



File Code: 2720

Date: July 1, 2007

Dear Interested Party,

The Gallatin National Forest is seeking public comment on our proposal to reissue special use permits for 197 recreation residences that are currently authorized by twenty-year term permits that will expire December 31, 2008. The new permits would become active on January 1, 2009 and would be valid for a new term of twenty years. Only improvements that are authorized by the current permits would be authorized by the new permits.

Purpose and Need

The existing permits will expire December 31, 2008 and the purpose of this action is to continue the use of these recreation residences. As stated in the Forest Service Manual 2347.1, "Recreation residences are a valid use of National Forest System lands. They provide a unique recreation experience to a large number of owners of recreation residences, their families, and guests. To the maximum extent practicable, the recreation residence program shall be managed to preserve the opportunity it provides for individual and family-oriented recreation. It is Forest Service direction to continue recreation residence use and to work in partnership with holders of these permits to maximize the recreational benefits of recreation residences."

Background

The recreation residence program was started by the Forest Service in the early 1900s as a way to encourage public use of the National Forests. Nationally, there are currently over 15,000 recreation residences. These are cabins or houses and their associated facilities on National Forest land that are privately owned and maintained and that operate under the authority of special use permits.

Recreation residences proposed for continuance are located on four of the five districts on the Gallatin National Forest, in the following areas (see attached map):

- Big Timber Ranger District (one in the West Boulder and the rest in the Main Boulder area) - total 25 permits
- Livingston Ranger District (Mill Creek and Mission Creek areas) - total 6 permits
- Bozeman Ranger District (Gallatin Canyon and Hyalite areas) - total 86 permits
- Hebgen Lake Ranger District (Hebgen Lake, S Fork and Madison River areas) - total 80 permits

Prior to the issuance of new 20-year term permits, each lot and its associated improvements must be in compliance with the terms and conditions of its respective current permit. Most of the lots and associated improvements on the Gallatin National Forest have already been inspected for compliance. Holders have been notified if elements are out of compliance along with actions necessary to bring those elements into compliance. The remaining inspections and notifications will be completed this summer.



In addition, each district will be conducting Consistency Reviews to determine and ensure that all lots and tracts are consistent, or can be made to be consistent with the Gallatin National Forest Plan and all other applicable laws and rules. Actions will be identified by this Consistency Review as well as by public comments to ensure consistency or bring the recreation residences into being consistent.

As required by the permits, an Operation and Maintenance Plan will be developed that will become part of each permit. It will incorporate any actions identified during the Consistency Reviews or public input process, and address any issues that need emphasis or clarification, such as more specifically addressing the Forest-Wide Food Storage Order, as it pertains to recreation residences. The Operation and Maintenance Plans will also emphasize the requirement that the Permit Holders receive approval from the District Ranger before they undertake any alterations to their lots and its environs, their facilities or the exteriors of any of their buildings. This allows the Forest Service to ensure that those proposed actions are consistent with the Forest Plan and all applicable laws, guidelines, orders and policies.

Proposed Action

This proposal is to authorize and issue 20-year special use permits for the continued use of 197 existing recreation residences (listed above and shown on the attached map), with their associated facilities. This action is not proposing any new lots, tracts, facilities or alterations of existing facilities.

Environmental Review Process

A preliminary review suggests that this project falls within a category of action listed in the Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook 1909.15, Section 31.2 (15), that may be excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). That category is described as:

“Issuance of a new special use authorization for a new term to replace an existing or expired special use authorization when the only changes are administrative, there are no changes to the authorized facilities or increases in the scope or intensity of authorized activities, and the applicant or holder is in full compliance with the terms and conditions of the special use authorization.”

The Responsible Officials for the decisions will be the District Rangers.

People who are interested in or affected by this proposal are invited to send us comments. To be most useful, your comments should focus on specific issues and identify which tract or area your comments are addressing and include concerns you believe should be considered before a decision on the reissuance is reached. Comments received will become part of the public record and may be made available to others upon request.

Comments must be received by Augusts 31, 2007 and should be addressed to:

Gallatin National Forest Supervisor’s Office, attn: Jane Ruchman, P.O. Box 130, Bozeman, MT 59771

Comments may also be submitted electronically by going to:
http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin/?page=projects/recreation_residences/comment

For more information, please visit our website:
http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin/?page=projects/recreation_residences
or contact Jane Ruchman, Developed Recreation Program Manager at (406) 587-6966.
Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

/s/Bill Avey
BILL AVEY
District Ranger
Big Timber Ranger District

/s/Ron J. Archuleta
RON J. ARCHULETA
District Ranger
Livingston Ranger District

/s/Lisa Stoeffler
LISA STOEFLER
Acting District Ranger
Bozeman Ranger District

/s/William R. Queen
WILLIAM R. QUEEN
District Ranger
Hebgen Lake Ranger District

