



File Code: 1510; 2730
Date: October 2, 2015

Honorable Steve Daines
Senator from Montana
Attn: Dylan Klapmeier
Field Representative | Education Liaison
218 East Front Street, #103
Missoula, MT 59802

Dear Senator Daines:

Thank you for your inquiry concerning Trail #136 in the Crazy Mountains. The Forest Service is aware of this illegally-blocked access point. Trail #136 is known as the East Trunk Trail (also historically referenced as Trail #115) and is designated as open to mountain bikes, hiking, stock, and cross country shoeing uses in the 2006 Gallatin National Forest Travel Plan and is a component of the popular "Lowline" trail system. The trail runs north from the Big Timber Canyon Picnic Area and crosses both public and private property until it reaches Sweet Grass Creek. The Sweet Grass Creek trail is also a disputed access route to National Forest System lands that remains unresolved.

The southern portion of Trail 136 provides one of the few access points to the east side of the Crazy Mountains. It is a historic trail that dates back a century or more. The Forest Service maintains that it holds unperfected prescriptive rights on this trail system as well as up Sweet Grass Creek to the north based on a history of maintenance with public funds and historic and continued public and administrative use. The process for resolving this and other comparable access disputes is expensive, lengthy and time consuming. With limited staff and budget, the Forest is unable to immediately address these complex property law issues and often times these disputes remain unresolved until brought before a court of law.

In the case of Trail 136, we are beginning the process of attempting to work amicably with the private landowner(s) to determine options for restoration of public access to this portion of the Crazy Mountains.

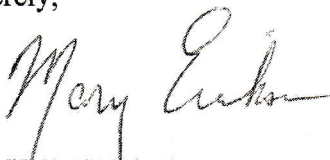
These access disputes are often quite complicated, and because they boil down to legal questions, the agency is rarely in a position to forcibly remove illegally placed barriers to access. Unfortunately, this resolution process can be quite lengthy and it is not likely to conclude prior to the end of this year's hunting season.



Access disputes across the Custer Gallatin Forest and the Northern Region have become increasingly common. There have been two new access disputes on the Yellowstone Ranger District in the last two months alone. There have been upwards of ten disputed or lost access points on the District in the last decade.

If you have additional questions or concerns please contact Alex Sienkiewicz, Yellowstone District Ranger at (406) 222-1892.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Erickson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

MARY C. ERICKSON
Forest Supervisor