



File Code: 1950/2720

Date: September 20, 2019

Dear Interested Party:

You are receiving this letter to inform you of the Forest Service proposal to conduct initial scoping and ask for public comment on the proposal to authorize the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission (WGFC) to use National Forest System (NFS) land for operation of an elk feedground at Alkali Creek. The proposed action is to authorize WGFC to operate and maintain the feedground on NFS land at Alkali Creek for five years, the 2019-2024 feeding seasons, for emergency feeding only, to enable WGFC to phase out its use of the Alkali Creek Feedground. The Forest Service authorization would cover five acres in Sec. 23, T. 42 N., R. 113 W., 6<sup>th</sup> Principal Meridian.

**Proposed Action:**

The proposed action is to authorize the use of NFS land at the Alkali Creek Feedground primarily for feed storage and to feed elk only in emergencies for the 2019-2024 feeding seasons. The criteria for emergency feeding includes:

- If a significant elk damage or elk/livestock co-mingling situation develops on nearby private land and it is deemed necessary to feed in order to draw and keep elk away from the conflict on private land; or
- If it becomes necessary to catch or stop a large down drainage movement of elk from Patrol Cabin or Fish Creek elk feedgrounds; or
- If there are large numbers of elk, in excess of 300, staged at Alkali Creek, feeding has been initiated at Patrol Cabin and Fish Creek Feedgrounds, and the elk at Alkali Creek are not dispersing to other feedgrounds; and
- The authorized officer of the Forest Service concurs that one of these emergency situations exists and approves initiation of emergency feeding, including when emergency feeding must cease.

The objective of this proposal is to phase out elk feeding on NFS land at Alkali Creek so elk do not remain or become habituated to feeding at this location, and to draw elk to the Patrol Cabin Feedground as soon as possible if emergency feeding is initiated. At the conclusion of five years, this authorization may be renewed for one additional five year period, if necessary, to complete the plan to eliminate feeding at Alkali Creek Feedground

The authorized facilities at the Alkali Creek Feedground include one elk tagging corral, one horse corral, one tack shed, one hay stack yard containing two haysheds, and a water facility, occupying approximately 1 acres of NFS land. The remaining 4 acres of NFS land may be used for dispersed emergency spot feeding within the historic feedground permit area, minimizing the concentration of elk at any one feeding location within this limited area and would include permitting the use of the route between Alkali Creek Feedground and Patrol Cabin Feedground



to draw elk to Partol Cabin from Alkali Creek. Use of the infrastructure at Alkali Creek Feedground will be phased out over the permit term so that all improvements associated with the feedground will be removed from NFS lands upon expiration of the authorization in 2024.

**Purpose and Need:**

Supplemental feeding of elk (*Cervus elaphus*) began in northwestern Wyoming in the early 1900s. This was in response to large-scale winter die-offs. Many feedgrounds were consequently established in the 1940's and 1950's to prevent elk from entering private lands and damaging stored crops.

In 2007, BTNF began an environmental analysis to determine whether or not to authorize WGFC to continue the use of NFS land for six feedgrounds on the Forest. In 2008, a decision was made to authorize the continued use of NFS lands for WGFC to operate five feedgrounds on NFS land. The decision to authorize continued use of NFS land at the Alkali Creek Feedground was postponed because the use was authorized through 2011, and additional information was needed concerning the location of the Gros Ventre Wilderness boundary and vegetative effects adjacent to the feedground inside the wilderness. After supplemental environmental analysis and decision-making was completed, BTNF issued a Record of Decision (ROD) late in 2015 deciding authorized continued use of NFS land at Alkali Creek Feedground. In 2016, the special use authorization, for the five feedgrounds that were authorized in 2008, was amended to add Alkali Creek Feedground.

In September 2018, the U.S. District Court for the District of Wyoming vacated the 2015 ROD, and remanded the BTNF's "decision to amend the existing 2008 long-term special use permit to reauthorize the continued use of National Forest System lands for winter elk feedground activities at the Alkali Creek Feedground." In 2018, WGFC applied for and received authorization to operate and maintain the Alkali Creek Feedground for the 2018-2019 season. This allowed BTNF and WGFC time to develop a proposal for future authorization of NFS land at the Alkali Creek for the 2019-2020 season and beyond.

The proposed action provides management flexibility while allowing WGFC adequate opportunity to phase out feeding on NFS land at the Alkali Creek Feedground. The proposed action will provide for management of potential disease impacts to livestock allowing WGFC to continue to manage elk conflicts on private land in the short term while transitioning to a different strategy, and provide an opportunity for elk to transition to native winter range over time, although it is recognized elk will likely move to a different feedground.

My preliminary assessment is that this project falls within the following category of actions listed in the Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Handbook, FSH 1909.15, CHAPTER 30-- section 32.12 **(3) Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of NFS lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land** [36 CFR 220.6(e)(3)]

The proposed action, purpose and need, and map of the project area are enclosed for your review and input. If you have information you feel the Forest Service may not be aware of, or you feel you have issues regarding potential effects of the proposed action, please send those issues in

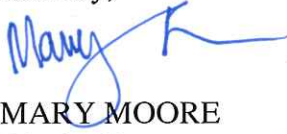
writing, including attachments, via mail, express delivery, or messenger to: Mary Moore, District Ranger, USDA Forest Service, Jackson Ranger District, PO Box 1689, Jackson, WY 83001; Faxed to: 307-739-5450; emailed to [comments-intermtn-bridger-teton-jackson@usda.gov](mailto:comments-intermtn-bridger-teton-jackson@usda.gov) or by hand delivery to 340 North Cache Street, Jackson, WY 83001 during normal business hours (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays). Comments should be received by the end of the day, **October 18, 2019** in order to be most helpful in the analysis. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets.

To receive information on this project and/or other projects on the Bridger-Teton National Forest, you can self-subscribe to our mailing list by following this link <https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/btnf/landmanagement/projects>. On the right-side of the page under "Sign up for NEPA Project Information" enter your email address and then submit the request. You will then be able to sign up for updates or access your subscriber preferences.

If you have questions about the proposed project, or would like more information, please contact Karen Kanen, Special Uses Permit Administrator, at [karen.kanen@usda.gov](mailto:karen.kanen@usda.gov) or 307-739-5597.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information and for your continued interest in the management of National Forest System lands.

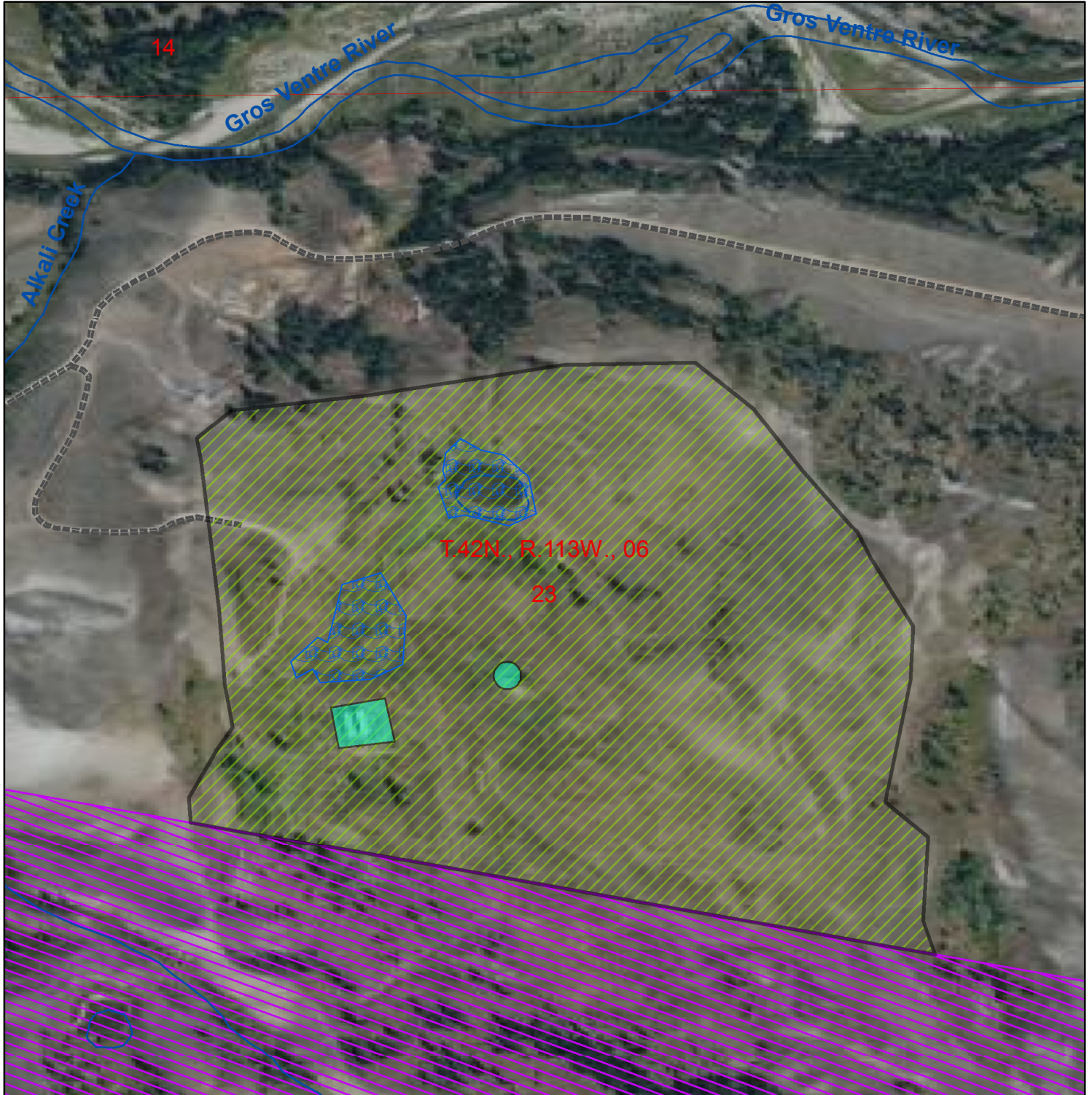
Sincerely,



MARY MOORE  
District Ranger



**Special Use Authorization - Appendix A**  
**Bridger-Teton National Forest, Jackson Ranger District**



**Authorization Information**

Name: Wyoming Game & Fish Commission  
 Authorization ID: TBD  
 Primary Use Code: 232  
 Use Code Name: Corral, Pen & Livestock Area  
 Expiration Date: TBD  
 Residence Tract/Lot: N/A  
 Legal Description: T. 42N., R. 113W., Sec. 23  
 Road Number(s): N/A

**Disclaimer**

The USDA Forest Service makes no warranty, expressed or implied regarding the data displayed on this map, and reserves the right to correct, update, modify, or replace this information without notification.

**Legend**



- Wetlands**
- Alkali Barns & Corral**
- Alkali Historic Feedground**
- Gros Ventre Road**
- Gros Ventre Wilderness**



**WYOMING**  
Teton County

