



File Code: 2720
Date: October 13, 2021

Dear Stakeholder,

Wyoming Game and Fish Commission (WGFC) has requested to use the facilities at Dell Creek feedground on the Big Piney Ranger District to conduct their winter elk management activities. The purpose of this letter is to provide you an opportunity to comment on the proposal for a one-year special use permit authorization for WGFC to operate and manage the Dell Creek feedground.

Background:

The Dell Creek feedground has been maintained and operated by the WGFC for supplemental winter feeding of elk since 1975. This feedground is one of 22 state operated feedgrounds located in Wyoming. On September 21, 2021, the authorization for WGFC's use of the Dell Creek feedground was determined by a United States District Judge to have expired. Under 36 CFR 251.50, an authorization is required for this use of National Forest System lands. On October 5, 2021, the Big Piney District received an application from WGFC to continue to use the facilities at Dell Creek feedground to conduct their winter elk management activities. Therefore, there is a need for the Forest Service to respond to the WGFC's application request.

The one-year special use permit authorization allows for the continued management of the elk feedground on a temporary basis while the Forest Service conducts an environmental analysis for longer term use. The Forest Service intends to prepare an environmental impact statement to analyze the environmental effects of long term use pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act.

Authorization of this project would contribute towards the Forest Plan Goal 1.1 - "Communities continue or gain greater prosperity" with the objective to help re-establish historic elk migration routes and to provide increased viewing and hunting opportunities for outfitters and clients (Forest Plan objective 1.1(g)).

Location: The Dell Creek feedground is located at N ½ and SW ¼ of Section 14, Township 33N, Range 113W, Sixth Principal Meridian, Sublette County, Wyoming, approximately 4 miles east on Dell Creek Road (Forest Service Road 30600) from Hwy 191/189, in Bondurant (Map 1 and 2).

Project Description:

WGFC proposes to maintain and operate the elk feedground facilities at Dell Creek including two hay storage sheds, 8' high woven wire fence, water well, portable tack shed, elk trap and corral for horses used for winter elk feeding. The proposed activity includes providing hay for a



long-term average of 275 elk from approximately mid-November to mid-April, depending on conditions. During the 2020-2021 winter, 529 elk were fed. WGFC would distribute hay daily from a sleigh pulled by draft horses within a 35-acre area. Any hay and straw used in association with these permits would be certified noxious weed free or noxious weed seed free. Trucks would haul hay to the feedground via Dell Creek Road. General maintenance would occur throughout the year when necessary. No new construction is requested.

Categorical Exclusion:

If it is found that there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effects, it is expected that this project would be authorized by the use of a categorical exclusion.

Extraordinary circumstances are those instances that could result in significant environmental effect to one or more of the following resource conditions, as described in 36 CFR 220.6(b)(1).

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.
2. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds
3. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, wild and scenic rivers, or national recreation areas
4. Inventoried roadless areas
5. Research natural areas
6. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites
7. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas

The proposed action is expected to fall within the category from 36 CFR 220.6(d)(8) which authorizes the following:

Approval, modification, or continuation of minor, short-term (1 year or less) special uses of National Forest System lands.

If this project is authorized with a categorical exclusion, it will not be subject to the Forest Service's Predecisional Review (Objection) Process (36 CFR 218).

Opportunity to Comment:

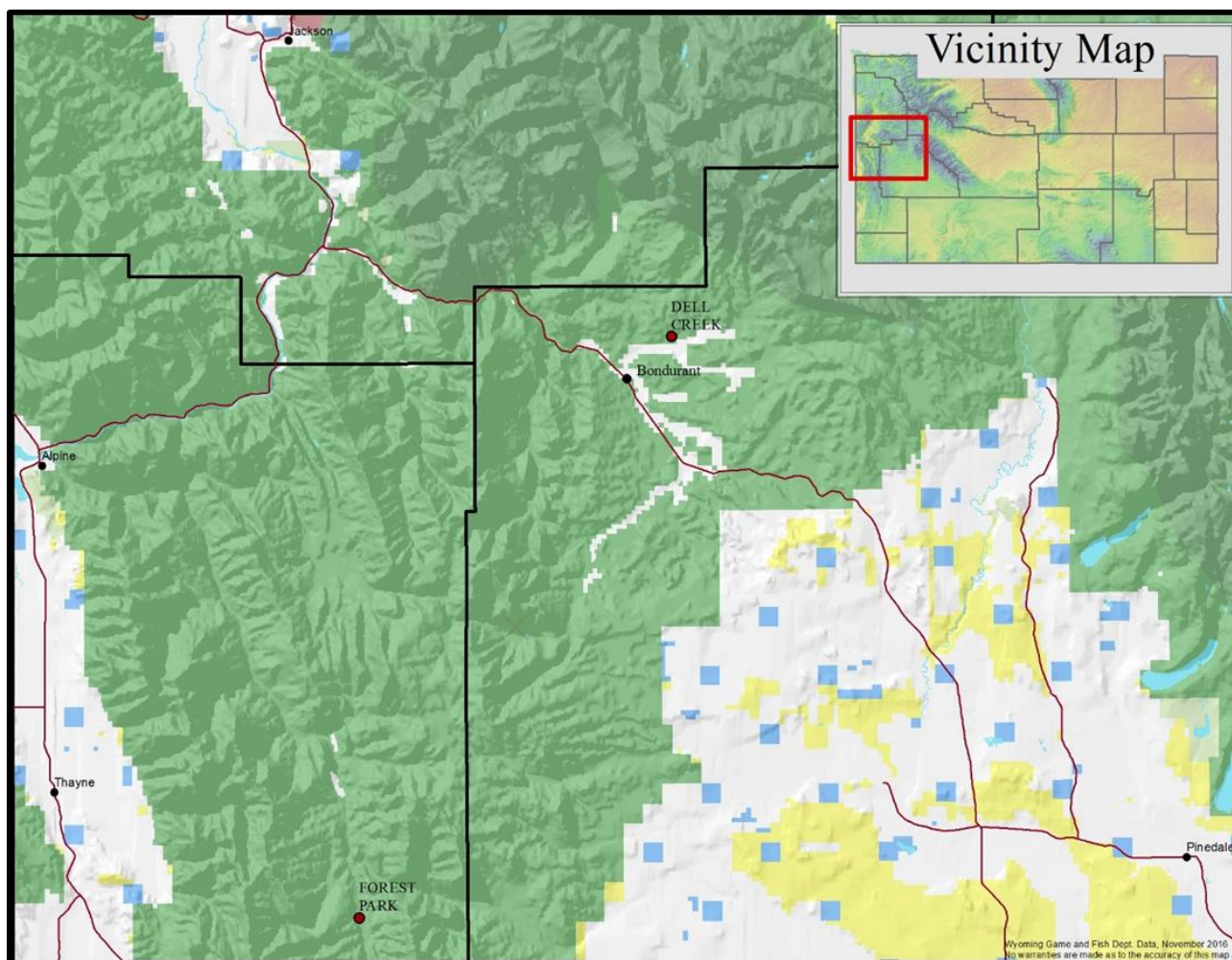
This comment period provides those interested in, or affected by this project, an opportunity to make their recommendations and concerns known. The proposed action and other information are available on the project webpage at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=60948>. Mailed, facsimile, oral, and electronic comments are most helpful if submitted by October 24, 2021. Electronic comments should be submitted online on the Bridger-Teton National Forest project webpage above. Click on the "Comment/Object on Project" link located in the right column. Written comments may also be submitted to Gregory Brooks, Acting District Ranger; Big Piney

Ranger District, Bridger-Teton National Forest; P.O. Box 218, Big Piney, WY 83113. The Bridger-Teton NF is not accepting hand-delivered comments currently due to limited office functions as part of precautions in response to the coronavirus. Those who respond to this request for comments will remain on the mailing list for this planning effort. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names of those who comment, will be part of the public record and available for public inspection.

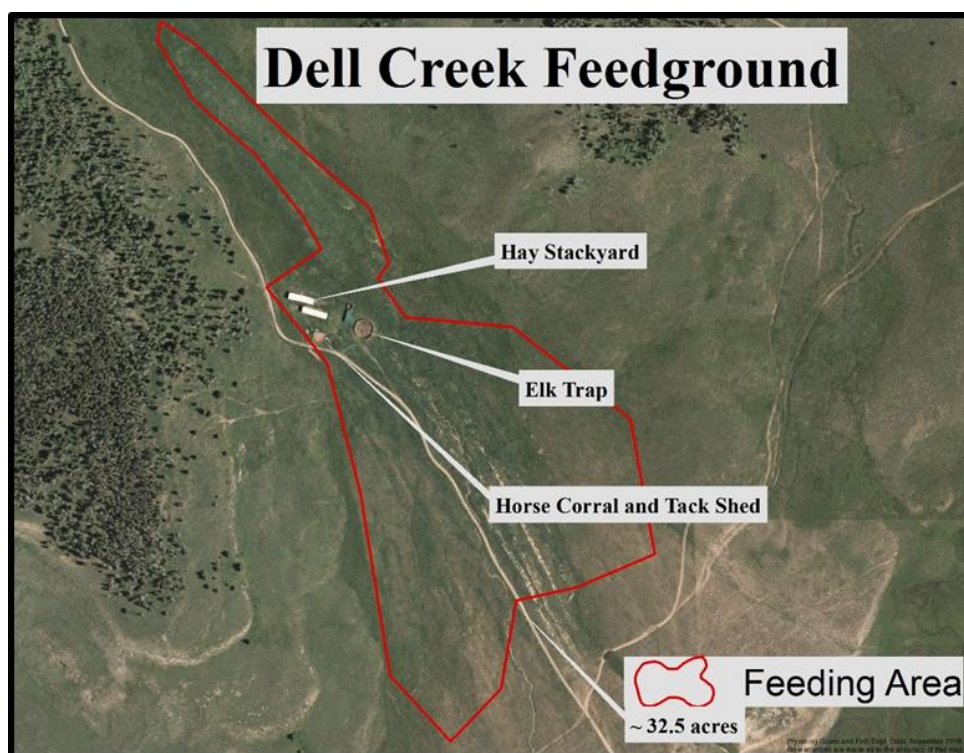
Additional information on the Dell Creek Feedground: 2021-2022 Special Use Permit project is also available on the webpage at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=60948>. For more information or to be added to the mailing list for this project, please contact Rusty Kaiser, East Zone Wildlife Biologist, at rusty.kaiser@usda.gov or 307-276-3375.

Sincerely,

Acting Big Piney District Ranger



Map 1. Vicinity map and location of Dell Creek feedground, Sublette County, WY.



Map 2. Dell Creek Feedground – elk feeding area and structures