



News Release

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FINAL SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT: PROPOSED LAND EXCHANGE SHOULD NOT LEAD TO SIGNIFICANTLY GREATER BASE AREA DEVELOPMENT

ALTA, Wyo. – Nov. 26, 2002 – The proposed Squirrel Meadows-Grand Targhee land exchange is not expected to lead to significantly greater or quicker base area development, according to a final supplement to the environmental impact statement (SEIS) released electronically by the Forest Service.

The land exchange will ultimately protect prime grizzly bear and other wildlife habitat (deer, elk, sandhill cranes, trumpeter swans, spotted frogs, and several rare and sensitive plants) at Squirrel Meadows and within the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem grizzly bear recovery zone – a longstanding goal of the Forest Service, the National Park Service, Teton County, Wyo., Teton County, Idaho, and the environmental community.

“It is important to note that the purpose of the proposed land exchange has not changed and that this is not a new decision by the Forest Service,” said Grand Targhee general manager Larry Williamson. “The purpose is, first and foremost, to acquire the rare, wet meadow land and grizzly bear habitat at Squirrel Meadows that has been a priority of the Forest Service for more than two decades. Second, the land exchange (a proposed 400 acres of private land at Squirrel Meadows for 120 acres of FS land at the resort) will allow the Forest Service to concentrate on managing recreation at the resort rather than development, and the local community to be involved in the county planning process.”

While generally rejecting the legal challenge brought forward last year by some project opponents, the U.S. District Court for the District of Idaho did direct that additional information be provided on one limited issue: in the event that no land exchange occurs, the effect on future base area development that would result from the development

constraints that the Forest Service imposed as part of its 1994 Master Development Plan approval. The court noted that information on this subject was scattered throughout the EIS and should have been collected and discussed in connection with the no-action alternative.

“We believe that the Forest Service has directly addressed the issue of concern to the court,” Williamson said. “Based upon our initial review of the SEIS that the Forest Service has posted on its Web site, the further analysis that the Forest Service completed does not raise any new issues and the effects are very similar to those predicted in the original FEIS.”

The final SEIS projects that, under favorable market conditions, over the next decade Grand Targhee would develop 970 units with the land exchange and 686 units without the exchange. The difference amounts to only about five new households, or 13 new residents, per year. If market conditions are unfavorable, the SEIS projects that the level of development would decrease to 336 units with the exchange and 216 without the exchange. The difference similarly decreases to about four new households, or 10 new residents, per year.

While the development scenarios were prepared by the Forest Service, Grand Targhee has previously stated that it will not seek to develop more than 970 units with the land exchange and expects to develop 686 units without the exchange. Williamson concurred with the SEIS that the difference in the amount of development with and without a land exchange is unlikely to be significant:

"While it is possible that factors such as the national economy, weather conditions and market competition could slow the pace of development without a land exchange, the same effect would occur with a land exchange as well. In the real world, the number of units will be driven by our guests and the market, not whether or not an exchange occurs.

"The bottom line is that we remain committed to developing Targhee's base area in a manner that maintains its special character, better serves our guests, and protects the environment," Williamson added.

The final SEIS indicates that the population of Teton County, Idaho grew by more than 2,500 persons during the past decade, and projects that eastern Teton County's population will increase by another 2,000 residents during the next decade independent of any development at Grand Targhee. The final SEIS attributes this growth to lack of affordable housing in Teton County, Wyo., and strong demand for vacation and second homes, among other factors.

With respect to the four base area development constraints on which the court directed additional discussion, the final SEIS determines their effects are likely to mirror market conditions: they would not be restrictive in a strong market, but could be in a soft market. The final SEIS also notes that:

- The first condition requires that the amount of base area lodging not exceed the amount of lodging in the Valley. However, there are currently some 466 existing and approved lodging units in the Valley, which will allow Targhee to develop 370 units immediately under the Master Development Plan.
- The second condition requires that Targhee's winter lodging occupancy be at least 50 percent and indicate a trend to 65 percent during the next three years. Targhee has met this threshold because its occupancy rate has averaged 72.5 percent over the past five years.
- The third and fourth conditions are that financial feasibility and skier demand meet Forest Service approval. However, the Forest Service has already determined that Targhee's current ownership is financially strong and the financial feasibility of a particular project would be further confirmed by its ability to attract private capital.

Similarly, recent increases in visitation and Targhee's favorable market niche indicate that the skier demand requirement would be satisfied in the near term.

"The land exchange will assist us in becoming a true destination resort that provides a broader variety of lodging, dining, retail shops, and ownership opportunities," Williamson said. "Concentrating on today, exciting things continue to happen at Targhee. We had a strong summer season. Last winter we opened new lift-served terrain on Peaked Mountain, increasing our skiable acreage as well as allowing us to offer a more diverse ski experience. We were able to open early this season due to nearly 60 inches of snowfall at the beginning of the month. We are also continuing to work with both counties in Idaho and Wyoming, as well as through the Teton Area Advisory Forum (TAAF), for solutions to regional concerns."

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