



## Proposal to Manage Winter Use in the Cache Creek and Teton Pass areas

Dec. 14, 2015

### INTRODUCTION

For the past year, the Jackson Ranger District has been actively seeking public input to improve management of recreation use during the winter months (December 1 – April 30) in the Cache Creek drainage. While the central focus has been on issues related to dog waste and dog control in Cache Creek, people also raised concerns about dogs on Teton Pass and about other winter activities in these areas. From the beginning, we have been committed to developing community-wide solutions that take advantage of the talents and strengths agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individuals can bring to together to address the issues. We also recognize that there is no one silver bullet solution to resolve the complexity of recreation resource and social issues in these popular areas and, thus, an adaptive approach based on continual learning from monitoring and visitor feedback is needed. This proposal was developed with these principles in mind. **We invite you to provide feedback on the various actions included in this proposal and would appreciate hearing from you by January 20<sup>th</sup> 2016.** I expect to make a decision on actions that involve amending Forest regulations by early February. Expanded educational efforts are anticipated to begin in early January 2016.

### WHY CHANGE? WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?



Cache Creek and Teton Pass are both iconic places that contribute substantially to community character and people's quality of life. The Forest Service recognizes the importance of these areas and strives to manage them to provide accessible, day use opportunities while also promoting community stewardship, healthy lifestyles, and connection with nature. These areas are particularly heavily used during the winter when easily accessed opportunities are more limited. The Cache Creek and Game Creek drainages also contain crucial wildlife winter habitat, particularly in the lower portions of the drainages.

With strong roots in both recreation and conservation, we want to be a dog-friendly community that cares about wildlife, a healthy environment, and access to nature. But with more of us around, there is a growing need for all recreationists to do everything they can to minimize their impact on the land, water and wildlife and ensure interactions with other trail users are positive. For dog owners, there is an extra responsibility to clean up waste and ensure dogs are well-trained to not chase wildlife, not act aggressively towards other people or other dogs, and immediately respond to commands. The resource and social conflict problems will not improve on their own; we must work together to improve responsible behavior to ensure these places we love retain their beauty and provide quality experiences.



- Something different must be done for the sake of wildlife, clean water, people and pets. Solutions are needed to protect wildlife, water and ensure a positive experience for everyone. There is too much dog waste accumulating at trailheads and along trails causing a water quality concern, potential for disease transmission, and marring the beauty of the area and quality of the experience. There are too many adverse encounters between wildlife and dogs resulting in injury or death, either for wildlife or dogs. There are too many incidents of dogs biting other dogs or uncontrolled dogs causing people to fall with resulting injury.
- Past efforts to address dogs and recreation responsibility have helped but are not sufficient. Use is growing and change is needed before problems get worse. With increasing use, the effect of negative individual action becomes magnified. The cumulative impact of dog waste that isn't cleaned up becomes obvious in the spring. Likewise, a few negative interactions between people engaged in different activities (e.g. between snowmobilers and skiers, between walkers and bicyclists, poor dog control) often creates a negative image towards all users in a particular group. The reality is that the lack of responsibility by a few people ruins the freedoms available to all.
- People (including dog owners) are asking us to address this issue. The most common complaint about trails relates to dog waste and uncontrolled dogs. At the same time, people feel there are more limited options for locations to recreate with dogs, thus do not want to see this privilege restricted more than other uses. Issues relate to snowmobiles (particularly the issue of running over the classic ski track) and the growth of fat biking and compatibility with walkers on the single-track trails. As a community that values nature-based recreation, we own the problems and can do better. Not addressing the issues risks losing the very thing that makes these places special.

## WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

- ♣ Recent monitoring reveals an average of 248 people per day on the lower portion of the Cache Creek road (Nov 20 – Dec 5, 2015). This includes an average of 90 dogs per day which is consistent with past monitoring observations. The vast majority of use occurs in the lower mile of the canyon. A decade ago use was evenly split between walkers and skiers. Since then, the data suggests that the % of walkers or runners has increased relative to skiing, fat biking has emerged as about 10% of use, and snowmobile use remains at about 5% of total use. Teton Pass also sees about 300 people per day with use numbers highly variable depending on snow conditions.
- ♣ Monitoring found 168 dog waste piles left behind by pet owners in the Cache Creek trailhead area from Jan. 17<sup>th</sup> through Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Complaints about dog waste at Teton Pass are common.
- ♣ At least six incidents involving dogs and wildlife occurred in the winter of 2014-15 resulting in one dead deer, one injured dog, and one dog killed. Every year there are dog injuries and fatalities on the highway at Teton Pass.
- ♣ A 2005 water quality study conducted by the Teton Conservation District found that four water samples from Cache and Game Creeks exceeded the State Department of Environmental Quality proposed standard for moderate use recreational contact. Microbial source tracking found that the number one domestic source was attributed to dogs.
- ♣ Dog waste is the #1 issue that gives dog owners a bad image
- ♣ Dog waste accumulates faster than it decomposes – natural decomposition is NOT an option in heavily used areas. In the winter, dog waste does not decompose due to cold temperatures. With snowmelt, all of the dog waste is easily washed into adjacent streams.

## GOALS

1. Minimize disturbance of wildlife during the crucial winter months.
2. Provide for the safety of people and pets (minimize the potential for injury and death)
3. Keep water clean by reducing contamination from dog waste
4. Ensure positive experiences by promoting responsible, respectful, shared use of trails and encouraging unity among trail users.

## PROPOSAL

In March 2015, the Jackson Ranger District implemented a temporary dog closure within the Cache Creek drainage for one week to generate community discussion about solutions to address dog-related issues. In addition to visitor feedback on the trail and via phone, nearly 300 people provided input via an on-line survey. The ideas generated during the spring were consolidated into five options which were then discussed at a public workshop in October 2015. The options included implementing a leash requirement in certain zones, prohibiting dogs on certain trails or on certain days, requiring a permit to bring a dog off-leash in certain areas of the Forest, and limiting the number of dogs allowed per person. About 30 people attended the workshop and 132 people provided comments on-line. Of the five options discussed, implementing a leash requirement in certain areas received the most support (52%). However, there was also wide support for implementing an option that retained the privilege of allowing dogs off-leash. In particular there was wide support for an expanded educational ambassador program and implementing a regulation that would require dog waste to be cleaned up. Implementing expanded services requires new sources of funding and 76% of respondents said they would support a donation program to fund dog owner education and facility maintenance. 90% supported a requirement that all dog waste be picked up and not left in trailhead areas or along trails that have mutt-mitt stations.

After listening to the broad diversity of perspectives, the Jackson Ranger District staff is proposing to implement a multi-faceted program to address the issues. The proposed changes would only affect the winter season between December 1 and April 30 annually. At its core, the program emphasizes an expanded educational effort with relatively small changes in regulations. This approach is based on the reality that the issues are primarily related to visitor behavior and, thus the most effective approach requires peer-to-peer pressure that results in a change to social norms for acceptable behavior. A key aspect of the program will be monitoring to track whether or not there is an improvement in conditions on-the-ground and whether or not people demonstrate their financial support for the educational efforts. The four metrics that will be used to track progress are:

1. Number of dog waste piles within the Cache Creek trailhead and first portion of trail
2. Response to donation program lead by Friends of Pathways and PAWs to support on-the-ground educational ambassadors and educational outreach programs (including expanded dog training)
3. Compliance with existing leash requirements in the Putt-putt and Game Creek areas adjacent to crucial winter wildlife habitat
4. Number of documented incidents between dogs and wildlife in Cache-Game and Teton Pass areas

Program elements include:

1. **Education:** Friends of Pathways and PAWs would lead a campaign to generate the funds needed to provide additional educational services through media outreach as well as on the ground ambassadors. Up to six new ambassadors will be recruited with an emphasis on recruiting community members who are dog owners and have the ability to clearly communicate recreation responsibilities and answer visitor questions. The ambassadors would receive training and guidance from Forest Service staff and would be supported by Forest Protection Officers who can issue citations when necessary.
2. **Winter Wildlife closures:** Expand the existing winter wildlife closure in the Nelson drive area to encompass the Crystal Butte and Crystal Lite trails (see Map A). The sledding/walking knoll at Nelson drive would remain open to human use. The Crystal Butte area adjoins the National Elk Refuge and is a critical area for wintering wildlife. Increasing use on this hillside during the winter has resulted in many observations of deer, elk and moose fleeing from humans and dogs. Moving the closure boundary down to the junction with the Woods Canyon trail would provide more clarity for trail users and improve enforceability of the closure. The existing winter wildlife closure would be slightly reduced in the KC-Sink or swim trail area so that the closure coincides with an existing trail junction (see Map B). This change would not interfere with wildlife movement patterns, would prevent the development of a new trail just to avoid the winter closure and would enable people to walk a loop in the Snow King area immediately adjacent to town.

3. **Dog regulations:** Require dogs to be leashed in the Cache Creek trailhead area and on the Cache Creek trail between the trailhead and the Bar-T-5 cookout site (about ½ mile up trail) (see Map C). A dog leash requirement would also be added on Teton Pass in the parking area and portion of trail up Glory to the kiosk and to the south to the kiosk (see Map D). These leash areas coincide with the area where the majority of dog waste has been found and also coincide with the areas that are most congested. The leash requirement is intended to ensure dog owners are watching their pets so that waste can be picked up, ensure the safety of pets around vehicles and reduce the likelihood of dog versus dog and dog versus people incidents. A new regulation would also be added requiring dog owners to pick up all dog waste in the trailhead area and first portion of trail on those trails where mutt-mitt stations are available. At the same time, the existing dog leash requirement in the Putt-putt trail area would be reduced so that the leash requirement coincides with an existing trail junction. This change is a result of more accurate trail mapping and would have the effect of clarifying that the leash requirement does not apply to the Wiggle trail (see Map A). The existing dog leash requirement in Game Creek would remain the same.
4. **Fat bikes and Walkers/Runners:** There is a symbiotic relationship between those who want to walk trails in the Cache Creek area and those who want to ride fat bikes. Both user groups need a packed snow surface. At the same time, there is some conflict for walkers who desire an opportunity to walk without having to repeatedly step aside to let a bike pass. In response, we are proposing to prohibit fat bikes on the Cache Sidewalk trail between the trailhead and the junction with the Hagen trail (approximately 0.8 mile above the trailhead) to give walkers a loop option close to the trailhead (see Map C). At the same time, the Hagen trails, upper Putt-putt and portion of Ferrin's trail (to meadow area before the saddle) will be packed by volunteer human-powered groomers associated with fat bike interests. This grooming will provide a somewhat wider surface for the shared benefit of fat bike riders, walkers and runners.
5. **Snowmobiles:** Require snowmobiles to stay on the Cache Creek road between the trailhead and the Hagen trail intersection (approximately 0.8 miles up the Cache Creek road) (see Map C). With the expanded educational program, ensure snowmobilers understand that the groomed classic ski track must remain intact, speed must remain slow, and snowmobile use cannot occur within the Wilderness. The Forest Service acknowledges that many people believe snowmobile use is more appropriate in other areas of the Forest outside of the Cache-Game area; we believe this issue must be addressed in winter travel planning efforts that are broader in scope. For now, we believe the small percent of snowmobile use that occurs in this area can be successfully managed through expanded educational and patrol presence in the area.
6. **Facilities:** New signs would be installed to inform people about the leash requirements and trail specific changes. Leashes would also be made available to help people comply with requirements. Additional trash cans for depositing mutt-mitt bags would be installed at the Bar-T-5 junction on the Cache Creek trail and at the beginning of the Hagen trail. These products would be supported by both private and non-governmental partnerships.
7. **Visitor feedback and monitoring:** Visitor feedback on positive and negative experiences would be actively sought by field personnel, through a trailhead register at Cache Creek and through on-line options. Visitor feedback would also be sought on trends in conditions. New trail counting methodology was initiated in the summer of 2015 and will continue through the winter along with some photo monitoring.

If the monitoring shows an improvement compared to the 2014-2015 winter season, regulations would not be expanded. However, if improvement does not occur and people are not willing to financially support educational programs, then new regulations would be enacted the following winter (2016-2017). The new regulations may include prohibiting dogs in certain areas, expanding leash requirements, and implementing a required fee for use of the areas.



**Decision to be Made:** Based on public input and resource specialist expertise and experience, a decision will be made whether or not to amend existing Forest Special Orders regarding dog leash requirements, winter wildlife closures, and prohibit certain uses on certain trails or within certain areas. The District Ranger for the Jackson Ranger District will make the decision but enactment of any new Forest Special Order will require law enforcement review and Forest Supervisor approval.

**How to Comment:**

Comments received in response to this proposal, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

Comments must be submitted in writing (either letter or email) by January 20, 2016.

Letters should be sent to: Cache-Teton Pass winter proposal  
Bridger-Teton National Forest Service  
Jackson Ranger District  
PO Box 1689  
Jackson, WY 83001

Email comments or electronic letters can be submitted to: [comments-intermtn-bridger-teton-jackson@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermtn-bridger-teton-jackson@fs.fed.us)

For further project information, questions or assistance, please contact Lesley Williams or David Wilkinson, Jackson Ranger District, (307) 739-5424 or (307) 739-5544, or via email: [lwilliams@fs.fed.us](mailto:lwilliams@fs.fed.us) or [davidwilkinson@fs.fed.us](mailto:davidwilkinson@fs.fed.us)

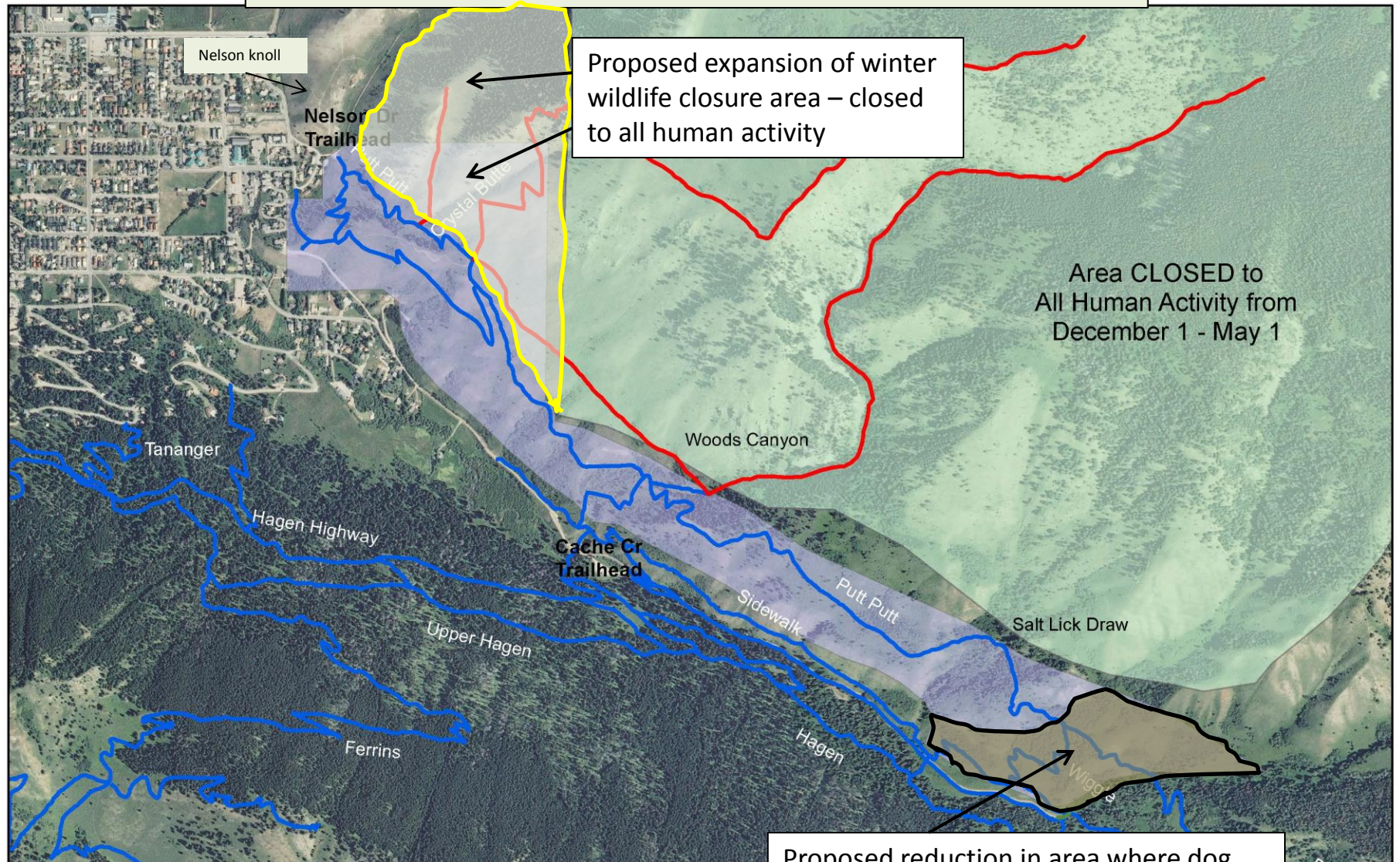
Sincerely,



DALE A. DEITER  
Jackson District Ranger



# Map A: Winter Proposal Cache Creek – Nelson Drive



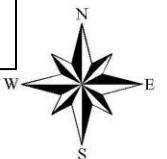
— System Trail

— Trail Closed (December 1 to May 1)

Existing dog leash area

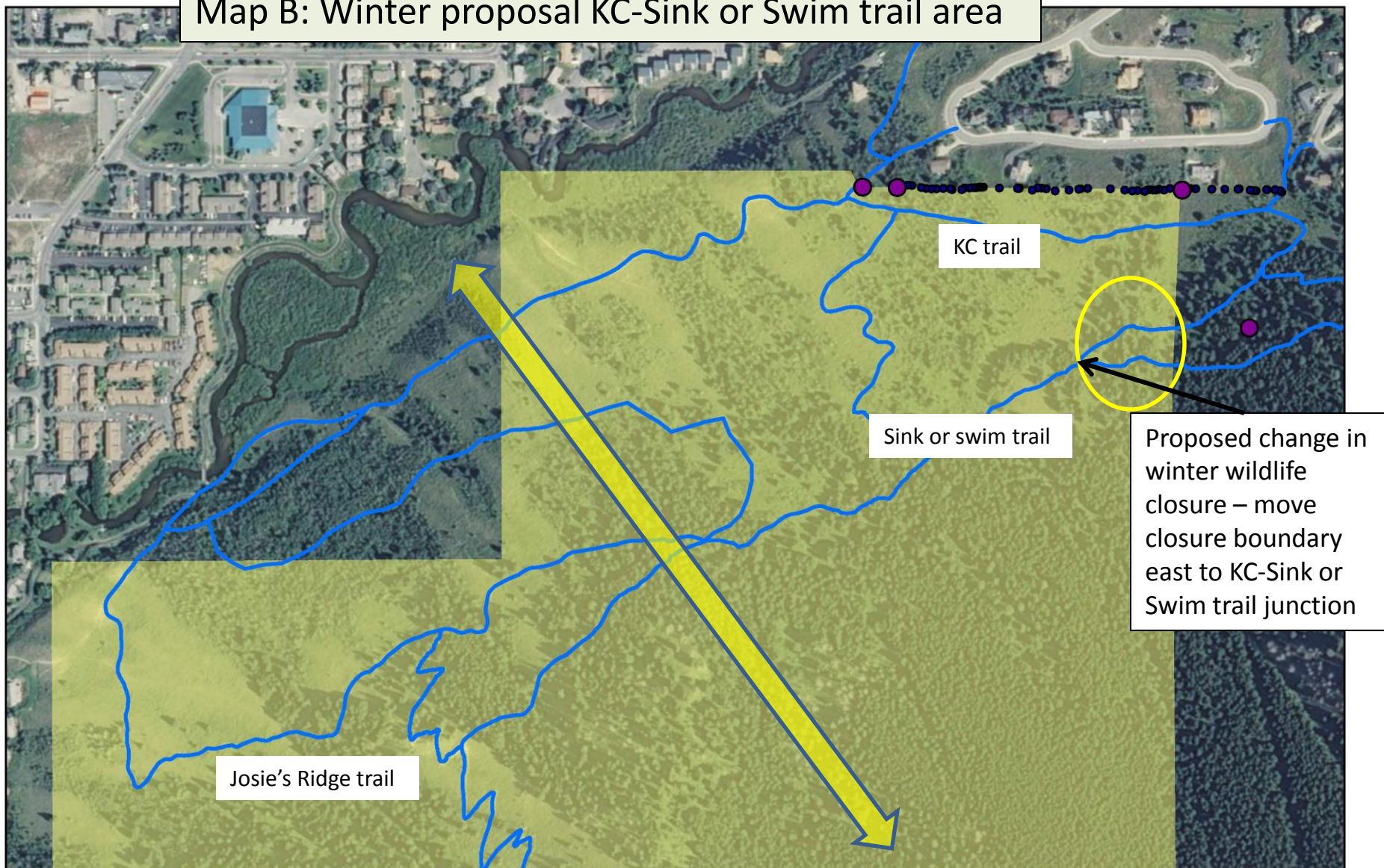
Proposed reduction in area where dog leashes are required (i.e. dogs would be allowed off-leash on the Wiggle trail)

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles





Map B: Winter proposal KC-Sink or Swim trail area



Winter wildlife closure – all human activity



Wildlife movement to access water

0.1

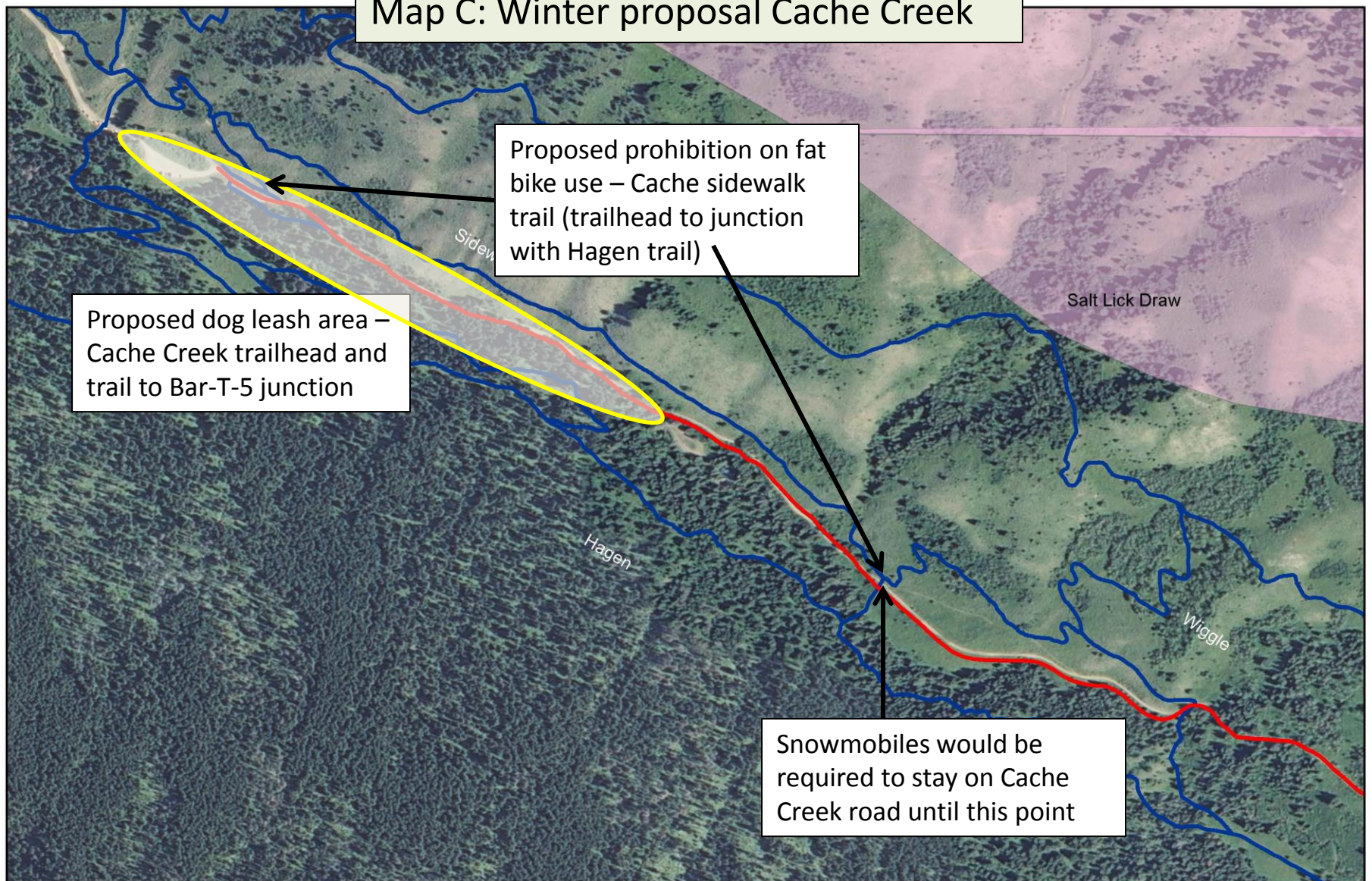
0.2

0.4 Miles





# Map C: Winter proposal Cache Creek





## Map D: Winter proposal Teton Pass

