

Landmark land swap would expand YC skiing, connect land in Crazies, add public access in Madison range

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A portion of the land that the Yellowstone Club would provide to the U.S. Forest Service near the Lee Metcalf Wilderness. PHOTO COURTESY OF YELLOWSTONE CLUB

Proposal enters public comment period

By **Brandon Walker** *EBS STAFF*

The Yellowstone Club, U.S. Forest Service and stakeholders in the Crazy Mountains northwest of Big Timber have been looking at possible land swaps for the last 12 months, according to a Crazy Mountain Access Project press release. Yesterday the

planning came to fruition. The Yellowstone Club officially announced a final plan July 9, and the public has 30 days to provide comment.

The “East Crazy Mountains and Inspiration Divide Public Access Improvement Land Exchange” aims to provide expanded public access on land within the Crazy Mountains and the Lee Metcalf Wilderness.

The Yellowstone Club would hand the Forest Service 558 acres near the Lee Metcalf Wilderness in exchange for 500 acres in the Madison Range adjacent to the club to expand skiing operations east of Cedar Mountain.

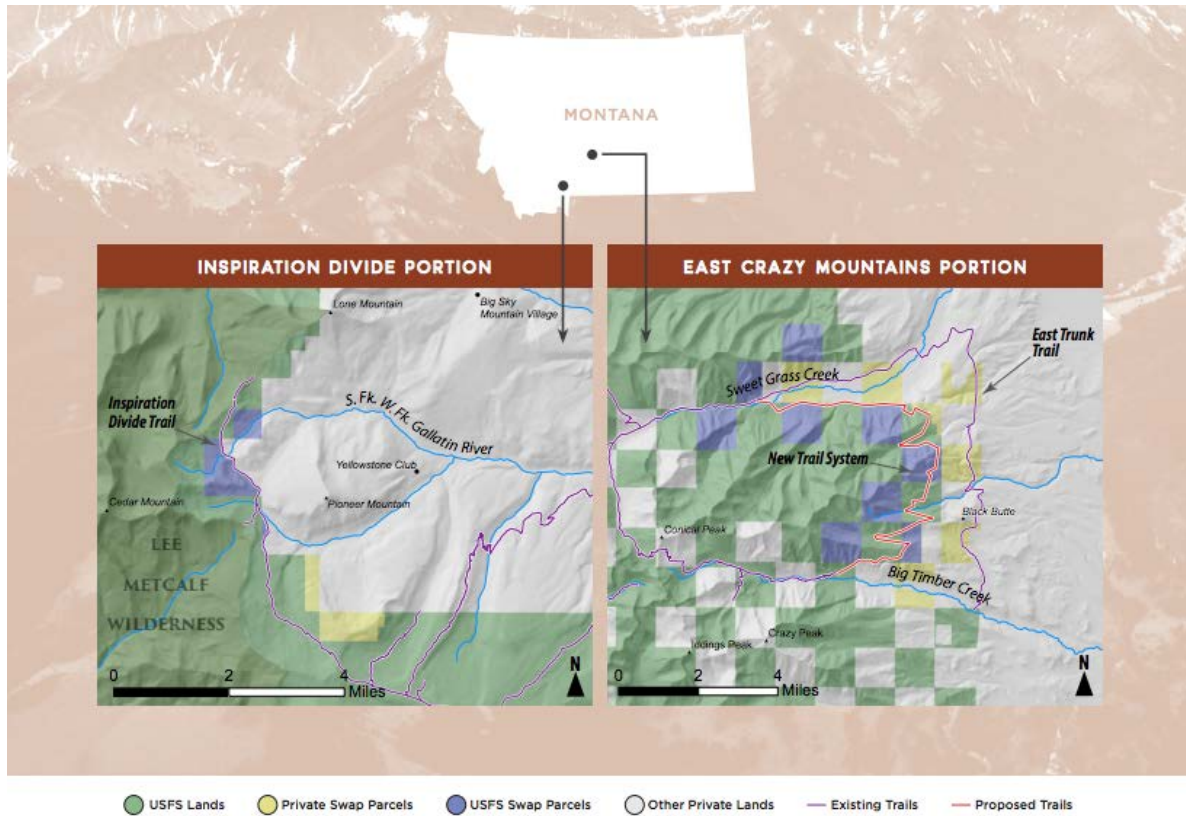
In a third part of the deal, 5,205 privately owned acres within the Crazy Mountains would be allocated to the Forest Service, effectively creating a contiguous, roughly 30-mile block of public land that is currently an intermittent mix of public and private parcels. The private landowners would be granted more than 3,600 acres on the border of the aforementioned public land in return.

“I think this exchange represents a really incredible effort from a lot of different stakeholders that have come together [and] recognized this is a problem,” said Deputy Director for the Park County Environmental Council Erica Lighthiser of the access issues to public land within the Crazy Mountains.

The Yellowstone Club plans to utilize the acquired land for skiing and riding but would come with an accompanying conservation easement allowing for: “ski uses only including avalanche control, with no subdivision, residential or non-ski development permitted,” according to the press release.

Additionally, the Yellowstone Club will pay for the construction of a 22-mile, \$1 million hiking trail in the Crazy Mountains, through the newly created chunk of public land, according to Lighthiser. She said the trail would complete a 40-mile loop within the Crazies and connect to existing trails.

“As a Montana native and a lifelong sportsman, it’s been a real privilege to work on this larger community effort to increase quality public access to land and habitat,” said Yellowstone Club’s vice president of development Mike DuCuennois.



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East Crazy Mountains and Inspiration Divide Public Access Improvement Land Exchange, showing both portions of the agreement. MAP COURTESY OF CRAZY MOUNTAIN ACCESS PROJECT

“Currently, two miles of the Inspiration Divide Trail go through property held by the Yellowstone Club and this agreement would mean the trail would instead be on public land and directly connected to the Gallatin National Forest lands,” DuCuennois added. “Overall, the public would gain a net increase in quality, midlevel land in the Madison Range, as well as increased access to wildlife habitat.”

As of July 9, the proposed agreement has entered a 30-day public comment period, concluding on August 7, with open-houses for public comment slated for Livingston on July 16, Big Timber on July 23, Bozeman on July 30 and Big Sky on Aug. 6.

Per the press release, at the conclusion of the public comment period on Aug. 7, the proposal will be presented to representatives of the Custer Gallatin National Forest as well as Montana’s Congressional Delegation.