

Spearfish Canyon/Bismarck Lake Land Exchange Communication

During the last year, the State of South Dakota and Senator John Thune's Office have had multiple conversations with the U.S. Forest Service about the proposed Spearfish Canyon and Bismarck Lake land exchange, to get feedback and develop a dialogue.

November 1, 2015

- Doug Hofer, then-Director of Parks for the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP), met in Pierre with Supervisor Bobzien for several hours to discuss the state's proposed land exchange and invite input from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). In that meeting, Mr. Bobzien thanked Director Hofer for the proposal and told him that the USFS policy is to withhold comment on legislation until it is officially introduced.

January 13, 2016

- South Dakota GFP employees Matt Snyder and Shannon Percy met with USFS employees Rhonda O'Byrne, Bonnie Jones and John Kelly about a 600-foot section of trail that would cross USFS property in Spearfish Canyon. During the meeting, the proposed land transfer was also discussed.

January 20, 2016

- South Dakota GFP Secretary Kelly Hepler and Director Hofer met with Supervisor Bobzien and USFS Nebraska National Grasslands Supervisor Kevin Atchley to further discuss the land transfer. Director Hofer asked USFS staff about the potential for future conversations regarding the land transfer. Supervisor Bobzien told Director Hofer that no additional conversations were needed until after introduction of the bill.

February 9, 2016

- Several state employees discussed the land exchange with the USDA officials at the Capitol during the US Forest Service Legislative Day.

February 16, 2016

- Director Hofer sent a detailed letter to Rhonda O'Byrne, USFS Northern Hills Ranger District Supervisor, regarding potential improvements to Spearfish Canyon, including the 600-foot trail section.

March 2016

- South Dakota GFP Secretary Hepler spoke with U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell about the proposed land exchange during a meeting in Pittsburgh, PA. Secretary Hepler followed up that conversation with the attached letter.
- South Dakota Parks Director Hofer met with Supervisor Bobzien to discuss state-federal matters. The proposed land exchange was discussed.

Winter - Summer 2016

- South Dakota School and Public Lands Commissioner Ryan Brunner had multiple conversations with USFS National Grasslands personnel about proposed land exchange parcels and how the process could work.

July 2016

- South Dakota GFP Assistant Director of Planning and Development Al Nedved initiated contact with the USFS office in Custer numerous times, leaving messages without a response.

July 8, 2016

- Senator John Thune's Senior Policy Advisor emailed two members of USDA/USFS Office of Congressional Affairs two times.
 - One email requesting an opportunity to discuss the proposed land transfer bill.
 - The second email included all maps of both federal and nonfederal land and the draft legislation.
- USFS Congressional Affairs acknowledged receipt of the email with no initial response to the proposed plan.

July 14, 2016

- Senate Bill 3254 is introduced by Senator John Thune with Senator Mike Rounds as a co-sponsor. Representative Kristie Noem introduces companion legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives.

July 14, 2016

- Senator Thune's Senior Policy Advisor received an email from USFS after the bill was introduced suggesting a follow up call with Sen. Thune's staff and the national and regional lands specialists at the USFS. The call took place on July 26.

September 21, 2016

- South Dakota Parks and Recreation Director Katie Ceroll attended the National Forest Service Advisory Board (NFAB) meeting in Rapid City where the proposed land exchange was discussed. The conversation was only informational due to the Forest Policy of not engaging in detailed conversations on proposed legislation.

September 22, 2016

- S. 3254 heard by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.