



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

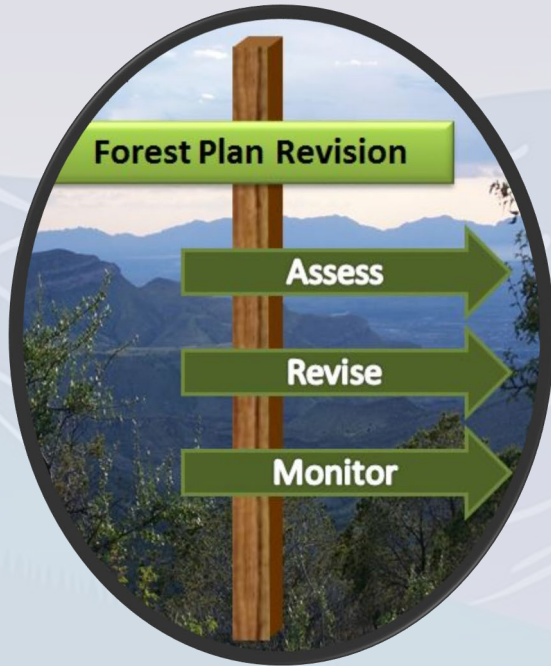
Intermountain Region | Bridger-Teton National Forest | July 2025

A scenic landscape photograph of a calm lake reflecting the surrounding mountains and sky. The mountains are rugged and have patches of snow. The sky is a mix of blue and light orange, suggesting dawn or dusk. The water is very still, creating a clear reflection of the mountains and sky.

BRIDGER-TETON

DRAFT ASSESSMENT

What is an Assessment?



The draft assessment is a summary of the “State of the Forest” and presents information about current ecological, social and economic conditions, and trends affecting the Bridger-Teton. It provides the foundation to inform the next steps in the forest planning process.

It is not a decision document and is the first step in the three-tiered forest planning effort: Assessment, Plan Revision, and Monitoring.



Draft Assessment - Content

Chapter 1 – Introduction

- Forest Setting
- Distinctive Roles and Contributions
- Management Constraints and Opportunities

Chapter 2 – Ecological Sustainability and Diversity of Plant and Animal Communities

- Ecosystem Drivers and Stressors
- Connectivity
- Terrestrial Ecosystems
- Aquatic, Wetland, and Riparian Ecosystems
- Watersheds and Water Resources
- Air Resources
- Diversity of Plant and Animal Species
- Geological Resources and Hazards

Chapter 3 – Socioeconomic Elements and Multiple Uses

- Social and Economic Conditions
- Areas of Tribal Importance
- Fire Management
- Recreation, Lands and Access
- Scenic Character
- Roads, Trails and Facilities
- Land Ownership
- Production of Natural Resources
(Forest Management, Range Management, Energy and Minerals)
- Protected Lands and Resources
(Congressionally designated and administratively protected areas,
Cultural resources)

References

Three documents are available for review and comment: the Draft Assessment, Supporting Documentation, and the Potential Species of Conservation Concern.

How do I access the documents?

The documents are available on the Bridger-Teton Planning webpage at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r04/bridger-teton/planning>.



Where to provide comments?

Submit comments on the draft assessment at <https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?project=63628>. (A direct link is on the planning webpage)

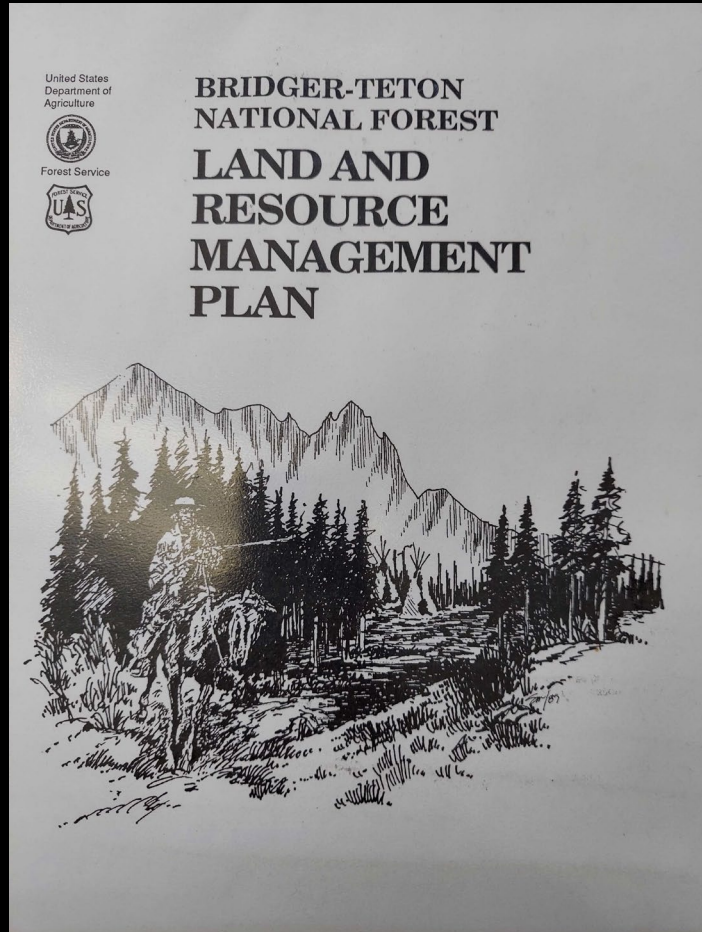
When is the comment deadline?

Written comments are encouraged through August 24, 2025.

What input would be helpful?

Do you think the draft assessment provides sufficient information to identify what the Forest should focus on as management direction is updated? Does the information on the status and trends for various topics seem accurate?

What is a Forest Plan & what progress has been made since 1990?



Forest Plans provide comprehensive, strategic, and integrated resource direction. They function like a county comprehensive plan and are used to guide all decisions about future projects and uses on the National Forest.

Why Update the Plan?

Much has changed ecologically, socially, and economically since 1990. With these changes, an update of the forest plan is needed. **What changes have you noticed since 1990?**

Forest Plan Revision Sequencing



Water and Snow

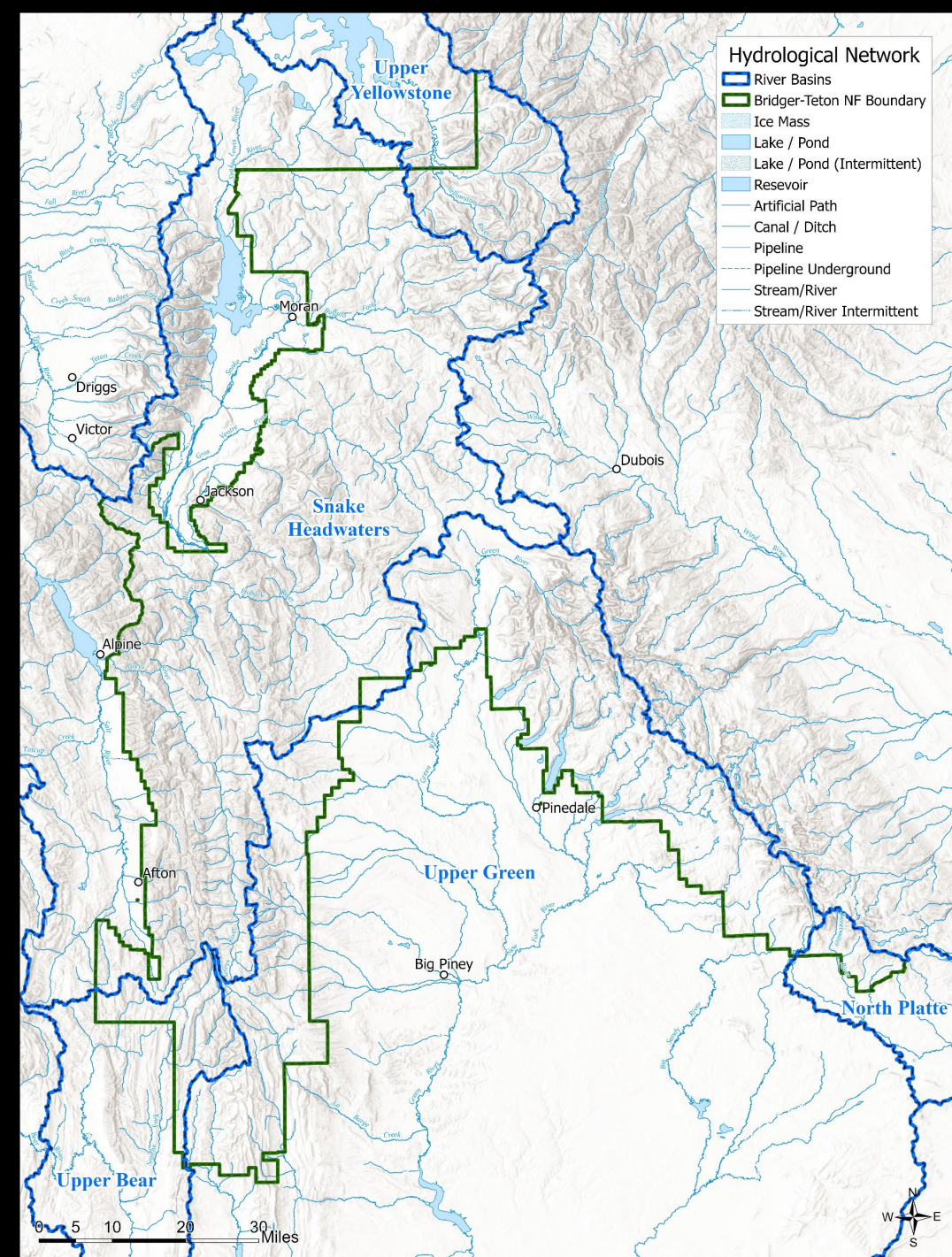
Water and snow are one of four qualities that make the Bridger-Teton distinctive within the larger region.

- Headwaters of our nation's most relied upon river systems – Snake (Columbia), Green (Colorado), Yellowstone (Missouri)
- Stronghold for native fisheries (4 out of the 6 native cutthroat trout species)
- Abundant snowfall and glaciers; snow predicted to persist longer on the BT than elsewhere
- 5,548 miles of perennial streams
- 344 lakes, 5 reservoirs
- Unique springs, waterfalls, Parting of the Waters

Water resources serve important socio-economic needs:

- 707 active water rights
- 21 Wyoming state zone 1 protection areas that include water systems that serve Alpine, Pinedale, and Afton
- Important irrigation, stock-water, ranching uses
- The types of water uses today are similar to 1990 but demand for water use has increased

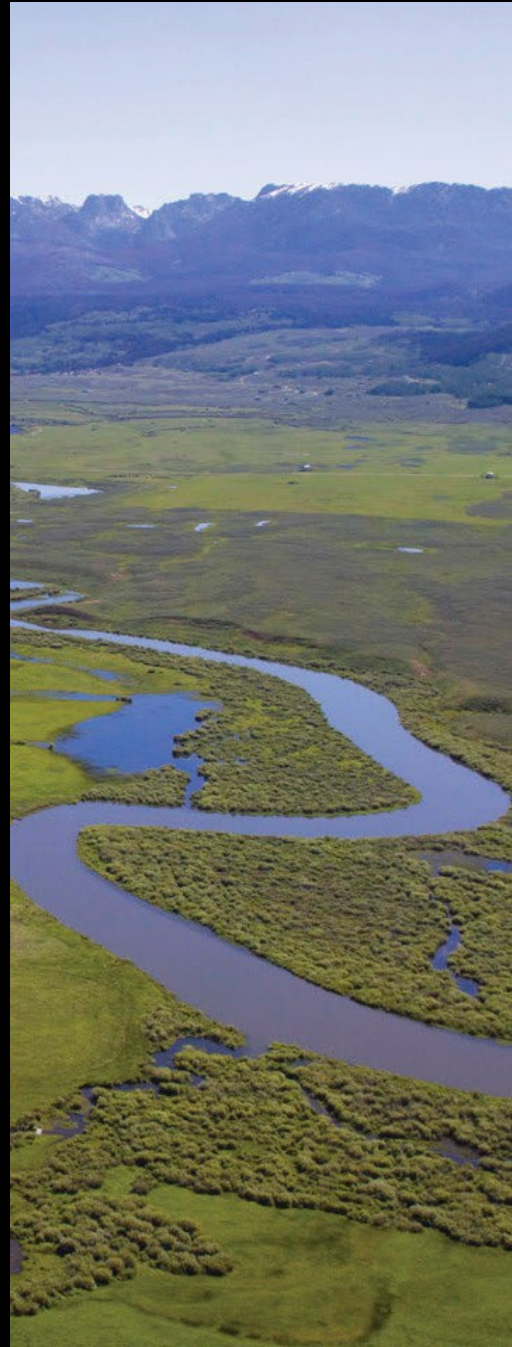
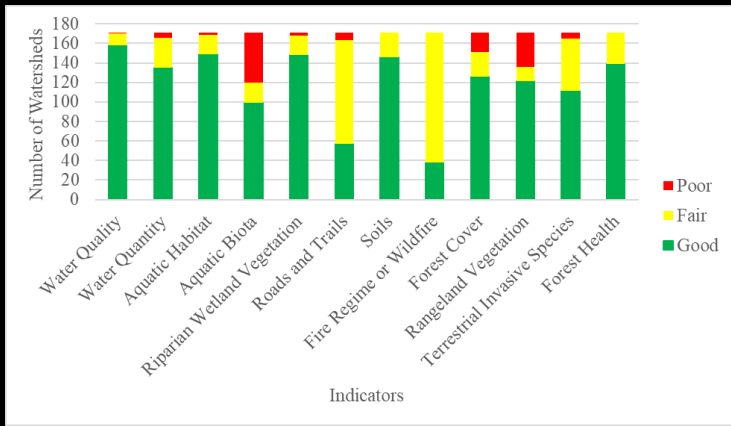
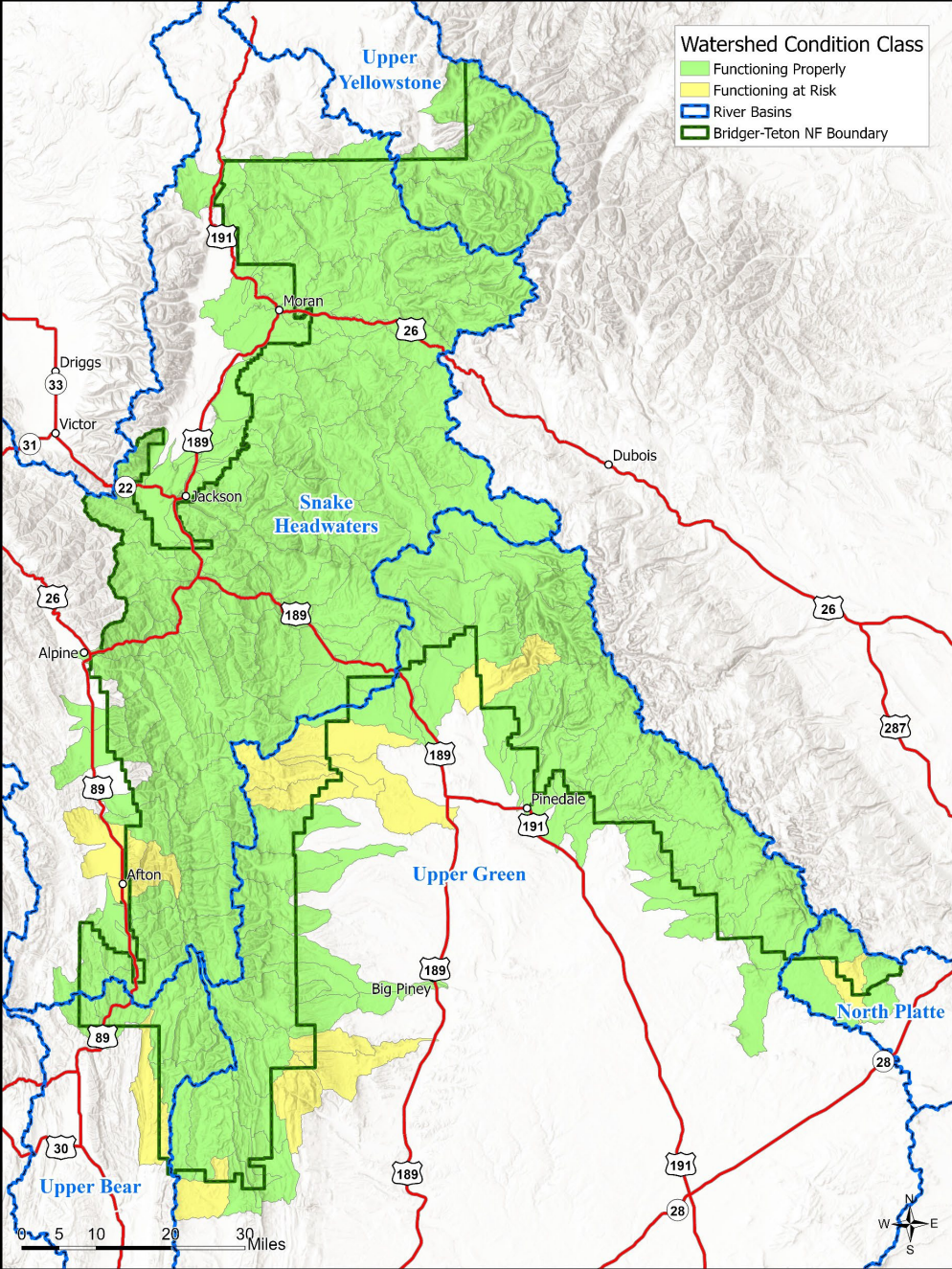
Wyoming State Class 1 designation to protect water quality include waters within designated Wilderness, the main stem of the Snake River above Highway 22, the main stem of the Green River above New Fork River, the main stem of Sweetwater River above Alkali Creek, Granite Creek, Fish Creek (near Wilson), and Fremont Lake. Water quality is considered good but sections of eight streams downstream of the Forest are impaired.



Watershed Condition

Of the 171 watersheds on the Forest, 157 are functioning properly, 14 are at-risk, and none are impaired. Aquatic ecosystems are generally functioning within the natural range of variation but climate change (warming temps, drought), along with roads/trails, recreation, wildfire, invasive plants, non-native fish, grazing, and increasing water demand are stressing aquatic ecosystems and fisheries.

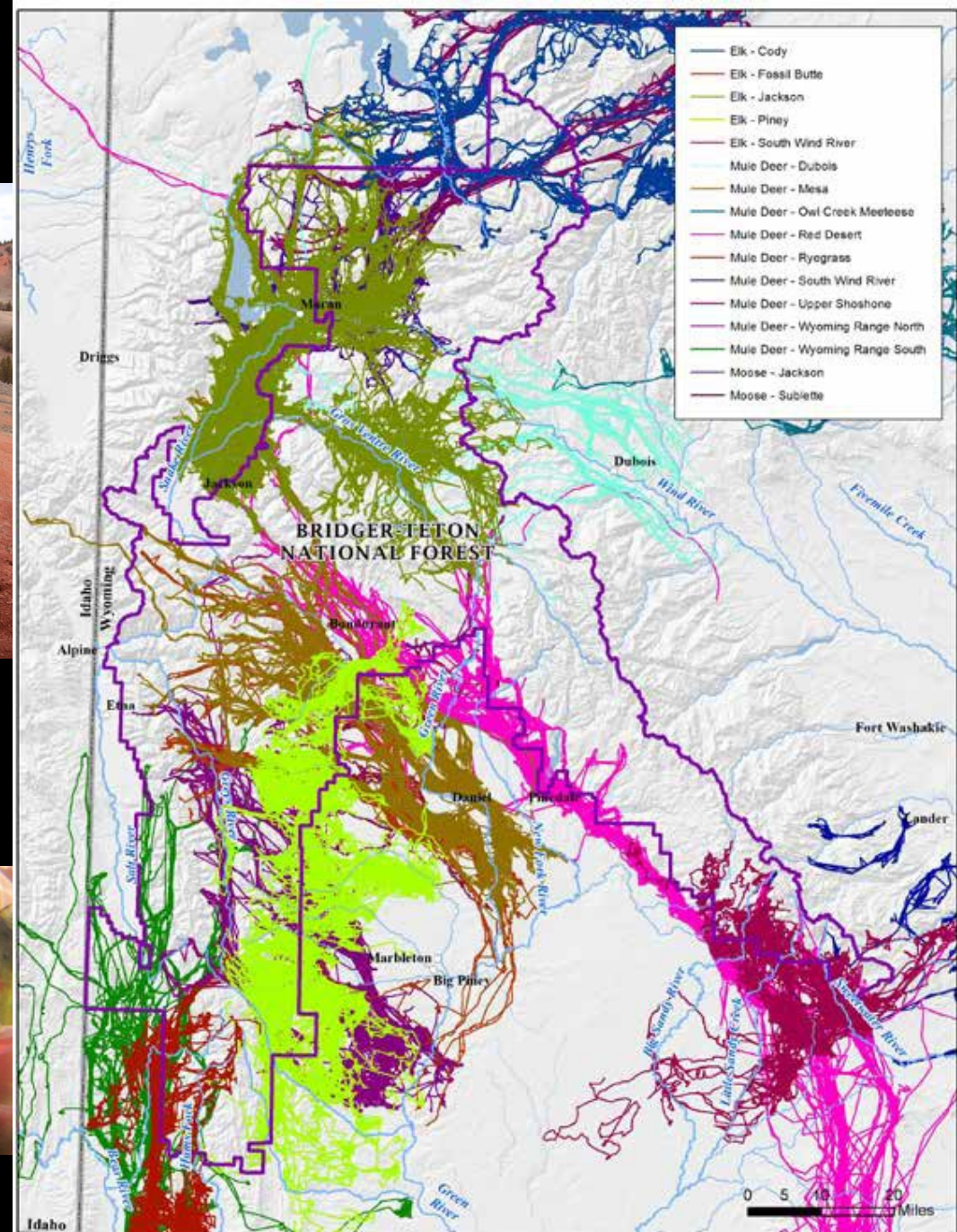
The majority of remaining cutthroat trout habitat exists in high-elevation, headwater portions of their historic range, mostly on the National Forest. An intact native fish assemblage is an indicator of aquatic system function and health and supports a robust recreational fishery. The BT is considered to possess the most intact habitat for boreal biota and cold water fisheries.

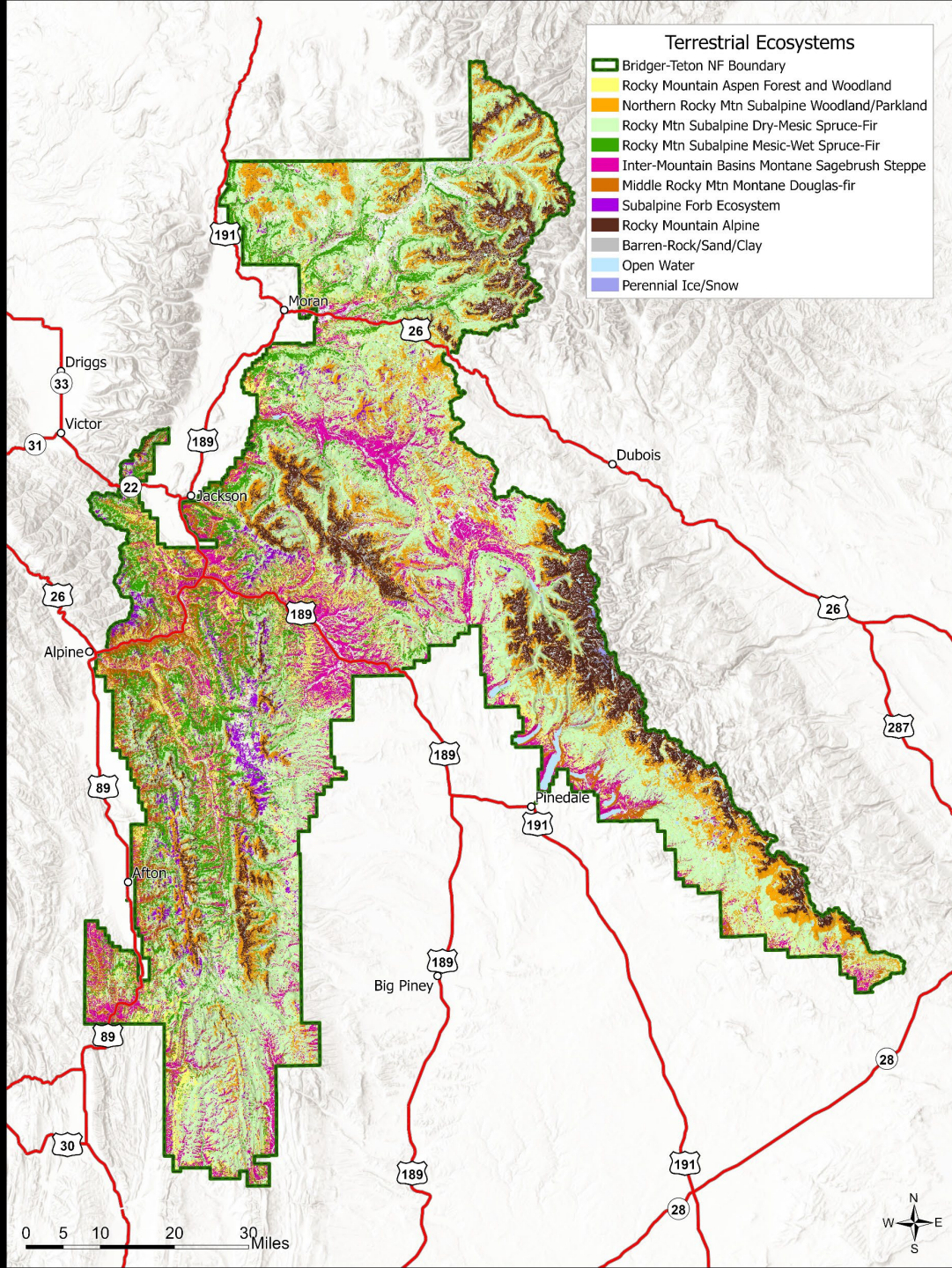


Wildlife and Fisheries

Wildlife and fisheries are one of four qualities that make the Bridger-Teton distinctive within the region.

- The BT supports most of the mammal and bird species that were present before the 1880s.
- Healthy populations of predator species – a strong indicator of a productive ecosystem.
- 74 mammal species, 355 bird species, 12 reptiles and amphibians, 25 fish species.
- Four core herds of bighorn sheep, which account for 85% of state's bighorn population.
- Numerous long-distance ungulate migration corridors including the first federally designated corridor (Path of the Pronghorn). Connectivity models reveal important movement corridors for forest specialists are present throughout the Bridger-Teton.
- Only home for the endangered Kendall Warm Springs dace.
- Center for much of the wildlife research in the U.S., wildlife galleries, filming, National Museum of Wildlife Art.





Terrestrial Ecosystem Integrity

Rocky Mountain Subalpine Dry-Mesic Spruce-Fir Forest and Parkland is the dominant ecosystem type on the BTNF, occupying 35.4% of the acreage. The ecological integrity of ecosystems is assessed by looking at the natural range of variation. The NRV does not necessarily constitute a desired condition but ecosystems that are within their natural range of variation are assumed to be more resilient to current and future stressors.

The integrity rating for most of the terrestrial ecosystems on the Bridger-Teton is considered “moderate” and trending towards either “moderate” or “low” integrity into the future, mostly attributed to the influence of climate change. A primary current stressor is insect and disease related tree mortality, invasive species, and fire suppression.



Proposed Species of Conservation Concern

Identifying Species of Conservation Concern is part of the 2012 Planning Rule approach to meet the requirement to “provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific Forest.”

For a species to be considered a Species of Conservation Concern it must be native and known to occur within the Forest. It also must have best available scientific information that indicates substantial concern regarding long-term persistence in the Forest.

Proposed Species of Conservation Concern, BT National Forest

6 wildlife species (sage grouse, western toad, Columbia spotted frog, black rosy finch, Gillette’s checkerspot, western bumblebee)

5 fish species (Colorado cutthroat trout, Snake River fine-spotted cutthroat trout, flannelmouth sucker, northern leatherside chub, roundtail chub)

14 plant species (Payson’s milkvetch, particular moonwort, scalloped moonwort, beautiful sedge, woolly fleabane, fragile rockbrake, Wyoming tansymustrad, fourpart dwarf gentian, Vasey’s rush, mountain wild mint, Greenland primrose, pink champion, Teton wirelettuce, largeflower triteleia)

Nearly 200 species were evaluated as part of this process. Refer to the planning webpage to read the evaluation for each species. Comments on the proposed list are encouraged.



Recreation and Wildlands

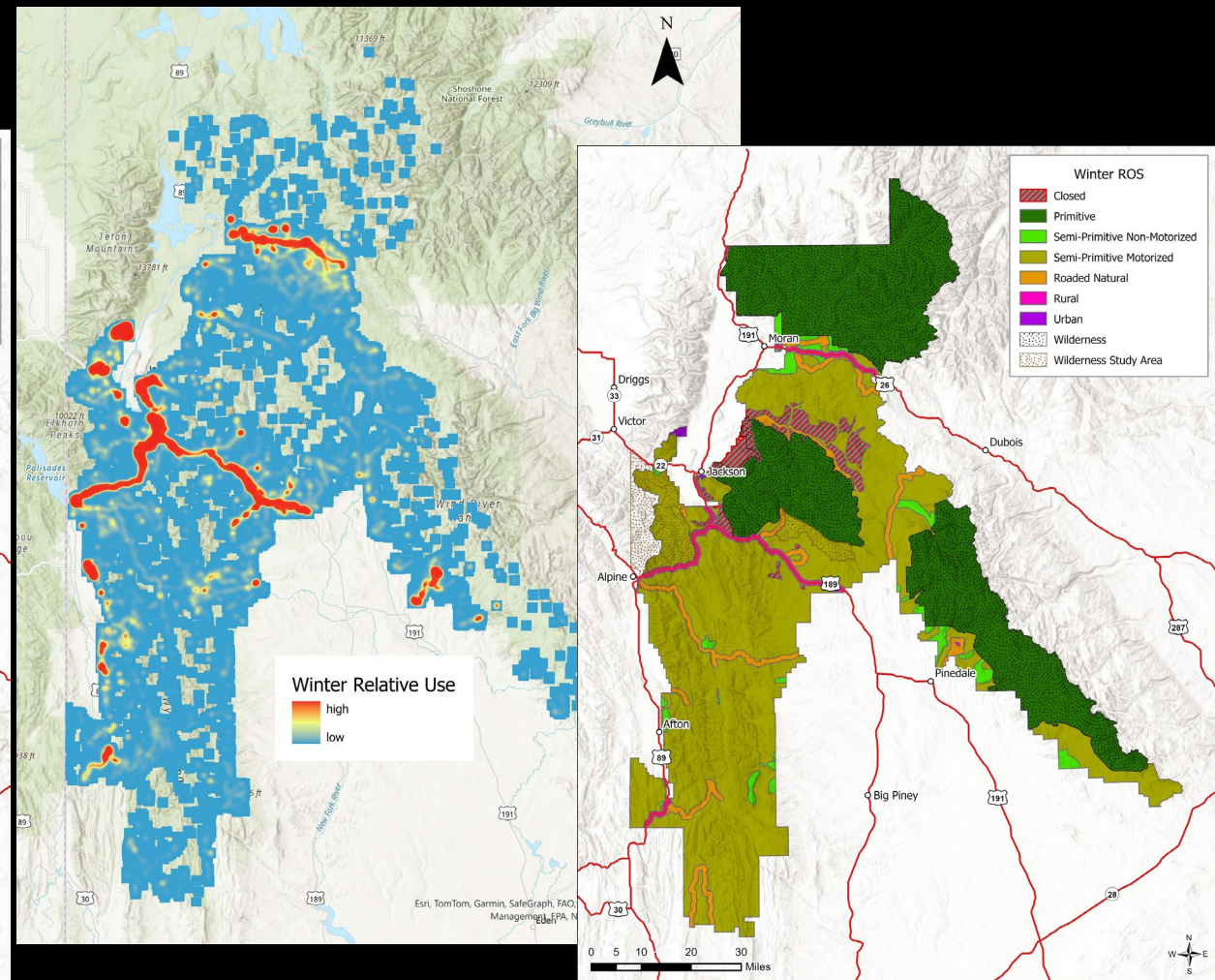
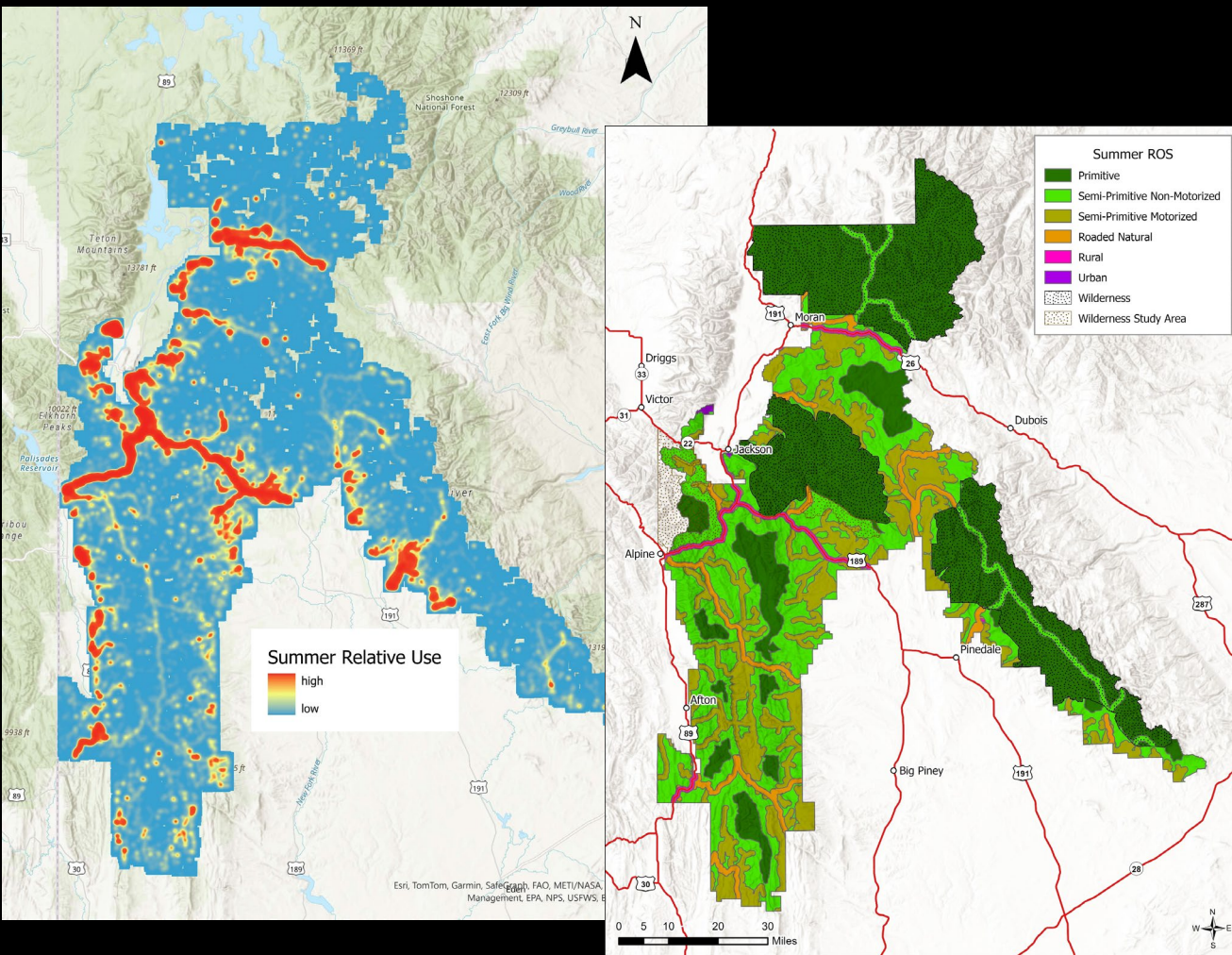
Recreation and Wildlands are one of four qualities that make the Bridger-Teton distinctive within the region.

- 2.2 million annual visitors, most heavily visited forest in WY.
- 2,807 miles of summer trails, 668 miles of groomed winter trails. Trail system miles have increased 17% since 1990 – more motorized trails, frontcountry trails, Nordic trails
- Largest outfitter-guide program in the region (220 permits). Winter outfitted activity increased 146% since 2012, summer/fall outfitted activity increased 6% but summer/fall use still dominates (180,000 service days vs. 20,000)
- Winter recreation (skiing, snowmobiling), trail-based activities, and wildlife-fish based activities are particularly distinctive
- Open road miles are very similar to 1990 (1,561 today compared to 1,539)
- Recreation activity generates the most jobs and contributes the most to local economy (56% of jobs, 90% of special use receipts from the Forest)
- The shifting nature of recreation has been more dramatic than sheer amount of use (technology, info sources, demographics)
- Huge deferred maintenance backlog for roads, trails, and facilities



The Challenge Ahead

1. Easily accessed day-use areas, road-accessible camping areas, and key destinations popularized through social media will face increased pressure.
2. Social conflict will be more challenging to address than ecological effects.
3. Electric technology will blur the line between motorized and non-motorized use.
4. Winter recreation planning to address non-motorized, motorized, and wildlife interests will be particularly challenging.
5. A warming climate will increasingly affect recreation settings and opportunities.



The Forest Service uses the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) to offer a range of recreation settings. Rather than disperse use, the goal is to provide a variety of opportunities, recognizing that not everyone seeks the same type of experience.

Use is not evenly distributed and tends to be concentrated near road corridors, close to communities, adjacent to national parks, at resorts, and in nationally designated areas. Summer use is more dispersed than winter use.

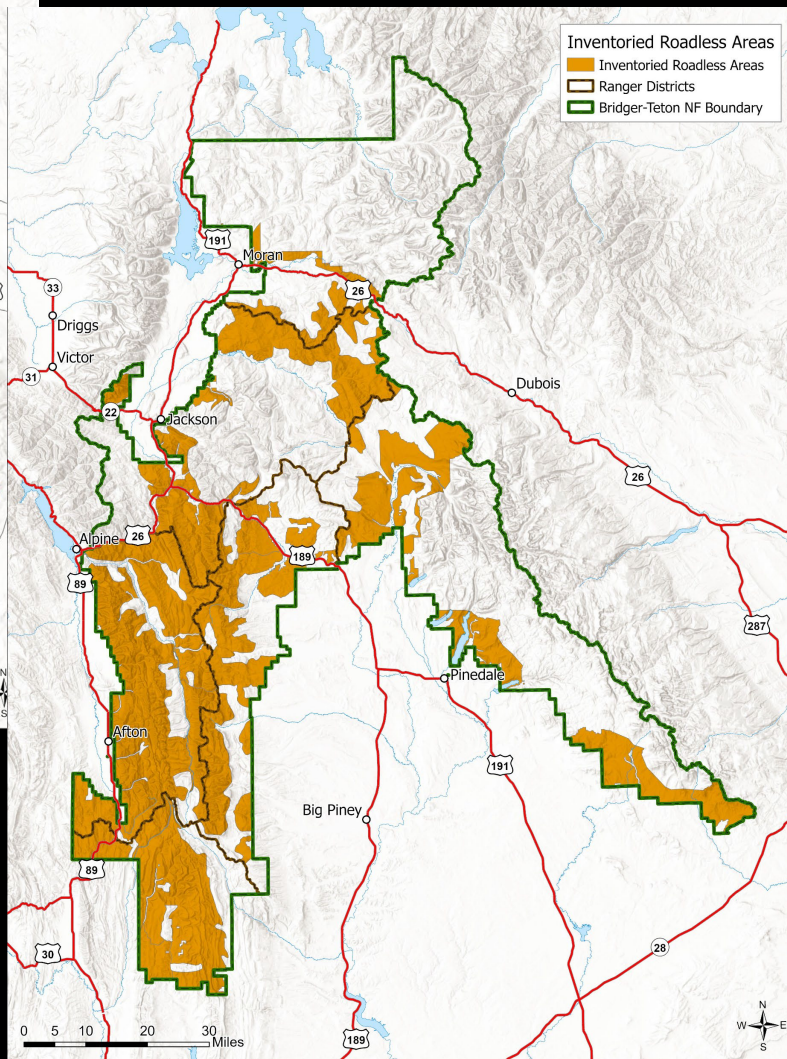
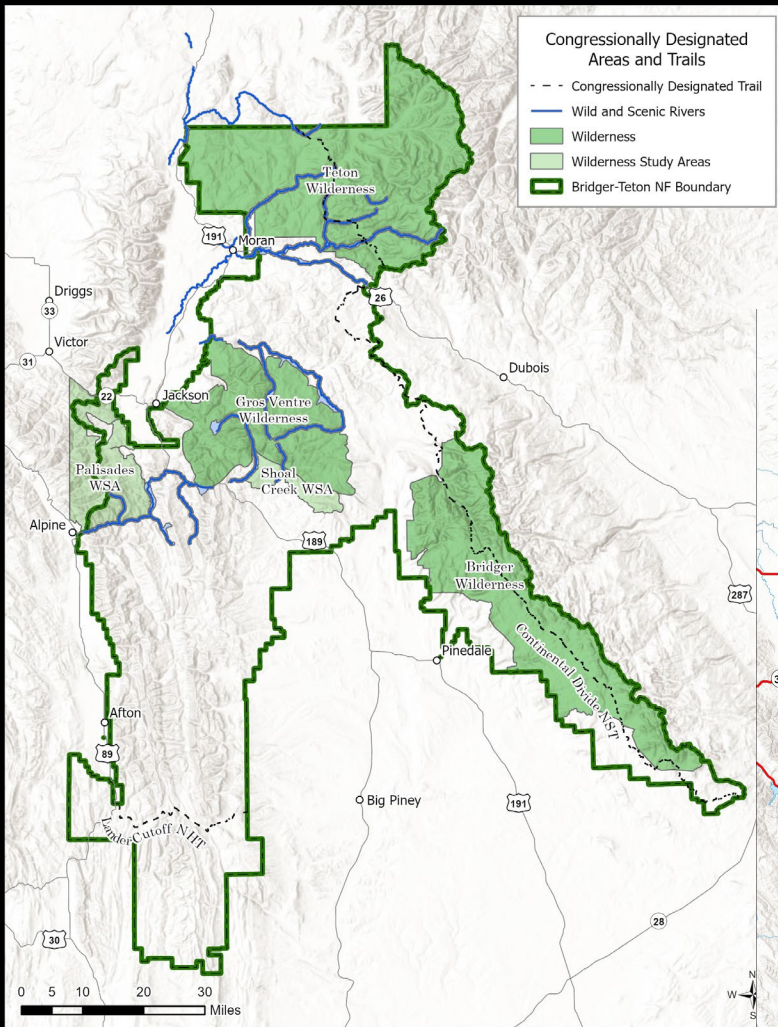
74% of the forest offers a primitive or semi-primitive, non-motorized (undeveloped) setting in the summer, whereas 52% of the forest offers a semi-primitive, motorized (undeveloped) setting in the winter.

The Forest Plan Opportunity

Some Key Questions will be:

- What is the desired and sustainable mix of recreation experience settings both summer and winter?
- How much change is acceptable?
- What monitoring metrics would be most useful to track change?

Congressionally designated and Administratively protected Wildlands



Congressionally designated areas reinforce the national significance of the BT's natural assets. The BT offers more area more than 3 miles from a road (primitive setting) than any other Forest in the region; backcountry areas larger than 5,000 acres exist on the BT but are rare elsewhere.

41% of Forest is Congressionally designated, (1.298 million acres Wilderness, 111,700 acres Wilderness Study Area, 315 miles W&S River, 231 miles of National Scenic and Historic Trails). The Teton and Bridger Wildernesses were two of the original 1964 Wildernesses.

41% of Forest is administratively protected, mostly as Inventoried Roadless Areas. Other administratively protected areas include the "Parting of the Waters" (NNL), the Gros Ventre Geological Area, 4 Research Natural Areas, 2 Special Interest Areas, 81 miles of scenic and backcountry byways, and 92 miles of National Recreation Trail.

Forest plan direction for Wilderness needs to be updated to incorporate the requirement to preserve wilderness character and address current concerns. W&S River direction is current as of 2014. Direction for WSAs, National Trails and administratively protected areas is absent.

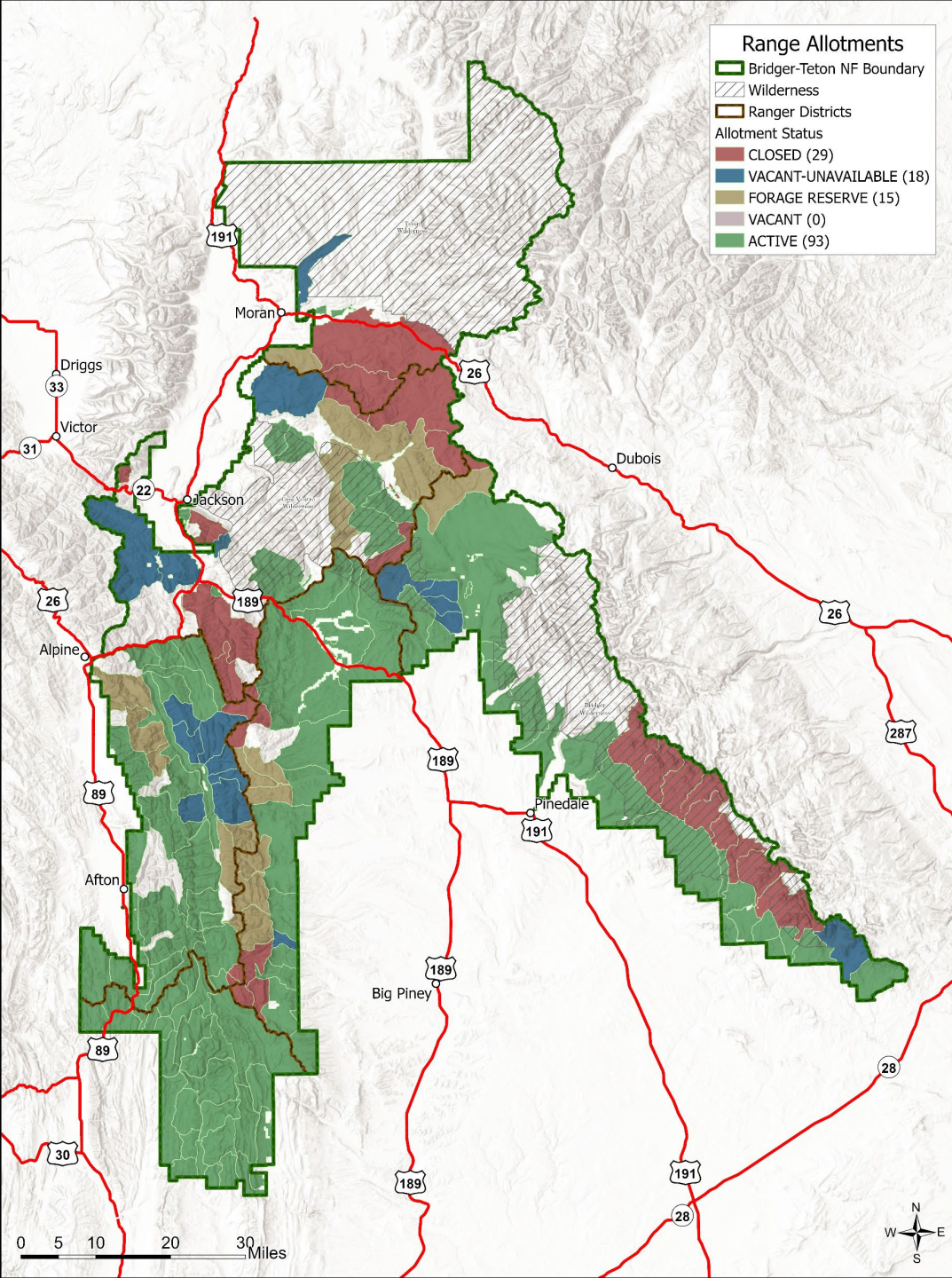
Cultural Connections

Cultural connections: way of life is one of four qualities that make the Bridger-Teton distinctive within the region.

- Ancestral homeland for numerous tribes who hold a 12,000-year-old relationship with the land. Current tribal practices include gathering plants and teepee poles, hunting, fishing, and visiting sacred places. The forest is where tribes such as the Eastern Shoshone, the Shoshone Bannock, and other tribes, hunted, lived, traveled and called home, especially in the warmer months.
- Euro-American settlers arrived in the late 1880s with Big Piney the oldest permanent settlement.
- Counties encompassing the Forest have histories and socio-economic community character closely tied to ranching, wildlife (elk and beaver), recreation/ tourism, and resource use.
- Roughly 75% of annual visitor use comes from people who live less than 50 miles away from the forest and 48% visit the forest more than 50 times per year.
- 30% of local county residents report that 11% or more of their household needs are derived from the forest (firewood, hunting, fishing)
- The nationally recognized Green River Drift symbolizes the historic and on-going relationship between ranchers and the forest.



Range Management



93 active allotments, 15 forage reserves, 18 vacant unavailable allotments, and 29 closed allotments.

Large carnivore conflicts, permit waivers back to the FS without preference, and separating domestic sheep from bighorn sheep are the primary drivers for the reduction in active allotments.

105 permittees graze 31,807 cattle and 39,945 sheep. Livestock numbers have declined since 1987 when about 40,000 cattle and 78,000 sheep grazed in the forest.

Monitoring for 18 allotments in the Pinedale and Big Piney districts show an average of 12% utilization on key forage species and an average of 9' stubble height on riparian plant growth; both metrics well within thresholds.

Monitoring for 13 allotments on the Kemmerer and Greys River District show 30% are trending upward, 60% are stable, and 10% are trending downward.



Fire Management

The fire regimes on the BTNF are mostly characterized by moderate to long interval frequency fire (50 to 300 years); large stand-replacing fires are part of this fire regime.

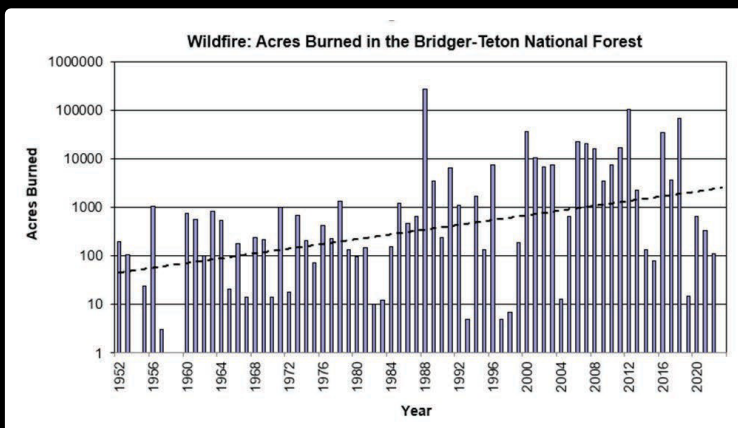
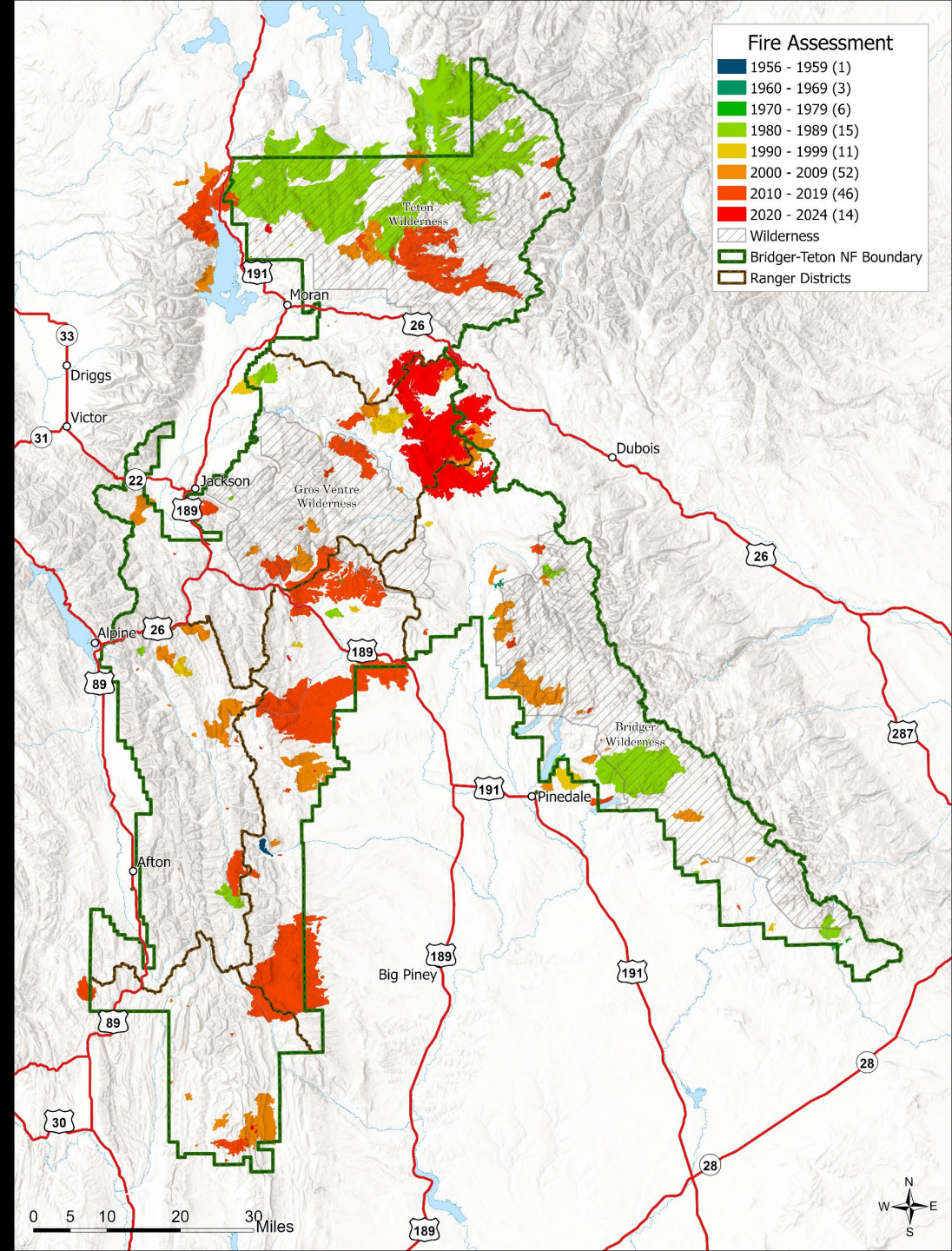
With a warming climate, the trend is for large fires to happen more often and for fire seasons to be longer, especially in the fall.

Since 1952, 3,470 fires have been detected with 56% attributed to lightning and 44% human-caused, mostly due to campfires.

The BTNF adopted a prescribed burning program in 1974 and since then 85,000 have been treated; 14,000 acres have been mechanically treated.

The extent and complexity of the wildland-urban interface has increased creating challenges for fire fighters at all levels.

An interagency “all-lands” approach (with county CWPPs) is in place for all 5 counties. To prepare communities to live with fire, the future includes integrated fuels treatments, managing smoke, fire wise programs for structures, and fire prevention/outreach.



Forest Management – Timber and Fuels

Role of forest management: restore and maintain forest structure to be more resilient, reduce fuels at strategic locations, restore or enhance wildlife habitat, provide commercial and personal use products.

Between 2011 and 2018, approximately 36% of trees on the Forest died, primary from bark beetles, white pine blister rust, and fire.

Timber harvest has declined, as have the number of forest product manufacturing facilities (from 27 in 2000 to 14 in 2019).

Just under 12,000 acres has been harvested via commercial timber sales since 1990 along with about 114,000 acres treated to reduce hazardous fuels. 69% of commercial harvest acres were treated with thinning, sanitation, or salvage cuts with salvage cuts associated with insect and disease the most common recent treatments.

Firewood volume has increased with an average of 10,239 cords sold each year. Christmas tree permits average 2,348 per year but have been declining as have permits for tree transplants.



Log deck – Pack Trail fire



Spruce beetle mortality



Firewood gathering

Table 11. Estimated annual mortality of trees, 2011-2018

FIA Species Group	Number of Trees
Douglas-Fir	469,823
Subalpine Fir	2,044,923
Engelmann and Blue Spruce	897,186
Lodgepole Pine	3,374,706
<u>Whitebark</u> and Limber Pine	1,665,737
Cottonwood and Aspen	704,217
Total	9,156,591