



July 13, 2026

Submitted Electronically via the U.S. Forest Service CARA Objection Portal

Objection Reviewing Officer
Grand Targhee Master Development Plan Projects
Caribou-Targhee National Forest

Subject: Grand Targhee Resort Master Development Plan Projects -- Administrative Objection to the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Record of Decision

Dear Objection Reviewing Officer:

This objection is submitted pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218, Subparts A and B, and 36 CFR Part 219, on behalf of the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, the Wyoming Wildlife Federation, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, and the Wild Sheep Foundation (collectively, "Objectors"). Each of the undersigned organizations submitted substantive written comments during the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) public comment period, which closed on June 20, 2025, and thus each is eligible to file an objection under 36 CFR Section 218.5(a).

This objection is directed at the Draft Record of Decision (ROD) issued in May 2026 by Forest Supervisor Kim Pierson, authorizing Alternative 2 (the Proposed Action, with modifications) for the Grand Targhee Resort Master Development Plan Projects on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Teton Basin Ranger District, Teton County, Wyoming. The Draft ROD approves, among other things, an expansion of the existing Special Use Permit (SUP) boundary by 694 acres, including a 235-acre expansion into the South Bowl area adjacent to Peaked Mountain and a 459-acre expansion into the Mono Trees area.

Objectors do not oppose ski area operations at Grand Targhee Resort within its existing SUP boundary, nor do we oppose improvements to guest facilities, lift infrastructure, and summer recreation opportunities proposed within the existing boundary. Our objections are specifically and exclusively directed at the South Bowl SUP boundary expansion and its projected impacts on the Teton Range bighorn sheep herd, a small, genetically isolated, Core Native herd that has never been extirpated or augmented, and which represents one of the most ecologically irreplaceable wildlife populations in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

The issues raised in this objection were raised in Objectors' June 19, 2025 comments on the DEIS and in earlier scoping comments submitted by the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation on October 15, 2020 ("WY-WSF 2020 Comments"). They are based on information available in the Final EIS (FEIS), the Draft ROD, the Wildlife Biological Evaluation (WBE), the Response to Comments ("RTC"), and the administrative record. Incorporation of documents by reference is not permitted except as specified in 36 CFR Section 218.8(d); all cited materials are referenced by the Forest Service in the approved project environmental analysis document.

We respectfully request that the Reviewing Officer sustain the objections set forth below and direct the Forest Supervisor to address the identified deficiencies prior to issuance of a Final Record of Decision.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This objection is grounded in the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), 16 U.S.C. Section 1604(g)(3)(B); the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. Section 4332; the Forest Service Planning Rule; applicable objection regulations at 36 CFR Part 218; Executive Order 13443 (Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation, Aug. 16, 2007); Wyoming Statute Section 11-19-604 (Wyoming Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Plan; “Wyoming Plan”); and Wyoming Statute Section 23-1-103 (Ownership of Wildlife). Each legal basis is set forth in the applicable objection section below.

The CTNF Forest Plan requires that sensitive species "receive special management emphasis to ensure their viability and to preclude trends toward endangerment that would result in the need for Federal listing," and that there be "no impacts to sensitive species without an analysis of the significance of adverse effects on the populations, its habitat, and on the viability of the species as a whole." (CTNF Forest Plan, Sensitive Species direction, FSM Section 2672.1, at p. A-10.) Bighorn sheep are classified as a sensitive species on the CTNF. The Draft ROD's viability determination, as set forth below, is not consistent with this direction.

OBJECTION ISSUE 1. THE DRAFT ROD CONTAINS INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS REGARDING TETON RANGE BIGHORN SHEEP HERD VIABILITY

The Draft ROD contains a fundamental and legally indefensible contradiction at its core. On page 14, the Forest Supervisor explicitly acknowledges that the Selected Alternative "has the potential to result in an overall decline in the population of the Teton Range Herd." This language tracks directly from the FEIS, which states on pages 316-317:

[D]egradation of habitat in South Bowl and Teton Canyon due to the proposed development, combined with projected increases in recreation activity throughout the range of the Teton bighorn sheep herd, has the potential to substantially reduce access to adequate nutrition and protective habitat. As a result, this alternative has the potential to result in an overall decline in the population of the Teton or Targhee Herd. (FEIS, pp. 316-317.)

Yet, immediately following this acknowledgment, the ROD concludes that the Selected Alternative “May Impact Individuals or Their Habitat, but Will Not Likely Contribute to a Trend Toward Federal Listing or Loss of Population Viability (ROD, p. 14).” These two conclusions cannot coexist in a legally or scientifically coherent analysis.

The Teton Range bighorn sheep herd is described in the ROD itself as "unique, native, genetically isolated, numerically and effectively small, and occupying a limited range (ROD, p. 13). The FEIS documents that the population was estimated at between 125 and 175 individuals as of 2020, declined to 71 individuals following the severe 2022-2023 winter, and partially

recovered to 80 individuals in February 2025 counts (FEIS, p. 292). A herd of this size and isolation has no demographic resilience to absorb a projected population-level decline. For a population in this condition, an “overall decline” is not a recoverable condition short of genetic augmentation, which would itself cause the permanent loss of the herd's Core Native designation under Wyoming Statute Section 11-19-604 and the Wyoming Statewide Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group Plan (September 2004; “Wyoming Plan”).

Bighorn sheep are classified as a Sensitive Species on the CTNF. The 1997 Revised Targhee National Forest Plan and Forest Service Manual Section 2672.1 require that sensitive species "receive special management emphasis to ensure their viability and to preclude trends toward endangerment" and that there be “no impacts to sensitive species without an analysis of the significance of adverse effects on the populations, its habitat, and on the viability of the species as a whole (CTNF Forest Plan, p. A-10).” The Forest Service must also evaluate the effect of agency actions on hunting opportunities and wildlife habitat under Executive Order 13443, Section 2(c). A projected population-level decline in a Core Native herd that already provides only a handful of bighorn sheep hunting licenses is directly incompatible with that obligation. This is addressed further in Objection Issue 6 below.

The Forest Supervisor does not explain how a predicted population-level decline in a numerically small, genetically isolated, non-augmentable herd is compatible with a finding that the action will not likely contribute to a trend toward federal listing or loss of population viability. No analytical bridge is provided between these two findings. Their coexistence in the same document renders the bighorn sheep viability determination arbitrary and unsupported by the record, and inconsistent with the requirements of NFMA, 16 U.S.C. Section 1604(g)(3)(B), and its implementing regulations at 36 CFR Section 219.9.

The Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation raised this concern in the WY-WSF 2020 Comments on pages 3-4, requesting that “a bighorn sheep viability assessment be conducted using both Wyoming Game and Fish and CTNF monitoring data . . . to help determine if the expansion will violate the Forest Plan and NFMA as they relate to bighorn sheep as a sensitive species.” This concern was not adequately addressed in any subsequent analyses. The resulting FEIS viability determination, which the ROD adopts, is internally contradictory for the reasons set forth above.

Requested Remedy: The Reviewing Officer should find that the Forest Supervisor must reconcile the contradictory findings regarding projected population decline and the viability conclusion, and provide a coherent, internally consistent analysis of population-level effects on the Teton Range herd before a Final ROD is issued.

OBJECTION ISSUE 2. THE POPULATION VIABILITY DETERMINATION EMPLOYS AN INAPPROPRIATE SCALE OF ANALYSIS AND RESTS ON FLAWED BASELINE DATA KNOWN TO THE AGENCY

A. The Targhee Planning Area Scale Obscures Real Risk to the Teton Range Herd

The ROD's viability conclusion is premised on analysis conducted at the scale of the broader Targhee Planning Area, defined in a footnote added to the FEIS as the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, where "the wildlife viability requirement strictly refers to the Forest Plan area." This is

the wrong scale of analysis and yields an ecologically misleading and legally insufficient finding under NFMA, 16 U.S.C. Section 1604(g)(3)(B), 36 CFR Section 219.9, and the CTNF Forest Plan's sensitive species direction at FSM Section 2672.1.

The FEIS itself acknowledges, on pages 292-295, that the Teton Range herd "was historically part of a much larger bighorn sheep complex, but habitat fragmentation has isolated the herd." The FEIS further documents that there is no connectivity between the bighorn sheep herds in the Targhee Planning Area. The Teton Range herd functions not as a component of a larger metapopulation capable of absorbing local losses through immigration and recolonization, but as a discrete, self-contained population unit. Evaluating its viability by reference to conditions across a planning area that includes biologically unrelated herds in another state is scientifically inappropriate.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), a cooperating agency on this project and the agency with statutory authority over bighorn sheep in Wyoming under Wyoming Statute Section 23-1-103, raised this concern directly in FEIS Appendix E, Comment 16.33:

In addition, it is important to note that there is no connectivity between the herds in the Targhee Planning Area. The Targhee Herd is one of the few native bighorn sheep herds in the western United States that has never been extirpated, reintroduced, or augmented via translocation. The herd is genetically unique due to this history and is genetically distinct from surrounding herds in Wyoming and Idaho, making it additionally valuable to the species as a whole (Kardos et al. 2010, TRBSWG 2020). The Department disagrees with the determination that expanding into South Bowl would not impact the population viability of bighorn sheep in the Targhee Planning Area. The cumulative impacts portion of the BE rightfully identified the potential for cumulative impacts, which includes South Bowl expansion, to threaten the population viability of the Targhee herd. (FEIS App. E, Comment 16.33.)

The Forest Service's response was to restate its own viability finding without engaging with WGFD's substantive objection (RTC, Response to Comment 16.33). This non-response to the cooperating agency's documented scientific and legal disagreement is itself a deficiency in the record. WGFD also raised this scale-of-analysis concern in its 2020 scoping comments (WGFD WER 6312.03, pp. 3-4).

B. The Baseline Population Data Is Demonstrably Flawed, and the Error Was Known to the Agency

The planning-area-scale viability analysis is further undermined by baseline data that WGFD demonstrated was inaccurate in FEIS Appendix E, Comment 16.34:

The BE states that there are 5 bighorn sheep herds on CTNF (South Lemhi, South Beaverhead, and Lionhead (2 herds) in Idaho and Targhee Herd in Wyoming) and that there are a total of approximately 300 sheep (BE; page 19). However, according to the most recent Idaho Department of Fish and Game Bighorn Sheep Management Plan (May 2022) the population estimates have changed in the last 8-9 years. The Lionhead Herd . . . entirely resides in Montana outside of CTNF and it should not be included. . . . Therefore, the Targhee Planning Area has 3

bighorn sheep herds and realistically fewer than 200 sheep (South Lemhi Herd, 110; South Beaverhead Herd, 17; and Targhee Herd, approximately 50 on CTNF) versus the 300 stated in the BE. (FEIS App. E, Comment 16.34.)

The Forest Service acknowledged these errors and updated population counts in the FEIS (RTC, Response to Comment 16.34). Critically, however, no revision was made to the viability determination in light of these corrections. When the correct data are applied, the Targhee Planning Area contains fewer than 200 bighorn sheep, not 300. Of those, approximately 50 reside on CTNF lands as part of the Teton Range herd. The Idaho herds used to supplement the planning-area analysis are reintroduced populations with documented disease histories. They are not Core Native herds as defined under the Wyoming Plan and Wyoming Statute Section 11-19-604 and are not subject to Wyoming management direction. Including them in a planning-unit-scale viability determination to offset impacts to the sole Core Native herd in Wyoming is not scientifically defensible. The Lionhead herd, as WGFD correctly noted, consists largely of transient individuals from a Montana population and should not be counted as a CTNF population at all (FEIS App. E, Comment 16.34).

Requested Remedy: The Reviewing Officer should direct the Forest Supervisor to conduct a revised bighorn sheep population viability analysis at the appropriate scale with the Teton Range herd treated as an independent, self-contained population unit, using the corrected baseline data now in the record, and to make that analysis available for public review before issuing a Final ROD.

OBJECTION ISSUE 3. THE ACREAGE REDUCTION DOES NOT CONSTITUTE ADEQUATE MITIGATION FOR MINERAL LICK ACCESS AND MOVEMENT CORRIDOR FUNCTION

The ROD characterizes the reduction of the South Bowl expansion from 266 to 235 acres as meaningful mitigation, stating the boundary was moved to “provide an increased buffer to further separate resort activities from the active bighorn sheep mineral lick (ROD, p. 16).” This characterization is not supported by quantitative biological analysis. The ROD does not identify what buffer distance is biologically adequate, does not cite peer-reviewed literature establishing a buffer standard, and does not demonstrate that the 31-acre reduction achieves any measurable reduction in disturbance.

The FEIS documents on pages 307-308 that the Apostle Cliffs mineral lick is less than 900 feet south of the Colter lift-access terrain, and that South Bowl serves as the primary movement corridor for sheep accessing this lick. GPS data from collared ewes confirm passage through the western and northern sections of South Bowl (FEIS at p. 307; WGFD WER 6312.03, pp. 4-6, Figs. 6-7). The FEIS further states on pages 316-317 that research demonstrates Teton Range bighorn sheep avoid winter recreation routes “even at low levels of intensity,” meaning the threshold for functional displacement is extremely low and cannot be remedied by boundary adjustment alone.

Mineral licks are point resources essential for trace mineral nutrition that cannot be substituted or relocated. WGFD's 2020 comments documented that approximately 30 percent of estimated

rams in the Targhee Herd were documented using the Teton Canyon lick via remote camera in 2018 alone, as well as nursery groups with ewes and lambs (WGFD WER 6312.03C, pp. 5-6). Natural mineral licks of this character are described in peer-reviewed literature as limited and ecologically significant point resources for mountain ungulates, access to which can be blocked by human activity along movement paths (Holl & Bleich 1987; Leslie & Douglas 1980; Mincher et al. 2008, cited in WGFD 2020 Comments at p. 8, WER 6312.03). No boundary adjustment addresses the behavioral incompatibility between operational ski resort activities and bighorn sheep corridor use during the winter months when nutritional access is most critical.

The WY-WSF 2020 Comments specifically flagged this concern, noting that "development of this area will compromise an important bighorn sheep movement corridor" and that "[r]emote cameras have documented a significant portion of the bighorns in the area using this lick (WY-WSF 2020 Comments, p. 4)." The RTC did not provide a substantive response demonstrating that the 31-acre boundary reduction achieves a measurable reduction in disturbance to corridor function or lick access.

Requested Remedy: The Reviewing Officer should find that the 31-acre boundary reduction does not constitute biologically adequate mitigation, and should direct the Forest Supervisor to either demonstrate through peer-reviewed biological standards what constitutes an adequate buffer from the mineral lick and movement corridor, or conclude that no adequate buffer is achievable within the proposed expansion footprint.

OBJECTION ISSUE 4. THE DRAFT ROD DOES NOT DOCUMENT ADEQUATE COORDINATION WITH WGFD REGARDING TETON RANGE HERD UNIT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES, AND CONFLICTS WITH THE WGFD-USFS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

WGFD is both a cooperating agency on this project and the primary authority for managing the Teton Range bighorn sheep herd under Wyoming law. Under Wyoming Statute Section 23-1-103, "all wildlife in Wyoming is the property of the state," and the policy of the state is to provide an adequate and flexible system for control, propagation, management, protection, and regulation of all Wyoming wildlife. Under Wyoming Statute Section 23-1-302, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission is directed and empowered to manage, protect, and regulate all wildlife in Wyoming, including through cooperative agreements with federal agencies. The Teton Range bighorn sheep herd is, in the most literal legal sense, Wyoming state property, and WGFD is its steward.

The record does not demonstrate that the Forest Service coordinated with WGFD to evaluate how the Selected Alternative affects the ability to achieve WGFD's specific herd unit management objectives for the Teton Range herd, including population targets, habitat management goals, and hunting season parameters established through the state's wildlife management planning process.

This absence is particularly significant in light of the Master Memorandum of Understanding for the Management of Bighorn Sheep on National Forest System Lands in Wyoming (FS Agreement No. 16-MU-11020000-006, executed 2015-2016; "WGFD-USFS MOU"), signed by

the State of Wyoming, WGFD, and the USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain and Intermountain Regions. That MOU expressly commits the Forest Service to the following obligations:

- Maintain close cooperation as needed in matters of mutual interest including management of bighorn sheep habitat and populations (MOU Section IV(A));
- Work collaboratively to provide Forest Service input and recommendations for establishment of Commission approved bighorn sheep herd unit objectives on NFS lands, and recognize that “the Forest Service recognizes the jurisdiction and responsibilities of the State of Wyoming with respect to wildlife and fish on the national forests” (MOU Section IV(B));
- Agree to collaborate with the State of Wyoming and WGFD on implementation of the State-wide Interaction Working Group Report and Recommendations on NFS lands -- the Wyoming Plan -- incorporated as MOU Appendix A (MOU Section IV(C)).

The Forest Service's response to WGFD Comment 16.33, restating its own viability finding without engaging with WGFD's substantive scientific and legal concerns, is inconsistent with the cooperative relationship these commitments describe (RTC 16.33). A response that simply restates the original finding without engaging the agency's documented objections does not reflect “close cooperation” or a “collaborative” management posture as the MOU requires.

Furthermore, the MOU incorporates the Wyoming Plan as Appendix A and requires the Forest Service to collaborate on its implementation on NFS lands (MOU Section IV(C)). The Wyoming Plan, codified by Wyoming Statute Section 11-19-604, identifies Core Native herds as “the highest priority areas for bighorn sheep management in Wyoming.” The ROD does not demonstrate that the Forest Service evaluated whether the Selected Alternative is consistent with that framework, nor does it document WGFD's assessment of whether the Selected Alternative is compatible with achieving the herd's management objectives under the Wyoming Plan's Core Native herd designation.

Requested Remedy: The Reviewing Officer should direct the Forest Supervisor to provide documentation of substantive coordination with WGFD regarding Teton Range herd unit management objectives; to provide a meaningful analytical response to WGFD's documented disagreement with the viability determination (FEIS App. E, Comment 16.33); and to demonstrate consistency with the Forest Service's cooperative commitments under the WGFD-USFS MOU (FS Agreement No. 16-MU-11020000-006).

OBJECTION ISSUE 5. THE OPERATIONS AND BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT PLAN CONSTITUTES IMPERMISSIBLE DEFERRED MITIGATION

The ROD requires GTR to develop an Operations and Boundary Management Plan prior to commencing lift operations in South Bowl, including a double-rope boundary and coordinated backcountry access points designed to minimize human encroachment on bighorn sheep habitat (ROD at pp. 18-19). This plan does not currently exist. Its specific terms, standards, and effectiveness have not been evaluated in the NEPA process. The primary mitigation for the most

significant impacts on bighorn sheep is entirely dependent on a plan whose contents are unknown.

Longstanding NEPA principles require that mitigation measures relied upon to support a finding be sufficiently defined and demonstrably effective at the time of the decision, not deferred to post-decisional planning. See *Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council*, 490 U.S. 332, 352 (1989); see also 40 CFR Section 1502.14(f). Where the primary mitigation for sensitive species impacts is an unwritten plan to be negotiated after the decision is made, the decision cannot be said to rest on a complete and adequate analysis of mitigation effectiveness.

The FEIS itself acknowledges on page 316 that the full extent of impacts to bighorn sheep from the existing Colter Lift and backcountry access points “are not yet known” and that “land management agencies are strategizing additional monitoring efforts and management actions.” The WY-WSF 2020 Comments specifically raised this concern, noting uncertainty as to whether “new ‘backcountry gates’ will be installed for out-of-bounds skiing, which could expand the anthropogenic disturbance beyond the currently proposed resort expansion (WY-WSF 2020 Comments at p. 5).” Six years later, those questions remain unresolved in the ROD. Approving a significantly larger expansion, with a new lift in the documented movement corridor, while deferring key mitigation to a future planning process is not consistent with NEPA's requirement to take a hard look at environmental consequences before a decision is made. See 40 CFR Section 1502.1.

Requested Remedy: The Reviewing Officer should direct the Forest Supervisor to either develop, finalize, and make available for public comment a complete Operations and Boundary Management Plan before issuing a Final ROD, or remove reliance on that plan as a basis for the bighorn sheep impact determination and viability finding.

OBJECTION ISSUE 6. THE DRAFT ROD DOES NOT ACCURATELY REPRESENT COMPLIANCE WITH EXECUTIVE ORDER 13443 (FACILITATION OF HUNTING HERITAGE AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION)

On page 27 of the Draft ROD, Forest Supervisor Pierson states: “In reviewing the FEIS, I have concluded that my decision is consistent with all relevant laws, regulations and requirements.” Listed among those requirements is Executive Order 13443 (Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation, Aug. 16, 2007; “EO 13443”). On page 29 of the Draft ROD, the Forest Supervisor explains compliance as follows:

The FEIS evaluates wildlife habitat and recreational uses, including how the project may influence hunting and wildlife-related recreation. It considers habitat changes and incorporates mitigation to sustain wildlife populations. Compliance is achieved by ensuring that project actions are consistent with maintaining wildlife conservation and associated recreational opportunities.

This representation is not accurate. The FEIS does not evaluate how the project will “influence hunting and wildlife-related recreation” in any meaningful sense. Hunting is referenced in historical context, offhandedly as a form of existing recreation, and as a factor that affected past migration patterns in the Teton Range bighorn sheep herd. Nowhere in the FEIS is there an

analysis of current hunting participation trends, harvest levels, license allocations, or economic value of bighorn sheep hunting in or adjacent to the project area. No attempt is made to explain how the Selected Alternative may affect those metrics.

EO 13443 directs federal agencies, consistent with their missions, to evaluate the effect of agency actions on trends in hunting participation and, where appropriate, to implement actions that expand and enhance opportunities for the public (EO 13443, Section 2(a)); to consider the economic and recreational values of hunting in agency actions (Section 2(b)); to manage wildlife and wildlife habitats on public lands in a manner that expands and enhances hunting opportunities (Section 2(c)); to work collaboratively with state governments to manage and conserve game species and their habitats in a manner that respects state management authority over wildlife resources (Section 2(d)); to establish short and long term goals, in cooperation with state governments, to foster healthy and productive populations of game species and appropriate opportunities to hunt those species (Section 2(e)); to ensure that agency plans and actions consider programs and recommendations of comprehensive planning efforts such as state wildlife action plans and range-wide management plans for big game (Section 2(f)); and to seek the advice of state fish and wildlife agencies with respect to federal activities (Section 2(g)).

The Selected Alternative fails to comply with these directives in multiple respects. Bighorn sheep hunting opportunities in Wyoming are rare, and the Teton Range herd is one of the few populations that currently offer such an opportunity. The ROD itself acknowledges that the Selected Alternative “has the potential to result in an overall decline in the population of the Teton Range Herd (ROD, p. 14). A population in overall decline will support fewer, not more, hunting opportunities. A population rendered non-viable, a risk the ROD acknowledges, would eliminate that hunting opportunity entirely. Neither the FEIS nor the ROD evaluates this consequence, and neither document considers the economic or recreational value of the existing bighorn sheep hunting opportunity in the project vicinity.

Furthermore, WGFD, the state agency charged with managing bighorn sheep under Wyoming Statute Section 23-1-103, filed formal objections to the viability determination. WGFD is not listed on page 23 of the Draft ROD as an agency the Forest Service was in consultation with regarding EO 13443 compliance. The Forest Service cannot credibly represent that it has worked collaboratively with WGFD as required by EO 13443, Section 2(d), or sought WGFD's advice as required by Section 2(g), while simultaneously declining to engage with WGFD's substantive documented objections. The Wyoming Plan, codified under Wyoming Statute Section 11-19-604, constitutes a comprehensive range-wide management plan for bighorn sheep of the type considered by EO 13443, Section 2(f). The ROD's failure to adequately integrate Core Native herd protections from the Wyoming Plan is, among other things, a failure to comply with the requirement to consider recommendations of range-wide management plans for big game.

Requested Remedy: The Reviewing Officer should direct the Forest Supervisor to complete an evaluation of how the Selected Alternative may influence hunting participation and opportunity for the Teton Range bighorn sheep herd; to provide a basic accounting of the economic and recreational value of the existing bighorn sheep hunting opportunity in the project area vicinity; to document coordination with WGFD under EO 13443 Sections 2(d) and 2(g); to explain how the Selected Alternative aligns with the Wyoming Plan as a comprehensive range-wide management plan under EO 13443 Section 2(f); and to amend the fifth Project Design Criterion

for Wildlife and Fish to require coordination with WGFD, in addition to the Forest Service biologist, in determining placement of backcountry access points in GTR's Operations and Boundary Management Plan.

OBJECTION ISSUE 7. THE CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ANALYSIS FAILS TO ACCOUNT FOR CROSS-BOUNDARY HABITAT CONSIDERATIONS, INCLUDING THE BRIDGER-TETON NATIONAL FOREST PLAN REVISION

The Teton Range bighorn sheep herd uses habitat on both the Caribou-Targhee National Forest and the Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF), which manages the eastern slope of the Teton Range. A complete cumulative impacts analysis under NEPA must account for management direction and planning decisions on the BTNF as part of the cumulative context within which the Selected Alternative will operate. See 40 CFR Section 1508.7.

The BTNF is currently undergoing a Forest Plan revision that will establish management direction for bighorn sheep habitat on the eastern slope of the Teton Range. Of critical significance, bighorn sheep are not currently being considered as a Species of Conservation Concern (SCC) in the BTNF Forest Plan revision process. Under the 2012 Planning Rule, 36 CFR Section 219.9, SCC designation triggers binding requirements for maintaining viable populations and habitat conditions. If bighorn sheep do not receive SCC designation on the BTNF, there will be no species-specific management direction on that planning unit to protect Teton Range herd habitat on the eastern slope at precisely the same time the CTNF is approving significant development in core western-slope habitat.

The cumulative effect of the BTNF's potential failure to designate bighorn sheep as an SCC, combined with the CTNF's approval of South Bowl expansion, could leave the Teton Range herd with no meaningful regulatory protection on either slope of the range it depends upon. This is a reasonably foreseeable future action with direct management implications for the same wildlife population that must be considered under NEPA. See 40 CFR Section 1508.7. The ROD does not demonstrate that the Forest Supervisor considered the BTNF Forest Plan revision, the SCC designation question, or their implications for cumulative habitat availability and herd viability.

Requested Remedy: The Reviewing Officer should direct the Forest Supervisor to supplement the cumulative impacts analysis with an evaluation of the BTNF Forest Plan revision's implications for the Teton Range herd, including the potential absence of SCC designation, and to coordinate with BTNF planning staff to ensure management decisions on both units are consistent with the long-term conservation of this herd.

OBJECTION ISSUE 8. THE APPROVED ACTION DIRECTLY CONTRADICTS DECADES OF COORDINATED CONSERVATION INVESTMENT MADE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CARIBOU-TARGHEE NATIONAL FOREST

Over more than 30 years, Objectors and their partners have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in protecting the Teton Range bighorn sheep herd in direct coordination with the CTNF. The FEIS acknowledges on page 316 that domestic sheep allotments on the CTNF "have been

effectively phased out from the Teton Range Subsection, reducing the threat of disease to bighorn sheep in the region." What the ROD fails to acknowledge is the precise nature of those investments and their direct relationship to the terrain now proposed for ski resort development.

The Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation (then Wyoming FNAWS) and the National Wildlife Federation raised approximately \$250,000 over a three-year period and provided compensation to domestic sheep allotment permittees for voluntarily waiving their grazing permits back to the CTNF (WY-WSF 2020 Comments at p. 2). The CTNF subsequently closed five allotments, including the Table Rock/Mill Creek allotment in 2001 (WY-WSF 2020 Comments, p. 2, Table 1). WGFD's scoping comments confirm the connection that the ROD ignores: "The South Bowl SUP Expansion Area is within the former Table Rock/Mill Creek Sheep and Goat Allotment (WGFD WER 6312.03 Comments, p. 3)."

The location of the proposed expansion within the former Table Rock/Mill Creek allotment is central to evaluating this decision, not peripheral. The Forest Service was a partner in retiring that allotment for the benefit of bighorn sheep. It has not explained why that commitment is now being set aside. The Forest Service, acting under the authority of the 1997 CTNF Forest Plan and its sensitive species direction, endorsed and facilitated the retirement of the Table Rock/Mill Creek allotment using non-federal conservation funding specifically to protect the Teton Range bighorn sheep herd. The South Bowl SUP expansion area sits within that retired allotment. Approving commercial ski resort development in terrain that was purchased out of domestic sheep grazing—with Forest Service endorsement, under Forest Service policy—to protect bighorn sheep represents an inconsistency in Forest Service management direction of the most direct and concrete kind. The ROD does not acknowledge this connection and provides no justification for it.

These investments also include the Teton Canyon Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project (decision signed June 2018), a collaborative effort between WGFD and the CTNF to restore approximately 840 acres of historical bighorn sheep habitat through prescribed fire treatments. Approximately 279 acres of the planned prescribed burn overlap with the South Bowl SUP expansion area. (WGFD WER 6312.03, p. 5). Approving the South Bowl expansion would directly conflict with and potentially foreclose this CTNF-endorsed habitat restoration investment.

Additionally, the Teton Range Bighorn Sheep Working Group's January 2022 news release requested that backcountry skiers voluntarily avoid the South Bowl area and the south-facing slopes of Teton Canyon surrounding South Bowl in order to encourage bighorn sheep use of this valuable winter habitat, in coordination with the CTNF (FEIS at p. 316). The ROD does not address how these Forest Service-endorsed voluntary closure agreements will be maintained or whether they will be rendered meaningless if commercial ski operations are approved in the same terrain.

Each of these investments—the allotment retirements, the Teton Canyon Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, and the voluntary closure agreements—was undertaken through collaborative, multi-stakeholder processes with the active participation and endorsement of the CTNF. Approving South Bowl expansion nullifies or undermines each of them. The ROD's failure to acknowledge this contradiction and explain how the Selected Alternative is consistent with prior Forest Service commitments is arbitrary and an abuse of discretion.

Requested Remedy: The Reviewing Officer should direct the Forest Supervisor to specifically acknowledge that the South Bowl SUP expansion area falls within the former Table Rock/Mill Creek domestic sheep allotment; to explain the relationship between the Selected Alternative and the retirement of that allotment using conservation funds raised in coordination with the CTNF; to address how the Selected Alternative is consistent with the Teton Canyon Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project; and to explain how the Selected Alternative is consistent with prior Forest Service commitments made through domestic sheep allotment retirements and collaborative bighorn sheep management planning.

OBJECTION ISSUE 9. THE WYOMING PLAN CORE NATIVE HERD DESIGNATION IS NOT ADEQUATELY INTEGRATED INTO THE ANALYSIS

Wyoming Statute Section 11-19-604 establishes a statewide framework for bighorn sheep management and conservation, with a goal to ‘maintain the health of bighorn sheep populations.’ Within that framework, the Wyoming Statewide Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group's Final Report and Recommendations (“Wyoming Plan,” September 2004), codified as the initial Wyoming Plan under Section 11-19-604 and incorporated by reference into the WGFD-USFS MOU as Appendix A, creates a hierarchy of protection based on a herd's genetic and demographic history. At the top of that hierarchy sit Core Native herds, defined as ‘those populations that have never been extirpated and repopulated.’ The Wyoming Plan identifies Core Native herds as ‘the highest priority areas for bighorn sheep management in Wyoming’ and specifically names the Targhee (Teton Range) herd as one of them (Wyoming Plan, p. 4). This designation is not a label; rather, it is a management directive. It reflects the irreplaceable ecological and genetic value of a herd that has persisted without human intervention, and it carries the strongest habitat protection obligations available under Wyoming law.

Under Wyoming Statute Section 23-1-103, all wildlife in Wyoming is the property of the state, and the state's policy is to provide an adequate system for the management, protection, and regulation of all Wyoming wildlife. Under Section 23-1-302, WGFD holds broad authority to manage and protect bighorn sheep, including through cooperative agreements with federal agencies. These statutes collectively establish that WGFD's formal disagreement with the Forest Supervisor's viability determination is not merely the opinion of one stakeholder among many. It is the documented position of the legal steward of the affected resource.

The ROD acknowledges the herd's unique characteristics but does not engage with the Core Native designation as a legal or management framework for evaluating the adequacy of mitigation or the acceptability of projected impacts. The Wyoming Plan's designation of this herd as Core Native carries the highest habitat protection priority under state law. If the herd were to be extirpated or augmented through transplants as a result of habitat loss—a risk the ROD itself acknowledges—it would permanently lose the Core Native designation and the strongest protections available under Wyoming law and the Wyoming Plan. No recovery effort can restore that status. This permanent, irreversible risk is not adequately weighed in the ROD.

The WGFD-USFS MOU, at Section IV(C), commits the Forest Service to collaborating with WGFD on implementation of the Wyoming Plan on NFS lands. The ROD does not demonstrate that the Forest Service fulfilled this obligation with respect to the Core Native designation or

solicited WGFD's assessment of whether the Selected Alternative is compatible with maintaining that designation.

Requested Remedy: The Reviewing Officer should direct the Forest Supervisor to specifically address the Core Native herd designation under Wyoming Statute Section 11-19-604 and the Wyoming Plan; to document WGFD's assessment of whether the Selected Alternative is compatible with maintaining that designation; and to explain how the risk of permanent loss of Core Native status was weighed in the decision.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REQUESTED REMEDIES

The Teton Range bighorn sheep herd is one of the most ecologically irreplaceable wildlife populations on National Forest System lands in the western United States. It is genetically unique, has never been extirpated or augmented, and currently numbers approximately 80 individuals, with approximately 50 on CTNF lands. The Forest Service's own cooperating agency—WGFD, the statutory steward of all wildlife in Wyoming under Wyoming Statute Section 23-1-103—formally disagrees with the viability determination on the record. The FEIS acknowledges a projected population-level decline. The primary mitigation measure is an unwritten plan for the future. The viability determination rests on an inappropriate analytical scale and demonstrably flawed baseline data that the agency knew was inaccurate. The South Bowl SUP expansion area sits within the former Table Rock/Mill Creek domestic sheep allotment, retired with significant conservation funding specifically to protect this herd—with Forest Service endorsement. The approved action is directly incompatible with the Forest Service's cooperative commitments under the WGFD-USFS MOU, the Wyoming Plan's Core Native herd framework, EO 13443's hunting heritage and wildlife conservation directives, and the 1997 CTNF Forest Plan's sensitive species direction.

These issues go beyond minor procedural deficiencies to the substance of the Forest Supervisor's duty under NFMA, 16 U.S.C. Section 1604(g)(3)(B); NEPA, 42 U.S.C. Section 4332; the 1997 Targhee Forest Plan's sensitive species direction (FSM Section 2672.1); EO 13443; Wyoming Statute Sections 11-19-604 and 23-1-103; and the WGFD-USFS MOU to manage sensitive species to maintain viable populations and to take a hard look at environmental consequences before making irreversible decisions. The expansion of Grand Targhee Resort into South Bowl is irreversible in any meaningful management timeframe. The loss of the Teton Range bighorn sheep herd, or its reduction to a remnant population requiring augmentation, is permanent.

Objectors respectfully request that the Reviewing Officer sustain this and direct the Forest Supervisor to:

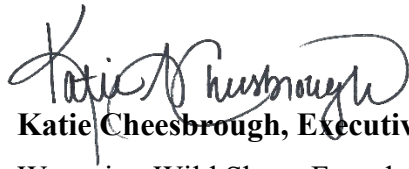
- Conduct a revised bighorn sheep population viability analysis at the appropriate scale with the Teton Range herd treated as an independent population unit, using corrected baseline data, and to make that analysis available for public review (Objection Issues 1 and 2);
- Provide a coherent, internally consistent explanation of how a predicted “overall decline in the population of the Teton Range Herd (FEIS pp. 316-317)” is compatible with a

finding of no likely contribution to a trend toward federal listing or loss of population viability, as required by 36 CFR Section 219.9 and FSM Section 2672.1 (Objection Issue 1);

- Document substantive coordination with WGFD regarding Teton Range herd unit management objectives; to provide a meaningful analytical response to WGFD's documented disagreement with the viability determination (FEIS App. E, Comment 16.33); and to demonstrate consistency with the WGFD-USFS MOU (FS Agreement No. 16-MU-11020000-006) (Objection Issue 4);
- Develop, finalize, and make available for public comment a complete Operations and Boundary Management Plan before issuing a Final ROD, or remove reliance on that plan as a basis for the bighorn sheep impact determination (Objection Issue 5);
- Complete a meaningful evaluation of how the Selected Alternative affects hunting participation and opportunity for the Teton Range bighorn sheep herd; to account for the economic and recreational value of that hunting opportunity; to document coordination with WGFD under EO 13443; and to amend the fifth PDC for Wildlife and Fish to require WGFD coordination in placement of backcountry access points (Objection Issue 6);
- Supplement the cumulative impacts analysis with an evaluation of the BTNF Forest Plan revision's implications for the Teton Range herd and to coordinate with BTNF planning staff accordingly (Objection Issue 7);
- Specifically acknowledge that the South Bowl expansion area falls within the former Table Rock/Mill Creek domestic sheep allotment; to explain how the Selected Alternative is consistent with the retirement of that allotment and with the Teton Canyon Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project (Objection Issue 8);
- Address the Core Native herd designation under Wyoming Statute Section 11-19-604 and the Wyoming Plan, to document WGFD's position on compatibility with maintaining that designation, and to explain how the risk of permanent loss of Core Native status was weighed (Objection Issue 9); and
- In the alternative, if the Reviewing Officer does not sustain all objections, direct the Forest Supervisor to reconsider the Selected Alternative and evaluate whether Alternative 3 (no SUP expansion) or Alternative 5 (Mono Trees only) better fulfills the Forest Supervisor's obligations under NFMA and the CTNF Forest Plan's sensitive species direction.

What makes this objection both substantive and urgent is not that the impacts to the Teton Range Bighorn Sheep herd are uncertain; it's that they are irreversible. The Teton Range herd genetics cannot be reconstituted once lost, and the Core Native designation cannot be restored once forfeited. We urged the Reviewing Officer and this irreplaceable herd receives the protections it is owed under federal and state law.

Respectfully submitted,



Katie Cheesbrough, Executive Director

Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation



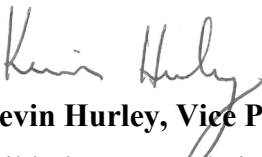
Nat Paterson, Policy Director

Wyoming Wildlife Federation



Josh Metten, Wyoming Field Manager

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership



Kevin Hurley, Vice President of Conservation - Emeritus

Wild Sheep Foundation



KEY LEGAL AUTHORITIES AND RECORD REFERENCES

Federal Statutes, Regulations, Executive Orders, and Case Law

National Forest Management Act (NFMA), 16 U.S.C. Section 1604(g)(3)(B)

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. Section 4332

Executive Order 13443, Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation (Aug. 16, 2007)

36 CFR Part 218, Subparts A and B (Predecisional Administrative Review)

36 CFR Section 218.5(a) (Objection eligibility)

36 CFR Section 219.9 (Species of Conservation Concern and viable populations)

36 CFR Section 219.19 (NFMA implementing regulation -- viable populations)

40 CFR Section 1502.1 (NEPA -- purpose of environmental impact statement)

40 CFR Section 1502.14(f) (NEPA -- mitigation measures must be analyzed)

40 CFR Section 1508.7 (NEPA -- cumulative impacts)

Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council, 490 U.S. 332 (1989)

Forest Service Manual and Plan Provisions

USDA Forest Service Manual Section 2672.1 (Sensitive Species Management)

1997 Revised Caribou-Targhee National Forest Plan, Teton Range Subsection (M33 1Db), Wildlife Goals at pp. 111-56, 111-156; Sensitive Species direction at pp. A-10, A-18; Monitoring at pp. V-34, V-38

Wyoming Statutes

Wyoming Statute Section 11-19-604 (Wyoming Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Plan; Core Native herd designation)

Wyoming Statute Section 23-1-103 (Ownership of wildlife; state management authority)

Wyoming Statute Section 23-1-302 (Powers and duties of Game and Fish Commission)

Administrative Record

Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), Grand Targhee Resort Master Development Plan Projects, Caribou-Targhee National Forest (2025), at pp. 292-295, 307-308, 316-317

Draft Record of Decision (ROD), Forest Supervisor Kim Pierson (May 2026), at pp. 13-14, 16, 18-19, 27, 29

Wildlife Biological Evaluation (WBE), Caribou-Targhee National Forest

Response to Comments (RTC), FEIS Appendix E, Comments 16.33 and 16.34 (WGFD cooperating agency comments)

Prior Comments and Cooperative Agreements

Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, Comments on Grand Targhee Resort 2018 Master Development Plan Projects, October 15, 2020 ("WY-WSF 2020 Comments"), at pp. 2-5 and Attachment A

Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Comments on Grand Targhee Resort 2018 Master Development Plan Projects (WER 6312.03), October 12, 2020 ("WGFD 2020 Comments"), at pp. 3-8 and Figs. 1-7

Master Memorandum of Understanding for the Management of Bighorn Sheep on National Forest System Lands in Wyoming, FS Agreement No. 16-MU-11020000-006 (executed 2015-2016) ("WGFD-USFS MOU")

Wyoming Statewide Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group, Final Report and Recommendations (September 2004) ("Wyoming Plan")