

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/18/2019 4:25:31 AM

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Comments: I very much appreciate that the Forest Service continues its efforts to consolidate national forest in the Crazy Mountains and secure reasonable public access. For the past 20 years, with friends and family I have hiked, camped, fished, hunted, skied, rented Forest Service cabins and cut firewood in the Crazies. In recent years, as a journalist, I have made a study of public access issues in the range and am familiar with the land purchases and exchanges going back to the 1930s.

While I believe the greatest long-term threat to the overall character of the Crazies is development of inholdings such as at Smeller Lake, I think the people most familiar with sections 4 and 8 in the Crazy Mountain Ranch portion of the swap have made a compelling case that these lands are too valuable for the public to give up in the context of what we get in return.

In the Crazies, as in many areas of the state and the West, there's a real lack of publicly accessible, mid-elevation foothills land that is among the most desirable for family recreation, wildlife conservation and hunting. Clearly, despite the Forest Service not encouraging recreation on sections 4 and 8, people are using these lands and are now speaking up for their long-term value.

It raises a larger question about the Forest Service's strategy for consolidating public land in the Crazies. Are the foothills lands to be primarily treated as chips to be traded for inholdings? I'd like to see some of these lower-elevation lands kept in public hands, and sections 4 and 8 are prime candidates.

So I'd like to see the Forest Service cool its heels on this proposal and go back to the negotiating table with the goal of finding an agreement that retains sections 4 and 8 as national forest. I support Alternative A, No Action Alternative.