
**Snake River Canyon Recreation Site Timber Sale
Notice of Proposed Action
Jackson Ranger District, Bridger-Teton National Forest
January 18, 2008**

Introduction

The Jackson Ranger District is proposing to implement an integrated vegetation project in the Snake River Canyon to control the spread of Mountain Pine Beetles and address screening between Highway 89 and three developed recreation sites. The project area includes three treatment areas: East Table Campground, Station Creek Campground and West Table Boat Ramp. Stands between these sites and the highway are infested with mountain pine beetle.

The project consists of 3 treatment areas in the Snake River Canyon, with the legal description of T37N, R117W, Sections 1, 2 and T37N, R116W Section 6. (See the attached map and aerial photographs).

Purpose and Need

A significant infestation of Mountain Pine Beetles in lodgepole pine stands within and surrounding developed recreation sites in the Snake Canyon was first identified in 2004. The beetles were/are infecting the dominant overstory of the developed sites. Starting in 2005, the Jackson Ranger District began an effort to reduce tree mortality within the East Table and Station Creek Campgrounds. Carbaryl insecticide was applied to high-value, uninfected trees located near campsites, buildings, parking spurs and roads. Additionally, Verbenone, a naturally occurring pheromone that repels dispersing adult beetles from susceptible host trees, was applied to susceptible host trees within riparian areas.

There is a need to address the screening and aesthetic qualities that are provided by the stands that separate the highway and the developed recreation sites. There is an additional need to continue our commitment to previous efforts to protect mature trees from beetle infestation at these sites. The combination of Carbaryl and Verbenone successfully slowed down the beetle attack in and immediately surrounding the campground, however, larger lodgepole stands between the highway and the developed sites are currently infested. These infested stands provide critical screening between the highway and the developed recreation sites. As of November 2007, the lodgepole stands between the highway and West Table Boat Ramp, East Table and Station Creek Campgrounds are nearly completely infested. Given the infestation rates of the last few years and the high percent of currently infested trees, the lodgepole stands that provide screening along the highway and East Table, Station Creek and West Table Boat Ramp will be predominantly dead and red within one to two years.

Without aggressive treatment, the above campgrounds, boat ramp and the highway within the snake canyon will lose important forest screening. The presence of a red (dead) forest will lower the aesthetic quality of the recreation sites and the highway corridor. Additionally, the campgrounds and boat ramp would be more susceptible to large fires and hazard trees if the stand were left unmanaged. To salvage the remainder of the healthy stands, the beetle infested trees need to be completely removed from the campground before the adult beetles emerge in mid July. This would minimize further spread of the beetles within adjacent lodgepole stands and among the few remaining uninfected mature trees within the treatment areas. Removal of the infested trees and continued application of Carbaryl and Verbenone would greatly reduce the spread of the mountain pine beetle among lodgepole stands within and surrounding the campgrounds and boat ramp.

The purpose of the decision to harvest dead and dying trees within the Project Areas is to:

1. Provide for the health and safety of public visitors within the campgrounds, boat ramp and travelers along the highway.
2. Retain remaining forested screening between recreation sites and highway and within the recreation sites.
3. Provide for conditions that would enhance regeneration and growing conditions of the understory.
4. Reduce the risk of wild land fire in the developed site.
5. Reduce numbers of mountain pine beetle infested trees within stands adjacent to recreation sites.

Proposed Action

The Jackson Ranger District proposes an integrated vegetation management project to address the mountain pine beetle infestation occurring in lodgepole stands between Highway 26/89 and three developed recreation sites. To address beetle infestation within the stands the District proposes mechanical removal of dead and dying trees (trees infested with beetles). Healthy trees, not visibly infected, would be retained.

The 3 treatment areas are mature lodgepole pine stands containing infected trees that range from 8 to 24 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh). The vast majority of the Mountain Pine Beetle infested trees are between 10 and 16 inches in diameter. These areas range in elevation from 5,800 feet to 5,900 feet, with mild slopes up to 20 percent.

East Table Campground's overstory species is dominated by mature lodgepole pine with some smaller subalpine fir. There is relatively little diversity in age or size of the overstory. Some older trees have already been thinned out as they have died from beetle kill. Younger trees are found in small openings within the stands where subalpine fir and younger lodgepole are growing. They would likely be released to grow more quickly with the removal of additional pine overstory.

Understory plants that would provide variety and screening between the campground and the highway include, wild rose, serviceberry, buffaloberry, and a small amount of aspen. Red twig dogwood, Geyer's willow, and chokecherry grow near wet areas. Lower plants that don't offer much screen but give variety would be more apparent after a timber sale include snowberry, common juniper, and bitterbrush.

Station Creek Campground contains more diversity of tree species than in East Table. Mature lodgepole pine dominates but there are also fairly large subalpine fir. Understory species that provide visual buffers for privacy between the campground and the highway include younger lodgepole pine and subalpine fir, wild rose, serviceberry, buffaloberry, aspen, common juniper, mountain-ash, and Geyer's willow. Some spruce is also present.

West Table Boat Ramp's overstory is largely mature and dying lodgepole pine, although there is tall understory for screening and many small lodgepole pines and subalpine firs that would likely be released for faster growth if groups of overstory trees were removed. Much of this area is influenced by underground water. Willows and horsetails are found scattered throughout the area west of the entrance road. Species that would serve as screening with removal of overstory pines include chokecherry, serviceberry, and willow. Younger pines and subalpine fir are present in most of this area and would likely be released by the removal of the older pines.

Table 1. Snake River Canyon Recreation Site Timber Sale Treatment Areas – Size and Volume:

Treatment Area	Approximate Acres	Estimated Volume
East Table Creek Campground (2 Units)	5	25-40 Ccf
West Table Boat Ramp (3 Units)	15	150-200 Ccf
Station Creek Campground (2 Units)	3	5-15 Ccf
TOTAL	23	180-255 Ccf

* Ccf (hundred cubic feet)

Project design criteria and mitigation in addition to the above descriptions will include:

- No permanent roads or other improvements would be constructed within the project area or in adjacent areas.
- All streamside riparian areas and most wet areas such as bogs would be left out of treatment units. Where small wet areas or bogs occur within treatment areas they would be protected by leaving all trees within 50 feet and/or directional felling would be employed.
- Skidding within 50 feet of live water or wetlands would not be permitted and/or directional felling would be employed.
- No more than two skid trails would be designated across swales. Crossings would be designated by Forest Hydrologist and approved through the sale administrator.
- Excessive soil rutting would be avoided (no ruts deeper than 4 inches) by skidding when the ground is frozen and/or when there is a good 1.5 to 2 feet of snow on the ground
- Stumps would be cut to 6 inches above ground to avoid impacts to visuals
- Project would be completed prior to May 22, 2008 to avoid impacts to campers during the summer season.
- Trees would not be felled into live water.
- Loading would not occur on highways.
- Landings would be on the campground roads or boat ramp parking lots.
- Slash piles would not be permitted in East Table, Station Creek or West Table boat ramp. Slash would be burned, hauled off or chipped.
- Damage to residual trees would be avoided.
- Landings for East Table and Station Creek would be along campground roads.
- Landings for West Table boat ramp would be in parking lot or west of the gate.
- Bald eagle perch or roost trees will be maintained on site where evidence of use is present.

Assessment of Extraordinary Circumstances

The following resources have been analyzed to determine whether or not extraordinary circumstances exist and if there are effects that would preclude use of categorical exclusion.

1. *Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.* The proposed action would have “no effect” on threatened Canada lynx and would not likely jeopardize the continued existence of the nonessential experimental population of the gray wolf. No known resident lynx or wolf pack occurs within or adjacent to the proposed treatment areas. There will be “no impact” to sensitive grizzly bear, American peregrine falcon, great gray owl, flammulated owl, Harlequin duck, trumpeter swan, northern goshawk, common loon, greater sage-grouse, fisher, North American wolverine, spotted bat, or western big-eared bat. Individuals of these species or their preferred habitat features do not occur within or adjacent to the treatment areas. Sensitive bald eagles are known to occupy the Snake River Canyon year round. No known nest sites occur within or adjacent to the treatment units, but foraging eagles may use suitable mature perch and roost trees anywhere along the river corridor. The proposed treatments “may impact individuals or habitat, but will not contribute to a trend toward federal listing or

cause a loss of viability to the Upper Snake River eagle population or species". Potential habitat for Columbia spotted frog, boreal owl, and three-toed woodpecker does occur within and adjacent to the project area. Treatments "may impact individuals or habitat of Columbia spotted frog, boreal owl and three-toed woodpecker, but will not contribute to a trend toward federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species".

Currently, four plant species are listed as Threatened or Endangered in the State of Wyoming by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Of these, only *Spiranthes diluvialis* (Ute ladies' tresses) has a potential of occurring in western Wyoming. However, *Spiranthes diluvialis* has not been located within Teton County, Wyoming nor the Bridger-Teton National Forest. Therefore, no USFWS listed Threatened or Endangered plants are likely within the delineated project area.

Astragalus paysonii is designated as "Sensitive" with the Intermountain Region of the US Forest Service. Fourteen populations of *Astragalus paysonii* were located in the Snake River Canyon highway reconstruction corridor during the 1995 floristic survey. One of these population was discovered northwest of the Station Creek Campground turnout. *Astragalus paysonii* occupies areas that have been disturbed by natural or human processes, especially fire, clear cutting, and road and trail development. This species favors disturbed sites which potentially succeed towards a *Pinus contorta* var. *latifolia* (lodgepole pine) dominance type. *Abies lasiocarpa* (subalpine fir) may codominate the stand. *Astragalus paysonii* will also occur in mid-seral to mature stands of *Pinus contorta* but at low frequencies. This later condition describes the existing conditions of this species habitat in the Snake River Canyon.

Astragalus paysonii is an early successional species, but not a pioneer of newly disturbed soils. This is evident with the populations in the Snake River Canyon. Individual plants occur where there are developed soil A and B horizons, but not in roadcuts that contain only parent materials and rock. Disturbances such as cutting or burning of trees and shrubs and trampling will actually increase the occurrences of this species. In contrast, disturbances which remove topsoils will eliminate the habitat. Populations tend to favor stands with low vigor and density of other plants as opposed to lush, highly productive understories.

2. *American Indian religious and cultural site and archeological sites or historic properties or areas within the project area* . In 1994 a cultural resource survey was conducted for the Snake River Canyon Highway EIS (1/94). No historic properties listed as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places were identified in the Project Area. There would be no effect to historic properties as a result of any of the three alternatives described in this assessment.
3. *Floodplains and wetlands*. Proposed treatment areas were selected to avoid wet areas, streams and sensitive soils.
4. *Wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas*. The Visual Quality Objective (VQO) for the Snake River corridor is identified as Retention and Partial Retention in the Forest Plan. Partial retention is generally applied to recreation developments that are visually evident but subordinate to the natural landscape. This designation is due to the unique landscape of the Snake River Canyon, the eligibility of the river as Wild and Scenic, and the high use and visibility of Forest System lands adjacent to both the Snake River and Highway 89. The Forest plan standards and guidelines require that eligible river segments are protected from activities that could diminish or change the free-flowing characteristic, water quality, or the scenic, recreational, fish and wildlife, and other values which make the river eligible for designation.

The designation of Retention is based on the assumption that the character of the existing and desired landscape is of high quality. The character of stands containing large amounts of dead trees has already changed negatively. Cutting dead trees is another character change. However, the open, clean, young growth would be an visual improvement over a red and dead stand. Studies show that seeing large amounts of dead trees is not aesthetically pleasing to the general public. This is a very different condition from cutting green trees on a north slope where dark, green, relatively healthy trees would be cut and changing the character of the landscape. A young, healthy, vibrant, diversified landscape that matches the public's expectation of what a forest should look like meets partial retention VQO.

No wilderness areas are nearby. Although the Palisades Wilderness Study Area (WSA) is near the project area, the treatment sites are outside of the WSA.

5. *Inventoried roadless areas.* Not applicable for project area.
6. *Research natural areas.* Not applicable for project area.
7. *Municipal watersheds.* Not applicable for project area.

Issues and Resource Concerns

Resource issues and concerns are addressed in project area location and design. In particular:

- *Implementation Dates* - Timing stipulations would prevent conflicts with recreational use of developed sites.
- *Access* - No new roads will be required. The project would require travel over snowpack.
- *Slash* – Slash piles would be removed from project areas (recreation sites).
- *Noxious Weeds* - Spotted knapweed, sulfur cinquefoil, houndstongue, and bull thistle are common within and around the project area. Timber sale activities have the potential to disturb the ground and to introduce new noxious weed seeds within the project area. Logging equipment would be cleaned prior to entering the forest. Monitoring and treatment of noxious weeds would be included to prevent the establishment of noxious weeds.

Decision Framework and Responsible Official

Responsible Official: Dale Dieter, District Ranger, Jackson Ranger District, P.O. Box 1689, Jackson, WY 83001. In the decision, the District Ranger will answer the following two questions based on the analysis:

1. Whether the proposed action will proceed as proposed, as modified by an alternative, or not at all?
2. What mitigation measures, design features and monitoring requirements will the Forest Service apply to the proposed action?

Forest Plan Consistency

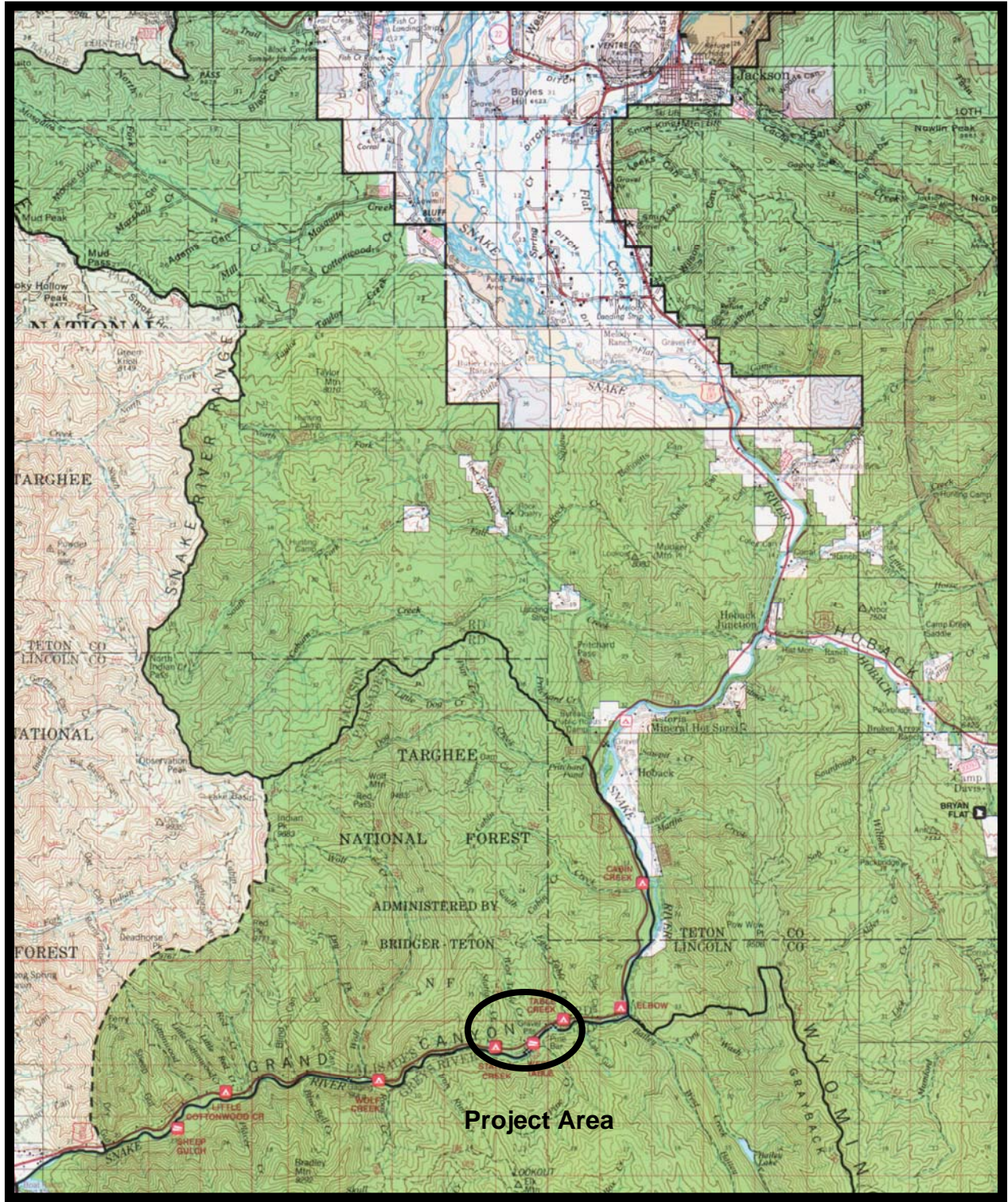
The project must be consistent with the Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan of 1990 (LRMP). The proposed project is within Management Area 48 – Snake River Canyon, as described in the LRMP (page 283). The analysis area includes one Desired Future Condition (DFC). DFC 3 – River Recreation has specific management direction to accomplish Forest goals and objectives. Management emphasis and prescription for DFC 3 is summarized as follows:

- *Theme* - An area managed to give river-and scenic-recreation experiences.
- *Wild and Scenic Rivers Prescription* – River segments that have been found eligible for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River system are managed to protect or enhance their wild, scenic, and recreational values.

- *Facility Improvement Standard* – Where facilities exist in eligible river corridors, improvements to roads, trails, facilities, and structures will be designed to protect and enhance scenic and recreational values.
- *Visual Quality Prescription* – The visual quality objective for this area are *Retention and Partial Retention*. *Partial retention* is generally applied to recreation developments that are visually evident but subordinate to the natural landscape.
- *Vegetation: Timber Prescription* – Timber harvest is not scheduled, but can be used to enhance recreation sites and visual quality.

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Map of Snake River Canyon Recreation Site Timber Sale Project Area
T37N, R117W, Sections 1, 2 and T37N, R116W Section 6





East Table Creek Campground Treatment Area



Station Creek Campground Treatment Area

