

Coalition Unveils Land Exchange to Improve Access on Forest Lands

A coalition of private landowners and public land users have unveiled details and next steps for a citizen-proposed land agreement intended to improve public access and outdoor opportunities on the Custer-Gallatin National Forest.

For the next thirty days Montanans are invited to learn more about the agreement and provide feedback at the coalition's new website www.crazymountainproject.com.

The East Crazy Mountains and Inspiration Divide Public Access Improvement Land Exchange was developed through 12 months of community-based negotiations and kitchen table discussions with private landowners and public land users. It would consolidate public lands, construct a new trail system, and create new public access on the eastern side of the Crazy Mountains and in the Madison Range, near Big Sky, Montana.

“This is a made-in-Montana compromise to improve public access, create clarity for Montanans, and protect our freedoms to hunt, hike and camp on public lands,” said John Salazar, a Livingston-based public lands hunter. “For those of us who use the Crazy Mountains this is a pretty good deal because we receive guaranteed public access where none currently exists and a net gain of public land.”

PUBLIC FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITY

The public unveiling of the East Crazy Mountains and Inspiration Divide Public Access Improvement Land Exchange marks the next step in the process of soliciting public input for this grassroots proposal. Montanans have until August 7th to learn more about the proposal and offer feedback either online or by attending a series of open-houses sponsored by The Crazy Mountain Access Project.

After public feedback, a formal proposal will be submitted to the Custer Gallatin National Forest and Montana's Congressional Delegation, according to Lorents Grosfield, a retired state lawmaker from Big Timber.

“We hashed out a homegrown solution that bears all the hallmarks of any good compromise,” said Grosfield. “After we consider additional public feedback it will be time for the Forest Service and Congress to start their own process to get this over the finish line.”

All open-houses will be conducted in compliance with Montana's most current COVID-19 guidelines and encourage social distancing and masks:

PROPOSAL DETAILS

The agreement would consolidate public lands and create new public access opportunities on the eastern side of the Crazy Mountains and in the Madison Range near Big Sky, Montana. Specific provisions include:

East Crazy Mountains

- The Forest Service would acquire 5,205 acres of private “checkerboard” inholdings resulting in approximately 30 square miles of contiguous public land between Big Timber Creek and Sweet Grass Creek.
- Landowners would acquire 3,614 acres of National Forest “checkerboard” land on the exterior of the range that are already interspersed with private ranchlands and ranch roads.
- Would construct a new 22-mile trail on consolidated public lands at no taxpayer expense to resolve disputes over legality and location of trail #136.
- The new trail would connect Half Moon campground in Big Timber Creek on the south end to Sweet Grass Creek at the north end and create a new forty mile loop opportunity.
- Would provide legal access for the Crow Tribe to visit Crazy Peak.

Madison Range

- The Forest Service would acquire approximately 558 acres of mid-elevation land along Inspiration Divide Trail #8 and create new access opportunities along the trail to highquality public land east of Cedar Mountain.
- The Yellowstone Club would acquire approximately 500 acres of high-elevation expert ski terrain adjacent to existing Yellowstone Club ski lifts.
- Parcels acquired by Yellowstone Club would be restricted by conservation easement to ski uses only including avalanche control, with no subdivision, residential or non-ski development permitted.

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