

Notes from Teton Canyon Project Public Meeting

Facilitated by Teton Area Advisory Forum

August 21, 2013 - Driggs HS, 6-8pm

Randy Williams, TAAF

Introduction of TAAF and FS personnel. Provided an overview of TAAF's purpose and involvement; role in dealing with issues which affect the adjacent Teton counties of Idaho and Wyoming.

Steve Smutko, Univ of Wyoming Extension, Facilitator

Agenda: purpose of this meeting is to have public in attendance discuss and record what they believe should be the management objectives of this project. FS will give overview of why it feels this area needs to have a mgmt project and answer questions from members of the public.

Jay Pence, CTNF TBRD, District Ranger

Within area around Teton Cyn and area as a whole forest conditions have significantly changed since settlement. Change is normal, discussion good vs. bad depends on what values are being considered. Regardless of values the forest in this area is heavily influenced by fire, is adapted to cope with fire, but human use of the area has changed. FS has concerns about public safety with regards to the heavy use in the canyon and fire danger. Additionally there are wildlife habitat issues and forest health concerns.

At previous public meetings and field trips specialists have shown their areas of concern and options to mitigate those concerns. This is an opportunity for the public to list/voice their value/concerns about the canyon with regards to management and treatment options. The FS can then use this knowledge/insight when starting the NEPA analysis and designing a range of treatment alternatives.

Questions? - Answered by J. Pence and other members of FS staff present.

Q: Understand the concern about bighorn sheep habitat, what is the historical vs. current population level?

A: There are approx. 125 in the Teton Mtns, traditionally were many more but no good data on total numbers. Bighorn sheep are no longer coming down into lower elevation traditional winter range areas, but are staying up in more severe high elevation areas through the winter. Data from collared sheep shows that some still move through the area in the summer, but do not stay and use.

Q: Individual has a number of q. aspen at his home which are dying, is there a blight or something killing them?

A: Hard to say what specifically is killing individual trees without seeing them. There is no single large scale disease or insect causing aspen mortality like was seen in area with lodgepole pine & mtn pine beetle. Trees often die due a combination of factors as they age, as well as factors such as drought or injury.

Q: Does FS assume that a catastrophic fire will happen?

A: Fires will happen, no way to really predict when/how severe. Forest is changing in a way that makes severe fire behavior more likely. Treatment of area should lessen fire risk, as well as improve wildlife habitat and forest health.

Q: Can we do logging? Fewer trees on ridges for would decrease lightning strikes.

A: Logging is an option, but only in some areas. Much of the canyon is designated as wilderness or roadless, logging not an option there. Additionally, most of the canyon is very steep which would require very expensive specialized equipment and the value of the product which could be removed would not cover costs (additional \$ to cover difference not likely).

Q: Have seen log trucks leaving Boy Scout Camp area though.

A: There were a significant number of identified hazard trees which needed to be felled for safety of campers as part of their Special Use Permit. BSA paid FS for value of those trees which logger removed. BSA paid logger add'l \$ for a larger number of trees which were felled in the name of camper safety but had no commercial value.

Q: Why can't firewood cutting be used to reduce fire danger?

A: Current firewood cutting rules only allow the cutting of dead and/or down trees within 300' of open roads. The distance limit is for resource protection and stipulated under the Forest Plan, changing the distance is outside the scope of this project. The dead/down trees are not a significant component leading to the increased fire danger and wildlife habitat issue. However, under some of the treatment options available there would be additional firewood availability.

Q: Why not utilize/open some of the existing older roads/trails within the "Designated Roadless" areas, why is it "roadless" when there are roads?

A: The 2001 Roadless Rule was designed to protect designated areas from a proliferation of un-managed "splinter" roads and trails. The FS and states worked together to identify sensitive areas which were either currently un-roaded, or where existing roads/trails had been closed for resource protection. This designation precludes the building of new roads or opening of old roads, but allows many other management activities and public use. Changing of this designation is beyond the scope of this project.

Q: What would happen to the forest if we cut the conifers? Would it regenerate?

A: One of the treatment options considered is the cutting and/or use prescribed fire to eliminate some conifer and promote better aspen regeneration. This is just a change in forest type, and results in a forest which is more resistant to catastrophic fire as well as promoting better wildlife habitat and forest diversity/resiliency. Other types of treatments would change the conifer composition, but would be designed to promote natural regeneration or be planted if necessary.

Q: Where is the FS in the NEPA analysis process?

A: Have not yet started analysis, or even officially designated a project area/bdy. This and previous meetings are a precursor to the analysis. By listening to the ideas and concerns expressed by public the FS will be better able to design a project that is more aligned with public opinion.

Steve Smutko, Univ of Wyoming Extension, Facilitator and Small Group Facilitators

Step 1 – Discuss "What is important to you about Teton Canyon?" Public participants were presented copies of the value statements captured in the May forum and had a discussion at their tables about values and possible management treatments and objectives.

Step 2 – "What should be done?" Participants were asked to come up with objectives, try to use verb (i.e. improve, reduce, protect) and object (i.e. aspen stand, bighorn habitat, fire hazard). Each group had at their table a map of the project area, upon which they were asked to indicate possible treatments/objectives they desired on maps through the use of colored sticky dots to signify areas or marker drawn areas. Facilitators captured the map notations being indicated by the group on the maps in writing.