



# Gallatin Forest Partnership

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the Gallatin Forest Partnership?**

The Gallatin Forest Partnership is a group of local conservationists, hunters, anglers, mountain bikers, horseback riders, guest ranchers, skiers, paddlers, and citizens who care deeply about the Gallatin and Madison Ranges. We come from different backgrounds and have different perspectives. Still, we work together because we've seen for ourselves that it is how we can find real-life solutions.

In 2018, after over a year of work, the Partnership reached agreement on a shared vision for the future of the Madison and Gallatin Ranges. We submitted the Gallatin Forest Partnership Agreement to the Custer Gallatin National Forest for consideration as it determines how to manage the Forest for the next 20 to 30 years.

### **What is the Gallatin Forest Partnership Agreement all about?**

The agreement maps out a future for the Gallatin and Madison Ranges that protects the wildlife, clean water, wilderness, and recreation opportunities that are important to all of us.

The agreement calls for a unique package of land management designations. These include recommended wilderness, watershed and recreation protections, and wildlife management areas spanning hundreds of thousands of acres in the Gallatin and Madison Ranges.

### **Who supports the Agreement?**

Since it was released in 2018, over 800 individuals and 100 organizations and businesses have endorsed the agreement, including the Park, Gallatin, and Madison County Commissions. Mountain bikers, hunters, anglers, equestrians, conservationists, businesses, guest ranchers, and many others have signed on, because we all recognize that the agreement provides a real road map to protect what makes the Gallatin and Madison Ranges special.

### **Why weren't other groups a part of the agreement?**

It wasn't possible to get every single person or organization with a stake in the Gallatin and Madison Ranges at the table to develop the agreement, but we worked hard to make sure all perspectives were considered. All Partnership members took collaboration seriously - we committed to listening to and understanding each other, even if we didn't see eye to eye, and we respected each other's perspectives and input. Willingness to engage in real, constructive dialogue was key to the agreement's success.

We also asked the Forest Service to consider the agreement as it develops a new forest management plan. This gave everyone a chance to weigh in on the agreement during the Forest Service's public comment period in 2019.

## **Why didn't you include more wilderness/less wilderness/more access/less access/more wildlife/less wildlife etc.?**

Here's what we know: if we want the Forest Service to act on something, it has to be inclusive and reflect the interests of all who have a stake in the Madison and Gallatin Ranges. If we, or anyone else, present a one-sided plan to the Forest Service, it is unlikely to be enacted, and these ranges will continue to lack permanent protection.

## **So, what's a forest plan?**

The Custer Gallatin Land Management Plan – often called the Forest Plan - will guide how the forest, including the Gallatin Range and most of the Madison Range, is managed for decades.

Every national forest has a management plan, which guides everything from recreation decisions to timber harvests. The plan can recommend new wilderness, identify eligible wild and scenic rivers, set the stage for future plans that govern where motorized and mechanized travel is allowed, and much more.

Forest plans are supposed to be revised every 15 to 20 years, but the current Forest Plan is more than 30 years old. The Custer Gallatin is undergoing plan revision now, which is especially timely given that urban growth, new recreation technologies, and climate change are putting more and more pressure on the forest. The new plan is our chance to get ahead of these threats by addressing human activities, protecting wildlife habitat, and preparing for the uncertainties of climate change. The stakes are high, but success will mean decades of healthier forests that support wildlife and surrounding communities.

## **How much wilderness does the agreement protect?**

The Gallatin Range has needed permanent wilderness protection for decades. Back in 1977, Congress set aside the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area for consideration for Wilderness designation, but that's as far as we've gotten. The current Gallatin Forest Plan doesn't recommend *any* part of the wilderness study area for Wilderness designation. The *new* forest plan is our chance to set the stage for permanently protecting large swaths of the Gallatin Range, as well as other parts of the national forest.

## **What new Wilderness does the Gallatin Forest Partnership agreement recommend?**

The agreement proposes more than 124,000 acres of new designated Wilderness from the core of the Gallatin Range to the beloved "Cowboy Heaven" high in the Madison Range.

- **New Gallatin Wilderness (102,005 acres)**

This proposed Wilderness includes the core of the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area. It will run from Hyalite Lake south to the boundary of Yellowstone National Park and include the Sawtooth Inventoried Roadless Area, which borders the park adjacent to Tom Miner Basin. This is nearly 40,000 acres larger than the area proposed for Wilderness designation in 1988. That proposal passed both chambers of Congress before being vetoed by President Reagan.

- **Additions to the Lee Metcalf Wilderness (22,066 acres)**

One of these proposed additions would connect the Spanish Peaks and Bear Trap Canyon units of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness in the area known as Cowboy Heaven. It is adjacent to the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest's Recommended Wilderness directly to the west and would exclude the #405 trail and the #401 trail to its junction with the #405, leaving a popular mountain biking route intact. The agreement also recommends a second addition to the southern end of the Taylor Hilgard unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, which has steep terrain and no trails.

### **Why doesn't the Forest Service just designate more Wilderness?**

Only Congress can designate new Wilderness. The Forest Service can recommend that Congress designate areas as Wilderness, which would make it much more likely that Congress would do so. Similarly, the Forest Service is more likely to recommend an area for Wilderness designation if it's clear that there's broad local support for doing so. That's why the broadly supported Gallatin Forest Partnership agreement is our best chance to designate new Wilderness.

### **What other land designations does the agreement include?**

The agreement would add approximately 250,000 acres of conservation designations in the Gallatin and Madison Ranges.

- **124,000 acres would be recommended as Wilderness** to protect the core of the Gallatin Range and connect isolated units of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness.
- **70,000 acres would be designated as a Watershed Protection and Recreation Area** in Hyalite Canyon and the Bozeman Creek and South Cottonwood drainages. This designation would give the Forest Service more resources to manage the unique recreation pressures in these places, which are significantly higher here than elsewhere in the range. This designation also provides the Forest Service the ability to reduce the risk of wildfire in Bozeman's municipal watershed.
- **25,000 acres would be designated as the West Pine Wildlife Management Area.** This designation would protect the area on the northeast end of the Gallatin Range from commercial logging, mineral development, and road building. Mountain bikes would be allowed on all system trails within the West Pine area, and we support a new trail to connect West Pine with the Hyalite/Bear Canyon trail system.
- **31,000 acres would be designated as the Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wildlife Management Area.** Currently, some trails in this area on the southern end of the Gallatin Range are open to dirt bikes and mountain bikes at different times of year. Part of the area is also open to snowmobile travel. The agreement preserves these recreational opportunities. It also supports existing seasonal closures and recommends applying them to all recreational uses to protect wildlife. Finally, the agreement calls on

the Forest Service to analyze human travel on all trails within the Porcupine Buffalo Horn area, designate additional system trails as necessary, and stop new user-created trails.

### **How will the agreement affect wildlife?**

Wildlife health has been central to the Gallatin Forest Partnership agreement since day one. Animals' ability to move between healthy habitats is essential, and the agreement takes major strides towards ensuring habitat protection and connectivity across the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and the rest of the Northern Rockies.

Protecting the core of the Gallatin Range as Wilderness and ensuring that new Wilderness is connected to Yellowstone National Park is central to the agreement. Furthermore, all partners are willing to put recreation interests aside if scientific monitoring shows that doing so is necessary to protect wildlife.

The agreement calls on the Forest Service to establish baseline data on recreational use and wildlife presence and movement patterns. It also calls for ongoing monitoring to ensure recreational use is not negatively impacting wildlife. With this knowledge, we can better understand and mitigate human impacts throughout the landscape, no matter the land designation.

### **How will the agreement affect water?**

Rivers including the Gallatin, Yellowstone, and Madison drain the Gallatin and Madison Ranges. Flowing from the high peaks, headwater streams provide us with clean drinking water and bountiful fisheries. But rising temperatures combined with shrinking snowpack, erosion, and invasive species put our waters at risk.

The agreement supports managing six streams considered eligible for Wild and Scenic designation as free flowing, which keeps them eligible for permanent protection. It also focuses on maintaining healthy riverside forests and native cutthroat trout populations to ensure that all our waters remain clean and cold for generations to come.

### **What about recreation? Will my access be affected?**

The agreement maintains all popular existing access. We do, however, recognize that recreation in the Gallatin and Madison Ranges is skyrocketing, and we need to take that seriously.

We know that wildlife is adversely affected by development, so the agreement recommends freezing the recreation footprint to stop roads and trails from becoming denser. We want to maintain existing recreation access while making sure that our wild backcountry stays wild. We also support concentrating recreation development in popular front country areas like Hyalite where recreation resources are needed most.

### **What's the timeline for the new plan?**

The Forest Service expects to release their draft plan and final Environmental Impact Statement in March 2020. They hope to have the final plan completed in early 2021.

After the Forest Service wraps up their planning process, we'll shift our focus to Congress. The Forest Service can *recommend* Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and other protections, but it's up to Congress to make it official and permanent through legislation.

### **How can I get involved?**

Start by endorsing the Gallatin Forest Partnership Agreement. By backing the agreement, you can join hundreds of others in sending the Forest Service a strong, unified message. If you're a business owner, you can also endorse on behalf of your business.

### **ENDORSE THE GALLATIN FOREST PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

You can further express your support for the agreement by writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Contact [gallatinforestpartners@gmail.com](mailto:gallatinforestpartners@gmail.com) to learn how.