

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/17/2019 11:13:29 PM

First name: Susan

Last name: Lanning

Organization:

Title:

Comments: November 15, 2019

To: Mary Erickson, Forest Supervisor

Thank you for allowing public comments on the proposed project number 56687 The Southern Crazy Mountain Land Exchange. It is of vital importance to protect our access and increase use of public lands in the Crazy Mountains.

I support the effort to consolidate the National Forest Service (NFS) lands in the Crazy Mountains. However this proposal has a major problem from the start.

This proposal is lumping land exchanges with three different private entities into one project. The exchanges with the Crazy Mountain Ranch, Rock Creek Ranch and Wild Eagle Ranch each have their inherently different properties and characteristics and should be subjected to review separately. In addition there will not be a new environmental assessment done for this exchange and/or new trail.

I will try to address my thoughts on each exchange individually.

Rock Creek Ranch (RCR) - The exchange of RCR sections 31 and 33, (Townships 3 N. 11 E.) for NFS sections 2 and 12 (Township 2 N. 11 E.) seems like a fair exchange without significantly disrupting public use. As I understand mineral and water rights transfer to and from each owner. The exchange with RCR will impact one grazing permittee on the NFS Duck Creek allotment while the RCR Little Cottonwood allotment will not change. So I am mostly agreeable to this exchange as it does help consolidate two sections with NFS lands.

Wild Eagle Mountain Ranch (WEMR) - The exchange with WEMR is also a fair exchange of Section 1 (Township 2 N. 11 E.) with NFS section 8 (Township 2 N. 12 E.). It doesn't look like there are any water rights in dispute, however parties need to resolve the fractionalized mineral claims on the WEMR lands. The effect on grazing permits should also be considered more with the parties involved. The problem I see with this exchange is there isn't an easy access for the public to section 1 thus the public doesn't gain much. I can support this exchange.

Crazy Mountain Ranch (CMR) - The exchange of CMR sections 11, 13 and 21 (Township 3 N. Range 11 E.) for NFS sections 4 and 8 (Township 2 N. 11 E.) is not an equitable exchange and more problematic.

I do respect the National Forest Service employees and am glad we have a federal agency that is supposed to protect our public lands. In regards to the CMR exchange I think the NFS is making some poor judgements and not working for the public. I also want to say I do not direct any of my comments to the CMR employees only to the owner, Philip Morris, USA (Altria).

It is important for the public to understand one impetus for these land exchanges. It is highly likely they involve the fact that Senator Steve Daines received \$12,500 (2012-2014) and \$7,800 in the 2020 cycle from Altria (tobacco industry, top non-individual contributor in Montana), the parent company of Philip Morris USA, who owns the Crazy Mountain Ranch. Also Sonny Perdue, USDA Ag Secretary, who is in charge of the NFS received contributions from Altria when he was governor of Georgia, as well as gifted flights from Altria, which were part of an ethics investigation. Note that as soon as Sonny Perdue was confirmed, he attended a Montana Ag Summit in Great Falls organized and sponsored by Sen. Daines. Also note that it was Sen. Daines who submitted landowner complaints and false information to get District Ranger Alex Sienkiewicz removed from his position

and within days Alex was removed from his position temporarily. For more interesting info and how Donald Trump, his family and administration have been involved with this please read the Bloomberg Business Week magazine article "This Land is No Longer Your Land" by Monte Reel, October 26, 2017.

Personally it is more important to put the high lake areas (CMR sec. 11 and 13) into public ownership. I am not a hunter but I understand how upset people are in losing (NFS sec. 4 and 8) in this exchange. Sections 4 and 8 are prime wildlife habitats with good access for hunting. The grazing permittee on NFS 4 and 8 would lose their grazing permit and water development compensation. The exchange of Section 21 would not affect water or grazing rights. The acquisition of section 21 would help consolidate a large portion on NFS land however, since it is not within a Wilderness Study Area and without good access it is not as valuable to me. The NFS should investigate all mineral rights on sections 11, 13 to insure no development of minerals will take place, the assumption that the difficult access would make it unlikely is not a guarantee. My priority would be getting sections 11 and 13 over 21.

Now I will address more problems in this exchange. The NFS water rights on Sections 4 and 8 would transfer clearly to the CMR. On the other hand CMR will transfer water rights with section 13 (Smeller Lake claims) while CMR will keep the rights of water use from section 11 (Rock Lake claims) along with the rights to operate the Rock Creek dam and outlet tunnel on this section. The NFS and CMR would share some operation and maintenance plans for this. Sounds ok but I heard that other Rock Lake water rights users were not even notified of this exchange before it came out in public. It seems that the NFS should have informed them as the other users should have had a say as to who would manage the water flows once Rock Lake belonged to the NFS. The Rock Lake area also has discarded materials like cables, cans, barrels etc. that could have contained potential hazardous substances. CMR claims they will clean this up but will they pay for any chemical analyses to determine any dangers to the public (hopefully not a HAZMAT site).

The main concern I have for this exchange is the loss of public access routes to the Rock Lake and Smeller Lake trails. I have been hiking up to Rock Lake (trail 270) and Smeller Lake via (Trail 270 and 220) for years and have never had to ask permission. These trails have been used for over 100 years and it is too bad that these newer rich landowners want to prevent future generations from enjoying the historic trails and lakes. My dear old friend, Bill Gibson, would anxiously wait for me to return from my hikes up there. In return I would sit and enjoy listening to his stories of his adventures up at Rock Lake even in the 30's. He would also tell of being in other parts of the Crazies along with herding sheep in the Shields Valley and some in the Bridger Mountains. He respected the land and his neighbors. He has since passed, I miss him but know he would be appalled that some landowners are now locking the gates and blocking the old dirt roads into the forestlands. What has happened to good neighbor courtesies?

In the recent loss of the Porcupine Low-Line trail # 267 the NFS ceded access to the landowner and approved a new trail. Instead of defending the public's right to access they gave in to political pressure and other large landowners. Again this was pushed through quickly with no environmental assessments done.

The NFS should be empowering themselves and the public to claim prescriptive easements on the public roads and trails that have been used historically. This new land exchange with CMR would require a new trail to be built while abandoning the lower portions of trail # 272 going through sections 4 and 8. The current trails (270 and 272) and roads (Robinson Bench, Rock Creek North 35, Rock Creek 199 and North Hammond Creek) are there and the right to use them should remain by defending easements through historical use. These new landowners need to realize and respect that the public has had access to these lands for years and be good neighbors.

With that being said, the public also needs to be respectful when passing on private lands; stay on trails and don't negatively impact trails or property. The NFS needs to clearly mark trails so the public knows exactly where private and public lands and roads intersect. The NFS has neglected the trails on the west and south end of the Crazies for years and this has led to some of the owner conflicts. The Porcupine low line trail was a prime

example of this neglect, NFS signs were removed, gates were locked, blazes were on trees not on NFS lands creating confusion, trails were not maintained and when the trail was hard to find the NFS did not have blazes or markers (there are volunteer groups who would help maintain trails if invited).

No wonder people got confused, went on private land then got arrested for trespassing.

I cannot support this exchange but still would like public ownership of sections 11, 13 and 21. Perhaps there could be another way to get these lands without losing sections 4 and 8. The CMR has used county roads to get to and from their ranch, they have received water and grazing rights at the expense of public tax dollars so they could reciprocate by granting access. I am sure they have had more than their fair share of tax deductions, unlike the rest of us. The best case scenario to ponder is, why couldn't the Altria Company do the right thing and philanthropically donate sections 11 and 13?

Alternatively, could the NFS possibly get funding or advise private land conservation groups to make cash purchases of these sections?

Regarding this project I cannot fully support all 3 ranch exchanges together as proposed. I think more dialogue with alternative or improved plans need to open with the NFS, RCR, WEMR, specifically with the CMR and the public before this exchange is approved.

Also the NFS is always saying there are no cultural resources affected, the whole Crazy Mountain Range was and is a spiritual and cultural resource for the Apsaalooke - Crow Tribe. I wonder if they were personally contacted to get their input.

Furthermore, we need to protect more of the Crazy Mountains and continue to consolidate the lands for the NF and work on designating some of this majestic range as Wilderness for future generations. With more difficult projects ahead, some future land purchases/exchanges to consider should be Section 7 (Township 3 N. 12 e.), Section 1 (Township 3 N. E.), Sections 33 and 35 (Township 4 N. 11 E.) and I could go on but I better stop here!

Respectfully submitted,

Susan P. Lanning