

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/24/2022 3:35:00 AM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I strongly approve of the East Crazy Inspiration land Exchange.

I approve because I care about the preservation of the land, and I believe that those who are working tirelessly to make this exchange possible know better than anyone how to care for it. In the summer of 2021, I visited the Sweet Grass Ranch, a family owned and operated guest ranch nestled deep in the valley below the Crazy Mountains of Big Timber Montana. I was immediately in awe of the raw and untamed beauty of the Crazies, the ruggedness of the terrain and the care and familiarity with which the workers of the ranch, who were primarily family members, navigated and cared for their surrounding environment.

The Sweet Grass Ranch family depends on the land for their livelihood - they guide their guests through the mountain trails on horseback all summer, and then in the winter, they turn their herd of over 60 horses loose to run free and survive off the land until the next summer.

It is a humble ranch that looks much the same way that I imagine it did when it was originally built in the 1800's under the name of the Brannin Ranch. I have seen from the photos and the artifacts in the main house how important it is for the Sweet Grass ranch to preserve their history, and to maintain their legacy for generations to come. I have seen how they care for their horses, and I have seen the fire truck that is parked prominently in the yard, ready to be brought into action at a moment's notice. When forest fires rage throughout the area, they are the ones on the front lines, risking their lives to stop the flames from destroying the land that they call home. This is not an instance of some wealthy celebrity or mega rich individual making a speculative land grab to flip for a profit. Not some massive commercial operation, using the land carelessly, or trying to take over more of it to crush their competition and make the area less accessible to others. It is a small group of 5th-7th generation families, who have deep ties to the surroundings, who benefit from people coming and experiencing the beauty of the crazies for years to come, trying to reduce the checkerboarding of their properties so they can better control wild fires and manage weeds and grazing. It is these families working together with the US Forest Service to consolidate a tract of public land that will make it accessible to all who wish to hike, ride, fish and hunt in its rugged beauty.

While the Sweet Grass Ranch generously gives permission for people to cross their land on foot to access the Sweet Grass drainage, there is currently no true public access point. While Sweet Grass plans to continue granting this permissive access, the exchange will allow the US Forest Service to create a looped foot and horse trail through the mountains with public access to all of the recreational activities the land has to offer. Not only do I hope this exchange is approved for the families whose everyday lives are improved, but also for the people who will now be able to more easily experience that same raw and untamed beauty that I was lucky enough to enjoy. Admittedly, I may not know every single intricacy of this agreement, but what I do know is that the people who live and die by this land, who I have seen care for it first-hand, and who have the biggest interest of anyone to protect and preserve it, have been fighting for 5 years alongside the US Forest Service to make this happen, because the families know how much it will mean to their way of life, and because the US Forest Service will be able to consolidate a large tract of land that will allow for public access. And that is good enough for me to trust that this is being done for the right reasons and with good intentions for the future.

I think it would be a major disappointment if this exchange is blocked by people who think they are doing something to harm a group they dislike, without thinking about the local people who truly stand to gain and lose, and who are well incentivized to be good stewards of the land for generations to come. I would urge people to not let the involvement of one party undermine the hard work of the US Forest Service and a small group of families to help protect and expand access to the land in question.

