

Dear Senator Daines and Senator Tester,

During this 115th session of Congress I hope you can help me maintain public access to Forest Service Trail 115. Trail 115 (named 136 on some maps) is on the east side of the Crazy Mountains and connects Big Timber Creek and Sweet Grass Creek. It provides access to 3 sections of public lands with quality elk hunting in an area with almost no public access to quality elk hunting. The south trailhead was the last non-contested public access point on the 35 mile long eastern flank of the Crazy Mountains.

I drew one of the twenty-five bull elk permits for this area (580-21) and had planned on using Trail 115 to access public land. However, as you may know, recently the Langhus family of the Hailstone ranch started posting this trail, claiming that the Forest Service has no easement. I called the Forest Service and both Brad Bolte and Alex Sienkiewicz indicated that their position is that there is a prescriptive easement on this trail. Nonetheless, they warned that I may be ticketed for trespass.

I used the trail to access public lands several times, making sure I remained on the trail when on private land. Generally the trail is well marked – even visible from space using Google Earth. However, the first ¼ mile is faint and I used the Avenza App to make sure I stayed on the trail.

On the last time using the trail I was ticketed for criminal trespass even though I never left the trail when on private land. I will need to travel to Big Timber three times: my initial appearance (Jan 4th), my omnibus hearing (Feb 16th), and the actual trial (TBD). The cost of an attorney will likely be in the thousands of dollars.

To make it even more interesting, the District Attorney (Pat Dringman) is married to one of the owners of the Sweet Grass ranch (Page Carroccia Dringman) on the north end of this trail. They currently do not allow public hunters to enter through their ranch. Page Dringman has FOIA'd the Forest Service for information on trails in this area, thus it is clear she is interested in trail ownership. (Note – the FOIA was prior to my ticket). I'm told the Sheriff and the undersheriff are related to ranch owners with property along this trail.

The outcome of my trial will not determine if there is a prescriptive easement, and the fact that the Hailstone Ranch is willing to inflict financial damage on people who rightfully want to use this trail shows that this is a threat that we need to take seriously. The potential conflicts of interest on the enforcement side also raise concerns that this won't go away on its own. People are afraid to use this trail, and if we don't act now people will stop using it and we will lose the only access into this area.

I'm told what is needed is a civil lawsuit against the Hailstone Ranch so the easement can be perfected. Alex Seinkiewicz has indicated that the Forest Service is interested in doing this, but he needs support from upper management. Anything you two can do to encourage the Forest Service to settle this matter will be in the public's interest. I would appreciate it very much if you could help.

Thank you very much,

Rob Gregoire
1105 Woodland Dr
Bozeman, MT 59718
406-599-3009