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Joe Gutkoski

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2019

To:

Custer Gallatin National Forest

US Forest Supervisor Mary Erickson P.O. Box 130, Bozeman, MT 59971

Project 56687 - South Crazy Mountains Land Exchange Public Comment

Dear Supervisor Erickson:

I have spent my whole life, all 92 years, in the outdoors and I know the value of our public lands. I do not support the proposed land swap in the Crazy Mountains. I say no action, no land swap. Here is a biography about me.

Joe Gutkoski was born in Wilkes-Barre, PA and was raised as a Pennsylvania deer hunter, trout fisherman and berry picker, hickory nut, walnut, hazelnut, butternut, and American chestnut gatherer. After graduation from high school, he enlisted in the Navy in WWII, where he served on the Destroyer Lansdowne. He graduated from Penn State University (attended with the GI Bill) with a BS in Landscape Architecture. He began work with the US Forest Service in the late 1940s as a fire fighter in Idaho. He transferred to Missoula, MT, where for 13 years he worked as a Smoke Jumper, squad leader and foreman, fighting fire throughout the West. Joe transferred as a Landscape Architect to the Forest Service Regional Lands Office, doing planning and design work in MT, ID, eastern WA, North and South Dakota, MN and AK. In 1964, he was assigned to the Gallatin National Forest in Bozeman. Joe retired from the USFS in 1982 with 32 years of service. He then started a licensed practice in land planning and design in MT, ID and WY. Joe is a lifelong environmentalist and defender of public lands. He was President and founding member of Montana Rivers and Yellowstone Buffalo Foundation. He was President, Secretary and Grievance Officer of Local 130 National Federation of Federal Employees Union. He served as equipment manager of Bozeman's Little League Baseball and President of Bozeman Babe Ruth Baseball League.

Joe has served as President of the Gallatin Wildlife Association, member of Montanans for Gallatin Wilderness, and Vice President of Montana Wildlife Federation, where he served on the Board of Directors for many years. Joe was President and Secretary of Madison Gallatin Alliance, a Chapter of Montana Wilderness Association. He was also Vice President of The Big Open Project in northeast Montana. He was Vice President and Secretary of Montana/Idaho Chapter of American Society of Landscape Architects, and lastly, Chairman of the Bozeman Schools, Parks and Recreation Planning Committee.

You can see my long involvement in environment and other community organizations.

On October 3, 2019, the Custer Gallatin National Forest released the Preliminary Environmental Assessment for the South Crazy Mountains Land Exchange. According to page 1 of the Introduction, it states the purpose of this document is to disclose any and all "anticipated environmental effects" resulting from the exchange. The proposed action entails the approval of three independent land exchanges of National Forest Service (NFS) land in the Crazy Mountains with three private landowners having land withholdings bordering or surrounding said

NFS lands. These three separate private entities are: Philip Morris USA, Inc. (Crazy Mountain Ranch (CMR)), Rock Creek Ranch I, Ltd. (RCR), and Wild Eagle Mountain Ranch LLC (WEMR). As a result, if approved, 3,797 acres of private land will be exchanged for 3,225 of NFS lands; all lands located in the South Crazy Mountains of south-central Montana.

The Forest Service has released a Preliminary Environment Assessment for a land exchange in the South Crazy Mountains. The information in the PEA makes it appear to be a good deal, but the PEA only tells half the story.

The Custer Gallatin National Forest has proposed trading about 1,305 acres of public land there to the Crazy Mountain Ranch, a private retreat owned by the tobacco giant Philip Morris. In exchange, the Forest Service would get 1,920 acres of privately owned land deeper in the mountains to the north, including two sections surrounding two high elevation lakes deep in the mountains to the north.

The truth is the Crazy Mountain Ranch part of the exchange is a very bad deal because the public gives up two sections (4 and 8) of prime big game habitat and an exceptional self-sustaining native cutthroat trout fishery. In return the public would get Rock and Smeller lakes and an inaccessible section while alpine lakes are desirable, their value for wildlife pales in comparison to the habitat wildlife would lose

Instead of a trade with a Swiss tobacco company, a Swiss-domiciled multinational cigarette and tobacco manufacturing company, with products sold in over 180 countries headquartered in Switzerland and worth billions (7.91 billion in earnings in 2018, and 39.80 Billion dollars in total assets) for lands that are much less valuable for hunters, fisherman, hikers and wildlife does not represent what Montanans want.

the forest service should be looking at a purchase of private land and consolidate ownership and designate the property as wilderness, the most protective land designation, and protect it for present and future generations. This is what Montanans want. In a 2018 survey from the University of Montana, it is clear that Montanans want more wildernesses and with land purchase by the Forest Service we can add wilderness quality land.

1. It is an important wildlife corridor
2. Biological connectivity for Grizzly
3. Consolidation of checker boarded lands was successfully done in the Gallatin

The land swap is not good for Montanans and the wildlife they treasure.

Please take no action

Joe Gutoski