

Appendix D

Response to Public Comments

Comment	Letter #	Response
<p><i>The proposed projects are needed and supported for the reasons stated in the scoping document</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects are well thought out and represent balanced approach; align with Forest direction and area values • With improved system trails, user-created trails are reduced and wildlife benefits from more predictable activity on trail • The trails are very important part of family vacations, important for my children • More trails will spread people out, enhance experiences, offer more options, mitigate conflict by providing longer loops so aren't passing people multiple times • Cache-Game area trails are community center and integral to quality of life – serve many purposes from recreation, exercise, meditation, and socialization. Will keep people connected with public land • Cache-Game is not wilderness and is a tiny area where a great deal of mountain biking can occur without conflict. Mountain biking is not just for young people • Skyline represents greatest opportunity for trail that provides special experience – accessible adventure, stunning scenery, unique vista/killer views • Appreciate effort to separate use in Nelson area and Josie's Ridge; this will create more relaxing experience 	<p>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 58, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 70, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 81, 82, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 90, 92, 93, 94, 95, 101, 102, 103, 104, 106, 108, 111, 112, 115, 116, 117, 119</p>	<p>We appreciate the support for these projects and have strived to incorporate this input into the rationale for the decision</p>

<p><i>Wildlife effects are a concern due to potential for increased use and new trails</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects on wildlife should be thoroughly analyzed • Increasing use in Cache Creek is concern – there is a cumulative effect on wildlife (trail density) • WGFD recommendations should be followed including consideration of seasonal restrictions • Wildlife protection should take priority over human use • Winter impacts should be considered; trails are being used in winter too • Skyline will fragment what is now intact habitat for several big game species; there may be unintended consequences on wildlife • Increased potential for lion and bear conflicts is a concern on Skyline • Concern about wildlife impact in spring on Skyline– formal seasonal closure needed • Putt-putt trail extension would cross drainages, impact/fragment key wildlife habitat – elk wallows, landslides. Trail would not be good location and is not needed 	<p>2, 6, 21, 28, 40, 41, 53, 56, 57, 69, 70, 89, 98, 99, 100, 101, 105, 107, 110, 118</p>	<p>Because of the concern expressed about potential effects on wildlife, especially related to the Skyline trail, a thorough analysis was completed including examination of cumulative effects. The results of this analysis are documented in Appendices B and C. Key wildlife habitats will not be altered and populations of deer, elk, moose, raptors, bears, and lions are expected to continue using the Cache-Game area. The trail projects will not impede the future recovery of threatened or endangered species such as grizzly bears, wolves, or lynx. Goshawks do nest in the Snow King area and surveys for additional nests will be conducted prior to construction. Surveys for great grey owls and boreal owls will also be conducted.</p> <p>Ungulates do not appear to use the Skyline ridge during the winter due to deeper snow on the ridge. In the Cache Creek drainage, ungulate use tends to be concentrated around the Hagen trails (thermal cover) and foraging areas on open slopes adjacent to the National Elk Refuge.</p> <p>Coordination with WGFD biologists has occurred throughout this process and will continue during the implementation phase. Based on the wildlife analysis and recommendations from the WGFD, the decision includes a seasonal restriction during the spring calving season (May 1 – June 30) to further reduce potential effects on wildlife. In addition, the decision does not include approval of the Putt-putt trail extension.</p> <p>Recommendations from the WGFD reiterate the need for a strong use education effort throughout the Cache-Game area to reduce the likelihood of negative encounters between people and bears or lions. These recommendations go beyond any one trail and are applicable throughout the area. The decision requires trail design to incorporate good line of sight, and supports the need for signing and education to help recreationists and wildlife successfully coexist.</p>
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<p>Concern that new trails are not needed - there are enough trails already</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating more trails adds pressure to an already over-loved area • It is time to stop building more trails and take care of what we have got. No matter how many trails you have, it will never be enough for bikers. More trails won't relieve pressure on existing trails. Increased use is not a justification for more development. Adding more trails will just increase use • Add language in trail assessment to resist pressure for more trails • Adding the Skyline trail won't reduce congestion and conflict 	<p>21, 53, 57, 60, 83, 89, 97, 99, 105, 107, 109</p>	<p>Recreation use will increase in the Cache-Game area whether or not new trails are added. The appropriate management response in these intensively managed small areas will not always be to “build more trails”. However, good management requires use of all of the tools available including ensuring the design of the trails system works to provide quality experiences for all types of non-motorized recreation use.</p> <p>The Summer Non-motorized Trail assessment for the Jackson Ranger District was completed to provide a clear master plan for where and how trails will be developed over time. The pressure to add more trails is coming from every user group. The decision on the Cache-Game trail projects reiterates the District’s commitment to use this master plan to guide trail development across the entire District.</p> <p>The primary purpose of the Skyline trail is to create a highly scenic loop opportunity to help accommodate growing use and concentrate use in the Cache Creek drainage. There will always be more congestion on trails immediately adjacent to trailheads but adding the Skyline trail can help disperse use within the Cache drainage.</p>
<p>Concern that constructing the Skyline trail will change the “wild” experience on the ridge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skyline ridge is currently a quiet, off-trail and wild area, trail would change the character of ridge • Value Cache-Game for its wildness, solitude and nature – proposals will degrade these qualities 	<p>53, 71, 89</p>	<p>We acknowledge that adding a trail on Skyline ridge will change the experience on the ridge. The interest to protect wildlife and provide true wilderness experiences on the Bridger-Teton requires a willingness to focus recreation use in some small areas such as the Cache-Game area. Based on the 1990 Bridger-Teton Forest Plan direction, the management emphasis for the lower Cache Creek drainage including Skyline ridge is for concentrated recreation use (DFC 9A and 9B). This direction recognizes that some areas immediately adjacent to population centers must be managed for higher levels of recreation use. However the decision does emphasize that the Cache-Game area will be managed to promote people’s connection with nature and we believe many opportunities exist to further this goal (Appendix A).</p>

		<p>The decision includes requirements to design the trail in a way that encourages slower bike speed and promotes people taking the time to absorb the scenic beauty. The trail will also be designed to visually blend with the setting. Even with growing use, monitoring suggests there are many days where few people are encountered particularly if one travels more than one mile from a trailhead. In addition, the Gros Ventre Wilderness is adjacent to the Cache-Game area and is legislatively managed to provide “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation”.</p>
<p><i>Concern that current uses will be displaced</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horse use and hunters are being displaced. Keep area open to hunting. Don’t preclude horses from multi-use trails. Maintain loop options on both sides of Cache Creek. • Don’t pander to the desires of one use group (bikes) • Allow horse riders to access and ride Skyline trail • Putt-putt trail extension would impact hunters who need area away from recreationists to safely hunt • Don’t eliminate bike access on Josie’s Ridge 	<p>21, 71, 86, 96, 98, 107, 108, 116</p>	<p>The decision emphasizes that the trail projects are not designed for just one group of users but rather are intended to successfully manage growing use from all non-motorized recreationists. As noted in the decision rationale, there is no value in creating artificial stereotypical divisions among recreationists. Shared use is still the goal for the Cache-Game area and we acknowledge that more can and should be done to build awareness of actions to create positive interactions among all recreationists.</p> <p>Horse use is a small percent of current use and is not increasing as fast as other non-motorized uses. Opportunities for day horse rides will still be available in the Cache-Game area but, as noted in the Trail Assessment, not all areas can have the same recreation emphasis and we acknowledge that other areas may offer better opportunities for trailer-friendly trailhead facilities and quality horse riding experiences. The Skyline trail is managed for shared use including horse riding although primarily horse access would be encouraged from Wilson Canyon or Game Creek rather than Cache Creek since the Ferrin’s trail is not suited to mixed bike and horse use due to steep side slopes which restricts the ability for these groups to pass during trail encounters.</p>

		<p>There is no proposal to reduce hunting opportunities. The Putt-putt trail extension was not approved partly due to the concern about effect on hunters.</p> <p>Bike access is not eliminated on Josie’s Ridge. The decision clarifies that <u>only the lower portion</u> of the Josie’s Ridge trail is now designated for hike use only (see map for Josie’s Ridge). We know that occasional bike use has occurred in the past on the lower section of trail however, the vast majority of use is from hikers. Providing a short hiking loop adjacent to this part of Jackson helps meet growing recreation use in a manner that will reduce conflict in the long term. Bikers can still use the KC, Linda’s trail and Sink or Swim trail to access the upper portion of Josie’s Ridge.</p>
<p>Concern about cost and funding for maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skyline trail will be expensive to build – is this the best place to put funding? • Concern that increasing trails in front-country will require more maintenance to detriment of backcountry trails 	89	<p>Funding for the Skyline trail would come from grants and donations thus should not detract from backcountry trail projects. Maintenance and improvement of trails throughout the Jackson Ranger District is completely dependent on grants, donations, and outfitter-guide fees retained under the Recreation Enhancement Act. Thus, priorities for work will always be guided by the Trail Assessment and where the public is willing to invest funds and labor.</p>
<p>Concern that the Skyline trail will become commercialized</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern that commercialization from Snow King Resort will spill into this area 	102, 110	<p>The decision includes a requirement that prohibits lift-served bike access from the summit of Snow King Resort. All activities that involve a guide or participant fee require a special use permit. Proposals for new recreation special use permits are subject to rigorous screening criteria and review.</p>
<p>Concern about user-created trail development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern that Skyline trail will lead to user-created trails developing to connect with West Game 	118	<p>The steep side slopes from Skyline ridge to West Game make development of user-created trails very unlikely, especially from bike use which is particularly dependent on built trails compared with horse or hike use. In addition, the decision includes a requirement that all existing user-created trails and any future user-created trails will be closed and rehabilitated to prevent use.</p>

<p>Alternative trail improvements should be considered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider shorter loop connecting first portion of Skyline to West Game trail. Would shorter trail to viewpoint suffice? • Could Putt-putt trail just be widened to reduce conflict? • Game Creek road should be closed except for emergency vehicles • Keep Game Creek road open until Nov 20 to coincide with hunt season – provides valuable access • Connection needed from Josie’s Ridge to Leeks or in Leeks Canyon more than Skyline. • Wilson Canyon trail should be improved • Re-open upper user-created trail on Josie’s Ridge that was closed 	<p>1, 2, 46, 73, 87, 89, 109, 112</p>	<p>A shorter trail to a viewpoint on Skyline ridge or a shorter loop connecting with the West Game trail was strongly considered. Ultimately, these options were dismissed for three reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature of the terrain suggests that providing a trail on the first portion of the ridge would just encourage user-created trails to be developed further out on the ridge. • The steep side slopes between the ridge and West Game limit the feasibility of building a sustainable trail without building many switchbacks which would be very visible on the open slopes. • Creating a loop from the ridge to the West Game trail would bisect open south-facing slopes which are located in Forest Plan DFC 12 managed for an emphasis on protecting big game habitat. These slopes contain important spring calving habitat. Connecting to the West Game trail also would not help encourage recreation use to be concentrated in the Cache Creek interface zone. <p>Alternatives such as creating loop connections in Leeks Canyon, Josie’s Ridge to Leeks Canyon or improving Wilson Canyon were dismissed because all of these trails are located in Forest Plan DFC 12 managed for an emphasis on protecting big game habitat. These locations all contain crucial winter habitat essential for wildlife survival. One of the most important strategies to protect wildlife populations in the Cache-Game area is to reduce human disturbance during the winter months. Spreading human use from the Cache drainage into these important habitats would compromise the desire to manage the area for recreation <u>and</u> wildlife.</p> <p>Alternatives such as widening trails for shared use rather than provide separate trails were dismissed because there is a high likelihood that wider trails would just increase bike speed and thus not reduce conflict.</p> <p>Alternatives to the proposed seasonal restriction on motor</p>
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		<p>vehicles in Game Creek were considered. There is not a significant amount of motor vehicle use during the open period but for some people, the limited access is very valuable. In light of motor vehicle closures and restrictions in other portions of the Jackson District, the decision retains a limited period of motor vehicle use during the core hunt season as long as resource damage can be minimized.</p>
<p>General comments about management of recreation use in the Cache-Game area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd like to learn how to communicate better with horse riders and hikers to avoid horses getting scared and people being angry because they think I'm doing something wrong. Trail users with headphones are oblivious to their surroundings. If you can't hear, you can't communicate. Trail ethics education and enforcement needs to be strengthened. Address bike speed, headphones, and dogs – poop and control • Goal for Cache Game area should be a place where user experience is positive. Respect for land and wildlife needs to be emphasized more • We could benefit from less local traffic and less need to drive to trailheads – need trail from town to Cache along road, gate road and take pressure off trailhead • Keep trails steeper, rough and more natural • Support use-specific and directional trails in high use areas • Forest Service should modify human behavior rather than modify resource • Bikers are out for speed, not enjoying beauty, initiate conversation on differing generational views on use of public land – playground versus appreciation of nature • Address weed management • Adding a bench to trails in Nelson area would be benefit for seniors 	<p>41, 47, 70, 74, 78, 83, 89, 102, 107, 108, 109, 110, 114, 115</p>	<p>As the decision notes, we recognize and accept that these projects alone will not address all of the needs associated with managing growing recreation use in the Cache-Game area. Doing this well will require the collective effort of agencies and partners coupled with community investment and a commitment by individuals to “raise the bar” in demonstrating respect for people and the land including wildlife. A number of innovative ideas to improve shared use and land ethics have emerged from the discussions regarding these trail projects and will be pursued. This includes ideas to encourage less driving to trailheads.</p> <p>The decision includes a requirement for the Skyline trail to offer a gradient from a moderately developed trail starting at Ferrin’s saddle to a more rustic, primitive trail as one travels towards the Game Creek saddle. This is partly in response to input desiring rougher, more natural trails.</p> <p>The decision includes the addition of one or two benches along trails in the Nelson Drive area to enhance opportunities for older adults and encourage all recreationists to spend some quiet time absorbing the beauty and sounds of nature.</p>