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Comments: Comment on Volunteer Role, Transparency, and Accountability in Draft Forest Plan

As a longtime volunteer Camping Ambassador with the Bridger-Teton National Forest, I am deeply concerned that the Draft Assessment fails to meaningfully acknowledge the vital contributions of volunteers and ambassadors. These individuals often serve as the Forest's front line-educating visitors, addressing resource impacts, and supporting understaffed districts-yet the plan ignores their role entirely.

This omission reflects a deeper issue: a lack of transparency and a dismissive attitude toward volunteers who raise legitimate concerns. In my own experience, when I sought clarification regarding per diem policy-a policy that affects the financial fairness and integrity of volunteer deployment-I was told by Forest Service staff, "We're not lawyers," and referred to a nonprofit partner, Friends of the Bridger-Teton (FBT), instead of receiving clear, direct answers from the agency responsible for oversight.

That level of unhelpfulness compelled me to submit a formal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request just to obtain basic information about volunteer treatment, data handling, and stipend eligibility-matters that should be publicly available and proactively disclosed. The agency's referral of responsibility to FBT, without clear accountability or financial transparency, raises concerns about oversight and the proper use of public funds.

When I inquired about data I had submitted as part of my volunteer service, I was told the matter was "resolved" without ever receiving a response. This is not how volunteers should be treated. Full-time Forest Service employees have a professional duty to communicate clearly and respectfully with the volunteers who support their mission.

I urge the Forest Service to:

Explicitly recognize and incorporate volunteers and ambassadors as essential components of fire safety, recreation management, and public education strategies.

Include a commitment to public transparency regarding volunteer data, logs, per diem and stipend policies, and the financial roles of partners like FBT.

Ensure that full-time staff are accountable for treating volunteers with respect, fairness, and professionalism, and that questions are met with timely, substantive responses-not deflections or silence.

Without meaningful recognition of volunteers and clear public accountability, the Forest's ability to address increasing use and resource challenges will remain undermined.