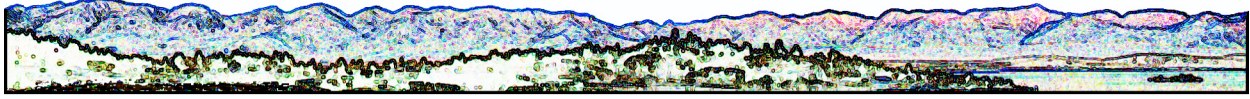


# Swan View Coalition

*Nature and Human Nature on the Same Path*



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ph/fax 406-755-1379

January 30, 2024

Uploaded to <https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?Project=65359>

Sent via email to:

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[Christopher.Dowling@usda.gov](mailto:Christopher.Dowling@usda.gov)

Re: Outfitter and Guide Special Use Permits in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex

Dear Rangers Carver, Ladell, Yarbrough, Munoz, Davies and Dowling;

We are sending this second letter of comments to each of you because we still need more information before we can provide fully informed comments. While we appreciate that you issued your 1/17/24 list of the 62 SUPs being considered for reauthorization, it still does not provide the types of information we and the public need to provide informed comments. Nor will providing an additional two weeks for comments solve the underlying lack of essential information.

Your 12/22/23 scoping letter provided phone numbers for each of you District Rangers inviting specific questions, so we asked numerous questions of you in our letter sent via email in order to avoid playing "phone tag." To date, we have received no reply from any of you to the specific questions asked in our 1/13/24 letter (please excuse the typo in the date of that letter, though the correct date was embedded in the file name of the pdf and of course on the email message).

In addition to the information requested in our 1/13/24 letter, we ask that you provide the following information to the public, preferably via the project web page:

1. The "Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex Character Narrative, R1-21-25," as referenced in your 12/22/23 scoping letter.
2. The "2017 needs assessment and extent necessary documentation" as referenced in your 12/22/23 scoping letter.
3. The number of permitted service days versus the actual use for each permit.

4. Annual inspections, performance evaluations, and public and other-agency complaints related to each campsite or operator.
5. Any NEPA documents and related decisions dealing with outfitting service levels or allocation in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex.
6. Campsite Management Plans for each outfitter camp.

If this seems like too much information to deal with while using a Categorical Exclusion, it likely is – and that’s the point. We ask that you provide the public with the above information, then reinitiate your scoping process with a 45-day public comment period and a clear announcement of your intent to prepare at least an EA if not an EIS.

The Categorical Exclusion you cite is written for its singular application to a single SUP, not for application to an entire program of 62 SUPs. And you know darn well that using 62 individual SUPs using that Categorical Exclusion will absolutely violate NEPA’s requirements that you thoroughly analyze the cumulative effects of your actions on all resources, including the individual and cumulative effects to especially fragile resources such as Wilderness lands, wilderness character, threatened grizzly bear, threatened lynx, and threatened wolverine – among other wildlife species sensitive to human impacts to them and their essential habitats.

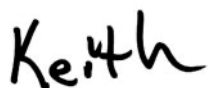
Moreover, you cannot use Categorical Exclusions to hide the very real and significant levels of controversy involved in the FS’s monitoring and administration of its SUPs. We attached to our 1/13/24 letter a 12/6/23 Hungry Horse News article about the removal of Scott Snelson as Spotted Bear District Ranger because he cancelled an outfitter SUP for noncompliance with the SUP – in other words, for doing his job.

We attached to this letter a 1/24/24 Hungry Horse News article reporting that Rocky Mountain District Ranger Michael Munoz “said he has had to pull permits from outfitters on his district in the past.” The FS cannot instill public faith in its permitting program nor fulfill its NEPA responsibilities by hiding its permit monitoring and enforcement actions from the public, especially when it has asked the public to comment on the specifics of those permits.

On the following page is a 1/29/24 posting of the Flathead City-County Health Department restaurant inspection results for January 11-7. The Health Department also posts these Food Inspection Grades at <https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/health/environmental-health> . This is an example of how one public agency keeps the public informed so it can make informed choices about where they eat and shop – and the results indicate there is a big incentive to run a clean facility in order to keep your public grades and reputation high.

Thus far in this O&G SUP scoping process, however, the FS appears to be doing the opposite; refusing to identify problem outfitters when asked, sending the message that the FS will defend the outfitter rather than the public interest when a District Ranger pulls his or her permit for noncompliance. We look forward to receiving timely answers to our questions and to seeing a public display of all the requested information before you go any further with this charade of a public comment process.

Sincerely,



Keith J. Hammer  
Chair

Enclosures: 1/24/24 Hungry Horse News Article

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## RESTAURANT INSPECTIONS

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Flathead City-County Health Department inspection results from Jan. 11-17. For more details or more information on other inspections in Flathead County, visit the Health Department's website, [www.flatheadhealth.org](http://www.flatheadhealth.org); or contact Environmental Health at 751-8130.

<b>Establishment</b>	<b>Facility</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Flathead County Adult Detention	Food Service	Kalispell	A+
Smith's Food & Drug Center	Store	Columbia Falls	A+
Pizza Hut	Food Service	Columbia Falls	A+
Smith's Food & Drug Center	Produce	Columbia Falls	A+
Frugals	Food Service	Kalispell	A+
Eagles Club	Bar	Kalispell	A
Franz Bakery	Store	Kalispell	A+
Your Turn C-Stop	Food Service	Bigfork	A
Your Turn C-Stop	Store	Bigfork	A+
Your Turn C-Stop	Tavern/Bar	Bigfork	A+
Whitefish Handcrafted Spirits	Food Service	Kalispell	A+
Kalispell Moose Lodge	Bar	Kalispell	A+
Taco Del Sol	Food Service	Kalispell	A
Salvation Army	Food Service	Kalispell	A-
Ed and Mully's	Food Service	Whitefish	A-
The Bierstube	Bar	Whitefish	A
The Bierstube	Food Service	Whitefish	A
Hellroaring Saloon	Food Service	Whitefish	A
Hellroaring Saloon	Bar	Whitefish	A+
Ed and Mully's	Bar	Whitefish	A+
Taco Bell	Food Service	Kalispell	A+
Lodge Boat Club	Coffee Dock	Whitefish	A+
North Valley Food Bank	Food Service	Whitefish	A+
Village Market	Store on	Whitefish	A+

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# Forest Service extends public comment on Bob outfitter permits

By **CHRIS PETERSON**  
Hungry Horse News

After some feedback, the Forest Service has extended the deadline to comment on renewing the outfitter and guide permits for the next 10 years until Feb. 16.

The Forest Service announced it was going to renew 62 permits for the Bob Marshall Complex, which included two for the Badger-Two Medicine region just north of the Bob, earlier this year.

But the announcement was thin on details — they didn't initially release the number of outfitters or where they operated and what services they provided.

That brought the ire of critics.

Keith Hammer, chair-

man of the Swan View Coalition, was one of the concerned public, noting that the initial scoping notice required all comments “must be site specific” and yet the notice provided no listing of the permits being considered for reauthorization, where they are located, or any other specifics about them.

The new notice now lists the outfitter, latitude and longitude coordinates for their permitted camps in the wilderness and what district they're permitted to operate in.

Outfitting services run the gamut — some offer hunting and fishing trips, other horseback, other hikes and seven of them offer flights to Schafer Meadows.

All told, outfitters

are authorized to guide 30,000 service days annually across the 1.6 million acre complex, noted Michael A. Muñoz, Rocky Mountain District Ranger.

Muñoz is spearheading the effort for the Forest Service and is a 25-year veteran. The Hungry Horse Ranger District has four permits, the Spotted Bear District 30; Swan Lake two, Rocky Mountain 20; Lincoln three and Seeley Lake three.

Outfitters do pay fees for the permits, though Munoz didn't know what the total figure was off the top of his head, he said in an interview.

The bulk of the fees go back to the Forests where they originated and are used for trail mainte-

nance and other projects. Muñoz noted that outfitter camps should be posted as such, so users know who has the permit. If they aren't posted, the public can use the camps if they're vacant, he noted, which is a popular misconception.

The outfitter permits have come to more public scrutiny as of late after former Spotted Bear District Ranger Scott Snelson claimed he was removed from his position for pulling a permit of an outfitter on his district for allegedly violating wilderness regulations. Snelson was transferred to a post at the Flathead National Forest headquarters for several months until he retired last fall.

Muñoz said he has had

to pull permits from outfitters on his district in the past. This public process is could shine a light on any potential problems with an outfitter, it also serves an an opportunity for the public to endorse an outfitter.

Not all outfitters are for profit, either. The Nature Conservancy and the University of Montana, for example, have permits as does the Lutheran Bible Camp.

Most of the existing wilderness outfitter permits are due to expire in April 2025; and if authorized again, the new permits would be issued for a new term from 2025 to 2035.

Outfitters cannot ask for more services under the permit renewal, the Forest Service notes.

“The scope of this proposal is limited to the existing outfitter and guide permits, and the associated priority use allocation systems and currently authorized assigned sites as established

in the current permits. It is beyond the scope of this proposed action to consider additional assigned base camps, assigned spike camps, or to change current use within seasons or overall use levels,” the scoping letter notes.

Visit: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/hlcnf/?project=65359> to learn more about the project and find information on how to submit comments. The deadline to submit a comment is now Feb. 16, 2024.