

Summary of the Teton County, ID virtual Town Hall about the proposed Grand Targhee expansion

Nearly 100 people attended the virtual Town Hall Meeting hosted by Teton County, Idaho on December 17th to learn about the proposed expansion at Grand Targhee Resort. Representatives from Grand Targhee Resort; the National Forest Service; Teton County, Idaho and Wyoming Board of County Commissioners and Planning Departments presented a variety of topics relating to the proposed expansion, which were followed by a Q&A session. Opening statements from Commissioner Cindy Riegel emphasized that learning was the primary goal of the Town Hall. The Town Hall called together the parties involved in the varying aspects of the proposed expansion to explain and clarify the complexities about the proposed and approved expansions on public and private land.

The presentations and associated questions from the Q&A session are summarized below. For an audio recording of the entire meeting, [click here](#).

Mountain Experience

Geordie Gillet, owner and Chief Executive Officer of Grand Targhee Resort

- While the base of the resort is on private land in Wyoming (120 acres) and governed by its own recently approved Master Development Plan, also called the Planned Unit Development, the bulk of the resort is on Forest Service land (~2,300 acres) and falls under a separate Master Development Plan that is currently under NEPA review and being analyzed through an environmental impact statement (EIS) by the Caribou Targhee National Forest.
- Gillet stated that Targhee was never intended to be the “locals’ best kept secret,” but emphasized the importance of Comfortable Carrying Capacity (CCC) within the proposed development to avoid “jam[ming] the mountain full of people”. (The proposed CCC in the Master Development Plan more than doubles the current skier capacity from 3,000 to ~6,200 skiers/day)
- Gillet stated that he feels that he has gone “above and beyond” in adhering to the county’s Land Development Regulations (LDR’s), which regulate any development that occurs on the private base area in the jurisdiction of Teton County, WY.

Q: If Targhee isn't meant to be a local secret, then can you share a resort of a similar scale that you would compare it to? How do you envision it continuing to serve our local community?

A: Gillet: Wasn't established as a city park or county park, like Bridger Bowl. It was established to be a resort and drive business here. Unique opportunity to learn from other resorts and do it differently. Vision is to serve both locals and visitors.

Follow Up: Riegel: You might also want to touch on skier density; what is your vision for that?

A: Gillet: I would love to load up a couple buses to see what other resorts are providing locals and to see the quality of our product. We are putting out a product / experience that is embraceable from a scale standpoint, but "we don't set our sights to be 42nd best at what we do." We want to be "the best that we can be." Conflict between being bummed out when the parking lot is full, and realizing that that is what we're trying to do. Want the area to be less boom and bust.

Q: How important is CCC in your decision making?

A: Don Dressler USFS: It is a component of what we call the balance of facilities. You need to have an appropriate level of facilities to CCC and services provided.

Q: *What is the difference between summer and winter impacts?*

A: Gillet: Much less due to Targhee, I think summer is much bigger growth area and driven primarily by Jackson side (parks, travel patterns, etc.). Biggest issue with socio-economic study – we are certainly a part of it, but I think it should look at regional conversation rather than singling us out.

Natural Resources

Don Dressler, Regional Chief for Ski Resort Administration at United State Forest Service

- NEPA process began when a notice of intent of the expansion was published in 2020, which initiated a public scoping period from August to October 2020. Information gathered in the scoping period is being used to draft an environmental impact statement (DEIS), which is slated to be released in late spring 2022. SE Group has been contracted to draft the EIS.
- The DEIS will evaluate alternative ways to meet the proposal's purpose and need and allow the public to assess the proposal's environmental impacts. When the DEIS becomes available, the public will have an opportunity to comment over a minimum 90-day period.
- The final environmental impact statement (FEIS) will consider comments made during the DEIS comment period.
- Forest Service officials pointed to SE Group's [website](#) as the best resource for learning more about the proposal and NEPA process.

Q: *Is there a mitigation plan for wildlife impacts, and who would be responsible for enacting it?*

A: Jay Pence, District Ranger CTNF USFS: Typically mitigations are included in the EIS, though sometimes development results in an irretrievable commitment of resources.

Q: *How do you plan to protect dark night skies with on-mountain amenities?*

A: Gillet: There is no such thing as an invisible ski resort. There are inevitable impacts when you build a chairlift or road or other amenities. I live here, I am a resident – I have no intention of putting a spotlight on the top of the mountain. We are subject to LDR's at the base area, which I think is a real testament of Teton County, WY looking out for greater area.

Q: *Is the Grand Teton population sheep study (affecting mostly the backcountry skiing community) going to be considered in the EIS?*

A: Pence: Of course. That is part of the EIS process and has consistently been an issue that is being studied.

Q: *Does the Forest Service have an obligation to approve proposed expanded development on public land so that a leasee's profitability will be improved?*

A: Dressler: There is no obligation to approve a proposed action. We will consider how the action meets the purpose and need and any effects associated with a decision.

Planning

Hamilton Smith, Principle Planner for Teton County, Wyoming

- Development of the base area is managed by an already approved Master Development Plan that is separate from the Plan currently under NEPA review by the Caribou Targhee National Forest. The Planned Unit Development (PUD) is the document that brings the revised 2008 Master Development Plan into the current regulatory world.
- No changes to shape or size of resort parcel; number of dwelling units permitted; commercial square footage allowed or transportation goals; and permitted Allowed Peak Occupancy was adopted between the 2008 and current Plan.
- At each step in development, scrutiny and approval by Teton County, WY is repeated and regular, and there will be an opportunity for public comment on every board level decision. If the on-mountain development is approved in the EIS, the resort will apply to Teton County, WY for any expanded services, such as parking or transportation, at the base area to support the new development permitted by the Forest Service.

Q: Could Hamilton provide details on Emergency Management Plan?

A: Smith: Admittedly lacks depth. Original onus is on developer to write document as part of application for original plat.

Q: Can Teton County, WY clarify what annual monitoring is?

A: Smith: Monitoring of so many aspects of base area development, a little random in terms of sequencing. I hesitate to answer now, but feel free to reach out for a formal and accurate answer.

Q: In the Teton County Land Development Regulations, under the Grand Targhee Resort Section, it states that no part of the 120 acres of the private base area is in the Natural Resource Overlay (NRO). It is unclear why that is, as the NRO boundary goes just beneath the base area, covering identical habitat. Will WY planning staff please explain? Was the decision to omit the base area from the overlay and from any environmental assessments made in negotiations during the Teton Creek Corridor Project?

A: Smith: These decisions predate my involvement, but the base area is outside of the Natural Resource Overlay, as stated. It is also clearly stated that environmental analysis is not required for development within the PUD zone. It is not just the NRO that would require an EA, or a mitigation requirement if there are impacts to be found, that can be triggered through other County means as well. No, the NRO line is from a decision dating back to 1994, so it predates the Teton Creek corridor project. The NRO was also reviewed in 2016 when Planning Staff reconsidered whether EAs would be required or not after an environmental analysis had been done.

Community Resources and Socio-economic Impacts

Rob Marin, GIS Manager for Teton County, Idaho

- The Targhee expansion concerns two Master Development Plans under two different jurisdictions. The Master Development Plan under NEPA review by the Forest Service addresses development on public land, while the Master Development Plan under the Planned Unit Development (PUD) approval process addresses private land, as described by Hamilton Smith.

- The group preparing the EIS has indicated that impacts at the base are outside of its scope, but the interdisciplinary group hired by Teton County, ID and WY County Commissioners to analyze potential impacts feels that the base and on mountain expansions need to be considered in tandem.
- Targhee's situation between two states is unique: while Targhee is located in Wyoming, the impacts of the expansion on labor, housing, public service, taxes, infrastructure, and transportation will largely fall on towns and communities in Idaho.
- Upon completion, the interdisciplinary group's study will describe how positive and negative impacts are distributed, in short, who are the "winners" and "losers" of this expansion and will be submitted as an official comment by Teton County, ID on the DEIS.

Q: I'm eager to see EcoNorthwest study; how will Teton County be able to keep with increased services (road, roads, waste, etc.) without some additional and yet to be identified revenue sources?

A: Riegel: What we are trying to get at with consultant, in many ways.

A: Doug Self (working closely on transportation with Geordie): I see it as a tremendous opportunity to work together as a region to address housing, transportation, all the things. There is a lot to do, regardless of what happens with EIS, and it's great that conversation has reached this point.

Q: If Teton County, ID is a cooperating agency on EIS, then why won't the socio-economic study be formally included in the EIS?

A: Marin, Riegel: Some things are outside scope of NEPA, so we are looking into it on our own to help us inform our comments on the DEIS. It will be submitted that way.

Q: What is the dollar amount of 100% tax revenue from development of base area going to Teton County, WY?

A: Riegel: We have asked our consultant, but anyone can take a shot at it. May just be a wait and see.

Q: What is Teton County, ID doing to become a "resort district" to help with the tax issues?

A: Bob: Idaho statute allows for cities like Driggs and Victor to obtain "resort city" status. This allows them to collect additional sales taxes within each city. There is no similar provision in Idaho law to allow counties to do something similar.

Q: It has been described that Eco Northwest will report on all of the challenges and limitations related to generating tax revenue to cover costs of impacts. Will Eco Northwest also thoroughly investigate existing opportunities for potential tax revenue such as local option tax revenue?

A: Marin: We would like them to do that, but cities have options, though the county is limited.

Riegel: We've had a lot of conversations about existing constraints. It's political, so from my perspective, when every single year we discuss how to get legislature to think more open mindedly about local option taxes. No counties are currently allowed, but resort cities are. We are working on that as a board, though chances are slim that it will happen anytime soon.