

3C. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES

SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

The scope of this social and economic analysis focuses on guided and non-guided backcountry skiing use of NFS lands administered by the Jackson Ranger District. This analysis focuses on the portions of the BTNF that are under a SUP to conduct outfitter and guide operations by JHMR. Because the existing and proposed JHMR OG SUPs overlap permits issued to other commercial guiding services, this analysis discusses the existing and potential socioeconomic effects of JHMR's allocation of annual service days on other guide services authorized on the Jackson Ranger District.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A total of 12 outfitter and guide operations are currently permitted to provide guided backcountry skiing on the Jackson Ranger District. A total of 6,041 annual service days¹ are allocated to these operations by the Jackson Ranger District on the Teton Pass area and in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon areas. Ten of these guides operate exclusively on Teton Pass, with only JHMR and American Avalanche Institute (AAI) operating on both Teton Pass and in Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area.² The 6,041 annual service days allocated to winter outfitter and guide operations on the Jackson Ranger District, relative to all permitted winter use (almost half a million) in the area, are considered negligible contributors to the Teton County economy.

Both Teton Pass and the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon areas receive high levels of backcountry use – particularly during December and January. The majority of this use comes from non-guided backcountry skiers. Refer to the Recreation Analysis in Section B for more information on guided and non-guided recreational activities that occur in the analysis area. In particular, Table 3B-1 in the Recreation section details the annual service days allocated to each commercial guide, as well as actual days used between 1999 and 2003.

Between 1999 and 2003, actual use of authorized annual service days among the 12 outfitter and guide operations averaged approximately 50 percent of the total 6,041 days allocated. Of its authorized 300 annual service days, JHMR averaged 491 service days between 1999 and 2003 – a utilization rate of 164 percent (additional services days were authorized on a case-by-case basis). While JHMR's *authorized* contribution to the combined annual service days among the 12 outfitter and guides is five percent (300 of 6,041), JHMR's *actual percent use* for the same period averaged 16 percent (491 of 3,010). Discounting JHMR's contribution to permitted and utilized annual service days

¹ Jackson Hole Ski Club has a permit to groom a ski trail on the Forest adjacent to the Trail Creek Ranch for training purposes, and for Nordic race events. This is not a commercial use permit, but it does represent permitted winter recreational use within the BTNF.

² AAI uses these the areas to conduct avalanche safety courses.

on the Jackson Ranger District, the remaining 11 outfitter and guides averaged a 44 percent utilization rate between 1999 and 2003 (2,519 of 5,741).

JHMR's maximum allowable 50 annual service days for Teton Pass represents approximately 0.9 percent of the combined 5,791 annually authorized service days allocated on the Jackson Ranger District for that area. However, as the Recreation analysis shows, JHMR has never approached full utilization of its 50 annual service days at Teton Pass, and JHMR's contribution to backcountry use of Teton Pass area is negligible.

Operated as a portion of the ski school, the JHMR guided backcountry service typically hosts groups ranging from six-to-eight clients per group. Fourteen backcountry guides are employed by JHMR for the provision of these services. Because the guides are required to have experience unique to backcountry guiding/mountaineering, the guides are not typically utilized within the regular JHMR ski school program. As such, the seasonal employment of the guides is dependent upon the success of the guiding program.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Direct and Indirect Effects

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under Alternative 1, the Forest Service would not renew JHMR's OG SUP. This would result in combined annual service days allocated to the remaining 11 outfitter and guide operations totaling 5,741 (a reduction of 300). AAI would remain as the sole outfitter and guide operating in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area.

JHMR's historic contribution to annual backcountry utilization of Teton Pass – both guided and non-guided – can rationally be discounted in light of overall high use of this area (refer to the Recreation Section 3B for additional details). Furthermore, due to the inherent difference in services provided by JHMR and AAI in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area, the potential for AAI to absorb JHMR's 300 annual service days is low.

Demand for and utilization of guided backcountry skiing services on the Jackson Ranger District is anticipated to increase over time. However, as these activities become more mainstream with increasing demand, the 11 remaining outfitter and guide operations are expected to expand, with an average minimum of approximately 44 percent³ utilization of their annually authorized service. As noted within the Recreation Section, it is conceivable that the remaining 11 outfitter guides would absorb a portion of JHMR's existing guided clientele, thereby affecting a shift of guided use from the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area to Teton Pass as the remaining outfitter and guides seek to utilize a larger portion of their authorized service days.

³ This is based on the past five years of data, for the other 11 outfitter and guide services.

This socioeconomic analysis indicates that selection of Alternative 1 would not be expected to measurably affect (i.e., improve or reduce) the economic viability of the remaining 11 outfitter and guide operations on the Jackson Ranger District. Consequently, selection of Alternative 1 would not have potential to affect the economic character of the area.

As previously discussed, 14 backcountry guides are employed by JHMR, for the provision of guiding services. Because the guides are required to have experience unique to backcountry guiding/mountaineering, the guides are not typically utilized within the regular JHMR ski school program. As such, the seasonal employment for most of the guides is dependent upon the success of the guiding program. Under the No Action Alternative, those guides that are not otherwise employed for other ski area functions (e.g., ski school) would be required to find other seasonal employment.

Alternative 2 – The Proposed Action

Reissuing a five-year OG SUP to JHMR with an authorization for an additional 600 annual service days would equate to a 200 percent increase over the 300 days currently available to JHMR. However, when compared to JHMR's average utilization between 1999 and 2003 (491 annual service days), the Proposed Action represents an 83 percent increase.

As proposed, the maximum of 50 annual service days available to JHMR at Teton Pass represents no change from historic authorizations. As such, JHMR's future use of Teton Pass under the Proposed Action would be expected to resemble historic utilization, and the full utilization of these 50 days would likely not be achieved on an annual basis. Therefore, this analysis indicates that JHMR's proposed utilization of Teton Pass would not affect other commercial guide services also operating on Teton Pass in a socioeconomic sense.

Likewise, there is no anticipated detrimental effect to AAI within the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area with the implementation of the Proposed Action. The backcountry experiences afforded to clients of JHMR and AAI are inherently different. AAI's program consists of varying levels of avalanche learning and fieldwork. A goal for many participants in the AAI program is to work towards the American Mountain Guides Association certification.⁴ As discussed previously, JHMR's backcountry program offers advanced skiers the ability to discover untracked snow and diverse terrain while teaching the skills necessary for a safe backcountry experience. The AAI program is more focused on avalanche training, education and forecasting and is more course/certification driven. Therefore, increasing JHMR's authorized service days in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area would not detract from AAI's business opportunities.

⁴ See <http://www.avalanchecourse.com/>

While selection of the Proposed Action would benefit JHMR economically, as stated the combined services offered by the 12 outfitter and guide operations do not measurably affect the Teton County economy. Selection of the Proposed Action would not affect the economic character of Teton County.

As evidenced by JHMR's previous five seasons of actual utilization in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area, the Proposed Action responds to a demonstrated need/demand for guided backcountry skiing in this area. Potential clients have a wide range of options when it comes to selecting a commercial guiding service to meet their particular needs. By increasing JHMR's permitted annual service days in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area, the potential exists for other outfitter and guides who operate exclusively at Teton Pass to be economically affected as clients choose to enlist JHMR's services over theirs. However, as indicated by the ski area, the typical demographic of JHMR's clientele would suggest that individuals attracted to this guiding program are primarily lift-served Alpine skiers seeking an alternative experience for a portion (usually one day) of their time spent in the Jackson area. This clientele tends to be mutually exclusive of the guest seeking a more traditional backcountry experience requiring climbing/hiking who patronize the other outfitter guides permitted in the area.

Increasing JHMR's authorized annual service days to 900 would represent approximately 13.5 percent of the total annual service days allocated to outfitter and guide operations (as compared to five percent currently). While, by nature of the permit, the majority (between 850 and 900) of JHMR's annual service days would be utilized at the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area, a portion of these 600 additional annual service days could reasonably be assumed to come from other outfitter and guides that operate exclusively on Teton Pass. However, these 600 additional annual service days equate to five skiers per day across a 120 day operating season, and less than half a skier per day when spread across the eleven other outfitter and guide services that operate on Teton Pass. Therefore, authorization of additional service days in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area to JMHR is not anticipated to quantifiably affect other permitted outfitter guides in the Jackson area.

Alternative 3

From a socioeconomic perspective, the affects of selecting Alternative 3 can be assumed to be identical to the Proposed Action. Removing the 50 annual service days that are currently allotted to JHMR on Teton Pass would not be expected to induce a measurable economic effect on other commercial guide services as JHMR has historically contributed an extremely minor portion of guided utilization of Teton Pass. As with the Proposed Action, it is reasoned that the authorization of additional service days in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area to JMHR is not anticipated to negatively affect other permitted outfitter guides in the Jackson area.

Cumulative Effects

Only one reasonably foreseeable future action is identified/analyzed in the cumulative effects analysis for social and economic resources. Each of the other 11 outfitter and guide operations authorized to guide at Teton Pass and in the Rock Springs-Jensen Canyon area (limited to AAI) may ultimately seek a reissuance of their OG SUPs in the future. Site-specific NEPA analyses will need to be conducted to re-authorize each of their services on the Jackson Ranger District. At that time, the Jackson Ranger District will determine the need for additional/modified annual service days allotted to each commercial guide service. Additionally, the Jackson Ranger District may reassess the current management of Teton Pass for backcountry skiing to address historic issues with high utilization.