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Comments: Mary Erickson

Forest Supervisor

Custer Gallatin National Forest

Bozeman MT

Dear Ms Erickson,

I have been hearing about your proposed land exchange in the Crazy Mountains. Let me offer some wisdom I learned many years ago on your forest in the northern Crazy Mountains.

I worked on the Livingston District and was on an ID team working on a land exchange on the north end of the mountain range. I attended open houses on behalf of the agency. At the time I felt the exchange was a reasonable solution to access and land management problems that I dealt with almost daily. I was tired of dealing with checkerboard ownership.

At one of the meetings I spoke with the landscape architect from the Forest who said she thought the exchange was short sighted as she felt we could eventually convince congress to buy all the private lands involved in the exchange.

After a couple of years of public opposition to the exchange, the forest slowed the decision and went to work with the delegation to build support to buy the lands. Guess what, the federal government bought all the land. The checkerboard ownership was solved. The landscape architect was right and I was wrong.

I think this example has application to this proposal. These rich people you're dealing with and their employees are very persuasive and very smooth. The reason they want to pursue an exchange is that checkerboard ownership is a pain for them and I suspect they fear public pressure will ultimately result in better access for the public and more unwanted users in their back yard.

Once you give up these Forest Service managed lands, there will be no going back. I think federal ownership of all the lands inside the Forest Boundary in the Crazies is in the best interest of the American public. This is not an original thought. The Forest Boundary was drawn in the early 1900's as a logical expression of what should be the National Forest.

I used to work for an old wise Forest Supervisor who said his strength was understanding the timing of a decision.

I would urge you to let time and change solve this problem of checkerboard ownership and public access. Public opinion, public pressure and time is on the Forest Service side. You don't need to solve this problem now.

Dennis Havig Wisdom, MT