

## 2. DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 provides detailed descriptions of the alternatives analyzed and summarizes the environmental consequences anticipated to result from implementing each of them. As required by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 CFR 1502.14), the alternatives are presented in comparative form.

### RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES

“Range of alternatives” refers to the alternatives discussed in this document; it includes all reasonable alternatives, which must be rigorously explored and objectively evaluated, as well as any other alternatives that were considered but have been eliminated from detailed study. By definition, “reasonable” includes those alternatives that are practical or feasible from the technical, economic, and pragmatic standpoint. Both CEQ Regulations and Forest Service Handbook direction emphasize that alternatives must meet the “reasonableness” criteria in order to warrant detailed analysis.<sup>1</sup>

The process used to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action followed the public and internal scoping process. Comments and issues raised during the scoping process (detailed in Chapter 1) were reviewed by a Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team). As a result, a third alternative was formulated in addition to the Proposed Action and the required No Action Alternative,<sup>2</sup> and is detailed below.

#### **Alternative 1 – No Action**

Under the No Action Alternative, the Forest Service would not reissue JHMR’s OG SUP for guided backcountry skiing on Teton Pass or in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon areas. As such, JHMR’s guided backcountry services in these areas would cease after December 31, 2004.

#### **Alternative 2 – The Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action would entail issuing a new five-year SUP allowing JHMR to provide guided backcountry skiing services on the eastern side of Teton Pass and in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area contiguous to the existing JHMR developed ski area.

A relatively large area is needed in order to accommodate guided backcountry skiing throughout the winter seasons and various snow conditions, as well as allow flexibility to avoid impacts to resources and other recreationists. The guides are responsible for informing and educating the clients to specific information pertaining to safe and efficient travel unique to the backcountry.

Currently, JHMR conducts guided backcountry skiing on two separate portions of the Jackson Ranger District: 1) immediately south of the existing developed ski area in the Rock Springs-

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<sup>1</sup> 46 Fed. Reg. 18026 (Mar. 23, 1981), as amended by 51 Fed. Reg. 15618 (Apr. 25, 1986)

<sup>2</sup> 40 CFR 1502.14(d)

Jensen Canyon area (approximately 2,146 acres); and 2) on the north and south sides of Teton Pass including Phillips Canyon to the north and Black Canyon to the south (approximately 1,874 acres). Operated through the JHMR ski school, the guided skiing service typically hosts groups ranging from six-to-eight clients per group. JHMR's existing OG SUP allows for a maximum of 300 total service days, of which no more than 50 may be used in the Teton Pass areas.

JHMR has proposed that a total of 900 service days be authorized under the new OG SUP, maintaining the condition that no more than 50 of the service days may be used in the Teton Pass areas. The operating season for the JHMR guided backcountry service is proposed to run from approximately December 1<sup>st</sup> to April 15<sup>th</sup> annually.

The OG SUP boundaries for the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon and Teton Pass areas are depicted in figures 2-1 and 2-2, respectively.

### **Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon Area**

Although the total annual service days for the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area are proposed to increase from 300 to 900, the 2,146-acre permitted area for guided backcountry services in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area is not proposed to change.

### **Teton Pass**

While a boundary modification is proposed for the Teton Pass portion of the permit, no change in annual service days is proposed. Annual service days would continue to be limited to a maximum of 50. Any service days used in the Teton Pass areas would be deducted from the total service days (900) allowed under the proposed permit.

On Teton Pass, the portion of the existing guiding permit which lies to the west of the Pass (on the CTNF) would be removed. Under the Proposed Action, the permitted use areas on the eastern side of Teton Pass would be enlarged to include the lower portions of Black Canyon and Triple Direct, including run-outs to the bottom of the Pass at Old Pass Road/Trail Creek Trailhead. Overall, the Teton Pass/Black Canyon permit area is proposed to increase by approximately 554 acres –from 1,096 acres under the current permit to 1,650 acres proposed.

Additionally, the current JHMR SUP allows for guiding services on approximately 778 acres to the north of Highway 22 in the Phillips Canyon/Ski Lake areas. Under the Proposed Action, this use area would be reduced by 576 acres to approximately 202 acres.

In total, the revised Teton Pass permitted guiding area would be *reduced* in size by approximately 22 acres (refer to Table 2-1).

Concentrating the JHMR guiding operations on the eastern side of Teton Pass would serve two primary goals: 1) this terrain is considered to be more appropriate for JHMR clientele, and would shift some use away from the popular Edelweiss area on the west side of the Pass; and 2) extending the JHMR permitted area to the bottom of the Pass would allow JHMR to offer more than “yo-yo” skiing to its clients – i.e., clients could ski the entire vertical extent of the Pass instead of repeat hiking/skiing confined to the upper elevations of the Pass.

JHMR would continue to primarily utilize a shuttle van to transport guests between the top and bottom of the Pass and would only occasionally need to park a vehicle at the top of the pass.

**Figure 2-1: Proposed Action – Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon Area**

**Figure 2-2: Proposed Action – Teton Pass Area**

### **Alternative 3 – Elimination of the Teton Pass Portion of the OG SUP**

An examination of the issues raised during public scoping revealed that the local backcountry skiing public is deeply concerned with the overall management of backcountry use and opportunities on Teton Pass. Due to the enormous popularity of Teton Pass as a backcountry skiing destination, this area receives heavy use and experiences considerable congestion both at parking areas and within the available terrain. In deference to these public concerns, a third alternative was created that would eliminate all JHMR guiding on Teton Pass, addressing this key issue. Under Alternative 3, the proposed 900 annual service days would be concentrated in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area adjacent to the JHMR's Ski Area SUP boundary. Thus, the OG SUP boundary in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area would include a total of 2,146 acres. Because the spatial extent of the OG SUP under Alternative 3 would be identical to the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area in Alternative 2 (Figure 2-1), inclusion of a map is omitted here.

### **Alternatives and Design Elements Considered But Eliminated from Further Analysis**

When scoped in January 2003, the Proposed Action included construction of a yurt in the Phillips Canyon/Ski Lake area with the intent of hosting occasional overnight stays and to provide day users a place in which to escape the elements. Based on overwhelming public sentiment, the Forest Service and JHMR collectively decided to remove the yurt from the Proposed Action. Therefore, the originally proposed yurt is no longer subject to approval by the decision maker.

# COMPARISON OF CONSEQUENCES BY ALTERNATIVE

Table 2-1 provides a comparison of project elements between the three alternatives and the current conditions.

**Table 2-1  
Alternatives Matrix**

Project Component	Current Condition	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
<b>Total Annual Service Days Authorized</b>	300	0	900	900
<b>Annual Service Days Allowable at Teton Pass</b>	50	0	50	0
<b>Annual Service Days Allowable at Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon Area</b>	300	0	900 <sup>a</sup>	900
<b>Acreage in OG SUP</b>				
Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon	2,146	0	2,146	2,146
Phillips Canyon	778	0	202	0
Teton Pass to Black Canyon	1,096	0	1,650	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,020</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,998</b>	<b>2,146</b>
<b>Guided Backcountry Skiing on Teton Pass</b>	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>Guided Backcountry Skiing in Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon Area</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

<sup>a</sup>Total allowable annual service days in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area would be 900 minus service days used on Teton Pass.

For the purpose of comparison, the environmental consequences associated with implementation of the previously described alternatives are summarized in Table 2-2. For detailed discussions of potential effects resulting from implementation of either of the alternatives, including cumulative effects, see Chapter 3 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences.

**Table 2-2  
Summary Comparison of Environmental Consequences**

ALTERNATIVE 1	ALTERNATIVE 2	ALTERNATIVE 3
<b>RECREATION</b>		
<p>JHMR's contribution to use of Teton Pass and the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area for backcountry skiing would be eliminated.</p> <p>Under all alternatives, including No Action, the dangers of backcountry travel would persist; however, selection of the No Action Alternative would perpetuate them with one less outfitter and guide service in operation.</p>	<p>Given the historically high utilization of the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon and Teton Pass areas for backcountry skiing, the proposed 200 percent increase in annual service days is considered inconsequential and is not likely to adversely affect the overall backcountry experience.</p> <p>While non-guided backcountry use far exceeds guided use in the Teton Range, the 12 backcountry guide services that are currently in operation offer an option for those who lack backcountry skills and/or who are unfamiliar with the area.</p>	<p>The potential effects to the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area under this alternative are indistinguishable from the Proposed Action.</p> <p>Removing JHMR's 50 annual service days from the Teton Pass area would not quantifiably affect (i.e., benefit) the recreational experience there given high guided and unguided utilization, although it may be perceived to be a benefit by some members of the public.</p>
<b>SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES</b>		
<p>No benefits to other commercial outfitters have been identified with revocation of JHMR's OG SUP. On Teton Pass, JHMR contributes approximately 1.2 percent of the total service days allocated by the Forest Service. In the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area, JHMR and AAI are not competing for similar clientele.</p>	<p>The increase in annual service days is not anticipated to shift business from other guide services. Continuation of 50 annual service days at Teton Pass represents a continuation of the current condition there, and the majority of JHMR's guided backcountry clientele in Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon is assumed to already be at the developed ski area.</p>	<p>Under Alternative 3, the effects to the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area would be similar to the Proposed Action. The Teton Pass portion of the OG SUP would be excluded from Alternative 3, and the other guide services would continue to operate at levels following historic trends.</p>
<b>WILDLIFE AND VEGETATION</b>		
<p>Given the historically and projected high utilization of the currently permitted areas for guided and non-guided backcountry skiing, no effects to habitat or TES species would occur with revocation of JHMR's OG SUP.</p>	<p>Selection of the Proposed Action <b>may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect</b> either grizzly bear or Canada lynx (both threatened) and would not result in a trend toward listing of any R4 sensitive species.</p>	<p>Selection of Alternative 3 <b>may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect</b> either grizzly bear or Canada lynx (both threatened) and would not result in a trend toward listing of any R4 sensitive species.</p>
<b>PARKING AND TRAFFIC</b>		
<p>Revocation of JHMR's OG SUP would not positively or negatively affect parking or traffic patterns along Highway 22 to Teton Pass.</p>	<p>Because 50 service days per season on Teton Pass amounts to approximately ten shuttle buses per season (based on groups of five) operating between the top and bottom of Teton Pass, JHMR's potential annual contribution to parking congestion would be inconsequential.</p>	<p>Revocation of JHMR's OG SUP for Teton Pass would not noticeably affect parking or traffic patterns along Highway 22.</p>

## **MITIGATION MEASURES AND MONITORING REQUIREMENTS**

1. Guided backcountry skiing and snowboarding operations will be conducted during daylight hours between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., when Canada lynx are least active.
2. Vegetated areas, especially along creeks or streams and dense conifer stands that may provide habitat for snowshoe hare, will be avoided.
3. Should any nest, den, or other important sites for any TES species be identified within the OG SUP area, additional evaluation, analysis and restrictions may be needed during specific sensitive time periods to minimize disturbance. Any such future stipulations would be made in coordination with state game agencies, the permittee, and in consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and would become part of the OG SUP. If a wolverine, wolf or bear den is discovered, skiers will maintain a 0.5 mile distance from it until a USFWS determination is made.
4. The Forest Service requests that JHMR report any sightings of gray wolf, Canada lynx, bear, wolverine or suspect snow digging activity within 24 hours, and report on any sightings of bighorn sheep or mountain goat. Reports of other species will be welcomed also, especially raptors and owls.