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Mary Erickson, Supervisor
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Subject: Forest Plan Revision

Dear Supervisor Erickson,

Thank you so much for considering my thoughts before you revise the future management plan for the Custer-Gallatin National Forest. As a life-long Montanan, resident of Clyde Park, hiker in the Crazies, and landowner on the Cottonwood Creek corridor that hosts a stream of wild activity to and from the Crazies, the future of this range is of utmost interest to me.

I was pleased to read in your draft plan recognition of the very special cultural, historic and spiritual significance of the Crazy Mountains to the Crow (Apsaalooke) Tribe. The Crazy Mountains were the location of the historic vision quest of a very youthful Plenty Coups documented by Frank Bird Linderman, including the story of the replacement of the bison by the cattle, the resilience of the chickadee, and Chief Plenty Coups' lifelong commitment to education. It is one of my favorite Montana stories and I related it often to my colleagues during my 16 years as a Montana legislator.

I understand the Crow continue to seek recognition and protection of the Crazies as a traditional cultural landscape, similar to the Badger Two Medicine on the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest. I, too, wish to ensure that the very special qualities and wild, primitive character of the Crazy Mountains are fully protected in the new and future plan.

As you so well know, the Crazy Mountains are a tiny and isolated range towering over a mile above the surrounding prairie - a wild oasis of glacier-carved peaks, cirques, snowfields, waterfalls and sparkling lakes. This Range stands alone in its unique combination of high natural beauty and low legal protection.

The 1987 forest plan (Alt A.) neither recognizes nor protects the outstanding wild and cultural values of these mountains. Alternatives B and E likewise offer no real protection, leaving it totally vulnerable to whatever machines, roads, leases, claims, easements or other scams pop up in the next 30 years. These alternatives are not worthy. None provide a long term stewardship plan for sacred wild and public lands.

Two alternatives suggest a start and a possible combination to suit the needs of the Crazies:

Alternative C recognizes the "Crazy Mountains Backcountry Area" with boundaries that appear similar to the roadless area. The boundaries are good. But the standards and legal protections offered in this designation fall fiercely short in actual protection of the existing wild land values of the Crazy Mountains for the next 30 years.

Alternative D, as Congress once did, recognizes and protects the Crazy Mountains as a future (Recommended) Wilderness. Alternative D protects the outstanding wilderness character of the Crazy Mountains, keeping it as it is. It provides the commitments necessary to retain wilderness qualities over time. There will be no new roads, wheeled or machine traffic, leases, logging or mines. Grazing may continue where it exists.

Alternative D offers necessary protections to preserve the existing wild character of the Crazy Mountains while Alternative C provides the best backcountry boundaries.

Looking to the future of the Crazy Mountains, it is essential that you apply the strongest and clearest protections available to you over the largest area to keep it remote and primitive. If that means recommended wilderness (Alt D with Alt C boundaries) I am for it.

I can't help but wonder if a one-of-a-kind Wild Area, or Primitive Backcountry designation could be made in the case of the Crazy Mountains. The allocation must have real teeth or it will degenerate into a weed-invested, rutted, overpopulated playground for Bozeman. Having seen my favorite trails in a huge radius around Bozeman become un-walkable and un-wild, I know the inevitability of this possibility. Could solid and lasting protection for the wild character and remoteness of this rugged area be designed expressly to protect its uniqueness?

I know the Van Cleves believe U.S. Forest Service lands in the Crazies should be strictly managed as a "primitive area" with travel limited to traditional foot and stock. I don't know, but perhaps other landowners might also be willing to accept a unique wild or primitive area. While most of the Crazies is national forest lands, particularly after the 1992 Galt Exchange, 25% are privately-owned lands in the heart of the range. The U.S. Forest Service has an obligation to continue to provide reasonable access to inholdings.

We can't forget that some of the most remote reaches of the Crazies are roadless and trail-less private lands. Some landowners view this wild remote and primitive quality as the land's highest value. So, too, should the U.S. Forest Service. The U.S. Forest Service has no obligation to grant new road (or trail) easements where none exist today. The new forest plan needs to protect the Crazies with clear and lasting commitments to keep roadless and trail-less national forest lands just as they are today - remote, primitive and wild.

Private land owners such as the Van Cleves, and some of my neighbors on the west side, have taken great pride in their family stewardship of the wild and primitive Crazy Mountains. Those who visit the Crazies should tip their hats to decades of private stewardship including showing great respect to the family that purchased the entire Lazy K Bar in 2012 and are today the largest private landowners within the wild Crazies.

Time moves on and changes come to all private landowners. That is yet another reason we need the U.S. Forest Service to set the bar very high for U S Forest Lands in the wild Crazy Mountains. For these lands, the forest plan goals and direction need to provide lasting and complete protection of existing wilderness, cultural and traditional character and values.

The U.S. Forest Service needs to take the lead in protecting the Crazy Mountains wild area. Preventing degradation, development, overuse, and weeds are important parts of being a good neighbor, just as is respecting property rights and cooperating with other stewards.

Thank you, Superintendent Erickson, for considering my thoughts regarding your future plan for the Crazy Mountains.

Dorothy Bradley

cc: William Avey, Supervisor, Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest,
Alex Sienkiewicz, Yellowstone District Ranger, Custer-Gallatin National Forest Forest Planning Team

