



BTNF management plan revision may soon resume

Since 2005, Bridger-Teton officials have been working on a long-range plan to guide energy development and other land-use decisions regarding the forest. But the public part of this planning process has been on hold since last spring, when a federal judge ruled that the Forest Service had to reinstate environmental reviews during the revision of forest management plans. In response, the Forest Service released a draft environmental impact statement in August on the planning process itself, and the final EIS on this federal Forest Planning Rule was released on Feb. 7.

Its preferred alternative addresses some concerns regarding reduction of protective measures, scientific rigor and public input on Forest Service plans, but it's still weaker than previous planning rules. Regardless, Bridger-Teton officials say they expect this document to provide the direction they need to resume the management plan revision process this spring. Meanwhile, planners say they've been working on "rule neutral" tasks, such as a forest-wide evaluation of current conditions, an economic profile of the forest by the University of Wyoming, and a Colorado State University survey of forest-related values held by local communities. Plan team leader Rick Fox says the products of these efforts will "soon be ready to share in draft form," and he hopes to work on the next stage of relating this information to the forest plan during the next few months. Visit www.jhalliance.org for updates.

Bad move for Bridger-Teton Supervisor's office?

Bridger-Teton officials got an earful during a Feb. 7 public meeting in Jackson regarding plans for possibly moving the Supervisor's office out of town.

Some options being considered include:

- Constructing a new Supervisor's office in either Pinedale, Afton or Alpine.
- Constructing a new building in Jackson to house both the Supervisor's office and the District office.
- Selling part or all of the 15.5-acre Forest Service parcel on North Cache, which is currently home to the green A-frame Supervisor's office, the Jackson District Ranger offices, storage buildings and employee housing.

The Forest Service Facility Realignment Act of 2005 allows the Forest Service to sell administrative properties and use the money generated to build new facilities, but many objections have been raised. These include concerns that the move will disrupt the lives of about 50 management-level employees and their families. These families are neighbors and friends who are fully integrated into the social, professional and volunteer fabric of this community. Also, moving the Supervisor's office from Jackson will likely lead to less cooperation between the Bridger-Teton and the two bordering national parks, the National Elk Refuge, the new Wyoming Game and Fish district office and the numerous non-governmental organizations based in Jackson. Regional Forester Harv Forsgren is to pick a location later this winter, and NEPA will begin in the spring on the proposed action. Plans are to begin construction of the new facilities in the late summer of 2009 – we'll provide updates.

Off-Highway-Vehicle plan update

Unrestricted motorized use is currently allowed on more than 250,000 acres of the northern part of the Bridger-Teton during the summer and fall. That use has resulted in miles of user-created trails, disturbed wildlife, habitat degradation, the spread of noxious weeds and increased soil sedimentation in trout streams. A draft environmental impact statement on a travel plan to address these issues was due out in January, but forest officials now say it won't be ready until March. We'll keep you posted. Details about the Off-Highway-Vehicle plan are available at www.fs.fed.us/r4/btnf (click on "North Zone Travel Plan Revision"). Visit www.jhalliance.org/Library/Alerts/BTNFmotorplan.4-07.pdf for background information.

Gold mining on the Bridger-Teton?

Bridger-Teton officials say they will likely approve a request from the owners of a mining claim in the Gros Ventre River drainage to spend 75 days this year digging exploratory pits to look for gold, silver and platinum. In November, owners sought permission to dig 15 to 20 12-foot-deep test holes on a 5-acre parcel on Cottonwood Creek. Should the site prove commercially profitable, the owners could then seek to expand the mining operation to more than 340 adjacent acres. Forest Service officials say an 1872 mining law would make it difficult for them to deny the test project, which could be allowed under a categorical exclusion, a project considered too small for environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act. Stay tuned for more on this as it progresses.

For a ton of information about the federal General Mining Act of 1872 and current efforts to reform it, visit www.earthworksaction.org/1872.cfm. Changes proposed for the Mining Act include abolishing patents (currently under a moratorium, patents allow mine owners to purchase federal lands for as little as \$5 an acre), requiring adequate bonds from mine owners for reclamation of lands, and placing royalties on extracted minerals similar to royalties placed on oil and gas.

Federal legislation in the works

U.S. Sen. John Barrasso introduced three bills in 2007 that, if passed, would affect Bridger-Teton National Forest and the region. None has made it out of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, where they're stuck in a backlog of land and energy legislation.

The Wyoming Range Legacy Act, which would prohibit future oil and gas leasing on the range, is discussed on Page 19. It and the Snake Headwaters Legacy Act – a bill that would include about 400 miles of rivers and streams in northwest Wyoming in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System – were instigated by the late U.S. Sen. Craig Thomas. More information on the Snake Headwaters bill is available at www.snakeheadwaters.org.

The third bill, the Wyoming Forest and Watershed Restoration Act of 2007, instructs the chief of the U.S. Forest Service to enter into a cooperative agreement with Wyoming's state forester "to allow the state of Wyoming to conduct certain forest and watershed restoration services, and for other purposes." Sen. Barrasso says the bill could help curb bark beetle infestation and improve forest health; critics maintain the bill is primarily designed to expedite logging on public lands, without public oversight.

There's also been no activity on the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, which would place about 23 million acres of public lands in five western states into the National Wilderness Preservation System. The bill has more than 140 cosponsors, however, none of them are congressional delegates from the three states that would be most affected: Wyoming, Montana and Idaho.

Contact Louise Lasley at Louise@jhalliance.org or (307) 733-9417 for more information on these bills, and please consider giving your input to Wyoming's congressional delegation. Their contact information is available at www.jhalliance.org/takeactioncontacts.htm.

Palisades Wilderness Study Area protected

The National Forest Service and High Mountain Heli-skiing have withdrawn their appeals of a court decision to decrease heli-skiing numbers to legally mandated 1984 levels in the Palisades Wilderness Study Area by 2010. Thus, the area's wilderness characteristics will be protected, and this could lead to its inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Progress!

Don't Poach the Powder!

Don't forget – many places are closed to human traffic in wintertime to protect wildlife. Visit www.jhalliance.org/dontpoach.pdf for closure maps. ■