

## **REQUEST FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS**

### **BRIDGER-TETON NATIONAL FOREST Jackson Administrative Site Land Conveyance**

**And**

### **New Facility Construction Teton County, Wyoming**

**INTRODUCTION:** The Bridger-Teton National Forest will complete an environmental analysis and document to analyze and disclose the effects of the proposal to sell not more than 11 acres of the 15.325 acres on the Jackson administrative site and construct new facilities at the Jackson, Nelson and Cottonwood administrative sites. All three administrative sites are on the Bridger-Teton National Forest within Teton County, Wyoming. The current Jackson administrative site was transferred to the Forest Service in 1962 from the Department of Interior. The Bridger-Teton National Forest facilities including the Supervisor's Office are over forty years old. The Supervisor's office was built in 1964. The Jackson Ranger District Office is currently using a building built by the Bureau of Reclamation in 1985 and transferred to the Forest in 1991.

**REGIONAL FORESTER DECISION MADE:** The Bridger-Teton National Forest Supervisor's Office and the Jackson Ranger District Office will remain in Jackson, Wyoming.

Earlier this year the Forest Service considered building a new Forest Supervisor's Office in other Wyoming communities primarily due to the high cost of housing for Forest employees and the higher cost of construction. Other communities considered were Alpine, Afton, and Pinedale. After conducting a thorough analysis, holding public meetings, and gathering input and data, it was determined that while housing was less expensive in some other locations, none of these communities could provide housing at a cost that many Forest employees could afford. Therefore, the many benefits of having the office remain in Jackson far outweighed moving the office to another community. As a result, last spring, the Intermountain Regional Forester, made the decision that the Bridger-Teton National Forest Supervisor's Office and the Jackson Ranger District office will remain in Jackson, Wyoming.

**BACKGROUND:** As energy costs rise and other costs of doing business increase, it has become necessary to evaluate current methods of operations, such as holding large administrative properties in high value areas, leasing private properties to house some District Offices, and maintaining outdated facilities. Many of these facilities do not meet current building and accessibility codes, including the codes mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Over time the condition of these facilities have deteriorated and maintenance costs are becoming prohibitively expensive. The Forest Supervisor's Office and the other buildings located at 340 North Cache are among Forest Service facilities that need to be replaced, however appropriated funds were lacking to accomplish this. In response to this need, Congress passed the Forest Service Facility Realignment and Enhancement Act (FSFREA) to allow the sale of Forest Service administrative properties and to authorize that the revenues obtained be used for new construction and/or maintenance of existing facilities.

Another concern facing the Forest Service relates to the high cost of living in resort areas like Jackson. As housing costs move beyond the reach of government employees, hiring and retaining a high-quality workforce becomes a challenge.

**DECISION TO BE MADE:** The Forest Supervisor will use the environmental analysis to decide whether or not to approve the sale of land and whether or not to construct new facilities at the sites proposed. If the decision is to sell land, the market will determine the price as well as the parcel on the Jackson administrative site (North Cache Street) at which the new office facilities will be constructed.

**PURPOSE AND NEED:** The purpose of this proposal is to reduce facility building maintenance and lease costs through the sale of up to 11 acres of the Jackson administrative site, along with most of the existing buildings on this site, and by constructing new accessible and energy efficient facilities on existing administrative sites. The purpose of this proposal is also to improve the housing situation for employees by constructing additional rental units at the Nelson and Cottonwood administrative sites. The Forest will use the Forest Service Facility Realignment and Enhancement Act (FSFREAA) to convey the property and utilize the revenues for the new construction and maintenance. The need for this action is driven by the fact that the facilities are over forty years old and by the difficulty for employees to find affordable housing in the Jackson area. Public benefits and services have decreased as maintenance costs have increased over the years. Currently the Jackson District Office is not open to the public, employees are scattered over the entire administrative site, and the office facilities are not energy efficient. The office and associated facilities are outdated and do not meet many building and accessibility codes such as the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Employee recruitment and retention is expected to become more challenging in the near future due to retirements and employee movement. The additional housing proposed will help mitigate this situation.

**PROPOSED ACTION:** The Federal Government proposes to sell not more than 11 acres of the Jackson administrative site, including the facilities presently administered by the U.S. Forest Service in the Town of Jackson, Wyoming. The site retained will be either Option A or Option B as shown on the maps attached.

This action proposes to build replacement facilities at three administrative sites. At the Jackson site not less than 4 acres would be retained. A new office facility containing both the Supervisor's Office and Jackson Ranger District as well as a small warehouse facility would be constructed on this site. The current employee-owned housing at the Jackson administrative site (eight manufactured homes) would be re-located to the Nelson administrative site and an additional eighteen housing units, in the form of multi-family housing, would be built at the Nelson administrative site. The existing hiking/biking trailhead (Putt-Putt Trail) would be re-located within the same general area to allow continued access for users. At the Cottonwood administrative site, the proposal is to construct two bunkhouses and four housing units also in the form of multi-family housing along with a new warehouse and fire cache. Approximately half of the new housing proposed at the Nelson and Cottonwood sites would be constructed immediately following the sale and the remainder phased in over the next five to seven years.

The existing horse facilities at the Jackson administrative site will also be relocated. The Nelson and Cottonwood sites are being considered for these facilities. Other sites on the Forest are also being considered.

**PROJECT TIMELINES:** The decision associated with this NEPA analysis is expected to be made by the Forest Supervisor in the spring of 2009. The sale of the property is estimated to occur in the fall of 2009 with the new construction estimated to begin spring/summer of 2010. Some site preparation and infrastructure work on the Nelson site could begin as early as the summer of 2009.

**SCOPING AND PUBLIC COMMENT:** The Forest Service will prepare an environmental analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Forest Service Facility Realignment and Enhancement Act (FSFREA).

The objective in the analysis is to disclose the environmental effects of this proposal. In addition to disclosing the effects, the analysis will develop ways to avoid or reduce any potential adverse effects to the environment.

Integral to the environmental analysis is the solicitation of comments from interested Federal, State, and local agencies, other organizations, and individuals. This ensures that the most current and accurate environmental information and public concern are incorporated into the planning and decision-making. This is the initial opportunity to comment on the proposal. At this stage, your comments will assist in identifying the scope of the issues and concerns that need to be addressed during the environmental analysis.

The Forest Service has identified preliminary issues associated with this proposal which include the potential future development of the land to be sold, visual effects of the new construction, and effects on wildlife.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** It would be most beneficial to the analysis to submit your comments by November 14, 2008. Please mail comments to the Bridger-Teton National Forest, P.O. Box 1888, Jackson, WY 83001. You may also submit electronic comments at [comments-intermtn-bridger-teton@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermtn-bridger-teton@fs.fed.us); please indicate "conveyance" in the subject line.

We expect to publish a environmental document in January of 2009. We will provide another comment period during this part of the process.

This document has been posted on our website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/btnf/projects/>

For further information on this proposal contact:

Mike Balboni, Michael Schrotz, or Mary Cernicek at (307)739-5500

Note: Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.

Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.