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TIPS FOR TETON BACKCOUNTRY USE DURING A PANDEMIC

Winter backcountry recreationists of the Tetons are fortunate. Not only is our community making efforts to address the coronavirus pandemic, but we are also surrounded by public lands that allow us to leave the confines of our homes and have outdoor experiences that nourish our bodies and souls. The current crisis, however, is creating new challenges for winter backcountry users. Recently, TBCA has received several emails and calls from backcountry users expressing concerns about some observed behaviors. As you may have heard, some areas in Colorado, have closed due to overcrowding and the high likelihood of disease spread as a result. GTNP and Yellowstone are now closed. What is next? Ongoing access to other areas is far from guaranteed. Here are some recommendations for recreating while not spreading the virus or adding to the crisis.

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE: Aggregations of people at the base of Snow King, on Teton Pass, and the top of Glory and 25 Short have been observed and reported as a concern. Have your gear ready to go so you can quickly leave parking areas. Please give people a minimum of 6 feet of space when they approach on a skin track or at the trailhead. Don't travel in large groups. Spread out both within and between groups when on the trail. What may be a comfortable distance for you can be uncomfortable for others. Consider wearing a mask or your buff over your mouth and nose when passing by others.

GO TO PLACES LESS TRAVELED: Avoid popular routes and destinations and seek out lesser traveled areas. Note: JHMR is currently closed to uphill travel. GTNP and Yellowstone just closed.

DON'T HITCHHIKE: This is not the time to be hitching up the Pass or picking people up. Protect yourself and others.

MANAGE YOUR DOG AND DON'T TOUCH OTHER'S DOGS: More people will result in more dogs in the backcountry, and more dogs will require greater vigilance on the part of dog owners to manage animal behavior. Use leashes and poop bags, and if your dog is not obedient to your commands, leave him/her at home. Avoid touching other people's dogs!

MAKE CONSERVATIVE DECISIONS: This is neither the time to be pushing the envelope with risky ski lines nor the best time to be building and practicing jumps. Calling on the services of Teton Search and Rescue or going to the ER with a torn ACL will be an added burden for healthcare providers, and very embarrassing. Hospital beds are needed for sick patients, not preventable accidents.

RESPECT CLOSURES AND PARKING SIGNS: Trailhead parking lots have been especially full. If a lot is full, just go elsewhere. Head to the hills with a backup plan in case the first parking lot is full.

DISSUADE VISITATION: This is not a good time to invite or host friends from out of town. Encourage them to stay in their home communities.

KEEP BACKCOUNTRY RECREATION IN PERSPECTIVE: Reducing the spread of the virus and not over taxing our health care system is the priority! Your travel in the Teton Backcountry can complement your physical and psychological well-being, but those benefits are secondary to the greater need. As recommended by health care providers, “Do not change your behavior to avoid infection; assume you are infected and change your behavior to avoid transmission.”

We are VERY fortunate to have access to such incredible open space, fresh air, and room to explore during this stressful time. Let’s do what we can to practice social distancing and not create an additional burden to an already stressed system.

Be smart, stay safe, and enjoy!

Your Teton Backcountry Alliance