Teton Canyon Yurt Proposal
Public Scoping Opportunity

United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Intermountain Region
Caribou - Targhee National Forest
Teton Basin Ranger District
August, 2012

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SUMMARY

The Caribou -Targhee National Forest is proposing to add a fourth yurt to the Rendezvous Backcountry Ski Tours (Permittee) yurt system. The proposed location for the new yurt is the group gathering area in Teton Canyon Campground, at the end of Forest road #009 (See Map 1).

Map 1:
Action is needed to respond to the written proposal from the permittee to expand their yurt system. Currently the three yurts under a special use permit are located at high elevation and require advanced to expert skiers to reach the yurt sites. The permittee is seeking a yurt location that serves the general public and is family accessible. The yurt would be erected in October-November after Teton Canyon Campground is closed and before Forest Road #009 is closed for the winter. The yurt would be assembled on the old cement pad that serves as a group gathering site in the summer (see photo 1) The yurt would be removed in the spring after Forest Road #009 is open to the public and prior to Teton Canyon Campground opening around Memorial Day.
BACKGROUND

Rendezvous Backcountry Ski Tours currently operates three yurts for backcountry skiers and has had a successful and incident free business since 1986. In the past several years the permittee has been noticing an increased interest in family oriented winter adventure including cross country skiing, snowshoeing and backcountry skiing. A yurt located in Teton Canyon provides the opportunity for a broad range of skiing abilities to access the public forest lands for winter recreation. The permittee’s three existing locations mandate an advanced skill level and are not suited for all age groups, whereas a yurt in Teton Canyon provides an easily accessible approach into the forest for a larger percentage of the general public.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of this project is to respond to a proposal from the permittee for an additional yurt located in Teton Canyon that is accessible to the general public. Currently the three yurt sites serve only expert skiers due to vertical climb of over 2,800 feet with a full backpack and supplies. Demand from novice to intermediate skiers and backcountry users cannot be accommodated due to mountainous terrain and long steep approaches. Locating a rental yurt in Teton Canyon will accommodate a much larger portion of the public than the yurt system currently serves.

The proposed location at the Teton Canyon Campground is within Forest Prescription 4.1 Developed Recreation Sites. The 1997 RFP gives the following guidance for developed recreation sites:

- Provide for a variety of concentrated public recreation uses in a roaded-natural setting based on the character of the area and visitor needs (Goal).

- On new developments provide adequate vegetation filters to maintain and/or enhance riparian dependent resources (Goal).

PROPOSED ACTION

The location of the 20’ yurt will be set on the already existing Teton Canyon campground concrete pad. By utilizing the already existing concrete pad, there will be no need to build a deck or any permanent structure. Due to its proximity to a maintained Forest access road (#009), the yurt would be transported in/out of the canyon each fall and spring, eliminating the need for remote storage. Ideally the yurt would be erected shortly before the road is closed in the fall, and then dismantled as soon as the access road is passable in the spring.

Clients would utilize the existing outhouse (Photo 2) and work with all of the parties involved to maintain the waste disposal facility. This eliminates the potential to disturb soils or pollute groundwater. Permittee will utilize pellet stove technology to further minimize the impact the surrounding landscape. Permittee will work with the current campground concessionaire to
insure that all winter operations are compatible with the summer campground operations, regulations and insurance policies, including waste management and electricity (Photo 3).

Vehicles will be limited to two cars per group in the Teton Canyon parking area to reduce the congestion at the trail head, and group size will be limited to six to eight participants. Permittee will work with the local landowners in the area and the local Trails and Pathways group to insure that overnight parking does not interfere with snow plowing operations.

Snow machines, which are legal in the area, will only be allowed for ingress and egress only. Yurt renters will be advised of this policy and it will be noted that the yurt is not used for recreational snow machine riding. Vehicles that transport snowmobiles will be required to park in the upper lot and snow machines will be advised not to interfere with the groomed ski tracks.

As with the other three yurt locations, dogs will not be allowed at the yurt due to sanitary and wildlife impacts. A specific area near the yurt will be fenced off to insure that the culinary snow meant to be melted for drinking water, is not contaminated.

Permittee will plan to manage food storage in compliance with current forest policy. Other operations will be similar to what currently functions at the three existing sites. For example: Pack it in/pack it out, melting snow for water, propane cooking stoves and lanterns as a means to prepare meals and provide lighting, emergency and first aid information. If bears become an issue, Rendezvous will provide electric fencing to keep the bears from coming near the yurt.

At this point in time, no additional user days are necessary due to permittee’s existing permit. However, there is a chance in the future the permittee could be requesting an additional 75 user days to operate this yurt, this would require additional public scoping and NEPA for approval. There will be no guiding of clients at this yurt; it would simply be a rental yurt only to service the local community of cross country and backcountry skiers.

The proposed yurt location is in Teton County, Wyoming T. 44 N, R. 117 W, Sec 20.

Photo 2: Outhouse in background.  
Photo 3: Campground well-house power source.
**ISSUES**

Issues serve to highlight effects or unintended consequences that may occur from the proposed action, giving opportunities during the analysis to reduce adverse effects and compare trade-offs for the decision maker and public to understand.

The proponents have considered several options to provide new opportunities to their clients and the public. This location was felt to minimize concerns by placing the temporary facility in an already developed site and not creating new ground or wildlife disturbances.

The main concerns are to minimize any effects to wildlife and to address parking and other social concerns with the existing recreation use in Teton Canyon.

**DESIGN FEATURES FOR PROJECT**

- Locate yurt on existing concrete slab, no new soil disturbance.
- Motorized access for ingress and egress only.
- Facility will meet bear food storage requirements.
- Existing vault toilet will be utilized.
- Pellet stove will be primary heat source eliminating the need to cut firewood locally.

**DECISION FRAMEWORK**

The Teton Basin District Ranger will decide:

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

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

I am very interested in understanding any concerns or issues you may have with this proposal as they relate to the management of the resources and visitors to the Teton Basin Ranger District. The District is preparing a Decision Memo for this project and additional information regarding this action can be obtained from the office at 515 south main, Driggs Idaho or by contacting Kurt Kluegel at kkluegel@fs.fed.us.

In light of a recent court ruling (*Sequoia ForestKeeper v. Tidwell*, 11-cv-00679-LJO-DLB (E.D. Cal.)), the Forest Service will provide public notice, comment, and opportunity for administrative appeal for projects and activities documented with a “Decision Memo” (36 CFR 220.6(e)) until new instructions are issued by the Washington Office, or the Agency issues regulations addressing the Court’s ruling. In addition, the Forest Service will prepare Decision Memos and offer notice, comment and appeal opportunities for timber sales and proposed approvals of oil or gas exploration and development activities that rely upon Section 390 of the Energy Policy Act.
of 2005. Only those who provide comment or express interest in this proposal during this comment period will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations.

**How to Comment and Timeframe**

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the Post Register, Idaho Falls, Idaho. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted to:
Teton Canyon Yurt Proposal
Attn: Jay Pence
Teton Basin Ranger Station
P.O. Box 777
Driggs, ID 83422

Comment can be made in person at 515 South Main, or sent via Fax at (208)354-8505. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00-4:30 Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official’s office during normal business hours via telephone (208)354-2312 or in person, or at an official agency function (i.e. public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, pdf, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc or .docx) to kkluegel@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 215.6.

Additional information regarding this proposed project can be obtained from: Kurt Kluegel, at (208) 354-6615.

Sincerely,

JAY  PENCE
Teton Basin
District Ranger