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Comments: The Forest Must Welcome Continuous Public Engagement, Encourage Volunteering, and Ensure Accountability

Public input must be ongoing, and the Forest should use social media constructively while holding its partners to the same standard of accountability. The Bridger-Teton belongs to the people, not the agency, and its plan must embrace continuous engagement. The strong response to this draft assessment shows how much citizens care for these lands, and that care should not be confined to rare planning windows. The Forest should keep input channels open year-round and make social media a genuine two-way forum for dialogue, allowing the public to post and participate on official pages rather than limiting communication to announcements.

To ensure trust, the Forest should establish a Public Engagement Ombudsman or Ambassador whose role would be to monitor communication, guarantee that no citizen is excluded, and provide a clear channel for concerns or complaints. Partners such as FBT should also be required to maintain open forums and refrain from punishing criticism by blocking voices. If they represent the Forest publicly, then the Forest must accept responsibility for their actions.

For eight seasons, I freely gave of my time and treasure as a volunteer out of love for the Bridger-Teton. Serving as a camping ambassador was rewarding because it allowed me to protect the land and help the public directly. Unlike FS employees and FBT employees, who earn their living from these lands, volunteer service is a gift of stewardship of the land and help to the public. I encourage others to step forward and volunteer as well.

The FS employees are paid servants of the public, not rulers, and must remain accountable to the people whose lands they are paid to oversee and support. This plan should enshrine openness, accountability, respect for volunteers contributions, and constant dialogue with the public as guiding principles. By embracing social media as a true forum, establishing an ombudsman, and valuing volunteer contributions, the Bridger-Teton can build trust and inspire more people to join in caring for these public lands.