



Mary Erickson, Forest Supervisor  
Custer-Gallatin National Forest

Dear Supervisor Erickson:

The Montana Conservation Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving Montana's incredible wildlife and habitat. We are a new organization comprised of Montana sportsmen, landowners and ranchers focused on best practices for land and habitat stewardship. Unlike some organizations which thrive on perpetuating conflict, we believe landowners and recreationalists have much opportunity to find common ground and solutions.

One of those opportunities is the East Crazy Inspiration Divide Land Exchange, of which we strongly support. The proposal will create large areas of contiguous Forest Service lands in the Crazy Mountains and facilitate efficient land and resource management for both the Forest Service and the participating East side Crazy Mountain landowners. The existing checkerboard land ownership pattern is not good for wildlife and not good for hunters and other recreationists.

We believe that the land exchange proposal will conserve the existing character of the Crazy Mountains by reducing the potential for development on 10 sections of private lands that are intermingled with Forest Service lands. The exchange will also result in a conservation easement being placed over Crazy Peak, and provide for Crow Tribe access to Crazy Peak, an important cultural area.

Public access into the Crazies has been riddled with controversy and litigation. The proposal dramatically improves and provides for perpetual public access into the Crazies. A new privately funded trail and trailhead will guarantee public access into the Crazies overall, and result in a 40-mile loop trail. Importantly, hunters will gain new access into excellent mid-elevation habitat supporting elk, mule deer, mountain goat, and various fish bearing streams and lakes.

In the Big Sky area the land exchange will result in improved public access along the existing Inspiration Divide Trail No. 8. The conveyance of private lands that include two miles of the trail into Forest Service ownership will increase Forest Service ownership in this popular area and lead to new recreation opportunities for hunters, hikers, skiers, and snowmobilers.

A couple of years ago Rick Graetz, one of Montana's leading conservationists who has a storied history of recreating in the Crazy Mountains and the greater Big Sky area, wrote an op-ed in support of the proposal, which you'll find attached. Moreover, since Rick wrote that letter, the proponents of the exchange have added 640 acres that includes Smeller Lake to their proposal.

We should not let the quest for perfection get in the way of solid progress in Montana's conservation journey. As such, we are pleased to support this land exchange. It's a good deal for the public, the landowners, and the Forest Service.

Sincerely,

Rob Arnaud, Executive Director