



## **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. In 2022, the Forest Service released the final management plan for the forest, which incorporated many, though not all, aspects of the Partnership Agreement. Now, we are working to make our vision for the Ranges permanent through federal legislation.

#### **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 that will prevent future fragmentation of this wild landscape. These designations 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 1100 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 ranches, 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 periods during the forest planning process.

## **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 or Congress 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, 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. A 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. The Forest Service can recommend wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and other protections, but it's up to Congress to make these recommendations official and permanent through legislation.

Forest plans are supposed to be revised every 15 to 20 years, but the last Forest Plan for the Custer Gallatin was more than 30 years old. At the beginning of 2022, the Custer Gallatin finalized the latest forest plan, 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 aligns with many, though not all, aspects of the Gallatin Forest Partnership Agreement. The plan recommends over 110,000 acres of new wilderness designation, including along the Gallatin Crest. This is the first time the Forest Service has ever recommended wilderness in the Gallatin Range. The plan also establishes backcountry areas in Porcupine Buffalo Horn, South Cottonwood, and West Pine. This designation allows existing recreation to continue but limits trail and road-building activities, commercial logging, and other industrial

development. We recognize that the Forest Service must start this planning process all over again in 15 years, and that's why the new forest plan is not the end of the road. The Gallatin Forest Partnership's proposal would expand on the protections in the forest plan and provide permanent designations for the area through legislation.

### **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 previous 1987 Gallatin Forest Plan didn't recommend any part of the wilderness study area for Wilderness designation. The new 2022 forest plan recommends over 92,000 acres of wilderness in the Gallatin Range and over 17,000 acres in the Madison Range.

### **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" in the northern 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 and Recreation 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 and Recreation 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 toward ensuring habitat protection and connectivity across the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and the rest of the Northern Rockies.

Across all designations, the agreement protects the landscape from development, commercial logging, trail and road building, and oil and gas leasing. This will ensure no further landscape fragmentation and preserve intact habitat and connectivity for wildlife. The agreement safeguards a range of elevational habitats that are important now and will be even more critical in the future as species have to shift their ranges in response to climate change.

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.

### **What about recreation? Will my access be affected? Will you be expanding use?**

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. In the Wilderness Study Area, the agreement prohibits new trail or road construction with the exception of one short trail segment already approved by the Forest Service. 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, outside of the WSA, where recreation resources are needed most. For the Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wildlife and Recreation Area and the lower Hyalite Watershed Protection and Recreation Area, where existing motorized recreation exists, the Partnership Agreement would not allow any expansion of motorized use.

### **Does the Gallatin Forest Partnership promote logging and road construction in the Gallatin Crest or the Porcupine/Buffalo Horn drainages?**

No, it does not, and any claims that it does are false. The Partnership agreement **does not allow** the construction of permanent *or* temporary roads anywhere in the Wilderness Study Area. Additionally, the Partnership recommends focusing on active vegetation and fire management outside of designated areas and in the wildland-urban interface to reduce the risk posed by high severity fires and restore more resilient conditions to forested habitats.

**No timber harvest of any kind** is allowed in the proposed Gallatin Range Wilderness, Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wildlife and Recreation Management Area, and the upper reaches of the Hyalite Watershed Protection and Recreation Area within the boundaries of the Wilderness Study Area.

In Hyalite, active vegetation management can occur **outside of the Wilderness Study Area and inventoried roadless areas** to address watershed health and wildfire hazards. Prescribed fire can be used for active vegetation management within the Wilderness Study Area and inventoried roadless areas.

In the West Pine Wildlife and Recreation Management Area, any active vegetation management to address wildland-urban interface concerns **must be compatible with the Roadless Rule** meaning there can be no road construction or commercial logging.

### **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.

### **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 Montana Congressional delegation a strong, unified message in support of federal legislation to permanently protect the Gallatin and Madison Ranges. 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.