

## ***News Release***

**For Immediate Release: 3/2/2010**

### **Regional Forest Service Refuses to Budge on North Cache Land Sale; Concerned Citizens to Meet March 5**

The regional office of the U.S. Forest Service declared it is standing firm on its plans to sell public lands on North Cache, thus rejecting a proposed compromise from a community member aimed at preventing construction of a big box store at the north entry to Jackson.

A Feb. 12 letter signed by Regional Forester Harv Forsgren ruled out the possibility that the Forest Service might seek to attract community support by agreeing to sell a conservation easement that would limit the size of future commercial structures on the land now owned by the Forest Service after the property is sold. (A PDF of the letter is attached.)

“Deed restrictions are not being considered for any of the land because we do not wish to preclude future options for the Forest Service or owners who may purchase the land,” Forsgren said. “We believe the future development of the land sold should be determined by the City of Jackson and not the Forest Service.”

Forsgren’s letter also appeared to raise the prospect that if the community succeeded in blocking the planned sale of the public land on North Cache, the Forest Service might reconsider its decision to keep the Bridger-Teton Supervisor’s Office in Jackson.

“Adequate facilities and housing are essential for the long-term presence of the Supervisor’s Office in Jackson,” Forsgren wrote.

He closed the letter by adding: “It is my desire that the objectives of new facilities and housing be met in Jackson with this conveyance project. If the social capacity in the community of Jackson is not sufficient to accomplish these objectives, other options for meeting these objectives will necessarily have to be considered.”

The letter stemmed from a meeting in Ogden, Utah, on Jan. 29 between Forsgren and two Jackson residents, with public interest group representatives, Bridger-Teton officials, regional Forest Service officials and County Commissioner Hank Phibbs sitting in via conference call. Jackson resident Joe Albright, who is a Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance board member, and his wife Marcia Kunstel, a former Conservation Alliance board chair, requested the conversation as private citizens to offer compromise solutions to the unpopular plans to sell public lands to cover the Forest Service’s administrative costs.

“We’re disappointed that other solutions aren’t being considered,” said Louise Lasley, who is Public Lands Director of the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance and participated in the meeting via conference call. “Everyone agrees it is vital to keep the Bridger-Teton headquarters in Jackson. We also believe that selling these public lands to pay for everyday administrative needs would set a dangerous precedent in disposing of public assets.”

The Forest Service intends to sell up to 10.4 acres of prime public lands at its Bridger-Teton headquarters through the Forest Service Facility Realignment and Enhancement Act (FSFREA). However, Lasley said that Congress never intended the act to be used to sell valuable public property that is used and needed by the agency. Notes from Senate committee hearings show that Congress only intended for “excess and unneeded land and facilities” to be streamlined. Further, FSFREA dictates that those land sales must have “support from public.”

The Conservation Alliance, other Jackson organizations, and individuals have been brainstorming to determine if solutions can be found to the proposed sale of Forest Service lands in Jackson. Discussed have been ideas such as a compromise in the amount of North Cache property sold, services and facilities that could be shared with other local agencies, and if the community could purchase an easement on the property to ensure it wouldn't be developed into a big-box store.

The issue has been a heated one in Jackson Hole since plans were announced in 2007 to move the Bridger-Teton Forest headquarters from Jackson and to sell its strategically located property at the north gateway of town to solve administrative budget woes and housing problems within the agency.

The Forest Service has responded to community sentiment in part by agreeing to keep the headquarters in Jackson, yet it has continued with plans to sell a chunk of the property. This move means relocating facilities and housing onto other forest lands, which aren't considered as appropriate for those uses. In fact, a community ad-hoc group – Protect the Putt Putt – sprung up to oppose the Forest Service's plans to push replacement housing onto forest lands at a significant wildlife habitat and popular recreational area up Cache Creek Canyon.

“We are appreciative that Harv Forsgren and the Forest Service took the time to meet with the public; however, we are still hoping for better solutions than we are seeing right now,” Lasley said. “The sale of public lands to cover operational expenses is simply not good business. Past generations have not sold assets to cover operational costs – if they had, land management agencies would have nothing left to manage. We need to preserve the mission of the Forest Service: ‘to meet the needs of present and future generations.’ ”

Albright added: “This community tends to react better to compromise than confrontation, and so I hope the Regional Forest Service office will reconsider its hard-line approach.”

While the Conservation Alliance has not signed off on all alternatives presented, they are spearheading efforts to identify community solutions that the Forest Service can further develop and implement. Discussions continue Friday, March 5, at 10 a.m. at the Conservation Alliance office, 685 S. Cache St. The public is invited to join and participate in these discussions toward keeping the Bridger-Teton Supervisor's office in Jackson.

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*The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance is a nonprofit organization dedicated to responsible land stewardship to ensure that human activities are in harmony with the area's irreplaceable wildlife, scenic and other natural resources.*



File Code: 7310-2/1950-1

Date: FEB 12 2010

Joe Albright  
Flat Creek Ranch  
P.O. Box 9760  
Jackson, WY 83002

Dear Mr. Albright:

I appreciate your visit regarding the Bridger-Teton Supervisor's Office conveyance in Jackson on Friday, January 29, 2010. I believe your meeting notes captured the essence of our conversation. There are, however, a few points to clarify.

As you know, the Forest Service has been pursuing options to improve the facilities at the Jackson administrative site for over 10 years. Our first attempt was with the Multi-Agency Campus (MAC) legislation that was enacted on January 24, 2000, and expired five years later without successful implementation. It was the intent of Congress under the MAC legislation that the financial value of the Jackson administrative site be used as a means to improve facilities for our employees. The passage of the Forest Service Facilities and Enhancement Act of 2005 (FSFREA), provided authority for the Forest Service to proceed with a conveyance project in Jackson without the need for new legislation. As you know, the Forest Service nominated the Jackson Administrative Site to Congress in 2007, which provided authority for the Forest Service to sell the property under FSFREA. The objective of improved facilities and housing for our employees is our sole purpose for pursuing this conveyance. As you know, adequate facilities and housing are essential for the long-term presence of the Supervisor's Office in Jackson.

Our current National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Environmental Assessment (EA) for this project identified several alternatives that evaluated parcels on the site that could be sold. While the final decision has not been made, it is our intent to sell the minimum acreage that meets the purpose and need of accomplishing our objectives. In addition, should Kniffy select an action alternative, our Sale Implementation Strategy (SIS) outlines our intent to structure the sale with the General Services Administration (GSA) in a manner that provides for the minimum amount of land to be sold that will meet our objectives.

In regard to market timing, the EA document identified this concern and specifically mentioned that the sale may occur this year or in subsequent years to allow for a recovery of the real estate market in Jackson. If an alternative is selected to sell all or a portion of the ten acres, that sale will have a minimum bid requirement. If the bids would not provide the required amount of funds, then the property would not be sold.

Deed restrictions are not being considered for any of the land because we do not wish to preclude future options for the Forest Service or owners who may purchase the land. We believe the future development of land sold should be determined by the City of Jackson and not the Forest Service.



The Big Piney Office lease is expiring. The current leased building is unsuitable for a long-term renewal. A new leased office or constructing a new owned office was our only option. The timing of the expiring lease provided an opportunity to move toward an owned office. The construction was funded from conveyance proceeds from the Caribou-Targhee National Forest (C-T NF) administrative site sales in lieu of relying on Jackson Administrative Site sale proceeds. In order to not encumber the Jackson sale proceeds, construction of the C-T NF administrative sites is planned in 2011 as part of our facilities Capital Improvement program with appropriated funds. As identified in the Preliminary Project Analysis (PPA), the Jackson conveyance may provide sufficient funds to reach other projects listed in the PPA, including the Big Piney Office repayment, but is not required to do so. The priority order of projects in the PPA indicates that Jackson Ranger District and Supervisor's office replacement and housing are a priority over funding of the Big Piney Office. Therefore, the future conveyance of the Jackson property in a manner that meets our objectives is not dependent on the repayment of Big Piney Office construction costs.

It is my desire that the objectives of new facilities and housing be met in Jackson with this conveyance project. If the social capacity in the community of Jackson is not sufficient to accomplish these objectives, other options for meeting these objectives will necessarily have to be considered.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harv Forsgren". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

HARV FORSGREN  
Regional Forester

cc: Jeanne Evenden, Keith Simila, Kniffy Hamilton