

Decision Notice & Finding of No Significant Impact

Pronghorn Migration Corridor Forest Plan Amendment

USDA Forest Service
Bridger-Teton National Forest
Wyoming

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

The pronghorn (*Antilocarpa americana*) that summer in Jackson Hole migrate annually between there and wintering areas in the Green River basin. Documented round trip migration distances from 175 to 330 miles make this the longest known terrestrial animal migration in the 48 contiguous states. Typically, the pronghorn migrate through the corridor in April or May and again in October or November. These pronghorn are a part of the impressive panorama of free-ranging native Rocky Mountain mammals in northwest Wyoming. This landscape and its wildlife draw tourists from around the world and support a robust regional economy.

A significant portion of the full migration route of these pronghorn is within the Bridger-Teton National Forest. The Forest portion extends from the Forest boundary near the Green River Lakes Road north of Pinedale in Sublette County, Wyoming to the Forest boundary with Grand Teton National Park northeast of Kelly in Teton County, Wyoming. It includes approximately 47,000 acres within the Pinedale and Jackson Ranger Districts of the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

Managing this migration corridor to facilitate continued successful movement of pronghorn will help ensure protection of this herd and its migration. The purpose of this amendment to the Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) is to ensure that projects, activities, and facilities authorized by the Forest Service on National Forest System lands within the corridor allow for continued successful pronghorn migration.

It should be noted that the Forest Service by itself cannot guarantee continued successful migration of this herd over the entire migration route. There are numerous factors beyond Forest Service control such as activities on lands under other jurisdictions within the migration route.

Decision

Based upon my review of the Environmental Assessment (EA), I hereby amend the Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan by 1) designating a Pronghorn Migration Corridor as shown on the attached map; and 2) adding the following standard, “All projects, activities, and infrastructure authorized in the designated Pronghorn Migration Corridor will be designed, timed and/or located to allow continued successful migration of the pronghorn that summer in Jackson Hole and winter in the Green River basin.” This amendment does not

remove any current Forest Plan direction for the area encompassed by the corridor; it simply designates the corridor and adds the above standard. This amendment makes no decisions about the compatibility of specific uses with the pronghorn migration, but requires that all uses be found to allow continued migration before they are authorized.

Activities currently authorized by the Forest Service within this migration corridor, including livestock grazing operations, coexist with the currently successful pronghorn migrations, so changes to current activities and infrastructure are not required by this amendment.

Before future activities can be authorized, a determination must be made that the activity will allow continued successful migration.

It is important to note that, while the full length of the pronghorn migration route includes lands under various jurisdictions, this Forest Plan amendment applies only to National Forest System lands within that larger corridor. Furthermore, the amendment does not constrain activities on private land within the Forest boundary.

Reasons for the Decision

I have decided to create the Forest Plan amendment because it meets the purpose and need of ensuring that Forest Service authorized activities and infrastructure allow continued successful pronghorn migration in the corridor. Furthermore, I find that there are no unacceptable impacts from the amendment. As noted above, activities currently authorized by the Forest Service within the corridor coexist with successful migration, so changes to current activities will not be required by this amendment.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered the No Action alternative. Under the No Action alternative there would be no Forest Plan amendment and current management plans would continue to guide management of the area. This alternative does not meet the purpose and need of ensuring that Forest Service authorized activities in the corridor allow continued successful pronghorn migration.

Public Involvement

The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment in a Scoping Statement dated March 6, 2008. The proposal was listed in the Bridger-Teton Schedule of Proposed Actions on April 1, 2008. Comments were received from government entities such as the Bureau of Land Management, Grand Teton National Park, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department; from livestock associations and permittees; from conservation organizations; and from many private citizens. Using the comments received from scoping, the interdisciplinary team developed the issues that were addressed in the EA.

Approximately 19,400 emails were received supporting the proposed amendment. Several livestock interests were concerned that the proposal could negatively affect livestock grazing operations. Because current grazing operations coexist with successful migration, current grazing operations will not be affected by this amendment. Future grazing operations will need to be designed to allow continued successful migration. Some conservation organizations

wanted specific restrictions added to the amendment such as a decision that no oil and gas leasing be authorized in the corridor. This amendment makes no decisions about the compatibility of specific future uses with the pronghorn migration, but requires that all future uses allow continued migration. I feel that this meets the purpose and need of the amendment.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the effects described in the EA, I have determined that this amendment will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant impacts is not based on a belief that the beneficial effects outweigh significant adverse impacts. Rather, it is my finding that there are no significant adverse impacts.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because the amendment is limited in scope and does not authorize any specific activity on the ground that could affect public health or safety.
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because the amendment is limited in scope and does not authorize any specific activity on the ground that could impact the unique characteristics of the area.
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project.
5. The effects are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk.
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects.
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant; this is addressed in the EA.
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. This plan amendment authorizes no specific actions on the ground that could cause such effects. Future actions proposed within the migration corridor will still be subject to National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 review by the BTNF and the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.
9. As discussed in the Biological Assessment (BA) for this amendment, the action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973. The BA documents a determination of “no effect” on the Canada lynx and on the Kendall warm springs dace, the only threatened or endangered species in the area.

10. The amendment does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to amend the Forest Plan is consistent with the National Forest Management Act and its implementation regulations. Because the amendment does not result in significant changes to multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management, the proposed amendment is considered to be “non-significant” according to the planning regulations at 36 CFR 219.14(2). Therefore, this amendment is authorized in this Decision Notice. The amendment is also consistent with the Forest Plan's goals, objectives, and specific management direction for the Forest, Management Areas, and Desired Future Conditions. As noted in the Decision section, this amendment does not remove any current Forest Plan direction for the area, it simply adds an additional standard to the corridor.

Implementation Date

This amendment will be implemented 7 days after the legal notice of this decision has been published in the Casper Star-Tribune and the appeal period has begun.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217.3. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 217.9. A written appeal must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Reviewing Officer within 45 days of the date of publication of the legal notice of this decision in the Casper Star-Tribune. Appeals must be sent to: Regional Forester, Intermountain Region USFS, 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401; by fax to 801-625-5277; or by email to: appeals-intermtn-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Emailed appeals must be submitted in rich text (rtf) or Word (doc) and must include the project name in the subject line. Appeals may also be hand delivered to the above address, during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service administrative appeal process, contact John Kuzloski by mail at the Bridger-Teton National Forest, P.O. Box 1888, Jackson, WY 83001; by email at jkuzloski@fs.fed.us or by phone at (307) 739-5568.

/s/ Kniffy Hamilton
CAROLE ‘KNIFFY’ HAMILTON
Forest Supervisor
Bridger-Teton National Forest

May 31, 2008
Date

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