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Title:

Comments: To the USFS

October 12, 2020

Re: The Grand Targhee Resort Expansion Project

From: Janna Rankin, Broadband Leader, Great Old Broads for Wilderness

My primary concerns regarding the proposed expansion of Grand Targhee Resort involve the proximity to the Jedediah Smith Wilderness area. Inasmuch as the proposed expanded boundary would include 1200 acres contiguous to this wilderness, many of the wilderness values could be compromised. For example, the Wilderness Act specifies that the land is to be managed to provide opportunities for solitude. When roads are being built, when trees are being cut, when avalanche control is underway, when skiers ski out of bounds, the opportunities for solitude are significantly compromised. I urge the Forest Service to include the encroachment on solitude in the consideration of the environmental impacts.

Wilderness is supposed to be a place where the human impact is minimal. The law itself defines wilderness as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled. Wilderness retains its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements and is to be protected and managed to preserve its natural conditions. Wilderness should be a place where the imprint of humans is substantially unnoticeable. While the law itself does not provide for a buffer area around wilderness to ensure these values, it is impossible to imagine that the expansion would be "substantially unnoticeable" from the adjacent Jedediah Smith Wilderness. If we stopped the environmental study right at this point, I believe the Forest Service would be required to deny the expanded boundaries.

Studies have been done to assess public opinion on wilderness. Most Americans, not just those of us fortunate enough to have wilderness easily accessible, ascribe high importance to the scenic beauty of wild landscapes, the option of visiting wilderness at some future time, and the knowledge that wilderness is being protected and preserved for scientific study and spiritual inspiration. This "bequest value" of wilderness preservation for my grandchildren is not something I take lightly. I feel compelled to object to the boundary expansion to protect these difficult-to-assess qualities of the adjacent wilderness.

I live in Alta and value our dark skies. The summer opportunities to lie on our backs and survey the heavens and those cold, clear winter nights when the sky is teeming with stars would be compromised if there are visible lights from Targhee. I am concerned about the availability and quality of water for my well. Will the increased use and disposal of both surface and ground water impact Alta? Will our air be degraded from the increased traffic on Ski Hill Road?

To what extent will our quality of life change? If the expansion proposed is approved will there be housing in the Teton Valley for employees? While I am retired and love my current life in our little Valley, I recognize that others have the right to enjoy our unique valley beauty and living standards. The socio-economic impacts of this proposal are significant and should be carefully analyzed.

I am apprehensive about the impact of the expansion on the Teton range wildlife. I would like to see species specific analysis of the impact on critical habitat for the Canada Lynx, the wolves, the grizzly bears, and the Bighorn Sheep as well as other species.

I fully recognize that there is no place on Earth entirely free of human impacts, but the ecological integrity of our region[mdash]the biological and genetic diversity, the caliber of our natural resources[mdash]ranks high among the qualities valued by scientists and the public at large. We must rely on science-based management as we consider activities which might degrade these important values, both now and in the future. I trust the environmental impacts of the proposed expansion will be considered in full and the management decisions will reflect the findings.