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Comments: Comments on Bridger Teton National Forest Plan Revision #63628

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Bridger Teton National Forest Plan Revision 63628.

I am an equestrian who lives on the edge of the Bridger Teton National Forest and has spent many a day over the past three decades posting trail signs on the Wyoming National Recreational Trail in the Wyoming Range, doing maintenance on the Continental Divide Trail near Green River Lakes, and performing maintenance on trails in the Wind River and Gros Ventre Ranges. Therefore, I speak from real first hand experience in the Bridger Teton National Forest.

Page 37, Recreation, Lands and Access

I was very disturbed not to see one mention of equestrians, outfitters, cowboys, horses, mules, llamas, or alpacas in this section! The forest is named after a historic mountain man, Jim Bridger, who rode horses throughout the very lands that are now the Bridger-Teton Forest. That alone is enough reason to recognize the role that horses have played in the lives of those who traverse this forest.

No mention of horses appears to be a major oversight. Today, hunters, packers, cowboys, outfitters, and recreational trail riders all use horses in the BTNF. Hikers increasingly are using llamas and alpacas to carry their gear. The omission of horse use in this section is a mischaracterization of forest use. We recommend that you add the historic and present use of stock to this section, in order for it to be complete and accurate.

Page 38, Table 6.

Table 6 indicates no guest ranches in the Wyoming/Salt Range. This is incorrect. The Box Y Lodge and Guest Ranch on the Grey's River Road at the intersection of the Wyoming and Salt Ranges has been a thriving Guest Ranch for three decades. They cater to both summer and winter tourists, providing horseback riding, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, lodging, and more. They deserve a mention on this table.

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I saw no mention of the Wyoming National Recreational Trail. This 70 mile trail from Big Piney to Hoback Junction is a real jewel for those who wish to immerse themselves in the backcountry, but still have a marked trail to follow. For a trail with national designation, volunteers who provide maintenance, and those hiking or horseback riding it, to leave it out is another major oversight.

General

Over the years, trailhead use by recreational equestrians has shifted in any given year, depending on the condition of the road leading to the trailhead or the condition of the parking area. In other words, if the road leading to a trailhead becomes too rough or the parking area too crowded with cars/light trucks, then equestrians/packers/outfitters may shift their use of the forest to a different location. The equipment needed by those with horses is expensive and big. Further, rough roads have the reputation for injuring horses inside the horse trailers. People using stock in the BTNF need a reasonably good access road and a parking area large enough to turn several 50' truck/trailer combinations around. Horse trailer parking areas that can accommodate several horse trailers at a time on the perimeter of the forest, with a good access road to a trailhead, are a horse owner's dream. An example of a good access road with adequate parking is Willow Creek in the Hoback. An example of a bad access road with poor parking is South Horse Creek.

If you need pictures of horses using the BTNF, I would be happy to provide some.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I hope you will incorporate these concepts.