



WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

Jim Geringer, *Assistant*



John Baughman, *Director*

May 23, 1996

COPY

Mary Stralick
Joe Bohne
Nan Stroud

WER 8303
Bridger-Teton National Forest
Greys River Ranger District
Scoping Statement
Salt River Watershed
Big Game Crucial Winter Range and Winter
Travel Plan
SIN: 96-046
Lincoln County

WYOMING STATE CLEARINGHOUSE
OFFICE OF FEDERAL LAND POLICY
ATTN: JULIE HAMILTON
HERSCHLER BUILDING., 3W
CHEYENNE, WY 82002

Dear Ms. Hamilton:

The staff of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department has reviewed the scoping statement for the Salt River watershed winter travel plan on the Greys River Ranger District. We offer the following comments.

The Wyoming Game & Fish Department supports the Forest Service's efforts to provide snowmobile recreation while protecting crucial wildlife winter ranges as proposed by the preferred alternative. However, we have the following concerns.

1. Snowmobile Hill Climb. We recommend a permanent location be selected for the annual Star Valley Maverick Challenge Hillclimb. Scoping statements and environmental documents to evaluate potential permanent sites should be prepared well in advance of the actual event. Use of a permanent site would eliminate the need for yearly preparation of environmental documents. We strongly recommend any sites evaluated as future locations for this event have adequate snow depth (to protect the underlying habitat) and be located outside crucial big game winter range. We recommend the following stipulations be included in the special use permit for future Maverick Hillclimb events as part of the winter travel plan, particularly if the site is located in an area designated as crucial wildlife winter range:

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- a) A minimum snow depth of 18 inches would be required on the course in order to hold the event;
- b) Each morning, before the climbs begin, event organizers will slowly move wildlife out of the area by walking the course up and back;
- c) During the event, snowmobiles will be limited to the designated course during the designated times. There will be no practice climbing or after-hours use.
- d) At any time, the climb can be halted if the Forest Service determines that unacceptable soil (and therefore habitat) damage will occur if the climb continues.
- e) Spectators will not be allowed on the course slope in order to minimize the impacts on wildlife.

2. Resolution of Conflicting Guidelines. Over the last year, the Wyoming Game & Fish Department has been working cooperatively with the Greys River Ranger District to address snowmachine travel on crucial wildlife winter ranges along the west slope of the Salt Range from Smoot to Alpine. The primary concern is to resolve the conflict between two Forest Service documents pertaining to winter travel on crucial wildlife winter ranges. The Bridger-Teton National Forest Land Use Management Plan specifically states crucial wildlife winter ranges will be protected. In addition, the Land Use Management Plan indicates areas designated with the Desired Future Condition 12 Wildlife Prescription should be managed primarily for wildlife and wildlife habitat. However, the most recent version of the Bridger-Teton National Forest Travel Management Plan for the Big Piney, Greys River and Kemmerer Ranger Districts allows unrestricted travel during winter on areas designated as crucial wildlife winter ranges along the west slope of the Salt Range on National Forest System lands. The Forest Service should continue to work on a resolution between these two documents, and thereby provide a more consistent directive for future winter travel use planning on Forest Service lands.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



JOHN BAUGHMAN
DIRECTOR

JB:TC:as

cc: ~~Wildlife Divisions~~
USFWS