Kathleen Susan Roche

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02/16/24

The Flathead, Helena-Lewis and Clark, and Lolo National Forests are requesting public input on the reauthorization of existing priority outfitter and guide special use permits in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (BMWC). This action is referenced to File Code: 1950/2720; Date: December 22, 2023

I am writing to you today as an interested party for this proposal. I am a former special uses and wilderness staff officer and former ecosystem and NEPA staff officer on the Shasta-Trintiy National Forest. My comments are based on my extensive experience in these areas.

You indicate that “Based on resource information to date and initial evaluation, it appears these actions fit within category 36 CFR 220.6(d) (11): Issuance of a new special use authorization to replace an existing or expired special use authorization, when such issuance is to account only for administrative changes, such as a change in ownership of authorized improvements or expiration of the current authorization, and where there are no changes to the authorized facilities or increases in the scope or magnitude of authorized activities. The applicant or holder must be in compliance with all the terms and conditions of the existing or expired special use authorization. Scoping comments and resource analyses will determine if there are extraordinary circumstances present that would warrant the need for an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement or whether actions could fall under the category listed above.”

You do not provide any specific resource information for the interested parties to evaluate. That appears to be a violation of the NEPA process in that site specific information is required for project level proposals.

I want to call your attention to the need to for all of these to be able to be issued while being in FULL compliance with the applicable Forest Plan. No permit can be issued based on potential future compliance (one of the principles of NEPA process).

In addition, I want to call you attention to your designated responsible official identified as District Ranger, Michael Muñoz, Rocky Mountain Ranger District, can’t possibly have the necessary authority to make this decision based on FSM 1230 for special use permits and also that since this covers several national forests, this decision must be made by someone above the Forest Supervisor level –as in a deputy chief.

Your scoping letter indicates that the Newspaper of Record: Great Falls Tribune, Great Falls MT and that comments are due February 2, 2024, however your webpage indicates that comments are requested through 2/16/2024 11:59:59 PM (Mountain Standard Time.

I find that the lack of information and forest plan compliance data as well as the fact that these uses occur in Wilderness, **means that an EIS** is needed and required to demonstrate the effects of these proposed continues uses.

Submitted electronically

*Kathleen Susan Roche* 02/16/2024