

Custer Gallatin Forest Supervisor
Mary Erickson
PO Box 130
Bozeman, MT 59771

RE: East Crazy Inspiration Divide Land Exchange
Project 63115

Dear Ms. Erickson:

As one of the landowners in the proposed exchange, we stand in support of the proposed East Crazy Inspiration Divide Land Exchange. Though this exchange may not feel perfect in anyone's eyes, we think that is the mark of a good compromise. We started this process 5 years ago when a variety of parties, including conservation organizations, access interests, and the Forest Service were willing to sit down and respectfully discuss interests. We appreciate each of those groups at the table, as well as the landowners who worked together to create a comprehensive proposal.

We believe the proposal does the following:

- * Eliminates a significant amount of checkerboarding and creates a large block of public land available for many users as well as providing connectivity to public land in the northern part of the Crazies,
- * Establishes a legal access route between two major drainages in the east Crazies and a looped trail through the mountains;
- * Respects private property rights by acknowledging that access through the lower Sweet Grass drainage is and shall continue to be by landowner permission only;
- * Facilitates land, resource, and wildlife management capabilities by consolidating public and private lands.

In reviewing comments on the proposal, we see a lot of inaccurate information about actual public usage in the lower Sweet Grass drainage. From living here, and from decades of talking to people seeking permission to cross our private land to access public land, we have a lot of knowledge about actual usage and considered that when working on this proposal. From our information, most people coming up the Sweet Grass drainage are doing so in the summer for multi-day hiking and camping trips. About half of those people are going to Cave Lake, which is a very challenging hike. In fact, most routes in the Crazies are through difficult terrain and have significant elevation gain (as exhibited in the Crazy Mountain Ultra run from this past summer). Further, Sweet Grass Creek is not a good fishery on Sections 8 and 10, as the creek goes dry in 8 and many places in 10 every summer and people go elsewhere for fishing opportunities. While we occasionally get access requests from bow hunters, they generally want to hunt above the Falls, not in lower sections. Overall, we get far fewer access requests for hunting in the fall than for hiking in the summer.

Perhaps most importantly to us, if this exchange comes to fruition, is that the east Crazies remain much as they are today: rugged, remote, and worth some work to make a living in or to explore. We are

surprised at some of the organizations that advocated for backcountry and wilderness designations in the latest Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan revision, but don't seem to care about the incredible damage that would occur to this range by shoving a public road miles into the middle of the range. Many of the comments in opposition to this exchange are predicated on concerns that landowners or private interests intend to develop or drastically change the land. That is a completely unfounded fear for the East Crazy Mountain landowners. Most of the landowners in this exchange, including my family, operates a ranch that is currently on its 5th or 6th generation. As people who have worked our whole lives to protect, conserve, and maintain the land, there is nothing more important to us than good stewardship. We believe that this exchange allows for private landowners, the Forest Service and public land users to effectively care for the Crazies for generations to come.

Page and Pat Dringman

Bill and Michele Carroccia, Carroccia Family Partnership