

RMEF: Public Access Improved to Contentious Crazy Mountains

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RMEF: Public Access Improved to Contentious Crazy Mountains; Credit:Sean Jansen

MISSOULA, Mont. —-(Ammoland.com)- Those who enjoy hunting, hiking and other forms of recreation will soon have better access to Montana’s Crazy Mountains thanks to a joint effort by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, U.S. Forest Service, Crazy Mountain Stockgrowers Association and other partners.

The organizations are part of the Crazy Mountain Working Group which is made up of landowners, nongovernmental groups, agencies and other members working together over several years to try to resolve long-standing disputes and facilitate public access.

Work is scheduled to begin this summer to construct a nearly 3-mile long segment of a planned 12-mile trail to improve access for non-motorized travel including foot, stock and bicycle traffic on the west side of the Crazy Mountains.

The area has been subject to long-term, divisive access disputes including a pending lawsuit.

“Securing access in and around the Crazies has been complicated and challenging for a long, long time,” said Blake Henning, RMEF chief conservation officer. “We are grateful for

landowners, agency partners and others who are working collaboratively to make this new access venture possible.”

When completed, the final trail known as the Porcupine-Ibex Trail will connect two Forest Service rental cabins located at existing legal trailheads. Specifically, the first segment of the project will connect the Porcupine Cabin Trailhead to the North Fork Elk Creek Trail. The majority of the work takes place on public land with right-of-way easements granted by private landowners where needed.

The Crazy Mountains are approximately 100 miles north of Yellowstone Park. They rise above the grassland plains to greater than 11,000 feet in elevation in south-central Montana. The island mountain range includes land managed by the Gallatin and Lewis and Clark National Forests checkerboarded with privately-owned land but is completely surrounded by private land making public access extremely difficult.

“Sitting down with stakeholders of differing interests and respectfully discussing challenging issues to find longstanding, reasonable solutions strengthens our communities. This is what the Crazy Mountain Working Group is cultivating,” said Stacy Donald, Crazy Mountain Stockgrowers Association vice president and a member of the Crazy Mountain Working Group.

“RMEF remains committed to working with all parties in finding solutions to complex on-the-ground access issues. Creating and improving public access lies at the heart of our mission,” added Henning.



About the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation:

Founded 35 years ago, fueled by hunters and a membership of nearly 235,000 strong, RMEF has conserved more than 7.5 million acres for elk and other wildlife. RMEF also works to open and improve public access, fund and advocate for science-based resource

management, and ensure the future of America's hunting heritage. Discover why "Hunting Is Conservation™" at www.rmef.org, elknetwork.com or 800-CALL ELK.

Summary – Custer Gallatin National Forest Land and Public Access Exchange
(East Crazy Mountains Land Exchange – Montana)

United States gets

-approximately 5,205 acres of private “checkerboard” inholdings in the Gallatin National Forest in Park/Sweet Grass Counties in south central Montana. Most of the land is unroaded wildland.

-approximately 558 acres of private land already under conservation easement near the Lee Metcalf Wilderness in Big Sky, Montana. Parcel includes portions of the Inspiration Divide Trail.

-a new approx. 21 mile recreational trail to be built and paid for by CGLEC over the land consolidated into Forest ownership. The new trail will be limited to horse, foot and pack animals and will insure permanent public access and loop trail routes in the east Crazy Mtns.

CGLEC (Gallatin Exchange Coalition) gets

-approximately 3,614 acres of National Forest “checkerboard” land interspersed with private ranchlands in the east Crazy Mountains. Most of land is traversed by existing ranch roads.

-approximately 500 acres of expert ski terrain adjacent to existing Yellowstone Club ski lifts and trails near Big Sky, MT. Land will be restricted by conservation easement to ski uses only, with no subdivision, residential or non-ski development permitted.

Miscellaneous provisions

-all required Federal appraisals, T&E species, cultural/historic, wetlands/floodplains and other clearances and mitigation must be performed, with final approvals by the Forest Service.

-all costs of the exchange, including appraisals, will be paid by CGLEC.

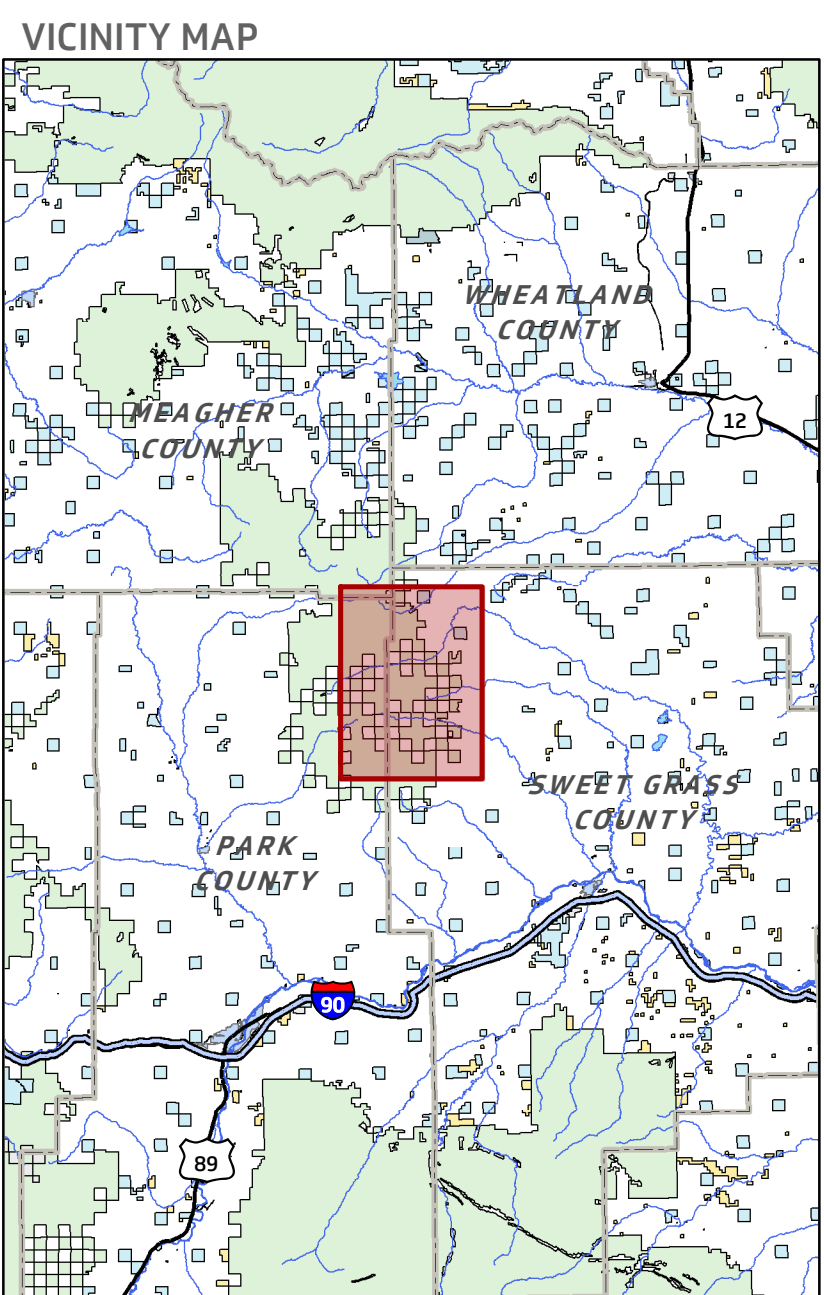
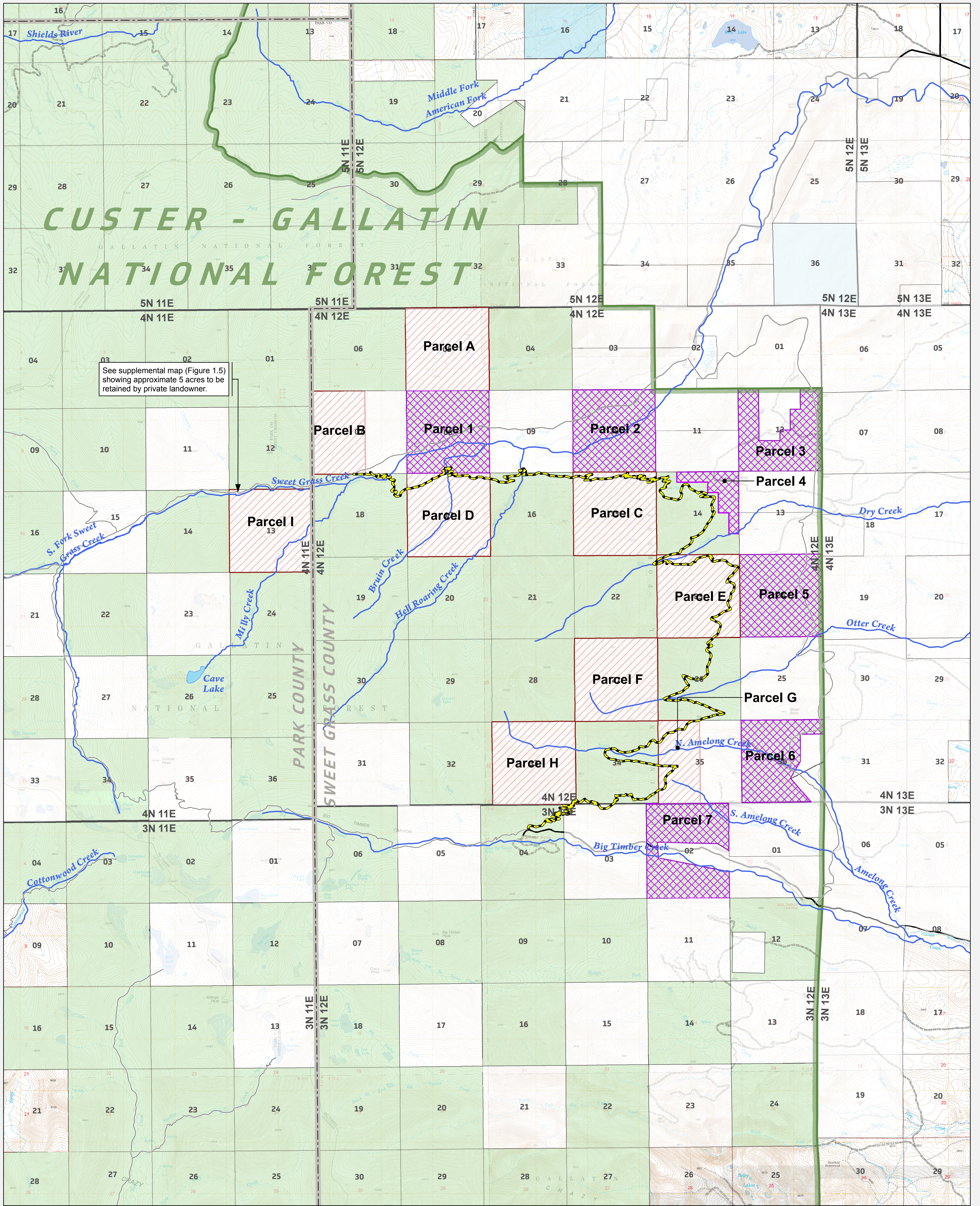
-exchange will result in an approximate 3,900 acre net roadless land gain to U.S.

-if the appraised value of Federal land CGLEC gets is higher than land it conveys to U.S., CGLEC must pay standard cash equalization to U.S. If the non-Federal land CGLEC conveys to U.S. is higher value than Federal land CGLEC gets, CGLEC will donate any excess value to the U.S.

-all lands acquired by U.S. will be withdrawn from mining, mineral leasing and other disposal to protect paramount public recreational values in East Crazy Mountains.

-exchange to be completed in 2 phases. Lands near Big Sky in Phase 1 and east Crazy Mountains land in Phase 2.

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LEGEND

- Crazy Mountain Trail
- National Forest Lands Proposed for Exchange
- Non-Federal Lands to be Acquired
- National Forest System Lands
- Private Lands

PREPARED FOR	PREPARED BY	DRAWN BY
Western Land Group	ELEV8 Inc.	ZDP
PROJECTION	DATUM	DATE
UTM Zone 12N (Meters)	North American Datum 1983	01.16.2020
	VERSION	
	001	

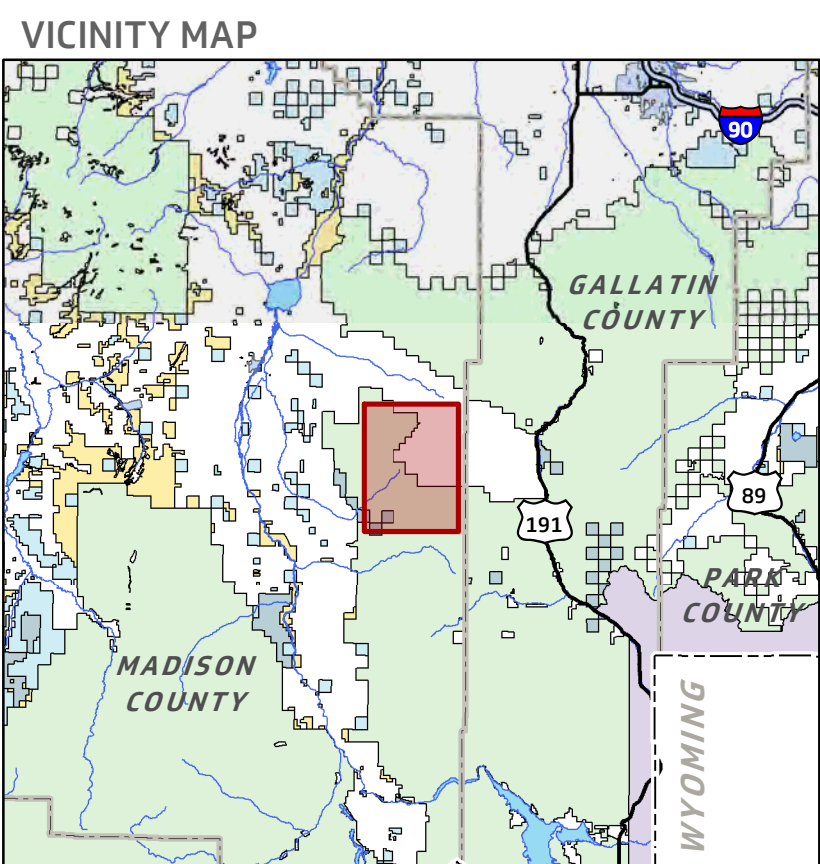
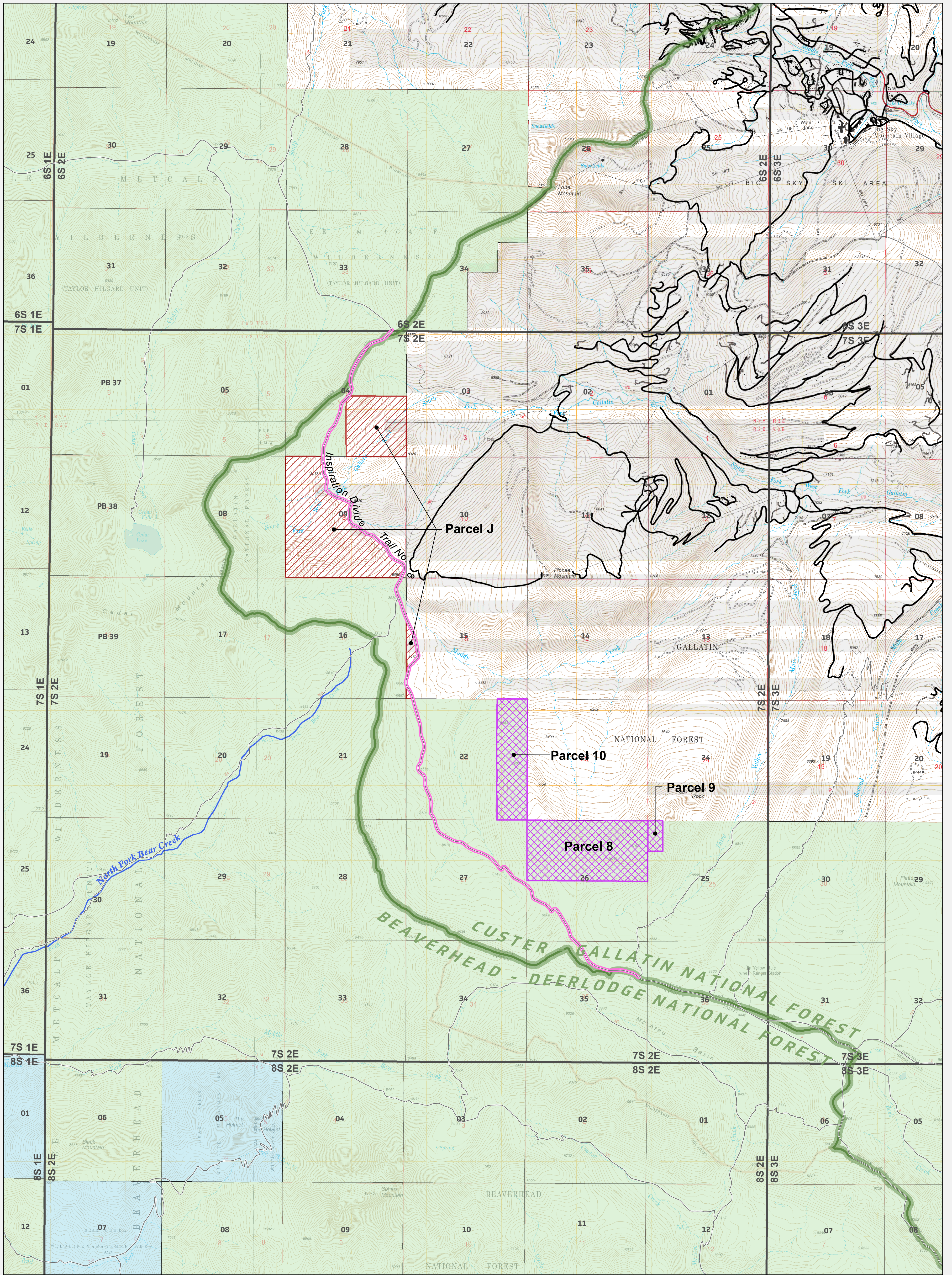
FIGURE 1.3.1
CURRENT LANDOWNERSHIP STATUS

PROJECT: Crazy Mountain Land Exchange (Crazy Mountain Parcels)
LOCATION: Park & Sweet Grass Counties, MT

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SCALE	1 inch = 4,000 feet (22" X 34") 1 inch = 8,000 feet (11" X 17")
1:36,000	0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles



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FIGURE 1.1.1

CURRENT LANDOWNERSHIP STATUS

PROJECT: Crazy Mountain Land Exchange (Eglise Parcels)

LOCATION: Madison County, MT

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SCALE: 1 inch = 2,000 feet (22" X 34")
1 inch = 4,000 feet (11" X 17")

0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Miles



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Narrative of Proposed East Side Crazy Mountain Trail between Halfmoon Campground (Big Timber Creek) and Sweet Grass Creek

January 3, 2020

Trail Overview:

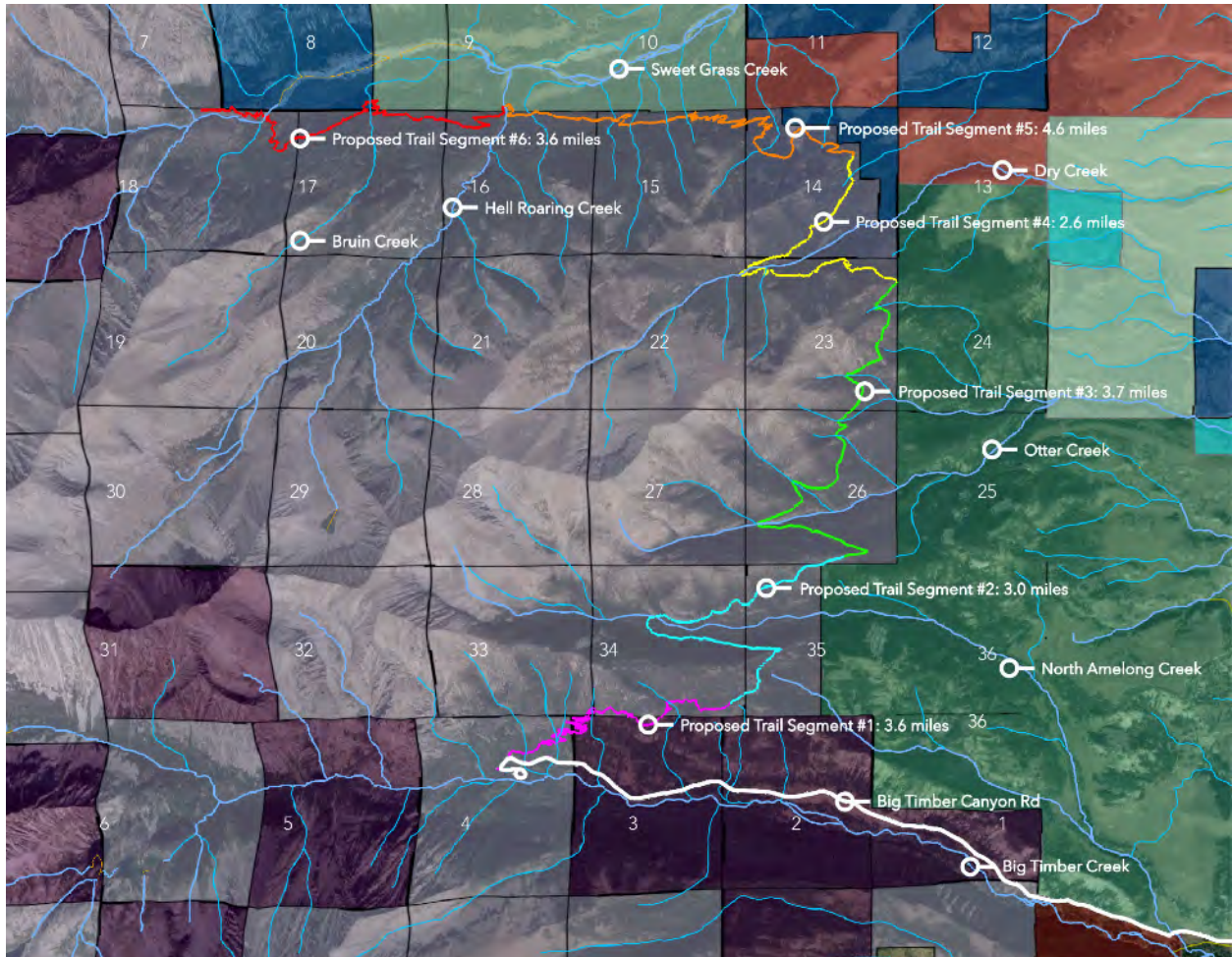
The new trail route will connect the existing trailhead at Halfmoon Campground, next to Big Timber Creek, to the existing trail along Sweet Grass Creek. The entire route will include over 21 miles of new trail. The new trail will be located almost entirely on federal lands consolidated as a result of a proposed federal land exchange. The elevations of the trail vary from 6,500' at both ends to a high point of 7,715' on the ridge between Otter and Dry Creeks. The average grade of the trail will be less than 10%. Along the twenty-one mile route, multiple perennial streams are crossed, including North Amelong Creek, Otter Creek, Dry Creek, Hell Roaring Creek, Bruin Creek, and Sweet Grass Creek. All of the costs of designing and constructing the new trail and improved trailhead will be paid for by the land exchange proponents.

Design Criteria:

- The proposed trail alignment will follow USFS guidelines for Hiker/Pedestrian and Pack and Saddle trail design parameters. Bicycles are not a designed use.
- Within the Hiker/Pedestrian and Pack and Saddle design parameters, the Crazy Mountain trail is laid out to meet USFS Trail Class 3 guidelines for grades (target 3%-12%), tread width (36"-48" max), curve radius (5'-8'), etc.
- Stream crossings have been located at fordable locations, as opposed to bridge locations.
- Access to water for pack and saddle users - perennial water sources are available at Big Timber, Otter, Dry, Hell Roaring, Bruin, and Sweet Grass creeks. North Amelong does not always flow at the ford location, but perennial water can be found a short distance downstream.

Trail Segments:

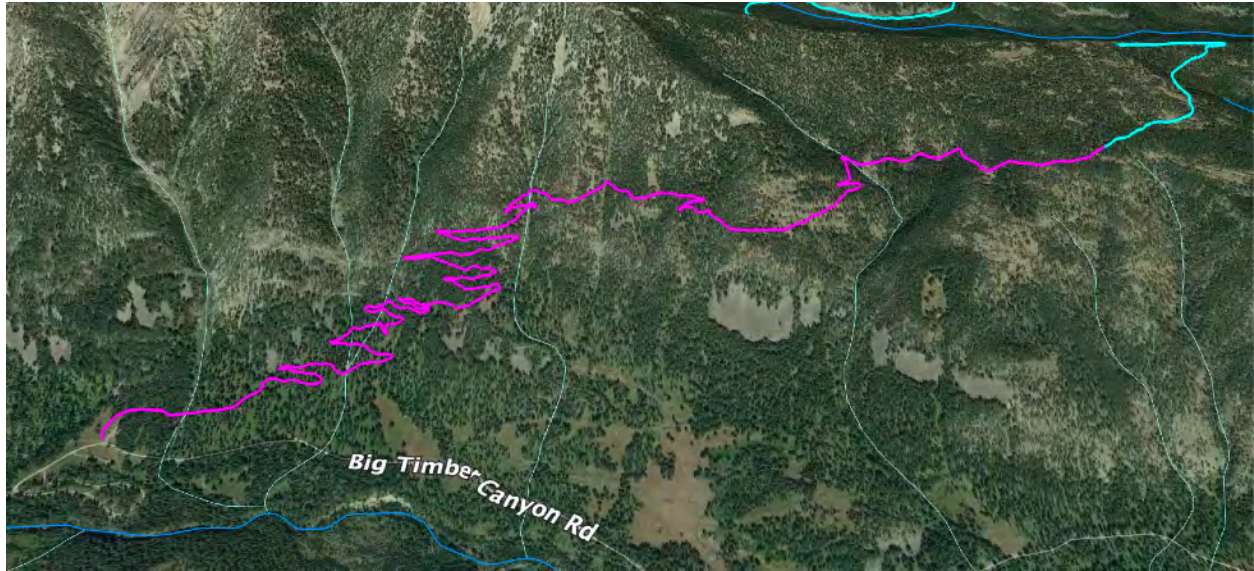
The new trail will provide access to multiple drainages between Big Timber Creek and Sweet Grass Creek. Each drainage has unique characteristics that will create myriad opportunities for solitude, enjoyment of nature, and access to outstanding wildlife habitat. Describing the route according to drainage allows a greater understanding of the topography. For the purposes of this summary the trail is described from south to north.

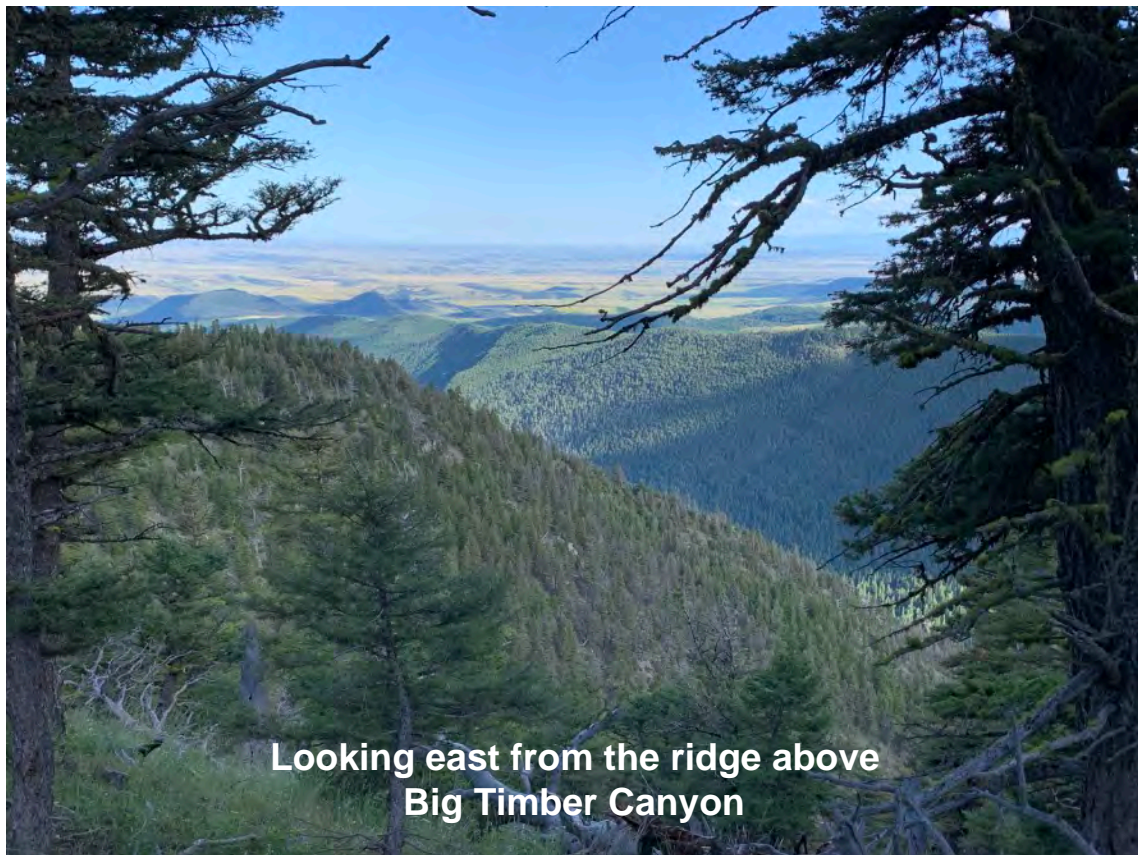


Segment 1 - Big Timber Creek (3.5 miles) magenta trail:

The trail begins at Halfmoon Campground, located at the end of Big Timber Canyon Road. The trailhead provides access to water, trailer parking, campsites, and a vault toilet. This first section of trail gains 1,000' in elevation as it ascends the ridge that separates Big Timber Creek from Amelong Creek. Segment 1 includes the most

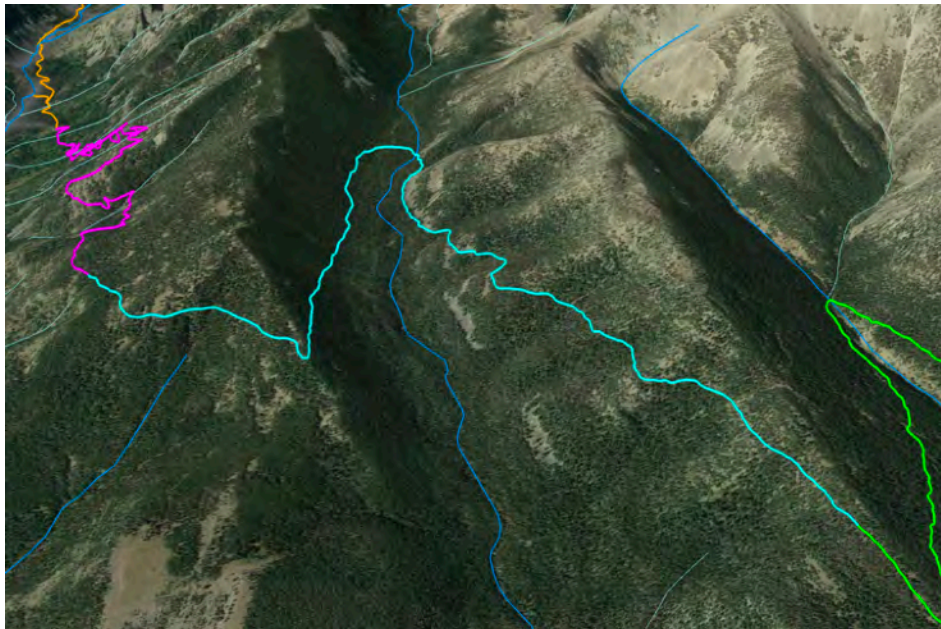
technical terrain, as the trail must ascend through steep terrain to reach gentler slopes above. The south-facing slopes of Segment 1 are dominated by Douglas-fir, including many old-growth trees. As the trail gains elevation, incredible views of Big Timber Canyon, Big Timber Peak, and Crazy Peak are obtained.





Segment 2 - Amelong Creek (3.0 miles) *blue trail*:

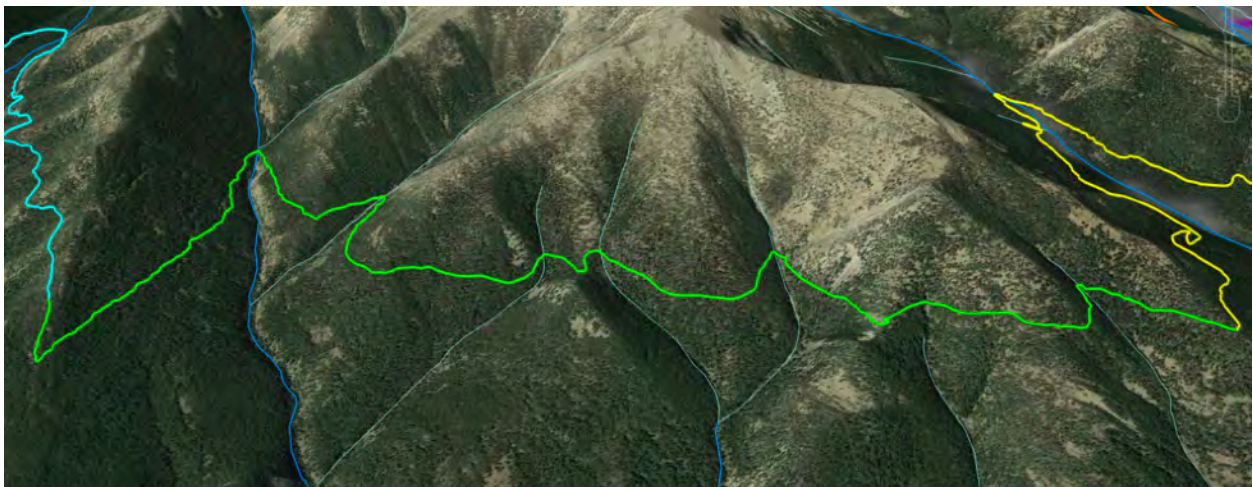
The Amelong Creek drainage includes gentle, open terrain above South Amelong Creek; steep, lodgepole pine dominated forest on the north-facing slopes south of the creek; and open, rocky terrain on the south-facing slopes north of the creek. This segment of trail avoids any switchbacks, and follows the contours of the land as it fluctuates between 7,450' and 7,650' in elevation. The understory is dominated by low-lying forbs, bunchgrasses, and wildflowers.

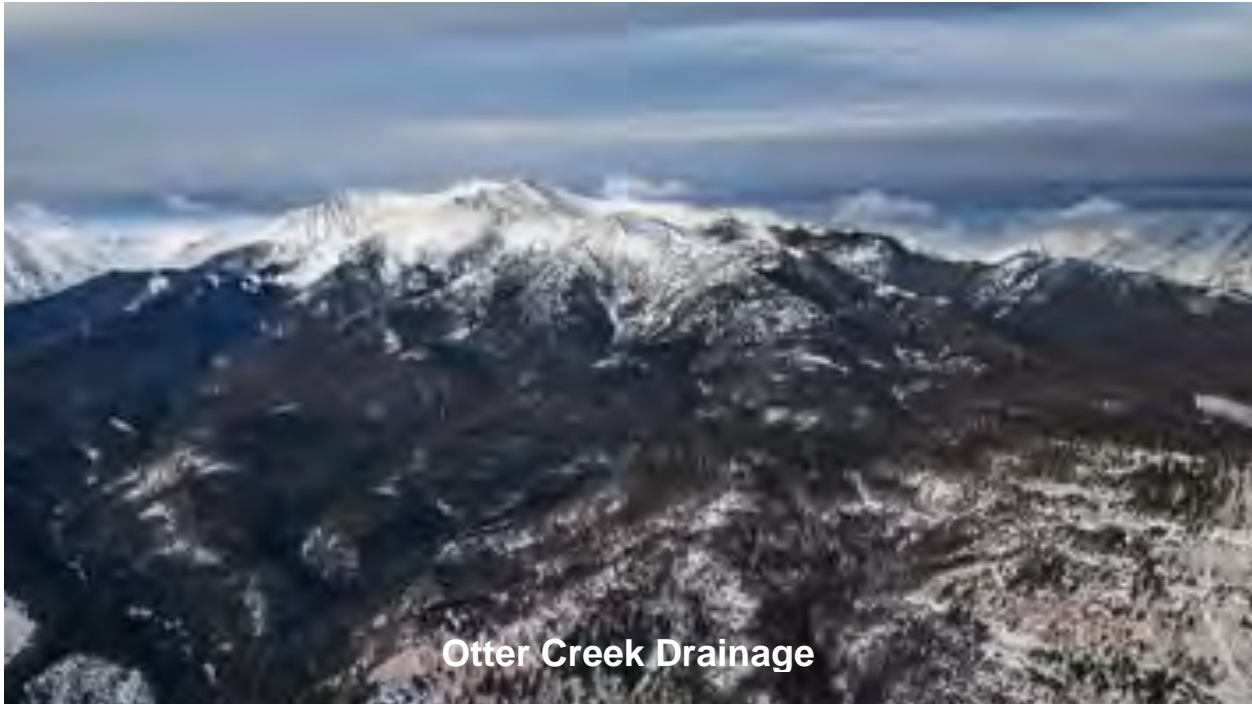




Segment 3 - Otter Creek (3.7 miles) green trail:

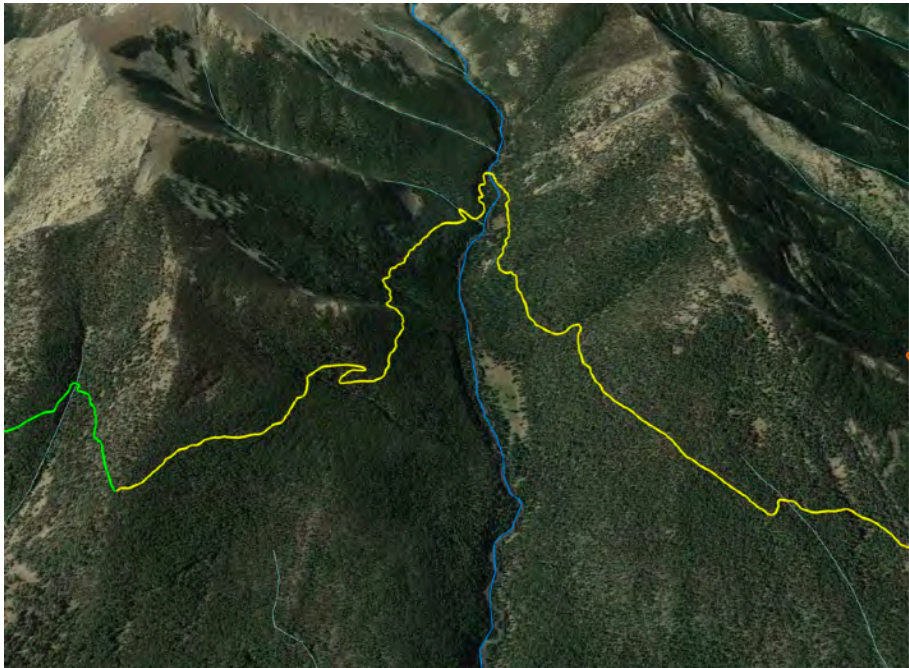
Otter Creek contains the gentlest terrain of the trail route. Similar to Amelong, the north-facing slope south of the creek is steeper but heavily forested with mature lodgepole pine. North of the creek, the trail passes through rocky, broken, south-facing slopes. As the trail bends northward, however, the terrain becomes gentler, with rolling contours and open forest. There are multiple small drainages through this area that make their way down to Otter Creek. The elevation of the trail generally follows contours as it fluctuates between 7,325' at the lowest elevation to 7,715' at the highest point.





Segment 4 - Dry Creek (2.6 miles) yellow trail:

Dry Creek is a narrow, incised drainage that flows east out of the Crazies. Both the north-facing and south-facing slopes are heavily timbered. Contrary to its' name, Dry Creek has flowing water even in late August. Elevations of the trail vary from 7,350' to 7,700' at the highest point. Elk sign was extremely prevalent in the Dry Creek drainage.





Dry Creek



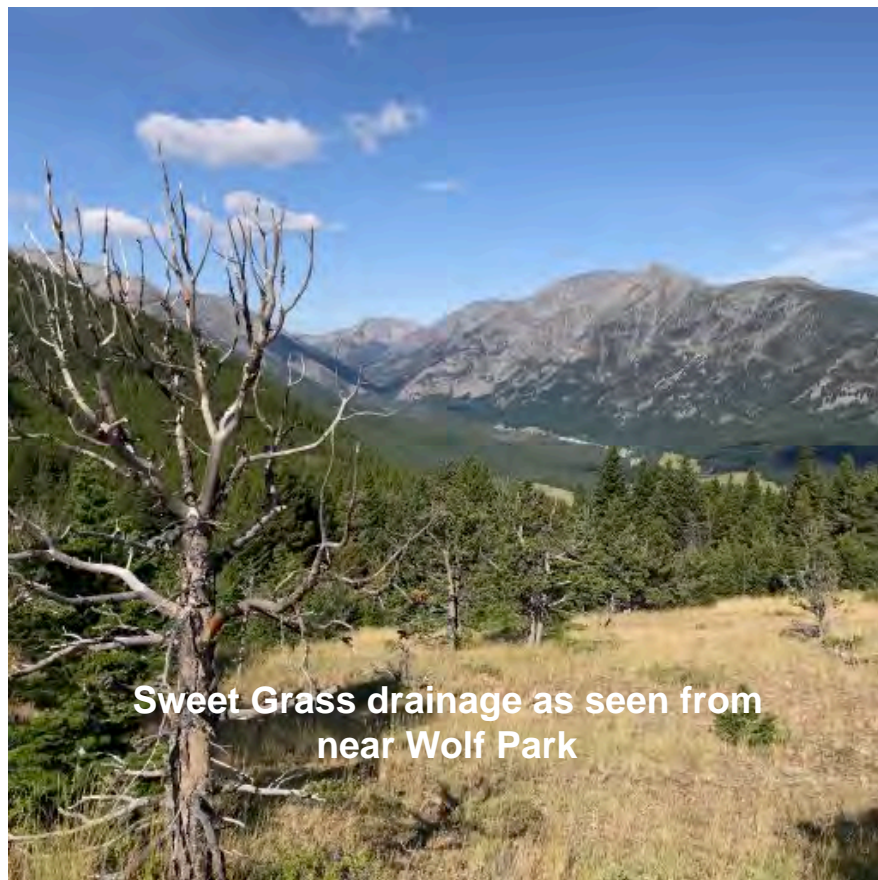
Bear Claw Marks



Mule deer in thick timber

Segment 5 - Sweet Grass - Wolf Park to Hell Roaring Creek (4.5 miles) orange trail:

Trail segment 5 descends through scenic meadows, wrapping through north-facing lodgepole-pine forests on its route to Hell Roaring Creek. With a high-point of 7,400', this section of trail descends to 6,150', losing approximately 1,250' of elevation from east to west. Although there are steep slopes through this area, the north-facing slopes are heavily timbered, and there are multiple drainages that bisect the route. The thick timber provides protection from wind and reduces snowpack depth.





Spring-fed meadow in the Sweet Grass drainage



Small Cliffs in Trail Segment 5



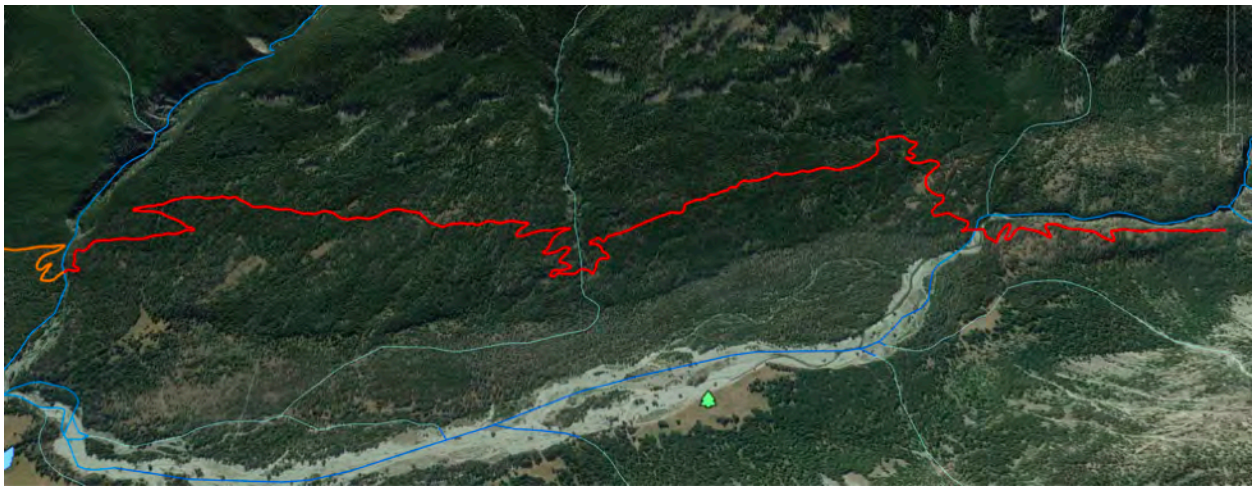
Looking down onto Sweet Grass Creek



Lodgepole forest & rock features

Segment 6 - Sweet Grass - Hell Roaring Creek to Sweet Grass Creek
(3.6 miles) red trail:

Trail Segment 6 navigates low-angle slopes from Hell Roaring Creek to the north side of Sweet Grass Creek. Elevations vary from 6,175' to 6,475' over the course of this 3.6 miles long trail segment. Midway along this route the trail fords Bruin Creek, a perennial stream similar in character to Hell Roaring Creek. As the trail approaches Sweet Grass Creek, the route navigates riparian areas including ponds and wetlands. The trail will ford Sweet Grass Creek at a wide, shallow location just downstream of where Sweet Grass emerges from a narrow box canyon. The timber through this section of trail is dominated by lodgepole pine, with smaller amounts of Douglas-fir and spruce.



Mature lodgepole between Hell Roaring & Bruin Creeks

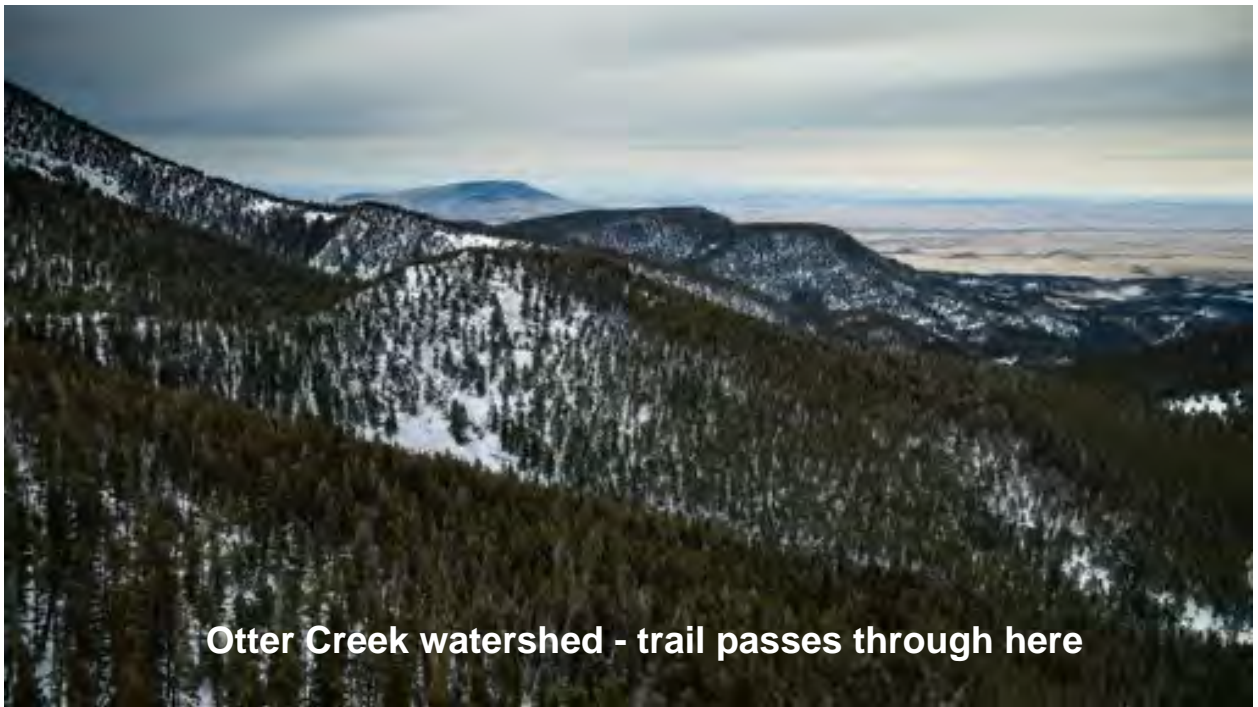


Sweet Grass Creek near ford location



Additional Photos:





Otter Creek watershed - trail passes through here



Dry Creek watershed looking east

Looking east in the Big Timber Creek watershed



**Bear scat & old-growth
Douglas fir**





Elk on ridge in Amelong drainage



**Flagging trail on a south-facing slope in the Big
Timber Creek watershed**



Bear scat and Oregon grape



Un-named stream and cottonwoods
west of Bruin Creek



Dusky grouse in Otter Creek watershed

