



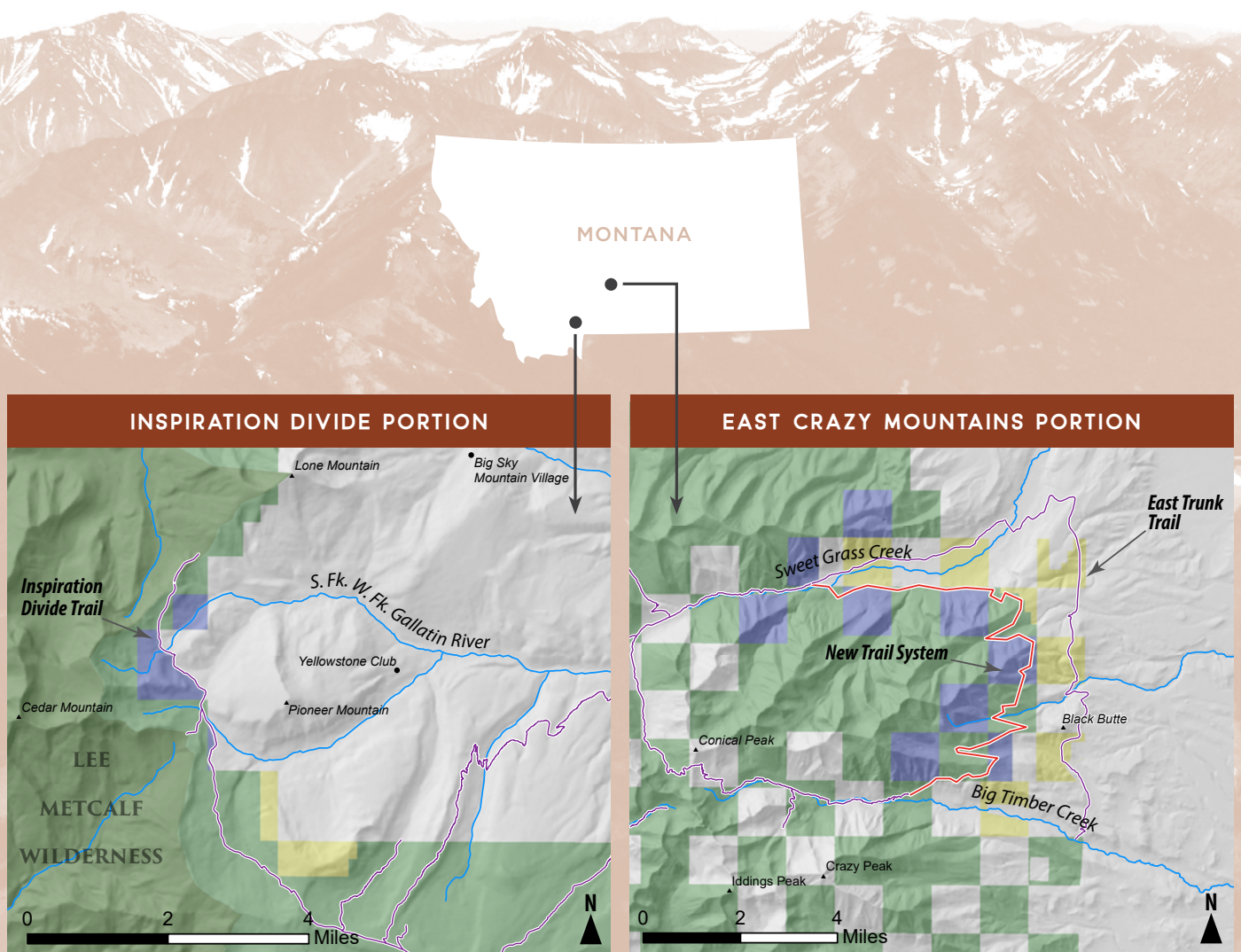
East Crazy Mountains and Inspiration Divide Public Access Improvement Land Exchange





The East Crazy Mountains and Inspiration Divide Public Access Improvement Land Exchange is a citizen-proposed land agreement in the Custer Gallatin National Forest.

It would consolidate public lands and create new public access on the eastern side of the Crazy Mountains and near Inspiration Divide in the Madison Range near Big Sky, Montana. The proposal would also relocate the disputed 'East Trunk Trail' in the East Crazy Mountains by constructing a new 22-mile trail that will guarantee legal public access at no taxpayer expense.



Frequently Asked Questions

Did this proposal originate from the Forest Service?

No. This is a citizen-led proposal. It originated from local landowners and public land users in the Crazy Mountains who have been working for years to resolve long-simmering public access debates through compromise and kitchen table conversations.

How would this impact the Crazy Mountains?

The proposal pertains to the east side of the Crazy Mountains between Big Timber Creek and Sweet Grass Creek. The Forest Service would acquire 5,205 acres of private “checkerboard” inholdings, resulting in approximately 30 square miles of contiguous public land. Most of these lands are roadless, possessing superb values for wildlife, primitive recreation and wildland conservation. The exchange would result in a 3,900 acre gain in roadless area—essential to protecting high quality wildlife habitat for protected species like wolverines and Canada lynx. Adjacent landowners would acquire 3,614 acres of National Forest “checkerboard” lands that are already interspersed with private ranchlands and ranch roads.

How would this impact the Madison Range?

The proposal involves roughly 1,000 acres of land near Big Sky, Montana. The Forest Service would acquire approximately 558 acres of mid-elevation private land east of Cedar Mountain bordering two miles of Inspiration Divide Trail #8. Conveying these private lands along this trail will improve public access and outdoor opportunities in the Madison Range and consolidate Forest Service ownership and land management.

The Yellowstone Club would acquire approximately 500 acres of high-elevation expert ski terrain adjacent to existing Yellowstone Club ski lifts. The parcels would be restricted by conservation easement to ski-use only including avalanche control, with no subdivision, residential or non-ski development permitted.

Why is the Yellowstone Club involved?

The Yellowstone Club has long been interested in a land swap in the Madison Range. They explored discussions with landowners and public land users near the Crazy Mountains and found strong agreement to package the Crazy Mountains and Madison Range into a single land exchange proposal for the Custer Gallatin National Forest to consider. The Yellowstone Club has been a good faith partner and contributed valuable expertise in this effort.

Is this a good deal for the public?

Yes. The public would receive a net gain of 1,566 acres and more consolidated public lands. The public would receive legal access in the East Crazy Mountains where guaranteed access does not currently exist. The public would receive a new trail and loop opportunity through the Crazy Mountains. The public would receive new access into the Madison Range from Inspiration Divide Trail near Big Sky.

Where would the new trail be located?

A new 22-mile trail in the Crazy Mountains would connect Half Moon campground in Big Timber Creek on the south end to an existing trail along Sweet Grass Creek at the north end. The new trail would connect with existing Forest Service trails to create a 40-mile loop managed for foot and horse travel.

Who will pay the cost of the new trail?

The trail will cost an estimated \$1 million, and will be built at zero cost to taxpayers. As part of the agreement, all costs of designing and constructing the new trail and improving the trailhead at Half Moon campground would be paid for by the Yellowstone Club.

What's wrong with the existing trail?

While depicted on maps, the Forest Service does not hold any recorded easements for Trail #136/East Trunk Trail. The location of Trail #136 has changed repeatedly on maps over time and is now depicted as crossing at least five sections of private land and meandering in and out of the forest boundary. In places, the trail is not locatable on the ground. Long-term disputes over the legality and location of the trail has exacerbated conflicts between hunters, ranchers and the Forest Service, and there is presently no access through the area.

Will this proposal impact access on Sweet Grass Creek Trail #122?

No, this proposal improves access into the East Crazy Mountains, but it maintains the status quo on trail #122. The Forest Service does not hold any recorded easements through private land along Sweet Grass Creek in Sweet Grass County. Visitors have permission to travel Rein Lane to its end in Section 2 and sign in at the ranch buildings for access up Sweet Grass Creek. During fall and early winter, gates are locked but access can still be obtained by permission from the landowners. The landowners in Sweet Grass intend to continue to allow permissive access as they have done for decades.

Does the proposal impact litigation against the Forest Service regarding access in the Crazies?

No, this agreement is separate from the litigation. The litigation makes procedural claims against the Forest Service. It cannot establish legal access over private land and would not secure public access to disputed routes like East Trunk Trail #136 or Sweet Grass Trail #122. While some people argue that there are prescriptive claims on certain routes, those claims would require a separate lawsuit by the Forest Service or the public, and landowners would be able to raise their own legal arguments resulting in a prolonged legal battle. This agreement however, provides a potential solution that would provide legal access in a collaborative and timely fashion.

Why doesn't this proposal address the entire range?

It is simply not realistic to think we can solve all the checkerboard and public access problems in the Crazy Mountains with one exchange. However, this agreement should be viewed as a model for additional collaboration between landowner and public land users in the future.

Why does the Crow Tribe support this agreement?

The Crazy Mountains hold spiritual significance to the Crow Tribe. Today, access to one of the Tribe's most sacred places, Crazy Peak, is controlled by a private inholding. As part of this agreement, Crow Tribal members will be granted permanent public access through this inholding to visit Crazy Peak.

How would the Forest Service manage newly acquired lands?

All lands acquired by the Forest Service would be withdrawn from mining and mineral leasing to protect public recreational values. In addition, lands would be subject to existing travel management plans and existing Forest Service policies already in place.

What are the next steps?

The public is invited to provide feedback on this proposal until August 7th. A formal proposal incorporating that public feedback will be submitted to the Forest Service and Montana's Congressional delegation later this summer. It's expected the Forest Service and Montana's Congressional delegation would cooperate on a public process to further review the proposal and advance a final agreement into law.

What is the Crazy Mountain Access Project?

The Crazy Mountain Access Project is an informal coalition of ranchers, conservationists, tribal representatives and hunters working to find common ground in Montana's Crazy Mountains. We formed to support the East Crazy Mountains and Inspiration Divide Public Access Improvement Land Exchange because it's an example of pragmatic compromise that could open the door for additional agreements.



PO Box 164
Livingston, MT 59047
e comments@crazymountainproject.com
www.crazymountainproject.com