



May 2, 2024

USFS Mt Baker Ranger District
Att: Louis Neff, District Ranger
810 State Route 20
Sedro- Woolley, Washington 98284-1263

RE: Temporary Winter Shelter Proposal

Dear Mr. Neff:

Please accept this correspondence as the input of the above Organizations with regard to the Temporary Winter Shelter Proposal ("The Proposal"). We are aware that it is somewhat unusual for Organizations outside the area to be commenting on a Proposal of this size, but we have been in discussion with the Washington State Snowmobile Association on the Proposal and would like to provide our insights into the Proposal. It is our understanding that the 10th Mountain Hut System and Vail Pass Winter Recreation Area have been repeatedly raised as a successful model of management of a mixed usage area. We are intimately familiar with this effort and would summarize the VPWRA as more of a last ditch effort to save access than a model for management moving forward. While there are snowmobile opportunities in the VPWRA, these are less than optimal opportunities and many snowmobilers simply choose to pursue opportunities in other areas. It is important to note that VPWRA is not the only model applying exclusionary boundaries of management for mixed use areas. Our experiences with these areas has been consistently less than positive regardless of where this model is applied as often this model does not resolve conflict but rather institutionalizes the conflict without resolving this conflict.

The Organizations would like to note that while each snowbelt state has a winter grooming program, each of these programs is different in how this goal is achieved. The major similarity of all our snowmobile programs, regardless of how they interact with partners and managers is the cornerstone that the programs are overwhelmingly funded by motorized users for the benefit of all interests in the winter recreational community. We remain the only user group to support recreation in this manner. While the snowparc system used in the Mt Baker area provides some additional funding for operations and maintenance of areas from other user groups, this relationship is a lower level of engagement of partners in management as these interests are not engaged at the programmatic level.

These programmatic distinctions allow certain management issues to be addressed with higher levels of specificity by other states simply due to the model of management that has been adopted. Our insights from other states and programs are somewhat unique given the fact our members and

clubs are actively grooming trails, holding permits and far more deeply engaged in the management process due to the management partnership that has proven most effective for the clubs and associations in each area. It is our hope that these comments provide valuable information to USFS staff to allow a full understanding of experiences and information available in their decision making process.

1. Who we are.

The United Snowmobile Alliance("USA") is a nationally recognized Not for Profit Organization dedicated to the preservation and promotion of environmentally responsible organized snowmobiling and the creation of safe and sustainable snowmobiling in the United States. Our membership spans the country, including associations from the Northeast, Midwest and Western United States. USA has enjoyed a long and successful partnership with the Canadian Council of Snowmobile Organizations as well. As we have noted previously, each of our member states has adopted varying levels of engagement in the management and operations of winter recreation in their region. Many of the states in the Northeast provide all forms of oversight and management of winter recreational opportunities without oversight or engagement from federal or state managers as trails cross private lands on rights of way or easements held by the Club or Association. This direct connection to management issues and challenges allows us to provide unique insights to challenges faced and their resolution.

Colorado Snowmobile Association ("CSA") was founded in 1970 to unite winter motorized recreationists across the state to enjoy their passion. CSA was a founding member of USA. CSA has also become the voice of organized snowmobiling seeking to advance, promote and preserve the sport of snowmobiling through work with Federal and state land management agencies and local, state and federal legislators telling the truth about our sport. Many of our members have partnered with USFS for more than 50 years to provide sustainable outdoor recreational opportunities for all and this partnership has included involvement with the VPWRA since its inception.

2(a). The Proposal seeks to analyze wildly disparate management situations under a single standard.

The first concern we had after reviewing the Proposal is the blending of analysis of what are very different activities, partnerships and interests. Mainly these activities fall into two categories, first being those of a partner with USFS in providing infrastructure to the public and secondly those of for profit outfitter that is providing benefits to those that chose to pay for the services that outfitter provides. While there may be public benefit from these operations, these benefits are significantly less direct in how the benefit is provided. While the Proposal does not address why these diverse interests are being addressed in a single scoping effort, the Organizations must assume unified analysis of permits for activities of a for profit business operation with efforts that are a public benefit provided by a not-for-profit partner are being undertaken in an attempt to create efficiency. While both management models in the Proposal provide opportunities that are conceptually open to the public, the process and function of these efforts in providing some level of public access are VERY different. The levels of public access are different as the Whatcom warming hut is truly open to the public, while all other huts are open to members of the public that have made a reservation and paid to use the facility. These are hugely different models of operation. While there are numerous assertions that the Proposal will benefit the public, we are unable to identify significant public

benefits for many of the sites. Rather benefits are most directly related to the rental operator and those that chose to purchase these opportunities. It is our hope that recognition of these highly different models of operation will avoid conflict in the future that could result from the assumption these models are operating with similar goals and objectives. They are not and it has been our experience that failing to understand this difference creates immense conflicts moving forward.

It has been our experience that managers have commonly thought this unified analysis to be more efficient than attempting to manage these opportunities separately. While we would agree that the short term analysis could be more efficient, it has been our experience that this type of blending for permitted activities is a major barrier to effective management in the long run. Too often significant differences are overlooked in the hope of resolving short-term management challenges. Often managers simply don't have time or resources to address issues like this in the short term. It has been our experience that this issue has taken an unusual development with the USFS staffing challenges over the last several years, as managers are simply not interested in long term issues that could result from a decision as they simply do not expect to be in a position for any length of time. When the problem arises from a management decision, they will be employed in other positions that could be thousands of miles from the planning area. The highly transitory nature of employees is a concern as while the employees may be transitory in nature the partners are not. These same partners will be partnering on the management of this area for the foreseeable future.

2(b). Permits for operation of huts must be separately addressed. confusion of users

After reviewing the Proposal provided by Aspire Mtn Huts, Baker Mtn Guides and Round House (For profit Proposal) we are concerned that the for-profit proposal and the partner proposal will create conflict. This consolidation of interests under a single permitting requirement is becoming an area of conflict between partners and managers and highlights a significant difference between the two models of operation. This issue is partially the result of the fact USFS regulations simply do not apply well to partner type efforts and are more directed towards for profit outfitter and guide operations despite the goals and objectives of these two efforts being significantly different. While we are aware that resolving this challenge is well outside the scope of the Proposal, this challenge must be recognized and addressed in the Proposal.

We would like to share a couple of experiences where the failure of managers and planning efforts to understand the different nature of a partner with that of a for profit operation are highly relevant. Our basis for this distinction starts from the fact the USFS has a partner guide and permittees guide. These are very different requirements and the confusion of these requirements has proven to be a challenge in some situations. For purposes of these comments, the Organizations are assuming that each Organization is assuming the responsibility of managing and maintaining each of the huts. The Organizations are aware that huts such as these need maintenance and oversight. Despite the best of intentions, trash needs to be removed, snow shoveled off roofs, periodically checked to insure people are not living in the warming huts and in the Proposal we are assuming the partners will be responsible for assembly and removal of the huts on an annual basis etc. Often these services are provided by nonprofit partners to supplement a limited USFS staff and this is an important resource for the public. It has also been our experience that partners willingness to assume responsibilities for management has limits for a variety of reasons including insurance limitations, availability of training of partners and volunteers and many other issues.

While many partners are willing to accept many responsibilities for projects there are also many requirements of an outfitter guide that a partner is unable to unwilling to accept. As an example, we are aware of multiple situations involving what we have come to identify as the “And justice for all” poster required under USFS Civil Rights requirements. While the Organizations completely support this effort, we are also aware that most partners simply are unable to provide language translation services and in many situations are entirely unable to display the poster. Partners often don’t have staff or expertise to provide these benefits and will continue to rely on the USFS to provide these resources on an as needed basis. It simply is outside of their efforts and volunteer groups are poorly situated to address these types of issues and candidly every discussion we have had on this issue has resulted from a poor understanding of the partner role in providing the service to the public and not from an actual issue that occurred in the providing of the service. For profit permittees are far more suited to even have resources to address these challenges and this distinction must not be overlooked. By contrast, an outfitter/guide has the financial resources to contract for these services as users are paying to obtain the outfitter/guide services and outfitter/guides can easily post this type of information in the lodge or hut that they are renting. Partners simply do not have this type of infrastructure available and rely on the USFS to provide these resources to the public.

We are also aware of situations where volunteer club members have been suddenly required to obtain CPR and first aid training on exceptionally short notice when staff simply does not understand the difference between a partner permittee and a for profit outfitter. Again, we do not disagree that first aid training and CPR certifications are a good thing, but we would add that telling a volunteer operator he needs to volunteer more than he already does simply so he can continue to provide is volunteer services to the public, fails to build a partnership between interests but rather divides them. This issue became more problematic when the insurance issues for the local club were addressed as the clubs insurance did not cover emergency response operations or many of the general training requirements of a for profit outfitter in any manner. Outfitters insurance often requires this type of training and resource to be provided as part of their requirements to be insured. These costs are simply included in the costs of hiring the outfitter/guide. In stark contrast any additional insurance costs for the partner are assumed by the club who then has to fund raise to cover these costs. This may seem like a small detail but is an issue where there are major challenges and conflict can result if the nuances of these relationships are not recognized. We would like to avoid any partner getting a phone call that there was an issue with that volunteer using USFS training to assist in an emergency and there was some type of issue and having to inform that volunteer the club insurance does not cover that type of activity. This would be bad for everyone.

While these are generalized examples, the Organizations must also recognize that these issues arise in the “response to public questions” document created around the Proposal. These questions appear to start to address issues like emergency response etc. Generally, this document appears to assume a lot of effort will be from motorized clubs and organizations despite the fact they are receiving only a small benefit from the Proposal. The Organizations would urge managers to confirm this is truly accurate and that there is truly alignment of the roles and responsibilities of each group moving forward, as often this has been a point of conflict. We are further concerned about this conflict as much of the public engagement materials created to date does not appear collaborative in nature or created in such a manner to meaningfully engage with the motorized community. Rather these materials focus on the outfitter/guide benefit to a small portion of the user community in the

area. Not only are these materials not embracing multiple uses, it more generally reflects the fact that many outside the moto community do not understand existing management, the large amount of partner funding already in place to make basic operations happen and merely assume it is free.

3(a). Conflicts between desired experiences of users must be addressed.

The unique nature of the planning area is highly relevant to the success of the Proposal as this landscape has Congressionally designated Wilderness and has a long history of management for multiple uses in the area, spanning back to the Mt. Baker areas designation as a National Recreation Area in 1984. The protection of snowmobile recreational opportunities in this Congressional designation could not be more clearly defined as the Legislation states this as follows:

(d) The Secretary shall administer the recreation area in accordance with the laws, rules and regulations applicable to the national forests in such manner as will best provide for (1) public outdoor recreation (including but not limited to snowmobile use); (2) conservation of scenic, natural, historic, and other values contributing to public enjoyment; and (3) such management, utilization, and disposal of natural resources on federally owned lands within the recreation area which are compatible with and which do not significantly impair the purposes for which the recreation area is established.¹

The Organizations would note that the Mt Baker National Recreation area is one of the few areas in the Country where snowmobiling is protected as a characteristic of the area. There are many other areas on the Forest where other values are prioritized but the Mt Baker NRA is the only one protected for snowmobile usage. We mention this as education of hut renters on this issue would be a major step towards reducing conflicts between desired recreational opportunities.

As previously noted, the Organizations are concerned that much of the messaging from outfitters supporting the Proposal is not created in a manner to engage with the diverse community using the area. This is a concern as we find it hard to believe the motorized community would be engaged in this effort, despite the high levels of usage in some areas. This possibility of poor sampling of the various users must be addressed in the Proposal, but this challenge extends beyond just various user groups in the areas and encompasses the type of experience that could be provided by the area. When promotional materials for the project and materials from the outfitters supporting the Proposal are reviewed, these materials convey that the renter of these cabins would be the only person in the area and have almost personal access to their desired recreational opportunities. We are not sure this message is accurate and this will create conflicts as this is generally a multiple use area. While some huts are adjacent to Wilderness areas, there are also congressionally protected snowmobile opportunities in the area as well and the renters of these resources should understand that this is a multiple use area that is merely adjacent to the Wilderness areas. They will be able to hear and see nonwilderness uses from the infrastructure they are renting. This is a very different experience than what is conveyed and it has been our experience that the poor alignment of the opportunities

¹ 98 Stat 305 §6(d)

provided with the desired experience has been another focal point of conflict in the management of effort such as this.

Creating this level of understanding and accuracy is a concern on a landscape scale as this understanding will also be a factor in the operation of the huts on a daily basis. It has been our experience that regardless of how these huts are designated, they will draw people to them. Generally motorized users do not object to other users on public lands but the converse is often not the case. This poor alignment of expectations will create conflict as from users who are simply investigating the new facilities available in the area. But this conflict extends beyond mere incidental contact as these type of facilities also draw multiple uses into operational aspects of the huts as often renters often do not want to pay guides to transport materials and seek other means. Either they will seek to transport supplies on their own or hire local snowmobilers to transport it for them at a reduced cost. This causes friction.

Our concerns on this issue of poor alignment of opportunities with desired experiences are most centered around the operations of the Vail Pass Winter Recreation Area and the 10th Mountain Division Huts in Colorado. The similarity of the Proposal area and VPWRA cannot be overlooked as each are adjacent to large highly developed ski areas with similar goals and objectives. Each of these areas have Congressionally designated Wilderness areas immediately adjacent to areas managed for intensive multiple use. Each area also sees comparatively high levels of use due to the comparatively easy public access to the area. Understanding the scope of issues that are involved in operations of this nature is critical to resolving them. It has been our experience that rather than resolving conflicts the VPWRA reduced conflicts somewhat but also has institutionalized conflict. Every year we hear the same concerns from other interests involved in the operations, despite the VPWRA being designed to remove these systemic challenges. When winter travel was updated for the White River National Forest these huts became the basis for arbitrary boundary areas to protect the recreational experience of the hut users and also assertions that only BAT snowmobiles should be allowed in the VPWRA. While these concerns were resolved, the institutional nature of this conflict could not be overlooked.

Our concerns with the Proposal is that a similar model of management is being proposed as follows:

“Group access to each hut is complicated by the variable snow, road, and grooming conditions that exist along forest roads in the winter. Phase 1 will allow each entity to problem solve transportation issues. Our hope is that grooming and road access may be an area of collaboration with diverse user groups who access winter recreation via forest roads.²”

While this goal is commendable, we are not sure the Proposal addresses the foundational problems it will face. It has been our experience that the maintenance of infrastructure such as roads and trails has been one of the largest and longest points of conflict for the VPWRA. While snowmobilers may use trails in VPWRA, their desired recreational opportunity is the large open areas accessed by the trails. For most other users, the trail is the recreational opportunity. As a result of these differing desired opportunities, snowmobilers are far more willing to accept lower levels of maintenance than

² See, Temporary Huts Phase 1 Proposal provided with the Proposal – undated pg. 1 .

other users. As we outline in the following portion of these comments, resolving these issues is a major undertaking and only works when it is meaningfully pursued. We have concerns that the entire Proposal appears to be undertaken on a somewhat haphazard manner by the rental operators/outfitters and rather than being a primary issue for them appears to be an issue that is addressed when time and resources allow it. This is not a great foundation for success as many of the conflicts that will result from the outfitter/cabin rentals can only be addressed with actual management by the operator and meaningful engagement with all interests.

3(b). User conflict around the winter trail network and funding.

All recreational access to public lands is highly dependent on a network of roads and trails which provide access to all types of usages in the backcountry. Winter recreational access occurs on a different landscape than summer recreational access, as winter recreational access networks must be rebuilt every year and normally require ongoing maintenance throughout the winter season. Unlike a summer trail network, where the foot print of trails can remain intact for decades with minimal maintenance, winter routes must be created from scratch as the winter season commences. Winter routes also may require extensive maintenance after snow or wind events due to the high mobility of snow in certain circumstances. These ongoing efforts around winter trails relied on for access to all recreational access are maintained overwhelming by motorized community as a result of the voluntary registration programs these users have put in place with states as early as the 1960s. The routes that result from these grooming programs are primary access tools for all recreational and other uses and are provided to the entire recreational community free of charge. Many are simply not aware of the fact that general tax revenues and land manager budgets are not the source of funding for the development and maintenance of these access routes.

As a result of the primary funding source for the creation and maintenance of winter trails being the voluntary registration fees that have been paid by snowmobile users, snowmobiles should be expected on routes and at trailheads as they are paying for the planning, implementation and operation of these facilities. Many states have enacted legislation that prohibits the use of snowmobile registration monies for routes that are not open to the motorized community. These funds are deployed in a variety of ways, as in some states clubs provide volunteers to operate and maintain grooming equipment while other states provide equipment and operators who are paid from the voluntary registration monies. While the Snow park system in the Proposal area reduces this type of conflict it does not resolve this type of conflict around the area.

While the groomed trail network provides the primary source of access for all recreational usage, the network can often be a source of conflict when users are not matching the provided opportunity with the desired experience or are not aware of how the groomed network is provided. As a result, users seeking a non-motorized experience can perceive conflict at trailheads and on the groomed trail network. We have consistently seen that users who do not understand the management resources seek to have management decisions made to provide large areas adjacent to a groomed network for specified usages that exclude motorized usage but rely on the groomed network provided through the voluntary registration funds from the motorized community. While this can be perceived as a basis for management action, closures such as this can convey a very negative message to those that have provided the groomed network free of charge. Asking the community that has partnered with land managers and provides the primary means of access to winter recreational opportunities to accept closures of riding areas due to the intolerance of other users that rely on the trail network

that is provided free of charge is a difficult position to place any partner of land managers in. This is a user conflict issue and must be addressed in the Proposal.

As outlined in these comments, the concept of user conflict can take many forms and impact a wide range of operational programs, and as a result understanding conflict is critical to resolving conflicts. Researchers have specifically identified that properly determining the basis or type of user conflict is critical to determining the proper method for managing this conflict. Generally, researchers divide conflicts into two general categories of conflict which are socially based and personally based conflicts. Scientific analysis defines the division of these two types of conflicts as follows:

“For interpersonal conflict to occur, the physical presence or behavior of an individual or a group of recreationists must interfere with the goals of another individual or group....Social values conflict, on the other hand, can occur between groups who do not share the same norms (Ruddell & Gramann, 1994) and/or values (Saremba & Gill, 1991), independent of the physical presence or actual contact between the groups.....When the conflict stems from interpersonal conflict, zoning incompatible users into different locations of the resource is an effective strategy. When the source of conflict is differences in values, however, zoning is not likely to be very effective. In the Mt. Evans study (Vaske et al., 1995), for example, physically separating hunters from nonhunters did not resolve the conflict in social values expressed by the nonhunting group. Just knowing that people hunt in the area resulted in the perception of conflict. For these types of situations, efforts designed to educate and inform the different visiting publics about the reasons underlying management actions may be more effective in reducing conflict.”³

Other researchers have distinguished types of user conflicts based on a goals interference distinction, described as follows:

“The travel management planning process did not directly assess the prevalence of on-site conflict between non-motorized groups accessing and using the yurts and adjacent motorized users....The common definition of recreation conflict for an individual assumes that people recreate in order to achieve certain goals, and defines conflict as “goal interference attributed to another’s behavior” (Jacob & Schreyer, 1980, p. 369). Therefore, conflict as goal interference is not an objective state, but is an individual’s appraisal of past and future social contacts that influences either direct or indirect conflict. It is important to note that the absence of recreational goal attainment alone is insufficient to denote the presence of conflict. The perceived source of this goal interference must be identified as other individuals.”⁴

It is significant to note that Mr. Norling’s study, cited above, was specifically created to determine why winter travel management closures had not resolved user conflicts for winter users of a group of yurts on the Wasache-Cache National Forest. As noted in Mr. Norling’s study, the travel management decisions addressing in the areas surrounding the yurts failed to distinguish why the conflict was

³ Carothers, P., Vaske, J. J., & Donnelly, M. P. (2001). *Social values versus interpersonal conflict among hikers and mountain biker*; Journal of Leisure Sciences, 23(1) at pg 58.

⁴ See, Norling et al; *Conflict attributed to snowmobiles in a sample of backcountry, non-motorized yurt users in the Wasatch –Cache National Forest*; Utah State University; 2009 at pg 3.

occurring and this failure prevented the land managers from effectively resolving the conflict. The Organizations believe that understanding why the travel management plan was unable to resolve socially based user conflicts on the Wasache-Cache National Forest is critical in the Proposal planning area. Properly understanding the issue to be resolved will ensure that the same errors that occurred on the Wasache-Cache are not implemented again to address problems they simply cannot resolve.

The Organizations are aware that these socially based conflicts around issues are becoming more and more common in the Western United States. This type of social conflict can appear in wildlife management questions or even on a more large scale as frequently this type of conflict is becoming common in the discussions between urbanized interests and more rural portions of a state or region. The Organizations have entered into discussions with many in the wildlife management community seeking to address similar challenges between conflicting social values around wildlife and were pleased to find we agree on the proper path of resolving these conflicts.⁵ The resolution proposed from this research was education of all users of the area or resources as to how the area was managed and how this management was funded. These concerns and management efforts must be addressed in the Proposal and simply have not been.

3(c). The Travel Management Rule requires minimization of conflict.

The development of travel management efforts has been guided by Executive Orders 11644 and 11989, which include a requirement of minimizing conflicts between uses. While this provision has always been historically applied to address impacts to other uses from motorized, but we have never been able to identify any portion of these Executive Orders that require this planning effort to be applied only in this manner. The Executive Order provide a much larger scope of requirements as this requires minimization of impacts from motorized recreation but also requires analysis of impacts from expanding other uses in a motorized area. The Proposal does not expand motorized uses but provides expanded nonmotorized usages in the motorized area. This possible conflict is only that much more important in a landscape with areas Congressionally designated for the protection of snowmobile opportunities and Wilderness type uses. The EOs require managers to take a hard look at how the Proposal will minimize impacts to the Congressionally protected motorized usages in the Mt Baker area. Based on our experiences in other areas with similar efforts, the Organizations vigorously assert that managers must answer basic questions on the issues raised in the Proposal as we are very concerned that the Proposal will result in massive long term conflict in the area.

3(d). Unsupervised Rentals of Proposed Huts.

As we have generally addressed in these comments previously, it has been our experience that the management of conflicts around huts has a long and marginally successful history of management. Rather than proactively addressing foundational differences of partners and outfitters and possible conflicts between desired opportunities and resources provided the Proposal falls victim to many of the same failures as previous efforts to addressed mixed usage areas. Despite the consistent

⁵ See, Manfredo et al; Americas Wildlife Values; The social context of Wildlife Management in the US; National report from the research project entitled “Americans Wildlife Values.” Fort Collins CO; CSU- Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources (2018). A copy of this report is available here: [AWV-National-Final-Report.pdf \(colostate.edu\)](http://AWV-National-Final-Report.pdf.colostate.edu)

recognition of the immense value that educational materials will play in resolving conflicts in the area by social scientists, we are unable to locate any portion of the Proposal that provides for any educational materials. This is an immense concern for the Organizations as we have consistently found this material to be necessary in most shared usage areas. As areas become more heavily used by any group, these types of materials only increase in value. The Proposal failure on this issue could not be more complete, as not only are general educational materials not addressed, the Proposal immediately concedes these rental facilities that would not be consistently staffed or attended to by the rental outfitter. This only compounds our concerns as these unsupervised rental operations are the model of operation for any business that will create the most conflict regardless of what type of recreational opportunity is pursued. While it is not impossible to use this model of operation without conflict, this has not been a common result.

The unsupervised nature of the management of these cabins will only compound the impacts of the failure to provide educational materials as the uses of this area will bring immediate conflicts. Some examples of conflicts. An example of this type of issue would be What if hybrid skiers rent the hut and go into nonmotor area with sleds as part of that they think is skiing? Many users that are not familiar with public lands management may not even understand Wilderness designation by Congress mean no motorized usage. Most hybrid skiers don't even identify as motorized users but rather as skiers. The outfitter is going to need to address this type of issue and this is not an issue that other partners should have to educate hut renters regarding. This type of conflict is also more nuanced than Wilderness issues and will need to address problems such as: What if hybrid skiers are encountered outside the rental cabin? This should be an expected situation and renting the hut provides no legal expectation to first tracks in the area. This area remains open to the public. There is simply no mechanism addressed in the Proposal to require users of these cabins to understand this is a Congressionally designated multiple use area and a Wilderness area all at the same time. If they wish to avoid these types of uses it is incumbent on them to use the Wilderness areas, that might be immediately adjacent to the area to obtain these opportunities. They will be harder to obtain due to the highly restrictive nature of these designations.

This situation also highlights our concerns around understanding the role of a partner to the USFS and a rental outfitter/guide operating on the USFS lands. These are challenges the partner will not have to address generally as the operations of the Whatcom club hut provides no expectation of an exclusive recreational experience resulting from rental of the hut. Rather this hut will provide a highly social and diverse recreational opportunity as it cannot be rented. Again this is a significant difference.

While the Organizations have focused our concerns on user conflicts in the Mt Baker areas, we are also aware the area is home to a diverse range of wildlife. When there are conflicts between hut users and wildlife, how will these be handled? This must be addressed as well and allowing for drop off rentals of the huts will not facilitate resolution of these types of challenges but rather expand these types of challenges.

3(e). Parking areas have been a source of immense conflicts and this is not addressed in the Proposal.

The Organizations were surprised to see the limited amount of analysis around possible impacts to parking infrastructure from the Proposal. The analysis and documentation seems to take a very

optimistic position that conflict will not result. We would question this optimism as most winter parking areas we are involved with are an immediate point of conflict. This conflict can be reduced with education and management of expectations but again this takes management. While most states we represent do not have a snow park system, many areas have pay to park models or are fee areas that include parking in the fee charged to access the areas. While this additional funding stream reduces conflict at trail heads and parking areas, it does not eliminate these conflicts. Plowing remains an issue, trash and bathrooms need significant maintenance, non motorized users parking directly behind trailer and precluding access to the trailer simply because they don't understand the usage of the trailer. These are major concerns that are made worse in the era of diminishing federal budgets we are facing these services are becoming more difficult to support.

The highly optimistic nature of the proposal on parking issues is highlighted in the scoping letter by the assumption that outfitters will only be required to clean CXT toilets once a year?⁶ The Organizations must question how was this decided to be the appropriate level of maintenance for these sites? It has been our experience that most vault style toilets need weekly maintenance and during busy time periods of the year this maintenance expands to almost daily maintenance. Our experiences around COVID-19 are a perfect example of this issue as managers immediately stated the public should recreate responsibly during COVID. This immediately impacted vault toilets as the public thought responsible use involved the use of tens of thousands of Clorox wipes. This situation required an immediate alteration of maintenance at these sites simply to make sure the area was not buried in used Clorox wipes. Why wouldn't managers require parking and toilet maintenance by permittees on an as needed basis? This would allow flexibility in how a quality recreational experience is provided, supplement federal budget shortfalls and ensure that the permittee is actually engaged in the operation of the requested infrastructure.

It has also been our experience that dealing with parking issues is an issue that many seem to assume managers will simply deal with despite it being a constant point of conflict. Many collaborative groups have been created to deal with these types of issues, and often only a small portion of the user group is actually engaged on this type of issue. Again, we must outline our experiences with the VPWRA as this has been held up as an example of success. It has become our conclusion that the VPWRA effort has become a large subsidy for outfitters using the area. Our experiences that resulted from this organizational conflict would highlight why we disagree that VPWRA is a success. Parking has been difficult on VPWRA for decades, as funding was insufficient. The opportunity to finally resolve these challenges arose after more than 25 years of trouble when CDOT proposed expanding the interstate adjacent to the VPWRA.

As rebuilding the VPWRA parking area was a CDOT effort, significant planning and collaboration was needed on the lane expansion and rest area rebuild. CSA representatives were only VPWRA members at the CDOT meetings about lane expansions and rebuild of rest area. Most of the VPWRA members simply did not engage. CSA also was able to direct significant motorized trails funding to the rebuild of the VPWRA parking and trailhead facilities. This funding was not matched by any other group involved in VPWRA. These are failures that should be addressed in the Proposal to avoid these types of conflict in the future. While we are highlighting VPWRA in these comments, this situation is far too

⁶ See, Proposal scoping letter at pg. 1.

commonly encountered in shared use fee areas across the country. Managers should take steps to manage expectations on this type of issue before it expands. The Proposal does not reflect any steps in this manner.

4. Conclusions.

The Organizations welcome this opportunity to provide input on the project. We hope our experiences are helpful in creating success in the area. The Organizations and our partners remain committed to providing high quality recreational resources on federal public lands while protecting resources and would welcome discussions on how to further these goals and objectives with new tools and resources. If you have questions, please feel free to contact Scott Jones, Esq. (518-281-5810 / scott.jones46@yahoo.com).

Respectfully,



Scott Jones, Esq
USA Vice Chairman
CSA Executive Director



Jeff Miller
USA Chairman