

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/19/2022 7:00:00 AM

First name: Chris

Last name: Nygren

Organization: Gallatin Valley Back Country Horsemen

Title: President

Comments: Public Comment Submission to Proposed East Side Crazies-Inspiration Divide Land Swap

The Gallatin Valley Back Country Horsemen Chapter (GVBCH) of the Back Country Horsemen of Montana submits this comment regarding a land swap between the United States Forest Service (Custer-Gallatin National Forest (CGNF)) and certain private landowners located primarily along the east side of the Crazy Mountains northeast of Livingston, Montana. This land swap is being proposed for the overall intended purpose of increasing public trail access to the Crazy Mountains, an issue complicated by checkerboard ownership of public and private lands. Another significant participant in this proposal is the Yellowstone Club (YC) located near Big Sky, Montana.

A significant concern for GVBCH with this proposed land swap is how it affects GVBCH's core mission of perpetuating the commonsense use and enjoyment of horses in the backcountry. Increasing public access to trails accessing the backcountry as a general concept is something GVBCH strongly supports. We are also aware of the contentious trail access issues on the East side of the Crazies and we both welcome and support approaches which can increase access for our members and the public in general. Rather than tying up potential access in expensive litigation for many years, a cooperative approach between landowners, the CGNF and trail users is preferred and wholly supported by GVBCH. This specific proposal has the potential to do so, especially with the involvement of the YC.

However, GVBCH is also aware of some of the concerns being raised with the swap, the loss of public land along the Inspiration Divide at the head the Taylor Fork/Yellow Mule drainages in the Gallatin National Forest, the removal of prime wildlife habitat from public ownership in the Crazies and other reductions in public trail access. Every good compromise will involve some sacrifice by each party and at this time, GVBCH does not believe it has sufficient information to support or oppose this proposal. We do believe that access to the east side of the Crazy Mountains is an issue which needs to be resolved and appreciate the willingness of these parties to work towards a solution.

As stated above, the Gallatin Valley Back Country Horsemen want to be part of the process to develop a solution to this problem. Whether this specific proposal is the mechanism to do so is not something GVBCH can commit to at this time. We do support continued negotiations on this land swap proposal and desire to be part of further discussions in that regard.

Chris Nygren, President of the Gallatin Valley Back Country Horsemen