

Comments on East Crazy Inspiration Divide Land Exchange

The U.S. Forest Service proposes to trade away a large amount of prime real estate on the east side of the Crazy Mountains for a pile of rocks, a parking lot and an unusable trail. This has to be one of the worst land trades ever proposed. The Forest Service wants you to believe that this land trade will improve the management of these Federal lands and improve public access.

In fact, the proposed trade does not improve public access to the east side of the Crazy Mountains. There was public access to the east side of the Crazy Mountains via the Sweet Grass and East Trunk trails for over 100 years. Recently the Forest Service allowed private land owners to lock gates, block trails, put up "No Trespassing" signs and require users to sign in. The Forest Service removed the District Ranger for doing his job of enforcing the easements on the trails. The Forest Service claimed the easements were not valid because nobody had used the trails for five years. There was undoubtedly politics involved in removing the ranger and the same politics is behind this land exchange.

The proposed 22 mile access trail from Big Timber Canyon does not provide adequate access. Very few people are willing to walk or ride a horse 22 miles to get to an area where the adjacent land owner can drive a vehicle. In fact, the proposed trail would also privatize the big game hunting on the east side of the Crazy Mountains. Only a fool would take pack stock over the 22 mile trail during big game season. Heavy snow is common in this area in late October and November. There is no way a hunter in a snow storm could get over a rough trail that approaches 9,000 feet. The only way out would be to trespass on private land.

The land the Forest Service is proposing to acquire is of very little value due to its steep and rocky nature. It is worthless as big game habitat, fisheries, livestock grazing or for forestry purposes and, because of lack of vehicle access cannot be developed.

The land the Forest Service wants to trade away has far greater value. It is usable for livestock grazing, big game winter range and possibly

timber production. But, far more important, it is key to a Yellowstone Club type development. The present adjacent landowners want to extend their landholdings and acquire some of the best land which currently happens to belong to the public. They particularly need two square miles in the bottom of Sweet Grass Canyon. They wish to exclude the public. The proposed land exchange would neatly accomplish the developers goals.

The Forest Service would like to see this exchange go forward because it would cover up their illegal and unethical actions in allowing the blockage of century old trails and ensure that their actions can never be reversed.

This land exchange was obviously developed by the adjacent land owners, the land developers, and the politicians that support them. This proposal is so one-sided that it would be funny if it was not such an obvious attempt to steal public resources.

The LOSSES:

- big game winter range
- fisheries
- water rights
- mineral rights
- wetlands
- public access

The Forest Service should not trade one acre of land on the east side of the Crazy Mountains. They should buy the inholdings from willing sellers. They should protect public access. Status quo is far better than any land exchange.

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