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Title:

Comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Grand Targhee Resort's development plan. I do not think this expansion plan can even approach offering sustainable recreation RELATIVE to the environmental impacts of the economic and social costs to our community and the ecological costs to the Tetons. Therefore, I oppose the plan as presented.

My wife and I are avid skiers and absolutely love skiing the terrain at Grand Targhee. Part of its allure is how spectacular it is and that it is not too large nor overwhelmed with skiers/riders as numerous mega resorts are. Our move to this valley, in part, was due to the attraction to that ski area along with other recreational opportunities. But even if we were not skiers, more important for us, was the draw to the quality of life offered by this quaint, rural community found in the spectacular setting of Teton Valley. With the type of expansion proposed, I see that quality greatly at risk. In 2009 the National Forest Service denied expansion of Crested Butte Mountain Resort on the grounds that it would not serve the public interest citing economic and social costs such as transportation impacts and increased demand for public services. Those and more would be at risk here which would subject the quality of our rural community to a deterioration relative to the values most residents hold. That "quality" includes the ecological integrity of the Tetons, including its wildlife and their habitat and the water quality of its streams. .

To be sure, there are positives to expanding GTR...

The development plan will infuse more money into the community while creating jobs and bringing in tax revenues. It would establish more biking trails in an attempt to meet the demand of the large growth in mountain biking. And it would give destination skiers seeking the Tetons, an attractive alternative to Jackson Hole.

But the Tetons do not need another Jackson Hole..

Increased development is a common mantra of ski areas. But with it comes a high cost that would be irreversible. The stated expansion not only would change the nature of the mountains with its new infrastructure, manipulation of the landscape and increased human visits, but it would transform the supporting community in undesired ways. Expansion brings increased population which guarantees many associated negatives that would erode or outright destroy the community characteristics that are so valued here. There are examples of this all over the country where communities became transformed negatively by such growth in quest to enhance recreational opportunities for more people.

We moved here from another mountain community...

This was in an attempt to escape the growth and population pressure from a large population area. We had become the playground for others outside the area which, in itself, isn't necessarily a bad thing. However, that playground became overused. As more people came up to partake of the "advertised" recreational opportunities, we watched our slow-paced community become overwhelmed and feel more impersonal. We all noted more rudeness and disregard for the surrounding mountain environment as more trash and TP appeared on local trails. Courtesies and pleasantries normally exchanged became less often. The roads became more overloaded and demand for services increased beyond what could be delivered. The neighborhoods saw more lights and noise. The increase in collected taxes did not mitigate the problems. ...Based upon our experience, the GTR expansion plan is a Pandora's Box that Teton Valley shouldn't open.

The economic and social costs to our Valley would be many...

Many of the public comment letters have delineated these costs. This increased growth would imbed a range of problems: from increased traffic with its associated noise, pollution and infrastructure needs, to the increased lighting causing a reduction of our already diminishing dark skies, and to an increase in crime, to name just a few. Every community that has tried to embrace such growth has had to listen to those who say that the negative costs can be controlled appropriately. But where has that been done successfully? If one exists, there are many more failures. Should Teton Valley take that risk?

But ultimately, ecological protection needs to take priority over increasing the recreational opportunities...

The expansion impact on our section of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem should be considered. The GYE is one of the largest nearly intact temperate zone ecosystems on Earth being sanctuary for the largest concentration of wildlife in the lower 48 states. A mandate for a responsible level of stewardship is therefore placed upon us. The Tetons define our area visually and ecologically. Development would change the viewshed with its lights and scarring by increased roading. Such impacts would be visible from the Valley, as well as from the surrounding Jedediah Smith Wilderness. Water quality would suffer from erosion by the forest cutting, expansion construction, the actual running of the facilities and with the induced visitorship to Teton Canyon. The resultant increase in stream sedimentation along with altered runoff would affect the riparian ecology of Teton Creek, putting at risk fish populations. The project would also threaten wildlife populations by fragmenting their habitat with physical changes and the high-intensity, all-year human recreational presence. Several threatened species such as the Canadian lynx, wolverines, grizzlies and Big Horn Sheep would be especially at risk. For many months of the year, much of the winter range is off limits to human travel to protect wildlife that is trying to conserve energy by limiting their movement. It seems contradictory to jeopardize this wildlife by planned development. Lastly, of great concern is the encroachment into Teton Canyon. With more activity associated with this expansion, the serenity and ecology of the canyon would be greatly compromised beyond what it is now.

As said, I love Grand Targhee Resort. It presents spectacular skiing at a relatively, low key level. But I am willing to trade off expanded terrain to protect the ecological, economic and social values that are important to many of us who live here in the quiet beauty of our side of the Tetons. There is only so much wilderness in the Tetons. With the already-approved addition of the Peaked lift, that seems to be a good place to stop. When is enough enough? I don't think we need another mountain Disneyland in the Tetons, especially adjacent to our laid-back valley. To be sure, this area is already on many people's radar. Check the diversity of license plates at GTR and in town. Again, in itself, that is not a bad thing at all. But with the size of this development plan, there is potential for the magnet to attract people explosively and, thus, transform our community into something unrecognizable.