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Environmental Assessment


Construction of Ski Run 6A at Grand Targhee Ski and Summer Resort

Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Teton Basin Ranger District, U.S.
Forest Service

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unrelated to resort activity have been observed to cause a disturbance to birds in the area and this may continue.

3.3.2. Proposed Action Alternative



The 1994 BA stated that no direct effects to peregrine falcons were anticipated as a result of habitat change in the permit area from the preferred alternative (including development of Peaked Mountain). No adverse effect was expected from the change in vegetation composition on Peaked Mountain; it was stated that peregrines may hunt in the open meadow areas of the developed ski runs. Alteration of mature timber stands may lead to a shift in prey distribution or composition on a local scale but similar habitats are not limited within or surrounding the permit area and prey abundance or availability was not anticipated to be impacted. Habitat patterns would not be altered by the Proposed Action (Ovard 2003).

The 1994 BA further stated that direct and indirect effects from human activity could occur within and outside the permit area related to expansion of recreational activities, including snowcat skiing and spring skiing in the vicinity of Peaked Mountain and Teton Canyon. Indirect effects may occur as a result of the increase in human activities due to timing and proximity to cliff sites. Depending on the aspect and exposure of the cliff sites, they may not be available for nesting in March and April due to snow and/or ice cover. The BA identified the need for cautionary measures to ensure available habitat near Peaked Mountain was not limited. The BA further stated that with implementation of such measures, the preferred alternative was not likely to adversely affect peregrine falcon or their habitat.

According to the 2004 BE and the survey data presented in the previous section, there is a natural variability in peregrine use of Teton Canyon. They have been observed on both sides of the canyon and in different areas. They have successfully fledged young in years when cat skiing has taken place in the area of the proposed Ski Run 6A and they have been absent in years when no activity has taken place on Peaked Mountain. The FEIS required monitoring to determine nesting activity and to refine management needs. Monitoring would continue for peregrine falcons and use of Ski Run 6A would be modified if impacts to peregrine falcons are attributed to its use. If continued monitoring shows a link between Ski Run 6A and adverse effects to peregrine falcons the mitigations in the FEIS provide the District Ranger with means to address the impacts. For example, grooming could be stopped or the run could be closed early before peregrines begin nesting in the area to reduce impacts. Forest Plan standards and guidelines would be utilized to provide protection during critical nesting and rearing periods.

Potential impacts from construction of Ski Run 6A would be mitigated by timing the construction to occur outside of the sensitive time period for peregrines. Because snow logging would occur in the spring, available information about the presence of peregrine falcons would be considered by the Forest Service Biologist before authorizing the use of snow logging. For example, if monitoring showed that peregrines were using the south side of the canyon and not nesting in the Apostles then snow logging could be attempted. However, if peregrines were nesting on the north side, logging would have to occur later in the summer. The increased human activity and noise in this portion of Grand Targhee, during construction of the proposed ski run is anticipated to temporarily cause some individual birds to avoid the project area, but is not likely to cause mortality, reduced reproduction, or other population-level effects.

of land at the base of Grand Targhee. Squirrel Meadows contains a unique wetland area that will be managed as prime grizzly bear habitat. The land exchange by itself does not cause direct effects but indirect effects may occur. The following represent some of the potential effects that were identified:

- Most forest wildlife species would be displaced from the developed acres but the reduction in habitat is not significant. For example, a reduction of four tenths of one percent of the mature forested habitat would occur for the three-toed woodpecker, flammulated owl, boreal owl, great gray owl, pine marten, and fisher.
- Potential relocation of the Bustle Creek northern goshawk.
- An increase in skier visits and additional destination skiers as well as an increase in summer recreation activities such as scenic chair lift rides.

Increased development at the Grand Targhee base area as a result of the land exchange is also planned for the foreseeable future. According to the Resort manager the authorization process with the County to approve the base development may take up to two years to complete before any construction could be authorized to begin. Guidance for development would be determined by Teton County and would occur under the direction of the Teton County Comprehensive Plan. Mitigations committed to in the FEIS pertaining to the development of the base would still apply and would reduce impacts. Complete buildout of the base area may take ten to 20 years to complete depending upon economic and other factors. The increase in the size of Grand Targhee may have an effect on the number of users in Teton Canyon by attracting more people to the area. Effects were analyzed in the Squirrel Meadows Grand Targhee Land Exchange Proposal EIS. The FWS stated in their biological opinion that the land exchange was not likely to adversely affect the peregrine falcon.

4.5. Determination

In 2001 there were 1525.31 acres of disturbance recorded in this watershed (Table 2). Between 2001 and 2003 an additional 27 acres of disturbance occurred for a total of 1552.31 acres of hydrologically disturbed area in the watershed. At that time, the disturbance for the watershed was 4.6 percent (1552.31 disturbed acres/ 33177 total acres).

Table 2. Disturbance in the Watershed as of 2001

Type of Disturbance	Acres of Disturbance
Ski Runs	112.07
Ski Lifts	24.11
FS Roads	144.06
FS Trails	220.04
BLM Roads	12.08
Developed C.G	21.82
B.S. Camp	74.94
Trail Heads	12.12
Landslides	869.18
Dispersed Camps	34.89
Total	1525.31

Table IV-8. Estimated Acres of Overstory (Tree) Removal (O.R.) by Community Type

Vegetative Community	Alternatives								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Aspen Woodlands	0	2.8	2.8	13.1	13.1	18.8	18.8	27.6	27.6
Seedling/Sapling-Mature	0	1.4	1.4	32.3	32.3	43.7	43.7	50.9	50.9
Mature	0	0	0	30.8	30.8	63.8	63.8	100.8	100.8

Table IV-9. Estimated Acres of Grading by Community Type

Vegetative Community	Alternatives								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Grassland (Xeric/Mesic)	0.00	19.90	19.90	25.40	25.40	31.50	31.50	32.70	32.70
Riparian	2.00	2.30	2.30	2.30	2.30	2.30	2.30	31.30	31.30
Alpine Fell-fields	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Shrublands	0.00	5.30	5.30	7.00	7.00	8.70	8.70	9.90	9.90
Aspen Woodlands	0.00	3.00	3.00	11.30	11.30	18.80	18.80	25.80	25.80
Seedling/Sapling	0.00	1.50	1.50	31.60	31.60	41.60	41.60	63.70	63.70
Mature Timber	0.00	0.00	0.00	20.50	20.50	48.30	48.30	85.30	85.30

**Grand
Targhe
4b**



Alternative 1 - The existing situation will continue with an insignificant amount of construction occurring as part of the facilities general operation. This alternative will not significantly impact or change any of the existing plant communities or affect any sensitive plant species or suitable habitat.

Alternative 2 - The electrical transmission line would follow an existing corridor for above ground lines of approximately 1.5 miles long from the Forest boundary to the proposed substation. This corridor will require some changes and widening. From the substation, three lines would continue underground to the Resort area, following the existing underground line route. Underground lines would be rerouted to skirt the edge of the wetlands instead of passing through the wetlands as they presently do. This corridor passes through several community types which would be impacted. Any timber currently in the overhead line corridor would need to be removed and could cause some problems with wind firmness in stands on either side of the corridor although most of the alignment is already naturally open. Vegetation along the above ground line corridor will be maintained at a lower successional stage to provide access to the transmission lines and prevent vegetation from growing into the lines. Underground lines, once they are laid and vegetation is reestablished, would have less impact on plant communities that it passes through and vegetation will be allowed to follow in normal successional patterns. Seedlings and plantings using introduced species could impact the remaining plant communities, especially those on harsher and less vegetated sites, by adversely effecting biodiversity on the corridor or adjacent to it (Dennis & Ruggiero, 1990; Hiebert, 1990; Keystone, 1991). Noxious weed infestations could occur within disturbed areas from construction equipment, seed mixes, and erosion control materials such as straw. Mitigations of equipment washing, certified seed and certified straw, will eliminate most of the changes of infestations.

Most vegetation will be covered by snow during winter activities and no detrimental impacts to vegetation