United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Bridger-Teton National Forest Jackson Ranger District | 340 N. Cache St. Jackson, WY 83001

File Code: 1950
Date: February 7, 2020

Re: Jackson Hole Mountain Resort Backcountry Guided Skiing Permit User Days Increase

General Location: 43° 35' 50" N, 110° 52' 13" W (Rock Springs – Jensen Canyon), and [43° 49' 68" N, 110° 93' 80" W enter coordinates] "Teton Pass", Bridger-Teton National Forest, Teton County, Wyoming. The entire permit area is approximately 4,020 ac. in size and is located southwest of Teton Village and on Teton Pass, Teton County, Wyoming (Figures 1 and 2).

Introduction:

Dear Interested Public:

On November 27, 2018, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort (JHMR) submitted a proposal to the Bridger-Teton National Forest to initiate an environmental review for the proposed increase of guided backcountry user days within the boundary of its current outfitter guide permit area. The Bridger-Teton accepted their proposal and is initiating a review in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). We anticipate preparing a categorical exclusion (CE) or an Environmental Assessment (EA) for this proposal.

This notice invites public comment on the scope of our environmental review. Let us know of any concerns you may have about the potential environmental impacts of this proposal and any recommendations for changes that might reduce those impacts. Comments are welcomed at any time during the planning process, but to be most useful in determining the type and scope of the environmental analysis, please submit your comments within 14 days of the date of this notice. This scoping period will be your primary opportunity to comment if a CE is pursued for this proposal.

Our decision regarding this proposal will be documented in a decision made by the Jackson District Ranger. Following this introduction, this scoping notice states the purpose and need for the proposal, describes the proposal in detail and provides instructions for submitting comments.

Background:

For over 30 years, JHMR has had an Outfitter Guide permit for backcountry skiing in a permit area consisting of 4,020 ac. (2,146 acres adjacent to the Jackson Hole ski resort (to the south) and 1,874 acres on the east side of Teton Pass on both sides of HWY 22). This permit authorizes 1,200 user days annually from December 1st to April 15th. Of these 1,200 days, a maximum of 50 days may be used on Teton Pass by JHMR.

Due to the high demand for backcountry guided skiing services, JHMR has requested that its current permit be administratively amended to allow a total of 2,400 user days. The 50-day limit on Teton Pass would remain unchanged. There are no changes proposed to the size and shape of the permit area, dates of use, or to the modification of any vegetation (tree removal) or existing terrain.

For over ten years JHMR has had so much demand for guided backcountry skiing that it would typically use all 1,200 user days by February or early March. Beginning in 2012 the Forest Service allowed JHMR to draw additional user days from a winter "pool" of days that were typically allocated for use by High Mountain Heli-skiing on an as-needed basis. These requests were usually granted in small increments as needed.

Currently, guided backcountry skiing activities account for approximately 7% of the total number of skiers using the permit area due to the fact that Jackson Hole Mountain Resort has an open gate

backcountry access policy, meaning that the public has access to the backcountry area without guided services.

Topics of Interest

The presence of native bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) is of interest for the implementation of this proposal because of the potential for increased skiers and human activity that may impact bighorn sheep crucial winter range habitat. The effect of human activity on bighorn sheep populations is a potential concern with the existing backcountry use permit. The current proposal may increase the potential for this impact (from approximately 6% existing to 10% of total backcountry user days – assuming overall use remains constant). This topic of interest will be included in an environmental analysis.

Purpose and Need for Action:

The Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) (BTNF 2015, as amended) provides direction for the Forest to sustain natural resources, contribute to community prosperity and provide high-quality developed recreation facilities to serve Forest visitors (Goal 1.1 and Goal 2.2 pp. 112-114). Forest Plan Objective 1.1(f) is to "Provide areas for alpine skiing and commercial ski and snowmobile operations.

The purposes of the project are:

- Capitalize on the partnership between the Bridger-Teton and JHMR to connect visitors with the natural environment and support the quality of life and the economy of the local community.
- Provide a safe experience for skiers accessing the backcountry who do not have the knowledge of the area or the safety hazards.
- Increase safe access and opportunities for guided backcountry ski trips through JHMR, the primary ski resort in Jackson Hole, to introduce and recruit new skiers to the sport.
- Introduce high-quality guest service experiences to attract and retain local and destination skiers and provide outdoor education opportunities for Jackson residents and visitors.
- Increase benefits to the public by establishing ski routes in safer locations.
- Provide more guides with backcountry training which can increase overall emergency response time.
- Provide more educational opportunities for clients, including transceiver training, avalanche safety, decision-making, rescue techniques, and backcountry hazards.

Proposed Action

JHMR proposes to meet the demand for providing guided backcountry services to visitors in a safe, controlled, professional manner. The proposed action is to administratively increase the number of Priority Service Days for JHMR's Guided Backcountry Skiing and Snowboarding from the current allotment of 1,200 to 2,400. The maximum number of service days approved for Teton Pass use would remain at 50 days, and the period would remain from December 1st through April 15th. The boundary of the Special Use Permit would not change and is depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2 (attached).

Implementation Timing:

It is anticipated that if the proposal is approved, it will result in the Outfitter Guide permit being amended in the summer of 2020 and implemented for the 2020/2021 ski season.

Scoping:

For information on this project, visit the project webpage at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57618. The project will also be added to the Bridger-Teton's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA).

How to Submit Comments:

It is important that reviewers provide comments in a way that is useful to the agency in preparing the analysis and decision. Comments should be provided prior to the close of the comment period and should clearly articulate the reviewer's concerns related to the environmental effects of the proposal. The Bridger-Teton will consider cited references if the articles are submitted with the comment letter and if the reviewer identifies the relevance of the articles to specific actions and effects of these particular proposals. The submission of timely and specific comments can affect a reviewer's ability to participate in subsequent judicial review.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not establish standing for the respondent to initiate a subsequent judicial review.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 14 calendar days following the date of this notice.

Please submit your comments to: Mary Moore, Jackson District Ranger, P.O. Box 1689, 340 N. Cache St. Jackson, WY 83001 or electronically to: https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=57618 by February 21, 2020. Comments may be hand-delivered to 340 N. Cache St. between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Information for this project can be viewed on the project webpage at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57618. For more information contact: Jason Wilmot, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, 340 N. Cache, Jackson, WY or 307-739-5542.

Please feel free to pass this letter on to others you think may have an interest or concern with this proposal.

Sincerely,

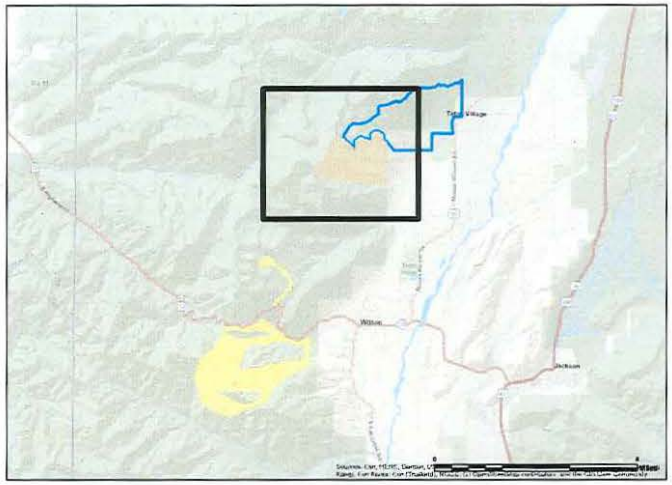
Mary Moore
Jackson District Ranger
Bridger-Teton National Forest

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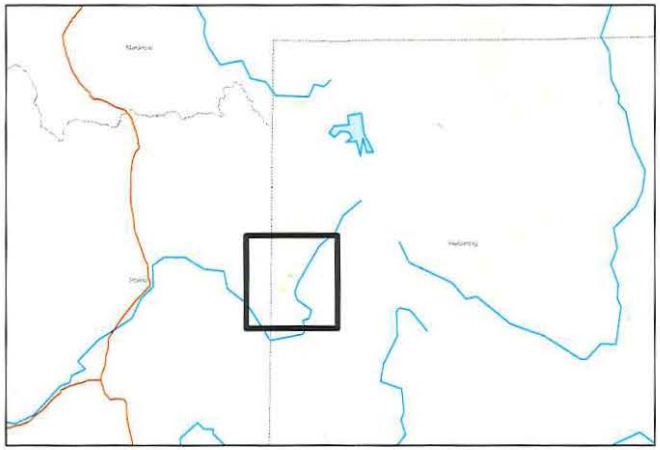
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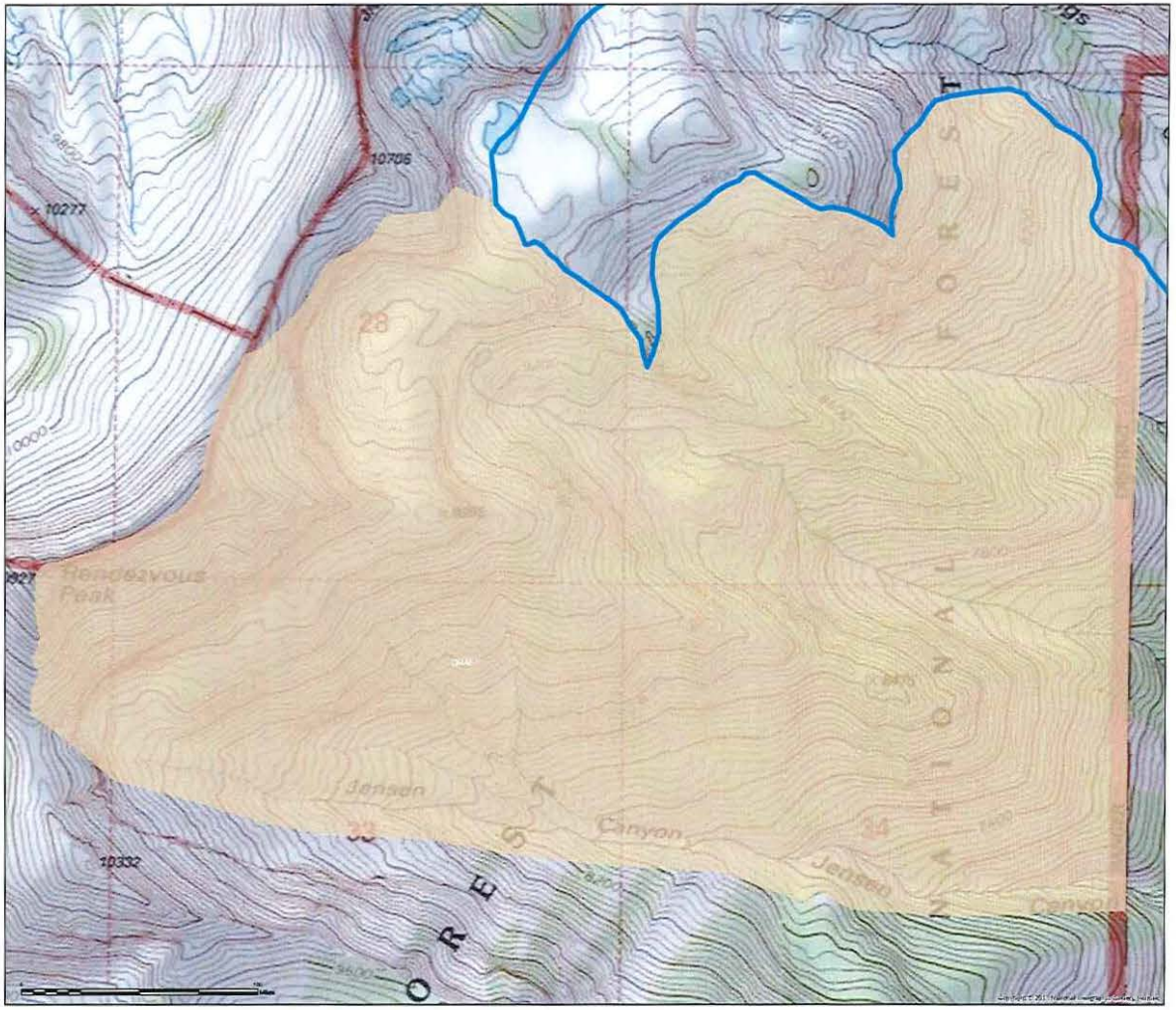
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Guided Backcountry Skiing Permit Areas (Teton Pass and Rock Springs/Jensen Canyon Areas)





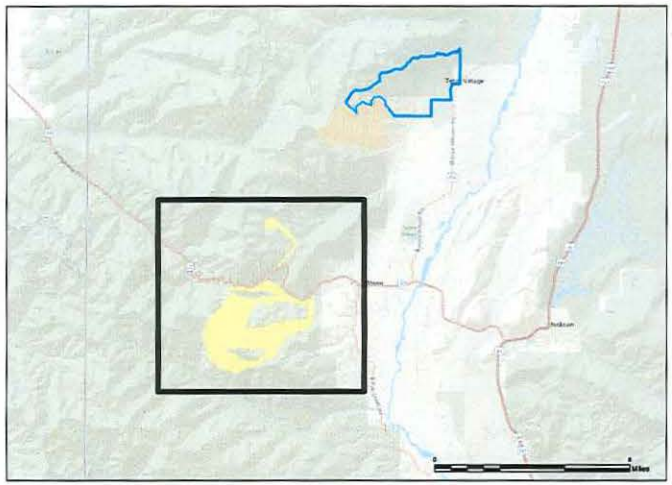
Draft Guided Backcountry Skiing Scoping Document

JHMR Backcountry Guide Permit Update
Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, Teton Village, WY

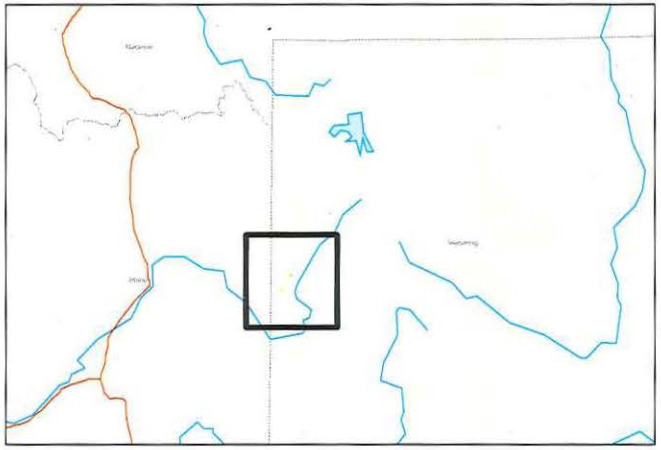
Rock Springs/Jensen Canyon Permit Area
Teton Pass Permit Area
JHMR SUP Boundary

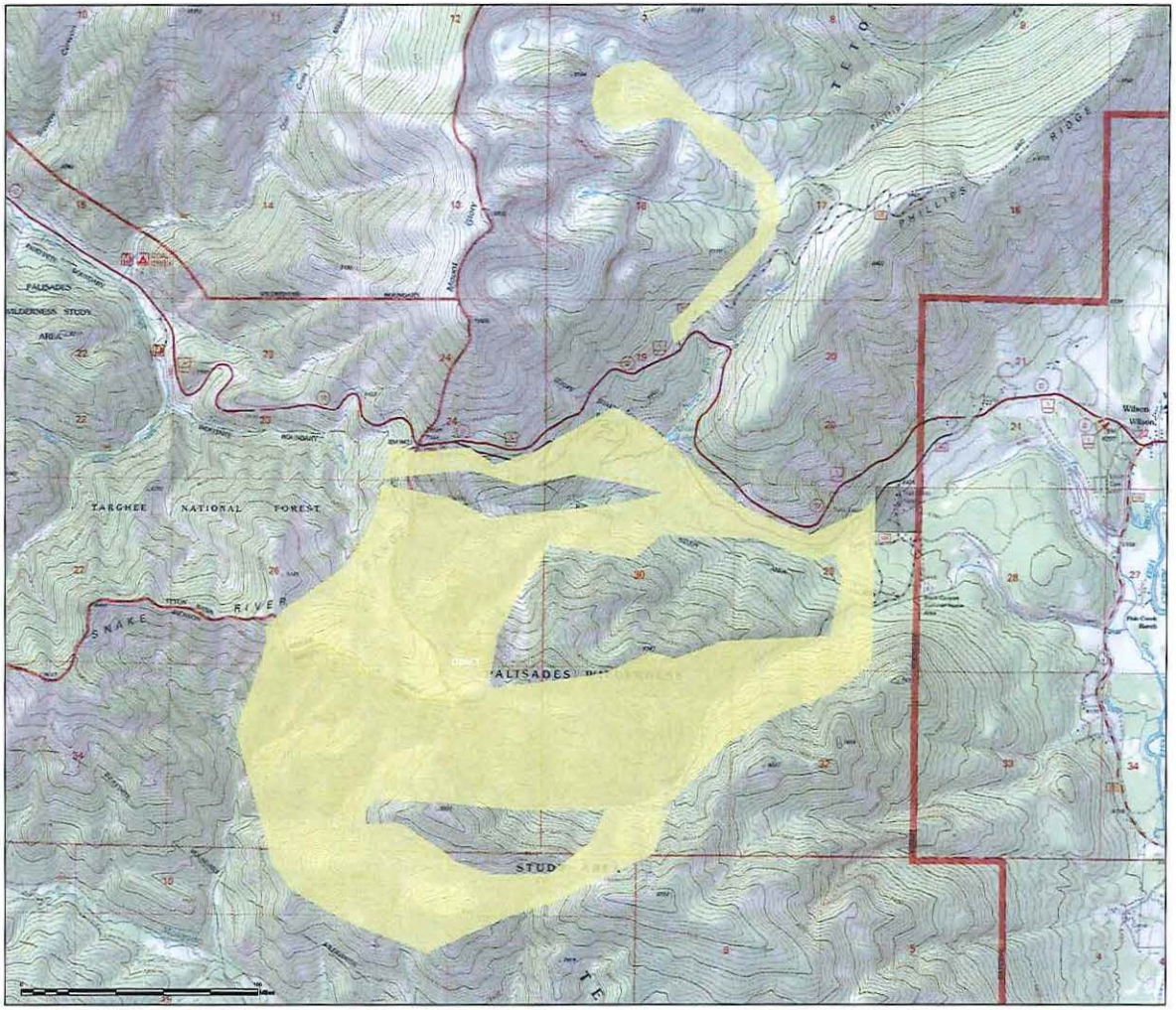
Figure 1. Rock Springs/Jensen Canyon Backcountry Permit Area

Pioneer Environmental Services, Inc. November 15, 2019



Guided Backcountry Skiing Permit Areas (Teton Pass and Rock Springs/Jensen Canyon Areas)





Draft Guided Backcountry Skiing Scoping Document

JHMR Backcountry Guide Permit Update
Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, Teton Village, WY

Teton Pass Permit Area
Rock Springs/Jensen Canyon Permit Area
JHMR SUP Boundary

Figure 2. Teton Pass Backcountry Permit Area

Pioneer Environmental Services, Inc. November 15, 2019