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Organization:

Title:

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Custer, Gallatin National Forest Supervisor Mary Erickson

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Re: Forest Service trails in the Crazy Mountains

To Whom it may Concern:

The trails were established for fire control by the Crazy Mountain District forest service crews. The first ranger station was on Section 8, 2 North 11 East. A road was established up Rock Creek for the benefit of the general public past the ranger station and Straton Grade to the meadows at the foot of the Crazy Mountains. Art Gilbert was the district Ranger and Lester Gilbert made up a two-man crew in 1934-35-36. Their job was to lay out and map a trail that could be used for fire control and public access through the conifer forest. They created the trail, placed a blaze mark (candle) on the trees and a metal section marker showing the section corner on the trail. Where there were no trees, they created a rock monument that could be seen from each location to the next as a trail. The local ranchers worked with the forest service crews and allowed the trails through their privately-owned land in exchange for fire protection in case of a lightning strike.

The trails were mapped and considered a legal access through the forest. There were no locks on the trail and signs were attached to the trees. The trails were maintained until the 1950's then left to organizations to do the maintenance but that didn't last.

Landowners and loggers cut the trees bearing the candles and obliterated the trails until you couldn't tell if it was a cow path and the signs were taken for souvenirs or to confuse the trail. The forest service management refused to react for the benefit of the general public and appeared to represent the wealthy nonresident landowners and the political pressures that the wealthy had access to.

Since 1903, The Gilbert families, have continually owned land in the foothills of the Crazy mountains and provided access via the Rock Creek Trail Head for the public to park their vehicles and proceed on foot to the National forest. I have been warned by one of our new part time resident, wealthy neighbor landowner that "one step off the county road or trail is trespassing" and they have the money to prosecute for any conceived infraction. Roads are being locked to the National Forest, State Land, and BLM land that belongs to the general public and our access to each should be protected for future generations to enjoy.

I am opposed to the land swap in the Crazy Mountains. This includes the West and East side of the Crazies. The elevation changes in the Crazy Mountains start at 6000 feet at the lower timber line to 12,500 feet elevation at the peaks. The timber land is between 6500 feet to 9000 feet so at 9000 feet, the oxygen level starts to get thin making it hard to breath. If the land swap happens the fire fighters would have to climb up to 9000 feet elevation to get around the private land that was swapped. The hunting, fishing and picnic areas are best between 6000 feet to 7500 feet. I am objecting because you are trading useable land that has marketable timber, pasture, and recreation for a barren inaccessible (except for a very few people) mountain rocks.

The forest service trails were established for fire control in the Crazy Mountain District. The fire of 1910 started at Rock Creek by a steam engine powering a sawmill on Section 8 or Section 9. The local ranchers and forest service personal and the community at large turned out to fight the fire and conditions were dry and hot. My family owned the East half of Section 10, 2 North, 11 East and all of Section 15, so they were involved in the fire control.

There were few trails (if any) and the frre fighters could not get through the conifer forest to establish fire lines and any control of the fire. The fire burned around the south end of the Crazy Mountains and did not get

controlled until reaching Sweet Grass Creek on the East side of the Mountains.

Accessible trails are important especially on the lower reaches of the Crazy Mountains. Some private sections are roadless and the only access is via the trails that were maintained by the Crazy Mountains forest service crews and ranchers in the area.

The trails were also used by the general public to reach the high lakes for fishing and around the solid rock peaks for hunting goats. At other times the ranchers drove the cattle and sheep to pastures through the meadows and ridges. What I am saying is that the trails were established to permit travel between the lower ridges and valleys where there is less snow and better hunting.

Future generations need access to the forest, the same as their for-fathers. The National Forest Service should not accommodate a few very rich landowners that aspire to build an empire over the members of the general public whom are interested in hunting, fishing, picnicking and recreating in the mountains. We are currently being blocked out of the forest by these well to do property landowners that are non-residents but close the access roads and trails that were established and mapped as access to the Crazy Mountains.