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First name: Liz

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Mary Erickson,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to express comments regarding the proposed South Crazy Mountains Land Exchange. I have enjoyed hiking, camping, hunting and huckleberry picking in the Crazies for over thirty years. They are very special to me and my family as a place of solace and recreation.

I am very much in support of consolidating public lands, especially in the very checker-boarded area of the Crazies. However, I believe the current proposal simply exchanges an area of checkerboard in the higher elevations, for one in the lower elevations. I believe we can do better.

It seems very wise and in the public's best interest for the Forest Service to gain the 2 Sections containing Rock and Smeller Lakes. Very few of the high mountain lakes in the Crazies have proper public access. Given the recent population explosion in the surrounding areas two more high mountain lakes available for public access is very advantageous.

My main objection to the proposal is the loss of public lands (FS) in Sections 4 and 8 (T2N, R11E) in the lower elevations. These sections have existing trails, access to the main road, or proximity to it, and are prime elk and deer habitat and therefore, hunting grounds. The Crazies contain a large population of elk and deer, yet offer very few public accesses for hunting.

In contrast, I see very little if any benefit to the public by acquiring Section 1 (T2N, R11E). Public access is minimal, especially given the loss of the adjacent Section 2 (T2N, R11E), which is next to the main trail to Rock Lake. Section 1, described above, has no existing trails nor proximity to roads, in dire contrast to Sections 4 and 8 (T2N, R11E). Therefore, Section 1 (T2N, R11E) needs to remain private and Sections 4 and 8 (T2N, R11E) need to remain public.

Ideally, the Forest Service would also acquire Section 5 (T2N, R11E) in order to offer a contiguous block of public land beginning in the lower elevations off Rock Creek Road.

In order to prevent more checker board at low elevation (with the transfer of public land (FS) Sections 31 and 33 (T3N, R11E), and to provide a significant block of contiguous public land at low elevation, I strongly encourage the Forest Service to collaborate with Conservation Groups such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Montana Wildlife Federation and the Land and Water Conservation Fund, to name a few. With a bit more time and effort considering creative alternatives, I believe we could secure an even more contiguous and public-friendly land exchange.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Respectfully,

Liz Muhs Stone