**OPPORTUNITY TO OBJECT TO THE RED LODGE MOUNTAIN LAND EXCHANGE PROJECT**

**DRAFT DECSION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

The Environmental Assessment (EA), Draft Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Red Lodge Mountain Land Exchange Project are now available. The Forest Service and Red Lodge Grizzly Peak, Inc., AG/JMA Red Lodge Realty Holdings, LLC (“AG/JMA”) are proposing to exchange certain lands of equal value, located on the Beartooth Ranger District of the Custer Gallatin National Forest in Carbon County, Montana in Township 7 South, Range 19 East, Sections 22, 25, 26, 27, and 35. The Forest Service proposes to exchange two noncontiguous Federal parcels comprising a total of 250.23± acres for three noncontiguous non-Federal parcels comprising comprise a total of 382.45± acres.

The Forest Supervisor, Mary Erickson as the Responsible Official, intends to select Alternative 2, as the Selected Alternative. The draft decision implements the land exchange and associated reservations, easements, permit amendments, permit terminations and mitigation measures based on public comments and resource concerns displayed in the EA and the draft DN/FONSI. The draft decision consolidates land ownership, reduces future management costs, enhances recreational trail opportunities, supports long-term economic viability of the ski area, and protects key wildlife habitat. A summary of actions in the draft decision include the following: Alternative 2 consolidates federal land ownership and private land ownership eliminating 1.6 miles of landline, and a 132.22± acre net increase in National Forest System (NFS) lands. Expansion of public recreational opportunities through expansion of year-round ski area and backcountry non-motorized trail systems, including acquisition of public trail easements across certain private and State lands. These include: (1) a proposed Ranger Trail #107 approximately 12.5 miles across NFS lands, State of Montana lands, private lands owned by AG/JMA, and potentially private lands owned by Palisades Livestock, LLC, (2) proposed RLM Uphill Trail #108 across the Federal lands and AG/JMA lands that would provide an uphill connection from the Red Lodge Mountain Resort parking lot to NFS lands in the vicinity of Grizzly Peak, (3) reservation of trail easements for Willow Creek Trail #105 and Nichols Creek #110, and (4) reservation of easements for existing roads #21479 and #21479C used by the Forest Service for administrative purposes. Existing authorized communication site users and transmission line permittees on NFS lands being exchanged will be converted to new private arrangements with AG/JMA. Certain wetlands and riparian habitat along Willow Creek and a perennial spring would be conveyed with protective restrictions.

The EA and Draft DN/FONSI are available on-line at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=46287>. These documents are also available for review at the Beartooth Ranger District, 6811 U.S. Highway 212, Red Lodge, MT 59068, or the Custer Gallatin National Forest Supervisors Office, 10 East Babcock Street, Bozeman, MT 59715*.* Additional Information can be obtained from Project Leader Jeff Gildehaus at the Beartooth Ranger District address, by calling (406) 446-2103, or by emailing jgildehaus@fs.fed.us.

The Red Lodge Mountain Land Exchange was scoped under the provisions of 36 CFR 218. Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the project, unless based on new information arising after the designated comment opportunities.

Written comments are those submitted to the responsible official or designee during a designated opportunity for public participation provided for a project. Specific written comments should be within the scope of the proposed action and have a direct relationship to the proposed action and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider them (36 CFR 218.2).

A written objection, including attachments, must be filed via mail, express delivery, or hand delivery to: USDA Forest Service, Objection Reviewing Officer, Northern Region, 26 Fort Missoula Road, Missoula, MT 59804. The business hours for submitting express or hand-delivered objections are: Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. MST, excluding holidays. Objections may also be submitted via FAX to 406-329-3411 or via email to appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us.

For electronic submissions, the subject line should contain the name of the project being objected (Red Lodge Mountain Land Exchange Project). An automated response will confirm receipt of the objection. Should the sender not receive an automated response confirming receipt of the objection, it is the sender’s responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means. Electronic objections must be submitted in Microsoft Word, Word Perfect, or Rich Text Format (RTF). In the case where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic submittal, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature page is one way to provide verification.

Objections must be submitted within 45 calendar days following the publication of the project Legal Notice in the *Billings Gazette.* The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the time to file an objection.

The objection must contain the minimum content requirements specified in 36 CFR 218.8(d) and incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided in 36 CFR 218.8(b). It is the objector’s responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer pursuant to 36 CFR 218.9. All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

At a minimum an objection must include the following [36 CFR 218.8(d)]: (1) The objector’s name and address, with a telephone number, if available; (2) a signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for email may be filed with the objection); (3) when multiple names are listed on an objection, identification of the lead objector (verification of the identity of the lead objector shall be provided upon request); (4) the name of the project (i.e. Red Lodge Mountain Land Exchange Project), the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the name(s) of the National Forest(s) and/or Ranger District(s) on which the project will be implemented; (5) a description of those aspects of the project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the project if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider; and (6) a statement that demonstrates connection between prior specific written comments on the particular project or activity and the content of the objection.

It is the responsibility of persons providing objections to submit them by the close of the objection period. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments will be eligible (36 CFR 218.25)(a)(3) to file an objection under 36 CFR 218.26(a). For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments must either sign the comment or verify identity upon request. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements at §218.25(a)(3). Names and contact information submitted with objections will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.