

NEWS RELEASE

**USDA Forest Service
Caribou-Targhee National Forest
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SQUIRREL MEADOWS – GRAND TARGHEE LAND EXCHANGE COMPLETED

IDAHO FALLS: ID: The Squirrel Meadows – Grand Targhee Land Exchange, approved in December 2000, is officially completed and the deeds are expected to be recorded in Teton County, Wyoming today. "I am gratified to see this land exchange come to a successful conclusion and the Squirrel Meadows property added to the Caribou-Targhee National Forest at last," stated Jerry Reese, Forest Supervisor for the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. "I appreciate the efforts and patience of all who were involved through the lengthy process needed to complete the exchange. Squirrel Meadows will now be protected from development and will forever remain available for use by grizzly bears in our most productive Bear Management Unit. The enclosed photo of grizzly bears at Squirrel Meadows pretty much says it all."

The completed land exchange adds 400 acres of private land at Squirrel Meadows to the National Forest System (NFS). It also privatizes approximately 120 acres of National Forest System lands at Grand Targhee Resort. Both parcels are located within the boundaries of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest in Teton County, Wyoming.

The Squirrel Meadows in holding was 421 acres and included three parcels: (1) a 330 acre parcel, owned by Krispen Family Holding; (2) a 55 acre parcel owned by Wildwood Properties and (3) a 36 acre parcel owned by BYU-Idaho.

With the completion of this exchange, 21 acres will remain outside public ownership. BYU-Idaho, owner of the remaining piece, has proposed a separate land exchange of the remaining 21 acres that will be considered under a separate NEPA analysis. Once this analysis is completed and an exchange takes place all 421 acres of Squirrel Meadows will be included in the National Forest System. The Forest is working through the exchange process with BYU-Idaho this year and anticipates completing that exchange in the coming year.

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The purpose and need for the exchange was to fulfill Forest Plan direction to acquire prime grizzly bear habitat. It consolidates management opportunities by acquiring important Management Situation one grizzly bear habitat and wetlands. Squirrel Meadows is completely surrounded by NFS lands and is within the Bechler/Teton Bear Management Unit (BMU) of the Recovery Area for the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Ecosystem.

Squirrel Meadows is prime habitat for grizzly bear. Historic and current use of the area by grizzly bears has been documented. In fact, the attached photograph was taken on May 25, 2004 at Squirrel Meadows. According to Adrienne Keller, District Ranger, Ashton/Island Park Ranger District, "These two cubs were seen in Squirrel Meadows first by Forest Service employees last Friday and then again yesterday." The picture was taken with a binocular digital camera.

Acquiring Squirrel Meadows maintains high quality grizzly bear habitat, minimizes grizzly bear-human conflicts by eliminating human developments to occur. Acquisition reduces habitat fragmentation in the BMU. In addition more than 350 acres of the Squirrel Meadows parcel meets the definition of wetland.

Others reasons the Caribou-Targhee wanted Squirrel Meadows in the National Forest System:

- Although private land in the Greater Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Recovery Area accounts for only two percent of the land, in the past decade, 26 percent of human-caused grizzly bear deaths have occurred on this small percentage of private land.
- Teton County, Wyoming, Board of County Commissioners considered the preservation of Squirrel Meadows to be invaluable to the natural assets associated with Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and federal acquisition to be of the utmost importance.
- The National Park Service has identified the ecological importance of isolated wet meadow habitats. Because Squirrel Meadows provides one of the rarer habitats (less than five percent) within the greater Yellowstone area, it is of crucial importance to the ecological values associated with the Yellowstone ecosystem.
- Squirrel Meadows provides habitat important for wildlife species, such as sandhill cranes, great gray owls, spotted frogs, elk, moose and deer. The area provides suitable habitat for furbearers and is occasionally used by trumpeter swans and other waterfowl.