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Organization:

Title:

Comments: 4225 Green Acres Drive Helena, MT 59602 November 15, 2019

Forest Supervisor, Custer-Gallatin NF
South Crazies Land Exchange
P. O. Box 130, Federal Building
Bozeman, MT 59771

Dear Ms. Erickson,

The following are my comments on the proposed South Crazies Land Exchange. They relate primarily to the portion with Crazy Mountain Ranch.

My family has owned land in the west half of Section 10, T2N, R11E since the homesteading days. Our cousin Art Gilbert took over the homestead from my Grandfather and he served as the ranger on the Rock Creek District for many years. (Our 1933 copy of the Absaroka National Forest Map shows the site in Section 8 as "Rock Creek R. S." even though current articles refer to it as a guard station.) Because the site had no water nearby, Art used our homestead cabin as the ranger station during his tenure. My parents granted the easement for Trail 270 that crosses our property in 1974. That easement along with others granted by the neighbors provide the current access in the Rock Creek area. Our current cabin is near the point where the Trail 270 intersects Road #199. We are there most Spring through Fall weekends and sometimes during the week. Because of that, we get to see quite a bit of the trail use on Trail 270 and Road 199.

By far the majority of trail users are people that want to get to Rock or Smeller Lakes. Until the last ten years when it became very popular to find isolated parcels of public land for hunting has there been other than incidental use of the easement through Section 9 to get to Section 8. Most of the trail users have been respectful and appreciative of the trail access through our property. However, we get frequent trespass by users who are honestly confused that "it's a Forest Service trailhead and trail, therefore this must be Forest Service property" and hunters who hike to our property and find that it will be a long way to National Forest land and that it will be a steep climb to bring their game out, so decide that they will hunt on us since they are there. There are also people that are just disrespectful and have shot up the original trailhead signs, burned six sections of jackleg fence, rutted the area, left litter and taken down our signs that say "private property, please stay on trail". We have had two thefts from our cabin during times when the only access has been the trail and my locked work road that I have plowed to remove snow.

It was a long term understanding of the Forest Service that we didn't have prescriptive rights to the historical trails. In the supporting information to obtain the easements for Trail 270, there is a statement that the easement is being obtained because there is no other legal access to the area. While I was staff officer (timber, fire, soil, air and water) on the Gallatin NF, we did a cooperative timber sale in the Jardine area with a mining company and two private mining claim owners that wanted to clear the timber from their claims. One of the benefit to the government was the mining company granted an easement on the trail that crossed their land and into the Beartooth Wilderness.

I am in favor of abandoning Trail 272 as it is shown in the current location. As stated in the preceding paragraph, I don't believe that the Forest Service has a legal right to most of that location. It was used with landowner

permission by the rangers at the Rock Creek and Ibex stations and occasional other users. The general public accessed the Rock Creek area by Road 199. When the Forest Service acquired the road and trail easements in 1966 and 1974 they had the opportunity to purchase the easement on the logging road in the west edge of Section 9 but there was no interest in doing that. Until the current craze of finding isolated areas of public land for hunting, there was virtually no use of the easement on Road 199 to Section 8 until about the last ten years.

I support the land exchange with Crazy Mountain Ranch, although my son-in-laws and grandchildren will be very disappointed in losing hunting access to Sections 4 and 8 that we have enjoyed. At the public meeting in Livingston, it appeared that the major concerns about the land exchange involve the CMR portions. CMR current management has not objected to people using the trails. However, people should realize that management objectives or ownerships change over time. The reason that the Trail 270 easements were secured was because the owner of the property in the 1960s shut off access to Road 199 and the trails. There were some rumors at the time that they were considering putting in lodges at the lakes and providing helicopter access for their clients. I also feel that if the other land exchanges go through and the CMR portion does not, there will be even more people coming to those two sections.

I agree that consolidating the land ownerships will be more effective for both the private owners and the Forest Service. It will also help avoid confusion by the public, as long as adequate signing at the trailhead and along the trail is maintained by the Forest Service.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,