

THE BOARD OF BLAINE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS


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Muffy Davis, Chair * Angenie McCleary, Vice-Chair * Dick Fosbury, Commissioner

February 22, 2023

Objection Reviewing Officer
Intermountain Regional Office
324 25th Street
Ogden, UT 84401

Submitted via email to objections-intermtn-regional-office@usda.gov

Re: Objection to the Sawtooth National Recreation Area Outfitter and Guide Management Plan

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to object to the draft decision on the SNRA Outfitter and Guide Management Plan (OGMP) and Final Environmental Assessment (EA). This objection follows a Board of Blaine County Commissioners August 30, 2022, comment letter on the draft OGMP to Ranger Kirk Flannigan regarding proposed limits imposed on the number of people who can use the backcountry ski huts in the Sawtooth Mountains and in the Wood River Valley. That letter shared the concern of our large backcountry ski community that the formula you adopted under Alternative B will limit winter use of the huts and access to recreation opportunities. These limits impact a significant segment of the Blaine County economy and residents and visitors who have enjoyed these backcountry huts for the past 40 years without user conflicts, without any demonstrable impact to wildlife and to the Sawtooth Wilderness.

On January 24, 2023, at a regular Board of Commissioner meeting, the Board was briefed by the SNRA staff and heard from the public on the recently released OMGP Final Environmental Assessment. At that meeting the Board expressed to Ranger Flannigan and Susan James our appreciation of our partnership with the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and all the extensive work that they have done with the SNRA Outfitter and Guides Management Plan. Additionally, at that meeting the Nordic and Backcountry Skiers Alliance of Idaho, Sun Valley Economic Development and other stakeholders indicated that winter recreation in our community would be negatively impacted by the Final Environmental Assessment.

One common theme reiterated from stakeholders and causes me concern is that the Environmental Assessment relies on an inaccurate baseline or formula to set winter priority use days in the OGMP. The document utilizes figures from 2016-2020 to calculate user days which do not reflect the impact of Covid and the increased utilization of all outdoor recreational activities in following years. More recent and available data from 2021 and 2022 should be included in the calculations.

I am also concerned that none of the adjustments or amendments to Alternative B and the original scoping plan requested by the Board of Commissioners, backcountry skiers, winter outfitters and guides, and Sun Valley Economic Development appear to have been considered. I believe that the Plan, without these considerations, will have a negative impact on winter recreation, small outfitter and guide companies, and our local economy. Specifically, as mentioned in our Blaine County Commissioner letter dated August 30, 2022, we requested that there be a re-examination of how backcountry huts are permitted in order to maintain consistency. The 4 Galena Yurts and SNRA's Redfish Cabin are not limited to use-day

allotments, but rather allowed to book to capacity. Whereas, the Sun Valley Mtn Huts are not allowed to book to capacity but only given use-day allotments. This discrepancy is unfair and needs adjusted.

I am writing to express my objections with the current management plan and the hope of working to find common ground in the management of the SNRA in a way that supports our community goals and the important objectives of the SNRA in managing winter recreation.

Thank you for consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Muffy Davis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Muffy" and last name "Davis" clearly distinguishable.

Muffy Davis
Chair, Blaine County Commissioners