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United States Senate

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July 25, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington DC, 20250

The Honorable Thomas L. Tidwell, Chief
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington DC, 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue & Chief Tidwell:

I am writing today regarding public access in the Crazy Mountains and the use of prescriptive easements. This issue has garnered significant attention and reportedly led to the reassignment of local U.S. Forest Service staff. I am deeply troubled that public access to more than 8,000 acres of public land is now even harder to access for Montanans. I respectfully urge you to meet with impacted Montanans, from sportsmen and women to local landowners, to find a responsible solution that does not further undermine our outdoor economy or the public's faith in the Trump's Administration commitment to public access.

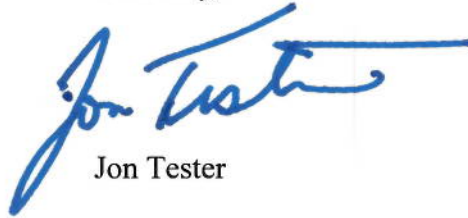
Access disputes in the Crazy Mountains are unfortunately not new. The U.S. Forest Service historically has taken the position these routes remain open to the public. This scenario plays out across the West, often when private land ownership changes. Finding a clear public access solution is often difficult in Montana, which is one of the reasons why I continue to advocate for a fully funded Land and Water Conservation Fund to secure amicable solutions. While these situations are rarely easily resolved, Montanans are no strangers to sitting down at a table to work things out.

The current situation does not serve Montanans well. The public is now even more hard-pressed to gain access to more than 8,000 acres of National Forest land that belongs to them. Local landowners will deal with a growing overpopulation of elk that will inevitably create land management challenges for everyone involved. The U.S. Forest Service needs to step up and bring folks together to resolve this situation as soon as possible. This should be done in a way that acknowledges the uniqueness of each access point and individual landowners.

I am sensitive to weighing in on any Agency's handling of personnel matters, particularly when they are reportedly ongoing. Yet I am troubled by reports that the local district ranger found himself reassigned after intervention from individuals far removed from the situation. I encourage you to proceed in a fair and transparent manner on this front.

Montanans expect those who represent them to do so in a transparent way on behalf of the greater good to the public. I respectfully urge both of you to engage the public in a meaningful way to ensure this issue is resolved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jon Tester