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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Comment Letter

Dear Ms. Pierson,

I'm a resident of Driggs and support Alternative 3 (with amendments, see below) of the GTR Expansion DEIS. While some on-mountain improvements and food concessions are reasonably justified, I cannot support the further expansion of the resort's boundary into NF public land, neither South Bowl nor Mono Trees.

I visit Targhee rarely as a paying customer, maybe once per winter and once per summer annually, but recognize the positive effects the operation has on many aspects of life and economics for both locals and visitors. I spend significantly more time backcountry skiing, hiking, and rock climbing on immediately adjacent public land, including wilderness, in the North Fork & Main Fork of Teton Canyon. From this perspective it becomes quite clear that the "lease" of public land by a private operator such as GTR renders said public land essentially private...to them and their (high paying) customers. To allow privatization and development of two additional large areas, South Bowl and Mono Trees, seems counter to the Forest Service's mission. We (the public) will never get those areas back. This is capitalism. GTR ownership will change, from the Gillette family to whomever, maybe the billionaires of the nearby Tributary development; maybe, like the Jackson Hole Four Seasons once was, GTR will someday be owned by a faceless shell company of the Chinese Government. This is how the system works, and we all accept that. But to sign away significantly more public land into these private hands with their own agendas and their own vision of who gets to visit and for how much money? Why? Does this whole thing not just feel like pumping the balance sheet with entitlements prior to a sale? Why concede nearly 900 more acres of prime public forest land to this?

Additionally, I echo the sentiment of many others opposing the boundary expansion on the basis of negative wildlife, habitat, and forest impacts to these areas, as well as the additional stresses it will put on the Teton Valley community. Are we all ready for and do we want the additional visitor traffic this expansion is aimed to bring? No.

Finally, I will address some on-mountain improvements covered in Alternative 3 of the DEIS that should be reconsidered: the summit restaurant and the north boundary lift. The scale and visual impact of the summit restaurant feels excessive for a development so close to wilderness areas. The scale, scope, and position of the summit restaurant should be revised to reduce visibility from the east. The proposed north boundary lift terrain is short, low-angle, and would involve significant cutting of a high quality forest area near the wilderness boundary. I have personally seen grizzly bear and fox in this area in summer. The benefits of this lift to skiing do not seem to make up for the negative impacts it would cause.

In summary, please consider Alternative 3 of the DEIS, with modifications as just described.

Thank you for your time,  
Nick Mestre