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First name: Sarah

Last name: Fitzgerald

Organization:

Title:

Comments: The Crazy Mountains are one of my favorite place to visit early and late season. The lower elevation foothills of the Crazies provide extremely important wildlife habitat and provide people with access to the quiet enjoyment of nature, particularly in the shoulder seasons, when much of Montana's public land is inaccessible due to snow.

I have three primary concerns about the East Crazy Inspiration Divide Land Exchange #63115.

My first concern is the relinquishing of public access. The proposal would leave only one public access point on the entire East Side of the Crazy Mountains. With the extreme population growth both Gallatin and Park Counties are experiencing, the last thing we should be doing is reducing public access points. It already feels more crowded in all the open space areas in SW Montana. One way to ease pressure is by spreading it out. More access points to public land will reduce user conflict and will reduce stress on natural resources. The high elevation trail proposal will only allow for limited seasonal access due to snow and steep terrain and will eliminate trail options for public users that have more limited ability to access steeper terrain. This proposal, if it proceeds will mean that the only way for the public to access Sweetgrass Canyon is by a steep trail that is nearly 20 miles in one direction--and only for about 3-4 months a year when the terrain is snow free. This is a bad deal for public users like myself that value diverse trail options throughout the Montana spring, summer, and fall.

Second, the Sweetgrass Drainage is one of the most beautiful places in Montana. It should remain accessible for the enjoyment of the public. These beautiful places should not be reserved for the sole enjoyment of the rich and privileged, who buy it and lock everyone else out. The Forest Service should retain public and administrative access claims to sections 7, 8 and 10 in Sweetgrass drainage, and the Lower Sweetgrass Road--which many Montana families utilize as a scenic drive to enjoy the scenic landscape. Relinquishing these claims sets a dangerous precedent for access disputes and gets ahead of litigation that is currently under appeal.

Finally, I am concerned by the lack of conservation easements in the proposal. Without conservation easements, there is no guarantee that the critical lower-elevation habitat will stay in tact. The privatization of pristine areas often results in commercial and residential development.

The lower Sweetgrass Drainage on the Eastside of the Crazy Mountains is a unique and beautiful area. Once gone, the natural value of pristine, wild places is often gone forever. We should not allow that to happen to this spectacular valley, that is currently open to enjoyment by all. The proposal should not go forward without guaranteeing public access and requiring conservations easements.