

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/20/2023 7:48:32 PM

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February 20, 2023

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To Whom It May Concern;

I recently reviewed the information regarding the proposed Pole Creek Vegetation Management Project which in part encompasses the Pole Creek Nordic and the Powder Pass 449 Ski Areas. Below are some observations and comments regarding the proposed project.

\*The project description mentions that "cross-country skiing opportunities exist during the winter season," but the locations of the two areas for winter recreation that are "maintained by the Powder Pass Nordic Skiers & 'Shoers in partnership with Powder River Ranger District, Bighorn National Forest, Buffalo, WY," (Pole Creek Nordic Ski Area Nordic Skiing Snowshoeing brochure containing U.S. Forest Service official logos and discrimination prohibition clauses) are not mentioned in the proposed project scoping document nor are the boundaries of those areas delineated on the proposed project maps. The Forest Service should make it clear that the only two winter cross-country/Nordic ski areas within 50 miles of Buffalo will be affected by the project.

\*The scoping document does not address the popularity of the Pole Creek Cross-Country Ski Area. Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are low-cost winter recreation activities that families can engage in. This in turn broadens the base of those who will be good stewards of the National Forest System lands.

\*With having a good snow year this winter ('22-'23), I have skied at the Pole Creek ski area an average of every other weekend. Each time, the parking lot has had many cars, even when there was little to no activity on the sledding hill. The level of grooming of the trails by the Powder Pass Nordic Skiers & 'Shoers is not present at other ski areas in the Bighorn Mountains; they provide opportunities for traditional cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and skating, and I have seen two or more of those uses at the ski area on every visit.

\*Portions of the Pole Creek Ski Area that are more open are subjected to wind and sun. As a result, the snow cover in these areas is blown away by the wind resulting in minimal snow cover, and affected by the sun resulting in slushy and icy conditions. If large blocks of additional overstory are removed within the ski area (regeneration treatments in lodgepole pine timber type), similar conditions will be experienced throughout the area and will destroy the areas characteristics that make it ideal for winter sports. It is important to maintain a level of overstory that protects from wind and solar effects.

\*The pre-commercial thinning treatments proposed within the Pole Creek ski area would leave lopped material scattered on the ground. Not all slash is cleaned up in overstory removals/regeneration cuts, either. The remaining slash will not lie flat against the ground and will require greater amounts of snow to be present in order to cover the material to facilitate grooming of trails.

\*What alternative locations have been discussed with the Powder Pass Nordic Skiers & 'Shoers and other recreating members of the public where cross-country and nordic skiing and snowshoeing trails can be maintained if the quality of the current location is degraded through the proposed treatments of the Pole Creek Vegetative Management Plan?

\*The two ski areas occur within the only two areas on the southern end of the Bighorn National Forest that are restricted for motorized vehicles including snowmobiles. These areas are ideal for maintaining opportunities for cross-country/Nordic skiing, which will help the Forest Service meet their multiple use, sustained yield objectives. Management practices should not favor one use over another unless that area available for that use is limited. This is the case with cross-country and Nordic ski area. As mentioned in the scoping document, there are approximately "37,000 acres of land classified as suitable for timber production is located within this project area;" the two ski areas represent a small portion of that.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful considerations of these comments. It would be great if the areas where the two ski areas are currently located were designated for that purpose.

Sincerely,

Katrina Gray