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Forest Service deserves resources to manage, not sell, public lands

For the past two weeks, the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance has run ads regarding the potential sale of lands on the Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF). In brief, Forest Service officials are still considering selling 40 acres of public land near the base of Teton Pass, as well as part of a 15-acre site on North Cache, to pay for replacing or remodeling BTNF facilities and building employee housing.

The Alliance is concerned about selling public lands to pay for basic needs of the Forest Service. We're also concerned that officials apparently still want to move the BTNF supervisor's office out of Jackson, probably to Alpine, where presumably costs would be less.

Since 2007, Forest Service officials have struggled with how to solve the problem of providing safe, efficient offices and adequate housing for BTNF employees. However, the Alliance believes that selling public lands should not be an option to generate operating funds for federal agencies. We also believe that the best location for the BTNF headquarters is in Jackson.

To try to find solutions, the Alliance has facilitated numerous meetings between the BTNF, local governments, other organizations and the public since early 2010. There have been countless conversations with Town of Jackson and Teton County officials, and with the Teton County Housing Authority on various ways to satisfy the critical components driving funding needs, but the ideas so far are not enough.

In our ad, we ask the public to tell the BTNF what they think about selling off public lands. Even better would be to help identify ways to help. Could we pass the hat and pay for these facilities? Can our community offer incentives for the BTNF to stay in Jackson? Should we write our congressional delegation and insist that costs like these should be a part of annual funding for the Forest Service? How do we maintain our public assets and our community character?

The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance will continue to help solve this and other concerns throughout our valley. The Alliance shares the belief that we don't want to lose this part of our community, and that the Forest Service deserves the resources that will allow it to manage our public lands without compromising those lands.

Please send your suggestions to Michael Schrotz, Bridger-Teton National Forest, P.O. Box 1888, Jackson, WY 83001, or email him at mschrotz@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

Louise Lasley, Program Director
Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance