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Comments: I have two primary objections with this final draft of the land exchange plan.

1. Voluntary commitments by landowners need to be formalized prior to the closing of the land exchange.

While I understand the time, effort, and relationship-building that went into this process, viewed from my and others perspective as members of the public, what amounts to a "handshake deal" for landowners to continue to allow seasonal access as it currently stands for the Sweetgrass Canyon trail is unacceptable. This agreement to allow continued seasonal access via Rein Lane needs to be formalized and enforceable before this deal closes and I believe this is completely justifiable considering the benefits landowners have received from this land exchange. Too much is at stake. A whim from the current landowners or a future sale could remove access forever. To claim this is out of the scope of this deal is absurd. If landowners are so comfortable with continuing access as-is, why not formalize it? Because they want an easy out, no strings.

Recording an easement preserving access at the time of closing and as a condition of closing is easy and reasonable.

2. Stricter deed restrictions for parcels leaving federal ownership

Deed restrictions for ALL parcels leaving FS hands should forbid subdivision of any kind and prohibit any development outside of agriculture. While I don't think the current landowners are hungering to develop, these lands will eventually change hands (as many multi-generational ranches are statewide) and the new owners may have different ideas. The spirit of this agreement is non-developmental and agricultural and should be enshrined as such across all parcels, not just ones in the Sweet Grass drainage.

3. General comments

This is happening. I get it. But I feel like I need to say that I feel let down by this process and by its results. As a member of the public, and an average resident of Park County, it seems like the only metrics improved by this land exchange are "contiguous federal acres" and a sort of warm fuzzy "look we can work with landowners" pat on the back for the FS. For an everyday user of our public lands, this is meaningless. We have in essence given up access to an incredibly scenic, low elevation trail in Sweetgrass for a tortuous 22 mile trail to nowhere. Who is going to use this trail past mile 10? I struggle to find even a handful of places someone could pitch a tent based on the topo. Most of the contiguous parcels gained along this new trail are places forest users would never go anyway and that the former private owners likely had no use for. While I'm pleased Smeller Lake will be in public hands, the winners here are landowners. Plain and simple. We can tip the scales back to the rest of us by implementing the two items mentioned above.