



File Code: 1950/5430
Date: June 2, 2004

Enclosed for your review and comment during a thirty (30) day comment period is the **Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Brackett Creek Land Exchange, Donation and Relocation of Roads**. You or your organization have expressed an interest in this proposal. This project is located on the Bozeman Ranger District of the Gallatin National Forest in the Brackett Creek and Cache Creek area, approximately 13 air miles northeast of Bozeman in Gallatin County, Montana.

The Purpose and Need for this proposed project is to consolidate the intermingled land ownership in the area to: (1) improve long-term management effectiveness of NFS lands in the Brackett Creek area; (2) provide clear and uncontested public access to consolidated NFS lands, and reduce conflicts stemming from public users crossing SMR lands, and; (3) protect fish and amphibian habitat and riparian areas in Brackett Creek.

In this proposal, the United States would convey approximately 602.9 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands to Sacagawae Meadows Ranch, L.P. ("SMR"). Certain deed restrictions would be imposed on the NFS lands. The U.S. would acquire from SMR, and add to the Gallatin National Forest, approximately 713.6 acres of non-federal lands. Of these lands, 602.9 acres would be acquired by exchange and 110.7 acres would be acquired by donation.

Within this proposal, public and administrative access to consolidated NFS lands in the Brackett and Cache Creek areas would change. SMR would, at its own expense, relocate two existing National Forest roads onto consolidated NFS lands (North Fork Brackett Road #6607 and South Fork Brackett Road #631/631A). Once these two roads are relocated, the Forest Service would terminate easements for portions of two existing roads across consolidated SMR lands (Central Camp Road #6607 and Middle Fork Brackett Road # 6948).

The Responsible Official for this project is the Director of Recreation, Minerals, Lands, Heritage and Wilderness, Northern Region. Based on the analysis presented in the EA, the preferred alternative is Alternative 2. This alternative best meets the purpose and need for the proposal and addresses the issues raised in the analysis. The EA evaluates three issues: (1) NFS land management effectiveness; (2) access to NFS lands and effects on private land trespass, and; (3) water quality including sensitive fisheries/amphibian habitat. The EA describes the proposed action and provides a comparison of the potential effects for two alternatives, Alternative 1 - No Action and Alternative 2 - Proposed Action.

The Forest Service is requesting comments on this EA from you and other interested parties. The Director of Recreation, Minerals, Lands, Heritage and Wilderness, Northern Region will consider all public comments before making a decision. In submitting comments, please provide specific facts along with supporting reasons that you believe should be considered in reaching a decision. Comments may be submitted in writing, orally, or through electronic means. In order to retain your administrative appeal rights, you must provide comments during this 30-day comment period. A legal notice was published in the newspapers of record (Missoulian, Billings Gazette, and Great Falls Tribune) on June 2, 2004 and the comment period will start on the day following publication of the legal notice and ends Friday, July 2, 2004; 30 days following the date of publication.



A complete EA with maps is available on the website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin>. To request a paper copy of the EA, please contact Nancy Halstrom at (406)-522-2520, or by mail at Bozeman Ranger District, or by email at nhalstrom@fs.fed.us.

Send written comments to: Bozeman District Ranger
Brackett Creek Land Exchange, Donation & Relocation of Roads
3710 Fallon Street, Suite C; Bozeman, MT 59718
Business hours are Mon- Fri, 0800-1630

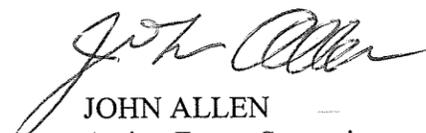
Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, faxed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 p.m. July 2, 2004 ; the 30th calendar day following publication of the legal notice. Hand delivered comments must be time and date imprinted at the Bozeman Ranger District office by the close of business on Friday, July 2, 2004; the 30th calendar day following publication of the legal notice.

Oral comments must be provided at the Bozeman Ranger District office during normal business hours via telephone or in person, or if during non-business hours, must be at an official agency function (such as a public meeting), which is designed to elicit public comment.

Comments may also be submitted electronically to comments-northern-gallatin@fs.fed.us. Insert "**Brackett Creek Land Exchange**" in the subject line. Acceptable formats are MS Word, Word Perfect, or RTF. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this project and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality might be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address.

Sincerely,


JOHN ALLEN
Acting Forest Supervisor

Enclosure: Environmental Assessment

cc: Bozeman Ranger District