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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the East Crazy and Inspiration Divide land swap project. I will break my comments into two geographic groups for ease of interpretation.

Inspiration Divide:

This project seems like a good consolidation of lands for both the USFS and private landowner as a way to manage lands for the specific conservation and habitat quality standards--my only concern is for the the potential degradation of of habitat that is currently owned by the public and stewarded by the Forest Service. The public lands in this location that will be relinquished to private landowners should remain roadless and undeveloped for commercial purposes--as it has been managed by the Forest Service. This could be accomplished through a deed restriction or similar conservation tool that will continue to highlight and protect the significant habitat and wildlife connectivity values that exist in this location for unrestricted development and commercialization as we have seen occur on other lands in the Big Sky region over the past 50 years.

East Crazy Consolidation:

I have more significant concerns for the proposed land swap and relinquishment of public rights for this portion of the proposal that was advanced by private interests. My main concern is related to the loss of equitable public access for all Montana citizens and others to enjoy the highly scenic and unique landscape in Sweetgrass Creek Canyon in the east Crazies. Many Montanans enjoy the scenic backcountry trails and roads of the state as soon as spring weather permits. This is accomplished through scenic drives on country roads and low elevation trails that access big wild landscapes that remain predominantly undeveloped--and abounding with diverse wildlife. This is the antidote to a long winter that many residents of all ages and abilities rely on as we emerge from long nights, cold temperatures, and windy winter weather. The Sunday drive on backcountry roads with family in tow was and is a common activity for many Montanans--and the early season hike to see the first pasque flowers and yellow bells of the season in the snow free foothills of mountain ranges are one of the advantages of living in a state like Montana.

Why do I mention this necessary antidote to winter and the mental and physical health benefits that come with it? There are two reasons--this proposal will eliminate public road access to Lower Sweetgrass Road--which will take away the opportunity for Montana's families and other to explore this scenic valley by road. I am opposed to the relinquishment of public rights to use this county road as it has been used by the public for nearly 100 years. Not to mention the loss of backroads biking opportunities (gravel grinding) that is growing in popularity. There has also been significant public investment in the roads through road building and maintenance over the years--I see no effort to recover these public resources in this proposal.

Relinquishing the East Trunk Trail to private interests and replacing it with a high elevation trail that will shorten the season of use in this portion of the Crazy Mountains is a severe diminishment of public access and will severely restrict access by trail users of all abilities to access this terrain. This is not a suitable swap or trade. The proposed trail also eliminates access to the lower portion of Sweetgrass Creek, a scenic and viable fishing opportunity that will be privatized and sold to the highest bidder.

Trading low elevation lands in the East Crazy Mountains to private interests significantly increases the chance that these lands will be developed for commercial and residential uses by the private parties. This will have impacts on wildlife habitat that will become fragmented with more roads and structures and high impact commercial activities. All public lands that will be traded to private interests needs to be protected with deed restrictions or conservation options that limit all commercial uses and future road building. This will help to protect the specific conservation values of these lands that the Forest Service has historically managed on behalf of the

public to protect their significant scenic and wildlife habitat values.

This swap and trade is not a good deal for the public, I would encourage the Forest Service to re-engage with the private interests that are pursuing this swap and figure out a different option that retains the current low elevation access that the public currently enjoys. If low elevation access is relinquished with this swap--the public will likely never have the ability to re-negotiate access in this location again as this landscape becomes captured by private interests that have a history of commercial development and for-profit development schemes.