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First name: Sofie

Last name: Graupner

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Kim Pierson and whomever else it may concern,

My name is Sofie Graupner, and I have spent my life in Teton Valley, Idaho. Though I briefly left to earn my Bachelor's degree in Salt Lake City, I returned and have lived the majority of my early adulthood in Driggs. I've been skiing at Grand Targhee since I was two years old, and for the past three winters, I've had the privilege of coaching the Big Mountain Ski Team through the nonprofit Grand Targhee Ski and Snowboard Foundation. I've watched both Grand Targhee and Teton Valley change. When my family moved here, agriculture and open space defined the community. Today, the ski-town identity has grown louder, and with it, a surge in development pressure. I am someone who benefits from Grand Targhee. I love skiing, and I'm fortunate to get paid to help raise the next generation of mountain athletes. But this expansion affects me deeply because this isn't just a place I recreate. It's my home. And I want a future here, not just for myself, but for the wildlife, the community, and the land.

As a lifelong local and recreationalist, I care about the environmental, economic, and social health of this valley. I hold deep respect for the Forest Service. As my own family has worked for and alongside it, I understand the weight of your decisions. That's why I keep returning to your mission:

"To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations." (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/meet-forest-service#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20Forest%20Service%20mission%3F,of%20present%20and%20future%20generations>)

This statement should be our compass. When I read it, I ask myself: whose needs are truly being met by this expansion?

Skiing is a beautiful sport, but it is also one of the most expensive forms of recreation. It caters to a small and privileged percentage of the population. Is expanding ski terrain truly a necessity? Or is it a luxury, an indulgence, that risks permanent damage to ecosystems and worsens inequality in our community?

We must ask: Is this in service of the future? Once habitats are lost, once forests are cut and lifts are built, we cannot undo it. The expansion won't just disrupt land, it will disrupt lives, both human and wild. And the people who will profit from this project represent a tiny fraction of those who will feel its consequences.

Yes, recreation matters. It keeps people safe, connected, and inspired. As a coach, I understand the value of access to terrain. But with the current boundaries of the resort, we are already producing some of the top youth skiers in the country, we have what we need. The resort could make improvements within its existing footprint to support our athletes and guests. Expansion is not essential, it's excessive.

On a deeper level, I want to raise a perspective that is rarely voiced in these conversations: the value of leaving nature alone. Too often, we act as though every untouched space is just waiting for our intervention. This mindset, rooted in a long legacy of colonization, tells us that land only gains value when it is used, altered, or profited from. But some places should remain wild. Wilderness does not need our improvements. Its value lies in its existence, in its integrity, in the fact that it is not for sale.

The economic argument for expansion is not as solid as it seems. The wealth it brings is concentrated in the hands of a few. While we're told it creates jobs, the reality is that many of these jobs are filled by people who commute long hours each day because they can no longer afford to live here. I was raised in this valley, and still, I don't know if I'll ever be able to afford a home here. As more money flows in, long-time locals are pushed out. Expansion may bring more people, but at what cost to the people already here?

Some argue that this expansion is inevitable; that we need more space to accommodate growing crowds. But inevitability is not an excuse for inaction. Just because something can happen doesn't mean it should. Growth at the expense of conservation is not progress-it's short-sightedness. We need to stop treating nature as unused land for exploitation and instead see it as a partner to protect.

Preservation is not a passive act-it is a radical choice in a world obsessed with development. If we truly want

future generations to enjoy the outdoors, we must ensure there is still an outdoors left to enjoy.
Thank you for your time and for your commitment to protecting our public lands. I urge you to consider not just what is profitable, but what is right for the land, for the wildlife, and for the future of this valley.

Sincerely,
Sofie Graupner
Driggs, Idaho