



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
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File Code: 1500

Date: August 16, 2013

Tom Maclay
17000 Old Highway 93
Carlton, MT 59833

Dear Mr. Maclay,

We have reviewed your May 24, 2013 unsolicited Special Use proposal and associated documents (accepted for screening on June 26, 2013) for alpine skiing, snowboarding, guided ski touring, mountain biking and Nordic ski trail development on the Bitterroot and Lolo National Forests. Since the viability of your proposal seems contingent on the area being developed as a downhill alpine ski area, this was the focus of our review. We have reviewed your proposal under the “Initial Screening Criteria” as required by Forest Service regulations and policy, 36 CFR 251.54 and FSH 2709.11, Chapter 10 to determine if it qualifies for further consideration. The screening process is comprised of initial and second-level screening. A proposal that does not meet all of the minimum requirements of the initial criteria does not receive further evaluation and processing. Based on review of your proposal, we have concluded that your proposal is not consistent with all of the initial screening criteria, and therefore the proposal will not receive further evaluation and processing. The following provides a detailed explanation of why your proposal did not meet the screening criteria. We have divided our response by each National Forest for ease of reading.

Lolo National Forest (LNF)

Initial Screening Criteria #2

The proposed use is consistent or can be made consistent with standards and guidelines in the applicable forest land and resource management plan prepared under the National Forest Management Act and 36 CFR part 219 (36 CFR 251.54 (5e[ii])).

Response:

Management Area 11 (MA 11)

This Management Area consists of “large, roadless blocks of land distinguished primarily by their natural environmental character”. Your proposal’s Phase Four calls for ski lifts and several ski runs within large blocks of MA 11. The proposal’s Phase Five also calls for “snowcat served skiing on Lantern Ridge and vicinity”. This area includes large blocks of MA 11. On page III-32 of the Forest Plan, the description of MA 11 states “There is no motorized access permitted in this Management Area, except for the development of mineral resources. Public use may be restricted”.



Also on page III-32 under C. Standard #2, the Forest Plan states that “developed recreation facilities, like campgrounds or picnic grounds, will not be constructed”.

Standard #4 reads, “tree cutting will be limited to that required to eliminate safety hazards or permit trail construction”.

As stated in Standard # 8, “Management practices will follow guidelines for the Retention visual quality objective...”

Ski area construction is incompatible with all of the standards listed above.

Management Area 24 (MA 24)

Visual quality practices for this Management Area are identified in the Forest Plan on page III-120.

Visual quality is identified as a Goal for this MA as well as being identified as a Standard (page III-122).

Standard #23 states:

“Management practices for all resources will follow guidelines for the retention visual quality objective from the viewpoints identified as visually sensitive.”

Your proposal calls for ski runs and ski lifts within MA 24 in Phase III and is incompatible with the first goals for this MA which is to “Achieve the visual quality objective Retention.” It is also inconsistent with Standard #23 above. The photograph of existing ski runs on private property included in your proposal does not demonstrate how ski lifts and ski runs in Phase III would be consistent with Forest Plan Goal #1 for MA 24 (Page III-120) or Standard #23 (page #II-122).

In addition there are some concerns with the Carlton Ridge RNA.

Management Area 6 (MA 6), Carlton Ridge Research Natural Area (RNA)

While this proposal does not appear to have any development, nor use of the RNA, it is unclear how you propose to maintain the RNA’s integrity with development nearly surrounding it.

Your proposal includes ski trail development immediately adjacent to Management Area (MA) 6. It also proposes ski lift construction immediately west, north and east of MA 6. Because of the topography in these areas ski trail development directly adjacent to the eastern, western and northern boundaries of the RNA would bring a high potential for non-permitted, concentrated recreation use within the RNA with no discussion on how this could be avoided. This is inconsistent with preserving the RNA’s natural, historic condition, as described in the RNA Establishment Report.

Bitterroot National Forest (BNF)

The proposed use is consistent or can be made consistent with standards and guidelines in the applicable forest land and resource management plan prepared under the National Forest Management Act and 36 CFR part 219 (36 CFR 251.54(5e[ii])).

Response:

Management Area 3a

Your proposal calls for ski lifts, ski runs and a lodge within MA3a. The visual quality objective is partial retention in MA 3a, Standard b (1). Human activities may be evident but must remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape. The ski runs in MA 3a would not be subordinate with the landscape.

MA 5 and Inventoried Roadless Area

Your proposal also calls for ski lifts, ski runs and lodge within MA 5 which encompasses the Lolo Creek Inventoried Roadless Area. Forest Plan goals for MA 5, as described on page III-7, state “Emphasize motorized and non-motorized, semi primitive recreation activities and elk security.” Standard 3a(1) states “manage for recreation activities associated with roadless areas, including hiking, hunting, fishing, camping, motor bike riding and snowmobiling”. Standard 3a (4) states that “facilities and trails will be compatible with the semi-primitive setting.” As described in Standard 3b, “the visual quality objective for MA 5 is retention (USDA, 1997)”. The facilities and improvements associated with your proposal are incompatible with both the recreation and visual quality standards for this management area.

We are returning your proposal and associated information with this letter. Please feel free to call if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

/s/ Deborah L. R. Austin
DEBORAH L. R. AUSTIN
Forest Supervisor

/s/ Julie K. King
JULIE K. KING
Forest Supervisor

cc: Boyd C Hartwig, Paul K Matter, Dan Ritter, Tod G McKay, Stuart Wilson, George M Bain
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