculture and Ranching, Quiet and Motorized Recreation, Hunters, Anglers, Outfitters, Mining Recreation and Economic Development and the Timber Industry.

The CGWG formally began collaborating and interfacing with the Forest Service in 2015 on the North Hebgen Multiple Resource project. The CGWG members educated themselves and the local community by organizing several informational meetings, which brought in speakers that were experts on topics such as silviculture, Grizzly bear and ungulate habitat and fire prevention and mitigation. The group attended all Forest Service (FS) informational meetings and field trips. CGWG members had numerous meetings with the District Ranger to further understand the multidimensional aspects of the project. This education and information gathering process culminated in the CGWG writing comments to the Draft Environmental Assessment. The interface with the FS and the comment letter facilitated some changes in the Draft EA and promoted some additional ideas that will benefit the project and make it more acceptable to the public. The willingness of the FS to work with the CGWG improved the project in practical and identifiable outcomes that we feel make this project much stronger.

## Highway 191 Treatment

CGWG questioned the scientific reasoning to justify a treatment along Highway 191 at the Yellowstone Park boundary to create a Wildlife Safety Corridor. In response, the FS dropped this treatment from the project. In the interest of finding a solution to wildlife fatality on that section of road, the CGWG was the catalyst in organizing a meeting involving Montana Dept. of Transportation (MDOT), YNP, Custer Gallatin National Forest, MFWP, Montana Highway Patrol and the Gallatin County Commission. As a result of that meeting, MDOT is already in the process of implementing a seasonal nighttime speed restriction. In addition, representatives will continue to explore and consider other options that are reasonable in cost and have high success ratio such as signage, lighting, education and real time alerts to the public and truckers.

*Our Mission: To promote, recommend and advocate for programs and projects within the Custer-Gallatin National Forest that will provide for the public health, safety and general welfare of our communities under the sustainable multiple-use management concept to meet the diverse needs of our communities through a transparent, collaborative and mutually supportive process within a diverse and committed stakeholder group.*

## Membership

### County Commissioners

*Bill Bullock, Carbon Co.  
Jim Hart, Madison Co.  
Steve Caldwell, Park Co.  
Joe Skinner, Gallatin Co.  
Mark Crago, Stillwater Co.  
Sidney Fitzpatrick, Big Horn Co.  
Bill Wallace, Sweet Grass Co.  
Darold Zimmer, Powder River Co.*

### Industry Representatives

*Skiing - Jeff Schmidt  
Red Lodge Mountain*

*Minerals/Mining - John Beaudry  
Stillwater Mining Corp.*

*Recreational & Economic Dev. -  
Margo Magnant  
Big Sky Chamber*

*Agriculture/Ranching -  
Brent Sinnema  
Camp Creek Land and CattleCo.*

*Timber - Jerry Furtney  
RY Timber Co.*

*Motorized Recreation -  
Bruce Reierson,  
Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Assoc.*

*Quiet Recreation -  
Hillary Eisen  
Winter Wildlands Alliance  
Ian Jones  
SW Mont. Mtn. Biking Advocates*

*Fishing -  
John Bailey*

*Outfitters -  
vacant*

*At Large -  
Michael Christianson  
John Prinkki*

### Conservation NGOs

*Darcie Warden  
Greater Yellowstone Coalition*

*Scott Brennan/Barb Cestero  
The Wilderness Society*

*Jackie Musgrove  
Society for Range Management,  
Northern Great Plains Section*

*Mike Penfold  
Our Montana*

**Reduction in Temporary Roads**

CGWG raised concern of the miles of temporary roads planned for construction and the way these roads would be decommissioned. In response to those concerns, the FS is reducing the number of miles of temporary roads from 21.1 down to 15.6, resulting in a reduction of 5.5 miles. The FS will be accomplishing this by eliminating one helicopter treatment and changing three helicopter treatments to hand treatments, which will not significantly affect the viability or commercial potential of the entire project. The FS is taking a stronger approach to decommissioning temporary roads because of the concern of the effectiveness of closure of these roads in the past. In this project, the FS is committed to adequately using closure devices and decommissioning methods that will impede travel to unauthorized use when the timber contract is completed.

**Whitebark Pine Monitoring**

Because these unique whitebark pine stands in the area are an important indicator of general forest health and an important indicator of habitat of wildlife especially Grizzly bears, CGWG has from the outset advocated for long-term monitoring of these treatments to insure that data obtained from this project can help in the design of future projects. CGWG is currently expending resources and coordinating a project between the FS, Rocky Mountain College and CGWG. This project would establish baselines and monitor the effect of the treatment on these stands with a citizen science monitoring and educational component.

**No Net Gain of Invasive Weeds**

CGWG had great concern over the proliferation of invasive weeds because of this project and a perceived lack of commitment from the FS to manage any weed increase long-term. In response to CGWG comments, the FS is writing into the document a quantitative commitment to keep the weed level at or below 3% of the landscape in the project area. CGWG will also work with the FS and the Gallatin County Weed district to revitalize the Upper Madison Weed Management District to insure that noxious weeds are not passing from the project to private land and vice versa.

The CGWG supports the North Hebgen Multiple Resource Project with the changes described above. By removing treatment areas, decreasing temporary road miles and including long term monitoring for whitebark pine treatment areas, the FS created a project more responsive to community input. We encourage the FS to continue working with the public in a transparent and open way. This will continue to build on the trust established in the early analysis stages of the project.

Sincerely,



John E. Prinkki, Chairman, CGWG  
Carbon County Commissioner