

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/31/2018 8:00:00 AM

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Organization:

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Comments: 2018 Forest Service Plan Comment

Thanks for the opportunity,

Rich

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To Whom It May Concern

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and for the hard work on making a Forest Plan that helps to balance the various uses and interests on the Chugach National Forest. Please consider our suggestion that the Chugach National Forest allows the designation of some areas as [ldquo]non-motorized, helicopters allowed.[rdquo]

Here at Chugach Powder Guides, the Chugach National Forest is the heart of our operations. We employ approximately 40 people in the Girdwood area seasonally each year. Our employees are 80% year-round Alaskans, most of whom live in the Turnagain Arm area. The Chugach National Forest is our backyard and it[rsquo]s one of the reasons so many of us want to call this place home. Guests from around the world join us to experience the wilderness of Alaska.

We support responsible motorized use on National Forest Lands. We also recognize and support the need for some non-motorized areas for summer and winter recreation. CPG enjoys the many areas where helicopter ski access, other motorized use, and non-motorized use occur together. We support these mixed-use areas and we will continue to do our part to keep these areas sustainable for future use.

We have been fortunate to have access to areas, such as the Center Creek area east of Johnson Pass and the Upper Girdwood Valley, where winter helicopter operations are permitted without competition with other general motorized use (snowmachines). These areas without snowmachine tracks play an important role for our operations, to provide a quality product in certain situations. Additionally, our operation is required to maintain significant distance from other backcountry users, which can be difficult in some motorized-use areas.

Areas that have experienced moderate to heavy snowmachine use without additional snowfall quickly become undesirable, and in some cases, even unusable for helicopter ski operations due to hard, refrozen snowmachine tracks. This is specifically highlighted in times of persistent dry spells and periods of heavy snowmachine use.

Having access to areas that allow helicopter ski access but do not allow snowmachine use is important in these situations.

For example, a zone like Center Creek can experience 50 skiers in a short period and still have an acceptable product and guest experience for additional users/days. However, areas that experience even a handful snowmachines, such as the Johnson Pass zone, can become quickly unusable without additional snowfall. With the improved technology and performance of modern snowmachines, they can easily access a lot more terrain in a shorter amount of time than was previously possible.

As backcountry use of all types increases both in summer and winter, Chugach Powder Guides supports a responsible balance of motorized and non-motorized use areas, as well as balanced management of different types of motorized use where they may conflict with each other.

Thank you for your consideration,