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First name: JOHN

Last name: JENKINS

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I have reviewed the proposal a number of times and discussed it with numerous members of the Back Country Horsemen of Montana, Beartooth Chapter out of the Fishtail/Absarokee/Columbus/Laurel/Billings area. In recent years as an officer in this chapter, and President in 2021 and 2022 we have expanded our volunteer work to include projects in the Crazies. I am not writing this letter on the behalf of the Back Country Horsemen, though such a letter will be forthcoming.

While the Crazies are not in my immediate back yard since I live in Yellowstone County, they are for 20% of our members. Our members, including myself do visit there to ride, hunt or hike. They are a special and unique place that is important to our group. I appreciate your efforts to address the public and private checkerboarding. Our group generally supports the position stated herein.

But I request that, as a condition of the land exchange, conservation easements are put on public lands going into private ownership. Without easements in place, there is no guarantee that existing low-elevation wildlife habitat will stay intact. Consolidation could end up harming wildlife by opening the door to private development within the existing Forest boundary. Please include easements as a condition of the exchange, as you did for the South Crazy Mountains Land Exchange.

In addition, the Forest Service should retain public and administrative access claims to sections 7, 8 and 10 in Sweetgrass drainage. Relinquishing these claims sets a dangerous precedent for access disputes and gets ahead of litigation that is currently under appeal.

Respectfully, and