

Working to create solutions for Crazy Mountains land access conflicts

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Issues surrounding public access, public lands and private property in the Crazy Mountains has garnered a great deal of public attention recently. If you've tuned in to various editorials, articles and social media on the issues, one may think there is no hope for resolution in some of these long-standing disputes.



But for the past four months, a group convened by the Crazy Mountain Stockgrowers' Association has gathered to work toward solutions. The Crazy Mountain Working Group includes a cross section of landowners, access advocates, nonprofits, and state and federal government representatives. This small but diverse group of stakeholders has agreed: it's time to change the storyline of these contentious issues and create a more productive

discussion. The Crazy Mountain Stockgrowers' Association stepped forward to fund a neutral facilitator for these meetings.

The group is exploring ideas and options for the resolution of longstanding issues related to private property and recreational access in the Crazy Mountains. The group's goals include identifying timely and practical solutions, and encouraging cooperative and respectful meetings between interest groups. Even in its early stages, participants are committed to understanding one another's perspectives and concerns, and making headway toward on-the-ground improvement of access issues.

One participant, Ryan Weiss, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Public Access Specialist, observed that "...this group represents one of the most positive efforts in the state toward resolving access disputes." David Allen, RMEF President and CEO noted: "[o]ne of Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's highest priorities is to improve access to public lands for sportsmen and women, and so we are pleased to be at the table working alongside landowners and other partners in a cooperative way."

We all value and respect this landscape, and we are eager for results. However, we know this process will take some time, and we hope for patience to see it through. We believe this collaborative approach, though in the early stages, holds promise to bring forward ideas for resolution that can meet the interests of landowners and public access advocates alike.

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