

Bridger-Teton management plan revision update

Stymied by legal wrangling over federal rules governing revisions of national forest management plans, Bridger-Teton officials have decided to adapt by making amendments to the 20-year-old plan under which our forest is currently operating. According to forest plan team leader Rick Fox, the Bridger-Teton will publish an evaluation of the forest this spring and will also initiate scoping on some proposed actions for amending its 1990 Plan Standards and Guidelines.

The lack of an up-to-date comprehensive management plan leaves the forest vulnerable to piecemeal changes that can add up to major threats to its health. But Fox promises that any amendments will proceed only with full public involvement. "We are very interested in hearing the community's concerns about planning and our planning process," he says. To this end, Forest Supervisor Kniffy Hamilton, Fox and other Bridger-Teton staffers joined the Conservation Alliance and about 70 members of the public for a forum on forest management we held at the library on Feb. 5. We'll keep you posted on future opportunities for involvement at www.jhalliance.org.

Wyoming Range, Snake River legislation advances

As promised, one of the first actions in 2009 in the U.S. Senate was reintroduction of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act (renumbered as S. 22), which includes federal legislation to protect the Wyoming Range of the Bridger-Teton and portions of the Snake River system. On Jan. 15, senators voted 73-21 to pass the act; the House of Representatives is expected to vote on it any day now.

The Omnibus Act combines about 160 separate bills protecting public lands. If it passes the House unscathed, the act will protect more than 1,000 miles of rivers and add two million acres of public land to the Wilderness Preservation System. It also prohibits new leases for energy exploration and development on the Wyoming Range, and allows conservation organizations and others to buy existing leases and keep the land safe from the ill effects of oil and gas drilling. Passage of the Omnibus Act would also protect about 400 miles of Snake River headwaters in northwest Wyoming from threats such as water quality degradation and dam building by including them in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Our thanks go out to everyone who has supported these campaigns. Wyoming's U.S. Senators Mike Enzi and John Barrasso both worked for this legislation and also deserve thanks. Here's their contact information:

U.S. Sen. Mike Enzi
379 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510
(202) 224-3424, Email via: <http://enzi.senate.gov/public>

U.S. Sen. John Barrasso
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510
(202) 224-6441, Email via: <http://barrasso.senate.gov/public>

Wyoming's new U.S. Rep. Cynthia Lummis has stated that she opposes it. Your comments may help her reconsider:

U.S. Rep. Cynthia Lummis
1004 Longworth HOB, Washington, D.C., 20515
(202) 225-2311, Email via: <https://forms.house.gov/lummis/contact-form.shtml>

More on the Wyoming Range and energy development

Bridger-Teton officials continue to work on a supplemental analysis of 44,720 acres on the Wyoming Range that were suspended from leasing in 2006, following a ruling that an earlier NEPA analysis didn't adequately consider impacts to wildlife and the environment. The new draft supplemental environmental impact statement is expected to be released soon. We'll keep you posted on how you can comment.

The Bridger-Teton also recently announced that its analysis of the Eagle Prospect and Noble Basin Master Development Plan (aka Hoback Wells) is now due out in March. This project in the Hoback Basin initially included just three test wells, but further study was required after Plains Exploration and Production Company switched to a master plan with the potential for 136 wells. The draft environmental impact statement for the original project generated about 19,000 public comments; almost all opposed it. Public review and comment on the new DEIS will be accepted after its release. Check www.jhalliance.org for updates.

Pinedale plan finally finished, with mixed results

After six years of concentrated effort, the Pinedale Bureau of Land Management recently completed its master plan, providing new guidance for more than one million publicly-owned acres in the Upper Green River Valley, where many of Jackson Hole's wildlife spend the winter. The Pinedale Resource Management Plan is a big-picture, long-term planning document that will guide natural resource decisions for the next 15 to 20 years. Air and water quality, wildlife, and many other resource values are covered in this general guidance document, available online at www.blm.gov/rmp/wy/pinedale/documents.html.

One good decision made in the plan is to allow wide swaths of important wildlife habitat to remain unavailable for future oil and gas leasing. These areas total 453,700 acres and include the Wind River Front along the west side of the range, the Ryegrass and Cottonwood areas, and the west flank of the Mesa. Existing leases there may be allowed to expire, although lease owners do retain existing development rights for the 10-year lease term. There are also several new special management areas, including the Trapper's Point migration corridor bottleneck (9,540 acres) and New Fork Potholes (1,820 acres).

On the downside, this management plan recognizes that intensively-developed oil and gas fields have been and will continue to be drilled on over 175,000 acres, and the Bureau will additionally allow more than 451,000 acres to be converted from traditional to intensively-developed fields. This means that there could be more Jonah Fields in the Upper Green. (Our thanks to Linda Baker of the Upper Green River Valley Coalition for providing this item, and for the Coalition's work toward a better plan. For details, visit www.uppergreen.org.)

North Zone OHV summer travel plan finalized

Following years of intensive work with the public, Bridger-Teton officials have finalized a plan to manage summertime motorized travel on more than 255,000 acres of the northern part of the forest. The plan restricts motorized vehicles to designated trails and roads, thus reducing their effect on wildlife and habitat, and providing a safer and better trail system for all recreational users. It also makes use of seasonal closures to better protect wildlife at critical times, such when they're birthing. Printed maps showing the new trails and roads are expected to be available by late spring at the Forest Service office on North Cache. ■