



Letter: Increasing vehicle use ruining Pryor Mountains

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From any high point in Billings or vicinity, look southward to see the massive twin ridges of the Pryor Mountains. Part of a geological formation flowing south into Wyoming, they do not resemble typical Montana peaks. Rain and melting snow largely disappear into their erodable limestone base, giving them a flatter appearance, a honeycombed interior, incredibly deep canyons and an extremely arid surface.

Unique qualities abound: past and current Native American spiritual sites; incredible views of Montana and Wyoming from heights reaching more than 8,000 feet; extremely rare plants drawing scientists from afar; opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, bird watching, hunting, spelunking - and more.

Alas, since their "discovery" by off-road-vehicle enthusiasts, the Pryors are fast dying from tire track. The Forest Service's 1987 travel plan allowed for 100 miles of roads; the number is now 200 and climbing.

Commentary closes Monday on the agency's new plan. Unfortunately, its preferred alternative still allows far too much motorized use - with little promise of adequate law enforcement.

Local affiliates of Montana Wilderness Association, Audubon, Back Country Horsemen and others spent five years, including two seasons of GPS work, devising a substitute 50-year "vision" for the Pryors. It provides a generous 75 miles of roads, strategically routed around five nonmotorized zones offering resource protection and quiet recreation.

Please go to www.pryormountains.org to understand the issue, see the "vision" and learn how to offer commentary to the agency. Those who prize the Absaroka-Beartooth will surely also want to help protect this area jewel.

Teddy Roe

Billings