



Letter to U.S. Senators John Barrasso and Mike Enzi, and to U.S. Representative Cynthia Lummis

November 2, 2009

The proposal of the United States Forest Service to sell up to 10.4 acres of an administrative site on the Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF) is a tragedy. The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance (Conservation Alliance) believes that this action highlights an underlying fiscal irresponsibility of our federal government, will disrupt our community and the effectiveness and efficiency of the BTNF, and sets an unfortunate precedent for disposing of public assets. We should not leave our government employees in the lurch, nor should we make unsound decisions that will negatively impact the value of our public lands. There is a win-win solution and we respectfully request your help in attaining it.

The Conservation Alliance has just completed its 30th year of operations and continues to be the most influential and respected voice for conservation in Jackson Hole. It is also one of the largest and oldest membership organizations in the southern Yellowstone region. We are known for providing accurate, well-researched information to the public, as well as organizing and encouraging public participation at the local, state and federal levels. For more than a quarter century, we have played a major role in local and federal decision-making processes that affect the environment. The Conservation Alliance consists of eight full-time employees, as many as 20 board directors, more than 100 volunteers and over 2,000 members nationwide and in seven foreign countries.

It is as a voice for those members and Jackson Hole that we express our concerns and ask your help in averting this detrimental proposal.

On October 27, 2009, the BTNF released a draft environmental assessment (EA) Jackson Administrative Site Land Conveyance and Development. Utilizing the *Forest Service Facilities Realignment and Enforcement Act* of 2005, the United States Forest Service (USFS) proposes to sell up to 11 acres on north Cache Street in Jackson, Wyoming, and use those funds to replace facilities and provide employee housing. The EA describes why this effort to replace existing buildings is needed:

“The action is driven by the fact that the North Cache administrative facilities are over forty years old, some more than 70 years old, and by the difficulty for employees to find affordable housing in the Jackson area. Public benefits and services have decreased as maintenance costs have increased over the years. Currently the Jackson District Office is not open to the public, and District employees are located in two separate buildings, while the Supervisors Office employees are scattered in five separate buildings located on the North Cache administrative site. Fire operations are scattered in six separate buildings. And warehousing shared between the District and Supervisors Office is even more scattered in ten separate buildings. The 28 offices and associated facilities are outdated, are not energy efficient, and do not meet building and accessibility codes such as the requirements of the *Americans with Disabilities Act/Architectural Barriers Act Guidelines*. Unfortunately, we have also entered an era whereby facilities require a higher level of security, especially for the front desk personnel. Building design and function are now important elements to protect all employees from dangerous visitors and to reduce potential homeland security threats.” EA Jackson Administrative Site Land Conveyance and Development; page 7.

The Conservation Alliance agrees that the above stated conditions on the administrative site on Cache Street need to be rectified, but the Jackson Hole community disagrees that selling two-thirds of that land in order to finance an operational need is unacceptable; the sale of public lands in order to cover agency

operational standards is not good business and is just wrong. The United States has the responsibility to adequately fund the USFS and its operations to manage the public lands under its care. Current economic indicators would also suggest that, even in Jackson Hole, this sale will not bring in maximum dollars for the real value of the land. Past generations in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem have not sold assets to cover operational costs—neither should we.

The three action alternatives for this EA each contribute to additional inefficiencies and problems in the effort to address the purpose and need of this action, and most of those directly affect the employees and the financial and social strictures they would face. For some it would be the cost of moving their modular homes off the Cache Street site to other properties; for others it would be to have their housing located in the Snake River Canyon that increases their commute time from a remote site, that does not receive cell phone reception, nor has access to less expensive utilities. The trade-offs for relocating some of the operational facilities would also negate some of the benefits gained in the new structures on Cache Street. The increased response time for fire crews, the time needed to gather horses and gear for the wilderness and trail crews, and the additional carbon footprint from those new factors, are some of these incurred inefficiencies. Alternative 3, the preferred alternative, “retains the least amount of existing efficiency while adding new inefficiencies, thus it is the most detrimental.” EA; page 95

But by far, the greatest opposition to this proposal is the need for the United States government to sell public lands to maintain the operations of the Bridger-Teton National Forest. All needed improvements should be funded by the USFS and Congress and not by the depletion of our assets during a time of financial uncertainty. To support this proposal would put us on the road to a continual use of funds from the sale of public lands to fund the operational needs of the agencies entrusted to their long-term health and sustainability. This is short-sighted and inappropriate.

The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance appeals to our Senators John Barrasso and Mike Enzi, and to our Representative Cynthia Lummis, to obtain the funding necessary to replace the inefficient structures on the BTNF and help provide employee housing on that site. Again, we should not leave our government employees in the lurch, nor should we make unsound decisions that will negatively impact the value of our public lands.

Thank you in advance for your help with this. We will be contacting your office to follow up on this letter in two weeks.

Sincerely,

Louise Lasley
Public Lands Director