Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/22/2022 3:50:31 AM
First name: Patricia
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Organization:
Title:
Comments: Forest Supervisor Mary Erickson
PO Box 130
Bozeman, MT 59771

Re: Preliminary Environmental Assessment (PEA) for the East Crazy Inspiration Divide Land Exchange Project

Dear Ms. Erickson:

I have hiked and backpacked in the Crazies for decades, and our family has long owned some private land in the Crazies' "checkerboard", although none that is involved in the current proposed land exchange nor any other recent access issues or proposals. I am cognizant of the public access issues in the Crazies and other management problems created by checkerboard ownership and agree with the overarching goal of ownership consolidation, but I write in opposition to the currently proposed land exchange.

My primary objection is to the USFS's proposed relinquishment of public access claims, particularly on Rein Lane and the Sweetgrass Creek Road. These areas have historically provided public access to USFS sections beyond the private land, as explicitly recognized in Gallatin National Forest's own 2006 Travel Management Plan, and the access issues are currently under litigation. Consequently, it is inappropriate and misleading for the PEA to implicitly endorse the landowners' contention that they have legal authority to grant "permissive seasonal access". Relinquishing claims to public access before the issue has been decided in court basically rewards the behavior of some landowners who have harassed and intimidated public land users and USFS employees. It is a terrible precedent to set.

The PEA suffers other deficiencies that have been well-described in some of the other public comments submitted to date. Rather than repeat them here, I simply concur with the comments provided by Maddy Munson on behalf of Wild Montana (dated 12/20/2022) and Brad Wilson on behalf of Friends of the Crazy Mountains (dated 12/21/2022). I do not belong to or have any connection with either organization, but I found their comments to be among the most comprehensive and accurate critiques of the PEA.

I do appreciate USFS's considerable efforts in support of the goal of consolidating land ownership and recognize the difficulties in the task. However, the access problems inherent in the proposed land exchange are too deleterious to the public interest for this proposal to go forward. Please either withdraw the PEA, or select Alternative A (No Action) to allow for the future development of a solution that is more equitable to the users (and owners) of public lands. Thank you for considering my comments.

Patricia Corry