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File Code:

1950

Date:

August 25, 2020

Dear Interested Party,

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest (CTNF) is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to consider and disclose the anticipated environmental effects of implementing proposed projects at Grand Targhee Resort (GTR) designed to improve the year-round recreational experience. These projects are referred to as the "Grand Targhee Master Development Plan Projects." The project would occur within the resort's existing Special Use Permit (SUP) area as well as two proposed SUP adjustment areas. All projects are included in the accepted 2018 GTR Master Development Plan (MDP)

I am soliciting public comments on these projects to begin the scoping process. Your comments will help identify issues that will be used to focus our analysis and generate additional action alternatives, as necessary. Based on the analysis that will be documented in the forthcoming EIS, the CTNF Forest Supervisor will decide whether or not to approve the Proposed Action (in whole or in part) or any additional alternatives that may be developed, or the No Action Alternative. The decision will also include a determination of whether additional site-specific management requirements and/or mitigation measures will be required. The proposal contains the following project components: 1) two areas to be incorporated into the SUP boundary with associated terrain and lifts; 2) proposed lifts, as well as lift replacements and realignments within the existing SUP area; 3) additional terrain and on-mountain infrastructure improvements within the existing SUP area; and 4) enhancement of non-winter and alternative activities. The purpose and need for action and a description of each of the projects is included in the following sections.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Forest Service is responding to an application submitted under the National Forest Ski Area Permit Act of 1986 and Ski Area Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Act of 2011 (SAROEA) by GTR to implement projects from their accepted MDP. In the MDP, GTR identified a need to improve the recreational experience, and address shortcomings in their terrain offerings and operations in order to remain viable in the competitive destination skier/rider market.

To address the growth in the Idaho and Wyoming skier markets and, to meet increasing guest expectations, GTR must continue to develop and improve its terrain and guest services offerings. These developments are in direct response to evolving consumer demands and the competitive regional and destination skier markets.

The CTNF, through acceptance of GTR's MDP, has identified a need to:

- Provide additional undeveloped, minimally maintained lift-served terrain and additional traditionally cleared alpine trails to enhance terrain variety and skiing experiences at GTR.
- Enhance the skiing experience for various ability levels of guests, by providing an appropriate learning progression in an uncongested beginner area and increasing the quantity of beginner, intermediate, advanced-intermediate terrain to meet current and anticipated public demand.





- Improve skier circulation across the mountain through improvements to the efficiency of the lift and trail network and by providing more reliable and consistent snow coverage in key areas.
- Improve base area, guest services, operational facilities, and on-mountain services to meet the everincreasing expectations of the local, regional, and destination skier markets.
- Expand alternative and non-winter activities to provide a variety of recreational options to guests and to more effectively utilize existing infrastructure during non-winter months.

PROPOSED ACTION

SUP/Operational Boundary Adjustments

South Bowl Area

GTR proposes to expand its existing SUP boundary into the "South Bowl" area adjacent to Peaked Mountain, which would add approximately 600 acres to the resort's permitted area (refer to Figures 3 and 4). In addition to naturally occurring undeveloped terrain that exists and would become skiable under this proposal, GTR proposes to construct new developed ski runs in the South Bowl area. In total, developed ski runs would account for approximately 180 acres of the approximately 600-acre South Bowl area that GTR proposes to incorporate into its SUP boundary. The proposed developed trails in the South Bowl area would all be constructed to provide well-defined and smooth skiable surfaces. As such, heavy machinery would be required in certain circumstances to achieve the desired surface. The South Bowl itself is an open, steep bowl on the southside of Peaked Mountain, and GTR intends to maintain its open bowl feel as much as possible.

To serve the terrain in the South Bowl area, GTR also proposes the construction of three lifts - South Bowl West, South Bowl East, and South Bowl Connector. The South Bowl West Lift would have a capacity of approximately 1,800 persons per hour and would provide lift service skiing and riding to the western portion of the South Bowl area. It would serve as the connection for guests in South Bowl to return to Peaked Mountain and the base area. Construction and maintenance access to this lift would be provided via an upgraded road to the top of the Peaked Lift. The South Bowl East Lift would also have a capacity of approximately 1,800 persons per hour and would provide skiing and riding in an open bowl setting with interspersed vegetation. Guests would get a backcountry feel without venturing outside of ski area boundaries when skiing the terrain served by this lift. Additionally, there would be a small guest support facility located at the base of this lift, which is described in further detail in the following sections. Lastly, the South Bowl Connector Lift is proposed with a capacity of 1,200 persons per hour to transport guests from the South Bowl East Lift to the South Bowl West Lift. The lift would be 1,700 feet in length and transport guests 250 feet in elevation from the bottom terminal of the South Bowl East Lift to bottom terminal of the South Bowl West Lift. Construction and maintenance access to the proposed South Bowl East Lift and the South Bowl Connecter Lift would be provided via the proposed South Bowl access road.

In the interim period between potential project approval and installation of the proposed lifts in South Bowl, GTR proposes to operate SnowCat skiing in the area (refer to Figure 3). This would be accomplished by shifting GTR's existing guided SnowCat and backcountry offerings—which currently take place in the Peaked Mountain area—to the South Bowl area before construction of the proposed South Bowl lifts, as the (previously approved) development of the Peaked Mountain portion of the SUP area would displace existing guided SnowCat tours. Select vegetation removal may be needed to enhance the experience of the SnowCat operation in places where future ski trails would be located; however, developed trails would not be cleared for interim cat skiing itself.

Mono Trees Area

In addition to the proposed South Bowl area, GTR proposes to expand its existing SUP boundary to the west to include the Mono Trees area, adding approximately 600 acres to the resort's permitted area. Within this area, GTR proposes construct approximately 97 acres of intermediate and advanced-intermediate trails to provide developed skiing opportunities in the Mono Trees area. Similar to South Bowl, inclusion of Mono Trees into the SUP adjustment area would also result in the incorporation of undeveloped, skiable terrain, into the overall GTR terrain network. The undeveloped terrain that would become accessible in the proposed Mono Trees area is primarily characterized by glades and open meadows.

To serve the terrain in the Mono Trees area, GTR also proposes the construction of the Mono Trees lift, a detachable quad chairlift, with a capacity of 1,800 persons per hour. This lift would provide a quality skiing experience on the north- and east-facing slopes of Lightning Peak during periods when the upper mountain experiences poor visibility, high winds, or other weather factors. A similar lift in the Lightning Ridge area was approved for construction in the 1994 ROD with a north-south alignment.

Development and operation of the Mono Trees area would utilize the existing road from the base area to the bottom terminal of Sacajawea Lift and 0.9 miles of new road construction from the bottom terminal of Sacajawea Lift to access the Lightning Ridge area for construction and in case of emergency.

Forest Plan Amendments

An amendment to the 1997 Revised Forest Plan for the Targhee National Forest (Targhee National Forest Plan) would be required to accommodate the proposed South Bowl and Mono Trees areas located outside of GTR's existing SUP boundary on land that is currently designated as management prescription 2.1.2: Visual Quality Maintenance. Therefore, the proposed development of this ski terrain would require that the Targhee National Forest Plan be amended to incorporate these two areas into the GTR SUP boundary and would result in the conversion of approximately 1,200 acres from management prescription 2.1.2 to management prescription 4.2 Special Use Permit Recreation Sites. No portion of the proposed SUP adjustment would occur in areas classified as designated wilderness (management prescriptions 1.1.6, 1.1.7, and 1.1.8).

The Forest Service is in the process of identifying other Targhee National Forest Plan amendments that may be required as a result of the Proposed Action. If other amendments are identified as necessary, they will be fully disclosed and discussed in the Draft EIS that will be prepared to analyze the projects described in following paragraphs.

Lifts, Lift Replacements and Realignments (within the existing SUP area)

The lifts described in the following paragraphs are proposed in addition to the lifts included in South Bowl and Mono Tree areas (discussed in previous section) and are located within the existing SUP area.

Crazy Horse

GTR proposes a new detachable lift on Fred's Mountain called Crazy Horse. It would have a capacity of 1,800 persons per hour. The bottom lift terminal would be located near the Powder Reserve Traverse and the top lift terminal would be located to the southeast of Dreamcatcher top terminal. Electricity would be routed from the feed that currently supplies the Sacajawea Lift.

This alignment would provide better access to trails on Fred's Mountain and allow skiers and riders to access Fred's Mountain terrain without having to return to the base area to ride Dreamcatcher Lift. In the event the Dreamcatcher Lift is inoperable, skiers would be able to access the terrain by riding Sacajawea and Crazy Horse lifts in succession to reach the top of Fred's Mountain.

North Boundary Lift

GTR is proposing to add the North Boundary Lift to provide access to the terrain from the North Boundary Traverse down to Rick's Basin. This lift would have a capacity of 1,200 people per hour and is intended to provide better utilization of the terrain at the far north edge of the resort, as well as providing access to intermediate and advanced terrain that is currently not lift-accessed. Additionally, this lift would be able to be operated during weather days when the upper mountain lifts need to be closed down. Similar to Mono Trees Lift, the North Boundary Lift would help provide a quality ski experience on those days when Dreamcatcher and Blackfoot lifts cannot be operated due to fog, wind, or other weather factors.

Shoshone

GTR is proposing to upgrade the existing Shoshone Lift to a detachable lift, as well as lengthen and realign the lift. The new alignment would improve access to surrounding ski trails and provide the necessary milling and preparation space for ski school and lower-ability guests using this terrain. This location provides further separation between intermediate and advanced skiers and riders on the adjacent Wild Turkey trail, and beginner/novice skiers and riders on the Shoshone Lift.

The realigned Shoshone Lift would serve beginner/novice skiing and riding through the addition of a midloading station, which would be located at the current bottom terminal location of the Shoshone Lift. Skiers and riders using the terrain historically served by the existing Shoshone Lift would load at its midterminal.

Palmer Platter Surface Lift and Lights

A surface lift is proposed to be installed on *Palmer's Raceway* trail in the Shoshone area called the Palmer Platter. The lift would be aligned along the southside of the tree island between *Big Horn* and *Palmer's Raceway* trails. Lights are proposed on *Palmer's Raceway* as well. The lift would provide a quick turnaround for athletes training on *Palmer's Raceway* and the lights would allow for longer training sessions during the winter months.

Teaching Carpets

GTR is proposing two new teaching carpets and the realignment of the Papoose carpet. The two additional beginner teaching carpets are proposed adjacent to the mid-station of the Shoshone Lift—one within GTR's SUP area and one on private lands. These carpets would provide additional lift service for first time skiers/riders and would access additional, needed beginner terrain adjacent to Targhee Village.

GTR is also proposing to realign the Papoose carpet to provide better integration with planned base area improvements. The lift would continue to provide both repeat skiing/teaching terrain as well as access from the mid-station of the Shoshone Lift up to the base area and the Dreamcatcher Lift.

Terrain and On-Mountain Infrastructure (within the existing SUP area)

Terrain Development, Glading and Grading

Approximately 118 acres of traditional terrain expansions and improvements are proposed within the existing GTR SUP area. Additionally, improvements to existing glades, combined with additional glade areas will result in approximately 550 acres of gladed areas across the resort (a portion of this glading extends into the proposed Mono Trees area). Proposed terrain development, glading and grading within the existing SUP area includes:

- New teaching terrain around the two new teaching carpets and realigned Papoose carpet;
- New trails and realignment of key circulation trails (Teton Vista Traverse, Powder Reserve Traverse, and Mill Creek Traverse);

- Two new trails, widening or extending seven trails, and glading in the areas served by the existing Dreamcatcher lift and proposed Crazy Horse lift;
- One new trail, lengthen and realign *Wild Turkey*, and improve tree skiing by *The Good*, *The Bad*, *The Ugly*, and *The East Woods* through glading in the Blackfoot area;
- Two new trails and glading in the Sacajawea area;
- Various glading projects throughout the Peaked area (163 acres of glading previously approved);
- Trail widening and grading along Papoose Creek upon the skiway which would connect the existing Sacajawea lift and the previously approved Peaked lift. Due to this project's proximity to Papoose Creek it is assumed that coordination with the United States Army Corps of Engineers would be necessary;
- Construction of the trails within the North Boundary area, including six new runs, one new access
 route/collector trail for the North Boundary area, and two new short access routes to gain entry and
 exit the area.
- Approximately 149 acres of grading to accommodate the trail construction and improve the skiability of existing trails.

In addition to the proposed new trails and glading, a portion of the existing Peaked trail network would require select tree removal once the Peaked Lift is installed to accommodate additional skier capacity.

Roads

GTR proposes a Mountain Roads Rehabilitation Program to eliminate steep and no longer necessary access roads, as well as construct new roads to bypass steep grades and improve mountain circulation and maintenance. The overhaul of the mountain road network would allow GTR to improve erosion and sedimentation as well as better maintain their on-mountain infrastructure. Key features of this program include realign and reconstruct the *Teton Vista Traverse*, *Powder Reserve Traverse*, Rick's Basin Access Road, spur road connecting the switchback on Peaked Mountain to the proposed South Bowl mountain road, and *Mill Creek Traverse*. In total, 3.9 miles of roads would be improved, 5.6 miles of roads would be constructed and 1.7 miles of roads would be reclaimed.

Snowmaking

GTR proposes 57 acres of snowmaking to improve lower-mountain circulation routes and high use trails (refer to Figure 5 for a depiction of existing and proposed snowmaking). By expanding their snowmaking infrastructure, GTR would be able to provide better snow surface and early season conditions. Snowmaking would be installed on the following trails:

- Lower portion of Chief Joseph Bowl (4.3 acres)
- The Funnel (3.5 acres)
- Big Thunder (7.5 acres)
- Sitting Bull Ridge (11.6 acres)
- Headwall Traverse (2.1 acres)
- Big Scout (4.6 acres)

- Little Beaver Traverse (4.9 acres)
- Mill Creek Traverse (3.4 acres)
- Tubing Hill (0.9 acres)
- Blackfoot Access Route (1.5 acres)
- Teaching Carpets (1.9 acres)
- Teton Vista Traverse (10.8 acres)

Necessary water for this increased coverage would come from additional groundwater wells. Prior to snowmaking infrastructure development, additional groundwater wells would be developed.

Restaurants, Yurt, On-Mountain Cabin, and South Bowl Facilities

GTR proposes to construct a full-service on-mountain guest service facility at the summit of Fred's Mountain, south of the existing Dreamcatcher Lift top terminal. The restaurant would serve many functions. It would serve as a central on-mountain location for skiers and riders within the Dreamcatcher and Blackfoot areas, which would eliminate the need to descend to Targhee Village for basic services, but also be a destination restaurant offering year-round views of the Grand Teton. This facility would include a restaurant, bar, restrooms and ski patrol facility. Electricity would be installed from the base area. Sewer would be a septic system or sanitary sewer line based on engineering recommendations. Water would be supplied from an onsite well. The building would have simple, linear forms to blend with the surrounding environment in sensitivity to viewsheds from the Teton National Park. It would be approximately 6,000 square feet of interior space and between 3,000 and 4,000 square feet of outdoor space. The realigned *Teton Vista Traverse* mountain road would provide construction access to the restaurant location.

In addition to the Fred's Mountain restaurant, GTR proposes to construct a full-service on-mountain guest service facility at the top terminal of the Sacajawea Lift, to serve the southern side of the resort, including the Sacajawea, Peaked and proposed Mono Trees areas. This facility would include a restaurant, bar, and restrooms. Electricity would be supplied from the top of Sacajawea Lift. Restrooms would be vault toilets or an onsite septic system would be installed. Water would be supplied from an onsite well. It is proposed to offer between 5,000 and 6,500 square feet of interior space. Additionally, 2,000 square feet of deck space is proposed for outdoor seating. The upgraded mountain road off the *Powder Reserve Traverse* would provide construction access to the restaurant location.

To accommodate guests using beginner terrain and the Summer Activity Zone, GTR proposes to construct a simple yurt at the top of the Shoshone Lift. The facility would be 1,500 square feet of indoor space and approximately 2,000 square feet of deck or outdoor space. The yurt would provide a simple, rustic environment. It would offer services to guests during the day, and also the potential as a dinner destination with access by evening winter sleigh rides or summer horseback rides. This facility would include restaurant seating, a simple kitchen and restrooms. Electricity would be spired from an existing electricity line supplying Shoshone Lift. Vault toilets are currently located at the top of Shoshone. Water would be supplied from an onsite well or would be transported to the yurt. The upgraded mountain road to the top of the Shoshone Lift would provide construction access to the yurt.

Two on-mountain warming cabins are also proposed to be constructed—one in Rick's Basin, within the Nordic trail system to support the Nordic trail network, and the other at the top of Lightning Ridge. These facilities would be outfitted with basic cooking supplies, wood stoves, and vault toilets.

A basic warming hut, with limited food service (i.e., outdoor grill and cold sandwiches, snacks, beverages, etc.) and vault toilets, is proposed at the bottom terminal of the South Bowl East Lift. This structure would be 1,000 to 1,500 square feet.

Non-Winter and Alternative Activities

Summer Recreation Trails

To provide additional summer activities, GTR proposes to construct approximately 29 additional miles of trail to enhance the existing network. This includes 6 miles of downhill biking trails, 2 miles of hiking trails, and 21 miles of multi-use trails.

Downhill biking trails would include nine new trails totaling 6 miles, including:

- Three trails descending from the Grand Traverse trail, adjacent to the existing Tall Cool One trail,
- A trail descending adjacent to the Blondie trail.

- A trail starting at the mountain road just east of the Sidewinder trail and ending at the Bullwinkle trail,
- A connector trail between the existing Rock Garden trail to the proposed Summer Activity Zone,
- A connector trail between Crazy Horse and Sticks and Stones trails to provide an easier alternative to the existing Grand Traverse,
- A re-route around the Summer Activity Zone, and
- A connector between Rick's and Otterslide trails.

Hiking trails would include one new trail totaling 2 miles, including:

A trail from Mary's Saddle to the base area.

Multi-use trails would include seventeen new trails totaling 21 miles, including:

- A Tall Cool One cutoff trail,
- An extension for the existing North Woods loop, starting at the base of the North Woods trail and connecting with the Quakie Ridge trail,
- A connector trail between the proposed North Woods-Quakie Ridge connector and the bottom of the Quakie Ridge trail,
- · A Quakie Ridge extension trail,
- A loop with a variety of switchbacks starting and ending along Rick's Basin trail,
- A beginner loop in between the Rick's Basin and Snowdrift trails,
- An outer loop on the western edge of the SUP boundary, extending from the Roundabout trail and terminating at Greenhorn Access,
- A shorter, beginner loop inside the existing Jolly Green Giants trail,
- A trail from Colter's to Peaked trails,
- A new trail from Ain't Life Grand to Peaked trails, with a segment extending west past the Peaked trail,
- A trail extending from Action Jackson, intersecting with Andy's and Trail 3, and connecting with the proposed Ain't Lift Grand-Peaked trail,
- A trail descending from the top of the Peaked lift to the northern tip of the Ain't Life Grand trail,
- A loop extending from Ski Hill Road and the base area, intersecting with the base of the Sacajawea lift and the Action Jackson trail,
- An outer trail around the Buffalo Soldier trail, connecting Buffalo Soldier and Rocky Mountain Way,
- A loop extending from the 38 Special trail,
- A trail connecting the existing 38 Special and Peaked trails,
- A connector trail between the northernmost proposed downhill mountain biking trail to the existing *Bring it On Home* trail in the Summer Activity Zone.

With the construction of these new trails, GTR could help prevent rogue trail development and provide quality recreation in a managed fashion. These proposed trails offer an ideal opportunity for GTR to assist the CTNF in stewarding the land.

Other Summer Activities

GTR proposes to focus their multi-season recreation opportunities in and around Shoshone Lift area. This area was called the Summer Activity Zone in the 2018 MDP and was allocated for concentrated use of activities. This is an ideal location for GTR's summer activity hub because it is an accessible location for a wide range of guests. The moderate terrain allows for a range of guests to experience the natural environment in a structured area. Activities in this area could include activities such as a canopy tour/fly line, zip line and aerial adventure course. These activities would be located on Forest Service lands.

While the Summer Activity Zone was designated to allow for flexibility in locating activities, and to accommodate new activities as summer recreation evolves at ski areas, preliminary sites have been identified as being capable of accommodating certain experiences. The canopy tour or fly line would start west of the Shoshone Lift top terminal. It would be a multi-station tour where guests would travel on an elevated tour through the tree canopy. A canopy tour is a more traditional activity where guests wear harnesses and use short zip lines to travel from station to station, while a fly line is a new hybrid mountain coaster/zip line where guests wear harnesses but travel along a track from station to station.

The zip line would start south of the Shoshone Lift top terminal. It would consist of a multi-segment zip line; a shorter segment to get guests familiar to the zip line harness and equipment and a second zip line of more than 2,000 feet over the event area.

The aerial adventure course would start northeast of the Shoshone Lift bottom terminal or uphill of the event area. This elevated challenge course includes a series of elements of varying length and difficulty for both adults and children.

The disc golf course would also be re-located within the Summer Activity Zone to the north of the proposed canopy tour/fly line.

Refer to Figure 2 for detail on the proposed summer activities.

Alternative Winter Activities

GTR also proposes a permanent, dedicated snow tubing facility located to the west of the Sioux Lodge on National Forest System lands. The facility includes lighting for night operation and snowmaking infrastructure sufficient to ensure quality construction and maintenance of tubing lanes. Proposed snowmaking coverage for the tubing facility totals approximately 2 acres.

GTR also proposes to expand the Nordic, snowshoeing and fat biking offerings. To improve access to Rick's Basin, GTR proposes to realign and re-grade the existing, steep trail segment from the base terminal of Blackfoot Lift into Rick's Basin eliminating the existing steep grade. Additionally, the existing Nordic trail and alpine ski-out trail connecting the bottom terminal of the Blackfoot Lift with Little Beaver Traverse would be graded to make the slope more consistent and improve the width of trail for dual-use by alpine and Nordic skiers. New Nordic trails would be established on private lands and near the tubing center to tie Nordic skiing into the Targhee Village and introduce additional trail variety. As discussed above, a 2,000 square foot guest yurt with vault toilets and potable water would be located within the Rick's Basin trail network. The yurt would be a simple, rustic structure to accommodate guests in Rick's Basin. Approximately 1.4 miles of Nordic trails would be constructed to improve connectivity with the Rick's Basin trails.

REQUEST FOR COMMENTS

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest is requesting your comments on any component of this project. The purpose of this scoping period is to provide an opportunity for interested parties to provide early and meaningful participation on this project and to learn more about the project. Your questions and comments regarding this proposal are an integral part of the environmental analysis process. Respondents should include: (1) name, address, telephone number, and organization represented, if any; (2) reference the "Grand Targhee Master Development Plan Projects" and (3) specific facts, concerns or issues, and supporting reasons why they should be considered.

Electronic comments including attachments can also be submitted via the project website at https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=58258. Written comments may be submitted via mail to: Mel Bolling, c/o Jay Pence, Teton Basin District Ranger, P.O. Box 777, Driggs, ID 83401.

Additional project information is also available online via a project Story Map located at https://arcg.is/1PjiOm0. There will also be two virtual open houses:

- Tuesday, September 8 at 6:00 p.m. MT
- Thursday, September 10 at 12:00 p.m. MT

Virtual open house connection information can be found on the project website listed above.

Your comments will be most helpful if received by September 25, 2020. Only those persons who submit comments during this comment period will be placed on the mailing list for future information regarding these projects. Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

For more information about the proposed projects or for individuals who do not submit comments but wish to remain on this mailing list, please contact Rachel Franchina, project lead, at Rachel franchina@usda.gov or leave a message at (208) 354-2312.

The Grand Targhee Master Development Plan Project decision is subject to objections following Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 218, Subparts A and B. Only individuals or organizations who submit timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project during a public comment period established by the Responsible Official are eligible to file an objection.

After we consider your scoping comments, the NEPA process will include the following steps: we will publish a Draft EIS and seek public comment; we will publish a Final EIS and Draft Record of Decision initiating an opportunity to object; after any objections are addressed, we will publish a Final Record of Decision.

Thank you for your participation. I look forward to your comments.

Sincerely,

MEL BOLLING Forest Supervisor