Categorical Exclusion and Decision Memo

Teton Canyon Yurt Proposal

USDA Forest Service
Teton Basin Ranger District, Caribou/Targhee National Forest
Teton County, Wyoming
Boise Meridian, T. 44 N, R. 117 W, Sec 20

Decision

I have decided to approve allowing an existing outfitter and guide to locate and operate an additional yurt into their system. I have also decided to approve an additional 75 days of use for their permit to meet future demand. A permit amendment to increase use by 75 days will not occur until the permittee has exhausted all priority use and submitted a written request for additional priority use. The 20' yurt will be set on the existing Teton Canyon campground concrete pad. By utilizing the existing concrete pad, there will be no need to build any additional 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. Specific details will be agreed upon in the operating plan.

Clients would utilize the existing outhouse (Photo 1). The yurt permittee will be required to work with the campground concessionaire to maintain and pump this facility and pay for any electrical use (pump-house photo 2) commensurate with their use. This eliminates the potential to disturb soils or pollute groundwater. Permittee will utilize pellet or other heat source technology to further minimize the impact the surrounding landscape. The 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 2).

Vehicles will be limited to two cars per group in the Teton Canyon winter parking area to reduce the congestion at the trail head. The overnight group size will be limited to six to eight participants. Permittee will work with the local landowners in the area, Teton County Wyoming and the grooming contractor (currently Teton Valley Trails and Pathways) to insure that overnight parking does not interfere with snow plowing operations (again this should be documented in the Operating Plan). The permittee has committed to providing appropriate reimbursement for plowing costs associated with their activity.

Snow machines, which are legal in the area, shall only be allowed for ingress and egress using a route parallel to the groomed Nordic ski trail. Snow machines will not be allowed to use the Nordic ski trail. Yurt renters will be advised of this and it will be noted that the yurt is not used or intended for recreational snow machine riding. The Operating Plan will designate parking for vehicles that transport snowmobiles. Misuse of snow machines by the permittee or clients in this
congested canyon could lead to the authorization for snowmobile access to be removed from this permit.

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

The permittee will also have to comply with the food storage order for bears. Other yurt 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, either propane or electric cooking stoves and lanterns as a means to prepare meals and provide lighting.

**Purpose and Need for This Project**
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, including young families, 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).*

**Location of the Project and Description**
This project is located in Teton County, Wyoming T. 44 N, R. 117 W, Sec 20. (See project map) and attached pictures.

![Map of Teton Canyon Yurt Location](image)

Figure 1: Project Map
Agency and Public Involvement

A press release was published in the Valley Citizen on August 29, 2012 and also in the Teton Valley News on August 30, 2012. A public scoping meeting was held September 5, 2012 at the Driggs City Center. A Legal Notice was published September 8, 2012 in the Idaho Falls Post Register providing public notice of the opportunity to comment.

In response to the public scoping listed above, Teton Basin Ranger District received 3 comments in support of the yurt proposal and 1 comment that expressed concerns. The primary concern was additional use and noise in Teton Canyon and how it would affect a morning coffee break while in Teton Canyon.

On January 3, 2013 Teton Basin received a letter of concurrence from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the yurt proposal.

Consistency with Targhee Revised Forest Plan

Revised Targhee Forest Plan Direction (RFP)
The Forest Plan establishes long-term management direction for the Forest and contains management standards to achieve forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives. Ecological subsection and Management prescriptions were also established based on ecological units and management themes. Each subsection and associated management prescription has specific goals, objectives, and standards that supplement forest-wide standards listed in the Forest Plan.

Forest-Wide Guidance

Winter Recreation (RFP III-25)
- Provide a quality winter recreation experience while minimizing conflicts between motorized and non-motorized use and wintering big game (Goal). Mitigation has been included in the project design to minimize conflicts between user groups.
- Promote opportunities for backcountry winter recreation (Goal). This project will provide additional backcountry opportunities targeted specifically for families and the general public.
- Snowmachines, snowshoes, and dogsleds are prohibited within designated groomed cross-country ski areas (Standard). This project has mitigated this standard by not allowing ingress and egress of snowmobile access to the yurt to occur on the groomed Nordic trail.
- Those areas mapped as winter range on the RFP elk and deer range map are closed to cross-country snowmachine travel. This direction supersedes direction in access tables for individual prescriptions (Standard). This project avoids all RFP big game winter range.

**Outfitters and Guides (RFP III-27)**
- Outfitter and guide facilities in dispersed nonwilderness areas should be built in less frequented areas and be temporary. To prevent unacceptable resource damage or sanitation problems, facilities may be allowed at more heavily used locations. Only essential facilities should be provided at commercial outfitter camps in accordance with Greater Yellowstone Area Outfitter Policy camp standards (Goal). This project is located in a developed recreation facility (Campground), outside any dispersed nonwilderness area. The project location was selected to avoid unacceptable resource damage or sanitation issues by utilizing existing campground facilities (power and restrooms) and locating the yurt structure on an existing concrete group gathering site. This project approves only one structure (yurt) which is essential for overnight use and is a temporary structure.

**Teton Range Subsection Direction**

**Recreation (RFP III-56)**
- Provide for a variety of opportunities including motorized, nonmotorized, developed and dispersed recreation uses (Goal). This project is consistent with the stated goal.

**Management Prescription**
Management prescriptions, a set of management practices, are applied to a specific area of land to attain multiple-use and other goals and objectives. The purpose of management prescriptions is to provide a basis for consistently displaying management direction on Forest Service administered lands. Management prescriptions in the Forest Plan are intended to provide a general sense of the management direction or treatment of the land where each prescription is applied. They identify the emphasis and focus of multiple-use management activities in a specific area; however, emphasis, as used in this context, is defined as a focus or a highlight and does not necessarily mean exclusive use.

The management prescriptions found in the project area is Prescription 4.1 Developed Recreation Sites.
Prescription 4.1 Developed Recreation Sites (RFP III-125)

- Provide for a variety of concentrated public recreation uses in a roaded-natural setting based on the character of the areas and visitor’s needs (Goal). This project is intended to meet a visitor need (family accessible) that currently does not exist in the roaded-natural setting of the Teton Range.
- Protect and enhance a natural appearing environment within and adjacent to the existing sites to the extent possible while maintaining the existing array of developed recreation sites (Goal). This project will protect the natural appearing environment by the use of a heating source that will not produce visible smoke in the Teton Creek Drainage. The yurt structure will be a light color that will blend in with the surrounding snowpack and snow covered campground facilities.
- Avoid new construction on unstable or highly erosive soil (Goal). This project has been designed to have no impact on soils due to the use of an existing concrete pad.
- On new developments provide adequate vegetation filters to maintain and/or enhance riparian-dependent resources (Goal). This project will not produce sediment and is located outside and not adjacent to any riparian area. The yurt site is surrounded by an adequate vegetation filter.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is consistent with the Targhee Revised Forest Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with forest plan decisions for:

- Provide a quality winter recreation experience while minimizing conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized use and wintering big game (RFP III-25).
- Promote opportunities for backcountry winter recreation (RFP III-25).
- Avoid new construction on unstable or highly erosive soil (RFP III-126)
- On new developments provide adequate vegetation filters to maintain riparian dependent resources (RFP III-126)

Implementation Date

This project would be implemented as soon as the notice, and appeal process is completed. If no problems are encountered, the permittee could implement this project immediately following that process. It is anticipated that the permittee will be operating this new yurt beginning the fall/winter of 2013-2014.
Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. This decision is also subject to appeal under 36 CFR 251 (b) as it could affect an authorized use or occupancy of National Forest Lands. The holders of such authorizations (permittees) can choose to appeal under either 36 CFR 215 or 36 CFR 251, but not under both parts. The permittees must choose between 215 or 251. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. As the deciding officer, per 36 CFR 251.84 I am willing to meet with applicants or holders to discuss any concerns or issues related to this decision. Only individuals or organizations who submitted comments or otherwise expressed interest in the project during the comment period may appeal under 36 CFR 215. Appeals must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the publication of this legal notice in the Post Register, Idaho Falls, Idaho. This date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Timeframe information from other sources should not be relied on.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Kurt Kluegel, at PO Box 777, Driggs, Idaho, 83422. Or phone at 208-345-2312.

JAY PENCE  
District Ranger  

Feb 6, 2013  
Date

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