



Date: August 24, 2007

Topic: Location of the Bridger-Teton Supervisor's Office

Issue: Where is the best location to replace the B-T Supervisor's Office?

What We Want to Achieve: A location for the new Bridger-Teton NF Supervisors Office that enables affordable housing, and meets the needs of the Forest staff and the public.

Background:

Jackson has been the historic location for the B-T and has resulted in a long-term public service to Teton County and various federal and state agencies. The existing SO was built in the early 1960's and contains assorted outbuildings, trailers, etc. for offices that would be replaced by the pending conveyance of the Supervisor's Office and Jackson Ranger District Office compound.

Housing is currently priced out the market for most federal employees in Jackson (none under \$500,000). The only options are to:

1. Build a new office in Jackson and expect new employees to commute from outlying areas over Teton Pass or through the Snake River Canyon;
2. Build a new office in Jackson and enough employee housing (up to \$20 million) for most employees over time;
3. Re-locate the SO to a community where housing is affordable for the long-term for employees without government provided housing.

Before the Region invests in a new office complex, we should affirm the best option and if moving is considered, the best community to re-locate. The attached report is an analysis of the issues and suitability of four possible communities for the SO. There are currently 45 permanent employees in the SO, and 40 permanent employees at the Jackson District.

Options:

1. **Build a new office in Jackson with no new housing.** The current site in Jackson is suitable to contain a co-located building for the Jackson District and SO. It was the original proposal when the conveyance went forward to retain Jackson as the location. The anticipated proceeds are expected to be enough to replace all office, warehouse and shop needs (about \$13 million). Over 50% of current employees own homes in Jackson. The issue is that over time as home-owning employees who live in Jackson retire, their replacements will not be able to afford Jackson area housing. This option then requires new employees to commute from the Alpine, WY or Victor, ID areas for affordable housing – over 30 miles each way.

2. **Build a new office in Jackson with more employee housing.** The existing proceeds are not expected to be enough to cover new housing, unless the proceeds exceed current estimates. Funding for new housing would need to come from the regional CIP program. This option would parallel what the National Park Service does in building housing for most employees on site. To build another 60 units would cost around \$15 - \$20 million. Some new housing may be needed for district employees regardless of the SO location. New housing would need to be built commensurate with pending retirements – probably over a 10-15 year period. This would come from conveyance proceeds and the Regional CIP program that now contributes \$1-2 million per year for administrative facilities.
3. **Re-locate the SO to a new community.** The analysis below describes various communities and their pros and cons. Re-location would result in few if any new SO permanent employee housing units being built as it assumes housing will remain affordable in the long-term in those locations. Forest Service housing that remains in Jackson may provide more housing for the Jackson Ranger District, depending on the community selected. There is a one-time cost with Transfer-of-Station estimated at \$3-5 million that would be incurred and perhaps the need to buy a new administrative site costing up to \$1 million. Construction costs outside Jackson have the potential to be lower. The land retained in Jackson would be used only for the district with the prospect that more land could be conveyed, increasing the revenue potential. Additional revenue may enable more facilities to be improved or the replacement of existing leased sites with owned sites.

Jackson

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current location of the SO – on the same administrative site as the Jackson Ranger District Office. • The office would be constructed near the highway, & where the public expects it. • Jackson is a large town with a relatively wide selection of schools, shopping and medical services • Little or no impact on current employees. • 12 Government housing units are available in Jackson without a commute. • Opportunities exist and good sites are available to increase the government housing capacity of the Jackson area. • Employees could continue commuting from Alpine and Idaho. • In the short-run fewer employees are exposed to commuting safety risk since they live in Jackson. • Interagency relationships and external partnerships easy to maintain. The benefits of being located in Jackson are great to both the B-T's programs and to the public. Jackson is the County government center and contains offices for the State, USFWS, NPS, and NGO's. • Over 50% of the permanent employees in Jackson currently own homes in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable housing is not currently available in Jackson, except for low income individuals that qualify for subsidized housing. • Conveyance proceeds or CIP funding used for Government owned housing precludes investments in other priorities such as reducing leased costs or deferred maintenance. • In the long run, as more employees commute from outside Jackson, the safety risk commuting to Jackson will increase if enough government housing is not available. • In the next 40 year investment period, few if any new employee could afford to live in Jackson in a private residence, resulting in most employees commuting from Alpine/Star Valley, WY or Victor/Driggs, ID, or in government housing.

Jackson area.	
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Pinedale

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger affordable housing market, enabling the SO to have few if any government owned houses. • Larger town than Alpine Junction. • Full service community with its own schools, medical facilities, etc. • Already has a designated Admin. Site for warehousing and temporary housing, but not an office. • Government housing in Jackson could no longer be used by SO employees, but would be available for Jackson District employees. • BLM office exists in a new leased building offering potential for coordination but not co-location until their lease expires over 10 years from now. WY Game and Fish office is in Pinedale. • Co-location with the Ranger District in owned building would reduce lease costs by \$140,000 per year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly two hours to the nearest large town with a hospital, shopping, etc. • Traveling distance/time to Ranger Districts is greater than Jackson or Alpine. • Is beyond the commuting distance from Jackson. Employees would have to relocate – costing \$3-5 million. • We would need to buy land for an administrative site – may cost \$1million or more. • Families with dual careers (One at the SO, and one at the Jackson District) would be adversely impacted. Safety risk could be an issue if one attempted to commute. • Some Interagency relationships local to Jackson would be more difficult to maintain and develop. • Housing availability and price is being affected by the current oil boom with fewer affordable houses compared to Afton.

Alpine Junction

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable housing market compared to Jackson, enabling the SO to have few if any government owned houses. • Closer than Pinedale or Jackson to a large town with a hospital, shopping, etc. • More centrally located to Forest destinations. Travel distance/time to Ranger Districts is least of all options. • Within commuting distance from Jackson. Employees could commute from Jackson, or relocate to Alpine/Star Valley. The government housing in Jackson could still be used by SO employees in the short-run. • There is currently a commuter bus from Alpine Junction to Jackson daily, presenting potential for employees to use the bus commuting from Jackson. • An existing 47 acre administrative site with utilities is available. • Office could be constructed near the highway for good public visibility. • Construction costs may be lower in Alpine Junction than in Jackson or Pinedale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller town with no schools, may be difficult to attract families to the community. Travel time to schools is high (over 30 miles for high school). • Housing prices rising due to proximity to Jackson. • No Opportunity to co-locate with the BLM Field Office, other agencies or Ranger Districts. • There is no government housing in Alpine Junction, but Cottonwood is closer to Alpine Junction than to Jackson, with 4 housing units. • Short-term increase in safety risks to Jackson employees due to commute from Jackson. • 5 Employees currently living in the Victor/Driggs, ID area would probably be displaced and have to move their families at their own expense or commute over 60 miles. • Jackson area Interagency relationships would be more difficult to maintain and develop. • Lack of services is unprecedented for a

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the long run, as more employees live in Alpine and Star Valley, commute distances will be reduced. 6 employees currently live in Star Valley. • Government rental rates for a three bedroom house would be \$659/month in Alpine Junction as opposed to \$698/month in Jackson or Pinedale should government housing be provided. 	<p>Forest Headquarter location. No such location is known in the entire USFS system. Alpine Junction does not offer typical services expected for employees. As Alpine Junction becomes more of a bedroom community for Jackson, more services may become available.</p>
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Afton

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger town than Alpine Junction. • Full service community with its own schools, medical care, etc. • Existing District Office. • Government housing in Jackson could no longer be used by SO employees, but would be available for Jackson District employees. • Has the most affordable housing of all locations and may remain the most affordable for the longest-term. It appears to be outside the zone of higher real estate prices from both the Jackson area and the oil boom area. • Office could be constructed near the highway for good public visibility. • Construction costs may be lower than in Jackson or Pinedale. • As employees move to Afton, commute distances will be minimized. • Government rental rates for a three bedroom house would be \$659/month in Afton as opposed to \$698/month in Jackson or Pinedale if housing were built. • Long-term potential (2015 earliest date) to get out of the Afton District lease by co-locating with the SO reducing lease cost by \$161,000 per year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly two hours to the nearest large town with a hospital, shopping, etc. • Traveling distance/time to Ranger Districts is greater than all other communities. • Is beyond the commuting distance from Jackson (over 60 miles). Most employees would have to relocate – costing \$3-5 million. • We would need to buy land for an administrative site - may cost \$1million or more. • Families with dual careers (One at the SO, and one at the Jackson District) would be adversely impacted. • Some Interagency relationships local to Jackson would be more difficult to maintain and develop.

Issue(s)/Concern(s):

The thrust of this analysis is to evaluate affordable housing as the primary consideration in the decision process. There are other good business reasons to remain in Jackson, especially intergovernmental coordination and sustained continuity of operations without disrupting employees. Housing availability and price is now and will continue to be an endemic issue in Jackson. In looking at the availability and affordability of housing in each individual community, Afton, Alpine or Pinedale would seem to be the best alternative, unless the region is willing to make a commitment to construct a significant amount of employee housing in Jackson. Pinedale and Afton are larger, full service communities than Alpine Junction. Alpine Junction is closer to larger towns (Jackson, Idaho Falls) with hospitals, shopping, etc. Alpine Junction is more centrally located to driving distances between ranger stations. It is also within commuting distance from Jackson. This would minimize TOS costs for the SO employees, and give

employees the option to maintain their residence in Jackson and commute. With the SO in Alpine Junction, the existing government housing in Jackson would still be available for use by SO employees in the short-term. Should any new government housing be built in Alpine Junction, it would carry a slightly lower rental rate than similar housing in either Jackson or Pinedale. The figures below show the rental rates for the same house in Jackson, Alpine Junction and Pinedale.

<u>Town</u>	<u>Nearest Established Community</u>	<u>Rent</u>
Jackson, WY	Jackson, WY	\$698
Alpine/Afton, WY	Afton, WY	\$659
Pinedale, WY	Jackson, WY	\$698

Availability of Federal government land

Pinedale or Afton would require purchasing or leasing land to build an SO. Alpine Junction has an existing 47 acre administrative site. Some of this site is not suitable, but it does have enough suitable land for an SO building, and most utilities currently exist. The Alpine Junction administrative site is along the highway for good public access, but on land currently administered by the Caribou-Targhee NF.

Recommendation(s): The Regional Forester, DRF’s and interested Directors were briefed on the subject. Some of the communities were discussed. Jack Troyer asked if anyone thought examining a re-location of the office was the wrong thing to do. None of the participants objected. The next step was to validate with the Congressional Delegation if moving the office was a politically viable option, before any decision on a location would be made. There was not a consensus on location – but more preference was given to Alpine by most participants.

The 1st community discussed was Alpine. Alpine would be least expensive for the government as no TOS costs and administrative site costs would be incurred. Alpine as a community has none of the expected amenities of a town with an SO such as grocery stores, schools, medical services, etc. It is mostly a junction of highways with some homes for Jackson commuters, some motels, restaurants and gas stations. Employees would likely live near Afton and commute 30 miles to Alpine. Employees could travel to Jackson to maintain contacts easier and the SO would be in a different location than the district which to some had an advantage. There would still be a significant line officer (District Ranger) and multi-agency visitor center in Jackson.

The 2nd community discussed was Afton as it will offer affordable housing for the longest period of time. It will require TOS costs to be borne but options to mitigate these costs such as deferred arrival of the out-of-area employees may an option. The other locations have rising real estate prices and will be influenced by the Jackson area housing prices or oil and gas housing prospects for the long-term. It is a full service community with services expected of an SO location.

The other communities discussed were Pinedale and Jackson. Pinedale offered lower housing prices than Jackson. But the oil boom has significantly affected home prices and availability at this time. For Jackson, the investment required to build new housing in Jackson in the amount needed for employees is not realistic considering our CIP budgets and national policy to minimize the amount of government owned housing. We could help the situation in the short-run by constructing some housing now if conveyance proceeds are available, but in the long-run the problem will persist and remain an issue for the forest to address. Spending more on housing has

an opportunity cost of not investing elsewhere on the forest such as a new owned district office in Big Piney instead of a lease.

RO Staff Areas Involved in this Recommendation: RF, DRF's and Directors

Minority Opinions/Recommendations: The B-T NF Forest Supervisor and staff have expressed their preferred option is to remain in Jackson.